



Historical Atlas of the Vietnam War

Harry G. Summers

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With more than one hundred four-color maps supplemented by photographs and reconstructions, the Historical Atlas of the Vietnam War provides the first major visualization of that war as well as a penetrating and comprehensive analysis of the conflict based on both U.S. and Vietnamese postwar accounts. The atlas begins with an overview of the foundations of the Vietnamese nation-state, including its almost two-thousand-year struggle to break free from Chinese domination and its century-long fight to gain its independence from French colonial rule, and sets the 1954 partition of the country and the subsequent American involvement there in their cold war context. U.S. involvement is examined in depth to provide an understanding of why America intervened and why, despite its battlefield successes, it ultimately failed to obtain its political objective: a free and independent South Vietnam. Colonel Harry G. Summers, Jr., examines the many anomalies of the war, including why the United States bought the Communist propaganda line that relations between China and Vietnam were as "the lips to the teeth," when Vietnam actually felt betrayed by its Chinese "ally." Unlike most U.S. writings on the war, which end with the 1968 Tet Offensive - a failing analogous to ending the study of World War II with Stalingrad or Guadalcanal - Summers' essay draws on North Vietnamese sources to explode the notion that the war was an indigenous South Vietnamese uprising. He details the destruction of the Viet Cong guerrillas in the Tet Offensive and tells how the war was primarily a conventional one waged by the regular armed forces of North Vietnam during the last seven years. The atlas examines the curious effect of the U.S. antiwar movement, the "Vietnamization" of the war, the Americans' cynical abandonment of their Asian ally, and the final North Vietnamese multi-division blitzkrieg that led to the fall of Saigon in 1975, as well as Robert McNamara's self-serving apologia that the war was militarily unwinnable from the onset. Given the strong emotion involved, many of the Vietnam generation may continue to be wedded to their prejudices. But it has been said that those who came of age after the war know there is a skeleton in the family closet and now want to be let in on the secret. An examination of the forensic evidence, the Historical Atlas of the Vietnam War is the closest we have yet come to a thorough autopsy of that debacle.

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