

## Chapter 1 : French fall to Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu - HISTORY

*Dien Bien Phu* (1966), a docudrama film with autobiographical elements, made by *Đinh Biện Phủ* veteran and French director Pierre Schoendoerffer, in conjunction with the Vietnamese army. *Memory of Dien Bien* (1967), a war drama directed by *Đinh Biện Phủ*— *Minh Tuấn*, about a Vietnamese and a French war veteran looking back at the battle.

The History Learning Site, 27 Mar The government of Laos was very much under the influence of the French though the Viet Minh had successfully infiltrated much of Laos, thus undermining the authority of both the Laotian government and, therefore, the French. It also placed a large and well-trained force in the heartland of the Viet Minh. This alone, the French hoped, would be enough to deter Viet Minh activity. Navarre decided to establish a major force at Dien Bien Phu. In 1954, the French had done the same at Na San to great effect. Here they had established a fortified camp that was supplied from the air. Giap had ordered frontal assaults on the base at Na San. He lost many men and had to withdraw. Navarre wanted to repeat this at Dien Bien Phu. His primary desire was to tempt Giap into another frontal assault with similar results. However, Navarre made a number of serious errors. Giap had time to dig in and camouflage where his artillery was. Another mistake made by Navarre was to put a base at Dien Bien Phu as it was at the very limit of aerial supply. With Giap placing a large number of anti-aircraft guns around the area, the French faced the real prospect of not being able to supply their men — as proved to be the case. When Navarre announced his plan to senior commanders in the French Union Forces, many protested that the plan was simply too dangerous and probably doomed to defeat. Navarre did not listen. Within three days, there were 9, French and allied troops there. By the end of the month, there were six parachute battalions in Dien Bien Phu and their initial firefights against the Viet Minh were successful enough to give the French commander there, Colonel Christian de Castries, a great deal of confidence. He set up seven strong points around Dien Bien Phu with his headquarters in the centre of these. Regardless of these initial successes, the French were in a very difficult position. They were many miles from any friendly land base and the planes that were meant to supply them were open to attack. Dien Bien Phu was surrounded by jungle that had not been secured by the French. Five Viet Minh divisions 50,000 men surrounded the French. Viet Minh artillery, based in the jungle, was virtually invisible and fired on the French for the first time on January 31st. A massive artillery onslaught started on March 13th against one of the French strongholds. By the following day the Viet Minh had taken it. Also on March 14th, the airstrip was so badly damaged by Viet Minh artillery that no plane could land. Therefore, after this date all supplies to the French at Dien Bien Phu had to be dropped by parachute. It was also during this time that senior French officers there told de Castries that they no longer had confidence in his leadership and that Colonel Langlais, a paratrooper, would assume command. The French launched a number of counter-attacks in late March but these were invariably met with strong Viet Minh counter-attacks. On April 5th, a combined French fighter-bomber and artillery attack on Viet Minh soldiers caught in the open caused heavy casualties. This led to Giap changing his tactics. It is thought that this decision by Giap led to a drop in confidence among the Viet Minh. French radio operators claimed to have intercepted Viet Minh radio messages, which clearly stated that they were refusing to obey orders. How much of this was true is difficult to know as it may have been done simply to boost the confidence of the French defenders. The battle became one of attrition. The Viet Minh advanced slowly and usually countered any French attack. By April 22nd, the Viet Minh controlled most of the airfield, making parachute drops impossible. A huge conventional attack was made on the French on May 1st. Several of the strong points were overrun. Another huge attack was made on May 6th with similar success. The situation is very grave. I feel the end is approaching but we will fight to the finish. The Viet Minh captured 11,000 men. The Red Cross looked after the badly wounded but 10,000 were held as prisoners. Only 3,000 were ever repatriated. The Viet Minh lost 8,000 killed with 12,000 wounded.

**Chapter 2 : No Salvation for the French at Dien Bien Phu – John Prados**

*French fall to Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu Dien Bien Phu falls to the Viet Minh. In March, a force of 40, Viet Minh troops with heavy artillery had surrounded 15, French soldiers, holding the.*

The French were unable to slow the Viet Minh advance, who fell back only after outrunning their always-tenuous supply lines. In , the French had begun to strengthen their defenses in the Hanoi delta region to prepare for a series of offensives against Viet Minh staging areas in northwest Vietnam. Mayer had given Navarre a single order – to create military conditions that would lead to an "honorable political solution". Everything was conducted on a day-to-day, reactive basis. Combat operations were undertaken only in response to enemy moves or threats. There was no comprehensive plan to develop the organization and build up the equipment of the Expeditionary force. They were going home, not as victors or heroes, but then, not as clear losers either. To them the important thing was that they were getting out of Indochina with their reputations frayed, but intact. They gave little thought to, or concern for, the problems of their successors. The French army would establish a fortified airhead by airlifting soldiers adjacent to a key Viet Minh supply line to Laos. This would enable superior French artillery, armor, and air support to decimate the exposed Viet Minh forces. Teams of Viet Minh volunteers were sent into the French camp to scout the disposition of the French artillery. Artillery pieces were located within well constructed and camouflaged casemates. When presented with the plan, every major subordinate officer protested: These later became painfully obvious but at the time may have been less apparent. In Operation Castor, the French dropped or flew 9, troops into the area over three days, including a bulldozer to prepare the airstrip. They were landed at three drop zones: Three of its four battalions, however, were absent that day. By the end of November, six parachute battalions had been landed, and the French Army was consolidating its positions. He had expected an attack, but could not foresee when or where it would occur. Each was said to be named after a former mistress of de Castries, although the allegation is probably unfounded, as the eight names begin with letters from the first nine of the alphabet, excluding F. The fortified headquarters was centrally located, with positions "Huguette" to the west, "Claudine" to the south, and "Dominique" to the northeast. En route, they were virtually annihilated by the Viet Minh. The rest had been killed, captured, or deserted". French military forces had committed 10, troops, together with yet more reinforcements, totalling nearly 16, men, to the defense of a monsoon-affected valley surrounded by heavily-wooded hills and high ground that had not been secured. Artillery as well as ten American M24 Chaffee light tanks and numerous aircraft attack and supply types were committed to the garrison. The French garrison came under sporadic direct artillery fire from the Viet Minh for the first time on 31 January and patrols encountered the Viet Minh troops in all directions around them. The French were completely surrounded. The French took up positions on a series of fortified hills. The southmost one, Isabelle, was dangerously isolated. The Viet Minh positioned their five divisions the th, th, th, th, and st in the surrounding areas to the north and east. From these areas, the Viet Minh had a clear line of sight on the French fortifications and were able to accurately rain down artillery on the French positions. Viet Minh artillery opened a fierce bombardment of the fortification and French command was disrupted at A few minutes later, Lieutenant-colonel Jules Gaucher , commander of the entire central sector, was also killed by Viet Minh artillery. The Viet Minh th Division then launched a massive infantry assault, using sappers to defeat French obstacles. French resistance at Beatrice collapsed shortly after midnight following a fierce battle. Roughly French legionnaires were killed, wounded or captured. About managed to escape and rejoin the French lines. The French estimated that Viet Minh losses totalled dead and 1, wounded. The victory at "Beatrice" "galvanized the morale" of the Viet Minh troops. In the following morning, a truce of a few hours was agreed and the French were authorised to come to the captured position and take some wounded, given back by the Viet Minh. Much to French disbelief, the Viet Minh had employed direct artillery fire, in which each gun crew does its own artillery spotting as opposed to indirect fire, in which guns are massed further away from the target, out of direct line of sight, and rely on a forward artillery spotter. Indirect artillery, generally held as being far superior to direct fire, requires experienced, well-trained crews and good communications, which the

Viet Minh lacked. The artillery had been dug in by single pieces. They were installed in shellproof dugouts, and fire point-blank from portholes. This way of using artillery and AA guns was possible only with the expansive ant holes at the disposal of the Vietminh and was to make shambles of all the estimates of our own artillerymen. The air strip, already closed since the attack began with a concentrated artillery barrage at This was very effective and stunned the defenders. Two regiments from the crack 3rd Division attacked starting at However, Colonel Pierre Langlais, in forming the counterattack, chose to rely on the 5th Vietnamese Parachute Battalion, which had jumped in the day before and was exhausted. The French lost around 1,000 men defending Gabrielle, and the Viet Minh between 1,000 and 2,000, attacking the strongpoint. The fall of "Beatrice" and "Gabrielle" had severely demoralized them. On the morning of 17 March, under the cover of fog, the bulk of the Tais left or defected. The French and the few remaining Tais on "Anne-Marie" were then forced to withdraw. The Viet Minh further tightened the noose around the French central area formed by the strongpoints "Huguette", "Dominique", "Claudine", and "Eliane", effectively cutting off the Isabelle and its 1,000 personnel to the south. Even more critical, after the fall of the northern outposts, he isolated himself in his bunker so that he had, in effect, relinquished his command authority". Cogny considered parachuting into the encircled garrison, but his staff talked him out of it. On 24 March, an event took place which later became a matter of historical debate. They told him he would retain the appearance of command, but that Langlais would exercise it. Both historians record that Langlais and Marcel Bigeard were known to be on good terms with their commanding officer. Remarkably, the attack was a complete success, with Viet Minh soldiers killed and seventeen AA machine guns destroyed French estimate, while the French lost 200 killed and 97 wounded. The positions in Eliane saw some of the most intense combat of the entire battle. Those two areas were held by five understrength battalions, composed of Frenchmen, Legionnaires, Vietnamese, North Africans, and Tais. Another group of French soldiers, near the airfield, opened fire on the Viet Minh with anti-aircraft machine guns, forcing the Viet Minh to retreat. The 3rd Division captured "Eliane 1" from its Moroccan defenders, and half of "Eliane 2" by midnight. Langlais ordered another counterattack the following afternoon against "Dominique 2" and "Eliane 1", using virtually "everybody left in the garrison who could be trusted to fight". The French, who were exhausted and without reserves, fell back from both positions late in the afternoon. The French deployed a small number of M24 Chaffee light tanks during the battle that proved critical in repelling the enemy attacks. Shortly after dark on 31 March, Langlais told Major Marcel Bigeard, who was leading the defense at "Eliane", to fall back across the river. Otherwise, Dien Bien Phu is done for. Just as it appeared the French were about to be overrun, a few French tanks arrived, and helped push the Viet Minh back. Smaller attacks on "Eliane 4" were also pushed back. The Viet Minh briefly captured "Huguette 7", only to be pushed back by a French counterattack at dawn on 1 April. The Viet Minh repeatedly attacked "Eliane 2", only to be beaten back. Repeated attempts to reinforce the French garrison by parachute drops were made, but had to be carried out by lone planes at irregular times to avoid excessive casualties from Viet Minh anti-aircraft fire. Some reinforcements did arrive, but not enough to replace French casualties. On 5 April, after a long night of battle, French fighter-bombers and artillery inflicted particularly devastating losses on one Viet Minh regiment, which was caught on open ground. The loss posed a significant threat to "Eliane 4", and the French wanted to eliminate that threat. The dawn attack, which Bigeard devised, was preceded by a short, massive artillery barrage, followed by small unit infiltration attacks, followed by mopping-up operations. The Viet Minh attempted to retake it on the evening of 12 April, but were pushed back. During a period of stalemate from 15 April to 1 May, the French intercepted enemy radio messages which told of whole units refusing orders to attack, and communist prisoners said that they were told to advance or be shot by the officers and noncommissioned officers behind them. On 11 April, the garrison of "Huguette 1" attacked, and was joined by artillery from the garrison of "Claudine". The goal was to resupply "Huguette 6" with water and ammunition. The attacks were repeated on the nights of the 14th-15th and 16th-17th April. While they did succeed in getting some supplies through, the French suffered heavy casualties, which convinced Langlais to abandon "Huguette 6". Following a failed attempt to link up, on 18 April, the defenders at "Huguette 6" made a daring break out, but only a few managed to make it to French lines. With the fall of "Huguette 1", the Viet Minh took control of more than 90 percent of the airfield, making accurate parachute drops impossible.

Following a massive artillery barrage on 30 March, the Viet Minh began employing the same trench warfare tactics that they were using against the central camp. By the end of April, "Isabelle" had exhausted its water supply and was nearly out of ammunition. The Viet Minh launched a massed assault against the exhausted defenders on the night of 1 May, overrunning "Eliane 1", "Dominique 3", and "Huguette 5", although the French managed to beat back attacks on "Eliane 2". On 6 May, the Viet Minh launched another massed attack against "Eliane 2". The attack included, for the first time, Katyusha rockets. A few hours later that night, the Viet Minh detonated a mine shaft, blowing "Eliane 2" up. The Viet Minh attacked again, and within a few hours then had overrun the defenders. The situation is very grave. The combat is confused and goes on all about. I feel the end is approaching, but we will fight to the finish. It is out of the question to run up the white flag after your heroic resistance.

**Chapter 3 : Dien Bien Phu: Did the US offer France an A-bomb? - BBC News**

*Dien Bien Phu cannot be seen as heroic, it was far from it. The battle is a stain on France's history, never to be repeated. Viet Minh troops plant their flag over the captured French headquarters shortly after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu.*

On 7 May, after 57 days and nights of fierce fighting between Viet Minh troops and members of the French expeditionary force, the insurgents finally prevailed. It had lasted eight years, leaving 3, killed and 5, wounded among the French, and many more among the Viet Minh. At the time the military described Dien Bien Phu as a cuvette, or basin. But when we landed on the airstrip, which was originally laid out by the French and is now asphalted, the overall impression was very different. It is more like a large bathtub, surrounded by hills and mountains that form the sides of a broad valley. Equally surprising, Dien Bien Phu is a large, rather untidy town population circa , , with houses patched together haphazardly, overlooking several long avenues. It looks like a provincial capital and at first sight there is nothing to recall the battle 60 years ago, when the valley was sparsely populated by the Tai ethnic minority. Walking down the street there is certainly no sign of the hillocks that dotted the plain, forming a ring of strongholds that were supposed to protect the main camp in the centre. In fact, the city covers up such details. In Hanoi, veterans who took part in the battle told us they were unhappy about this trend. They would have liked Dien Bien Phu to stay as it was, a place of memory and a living museum for one of the great victories of modern times. They were convinced that with their firepower, aviation, artillery and fortifications they would be able to drive the enemy back into a trap. Both sides seem to have been determined to make this the mother of all battles. The French believed that if they could defeat the insurgents here they could drive them back into Laos. General Vo Nguyen Giap, who threw most of the forces at his disposal into the battle, also saw the cuvette as a trap, but for the French. In Hanoi we talked to Nguyen Phuong Nam, 84, who fought at Dien Bien Phu, commanding a regiment strong and acting as a political commissar. But we did it, because we wanted independence. We were primarily a force of peasant soldiers and we knew that victory would change our lives. Such moral force was unthinkable for the French. The officers were killed and, one by one, the various strongholds fell to the enemy. The French were taken completely by surprise. They had no idea the Viet Minh could command such firepower, largely thanks to communist China and to a lesser extent the Soviet Union. In addition Giap had marshalled 30 regular battalions " about 40, soldiers " not counting support troops and volunteers. The French had several infantry units and paratroopers, some belonging to the Foreign Legion, in all about 15, men, many of whom were from north or west Africa. But Giap, whose forces had suffered heavy casualties in attacks on French positions, decided to hold off. However, on 30 March the "battle of the five hills" started. One after another the strongholds " Huguette, Dominique and Claudine " were overrun, leaving only Eliane, another series of hillocks, to protect the base camp. The Vietnamese have focused much of their subsequent efforts to commemorate the battle on this spot. Apart from a new museum, which opened on 7 May, all one usually sees are plaques, few of which are translated into French or English. But at Eliane 2 visitors can view a fortified command post and the wreckage of a US M24 Chaffee tank, now set on a pedestal and protected by glass. Above all there are trenches that give some idea of how close the opposing forces were. I was always in the frontline," he says. We had made tactical mistakes. On 6 and 7 May we decided to seize the positions on the flanks and at the rear. The assault ended in hand-to-hand fighting. When the French command post fell I saw the dead bodies of a white man and an African. In our ranks, people were sometimes dispirited of course, but very little. The Viet Minh laid charges just in front of the remaining French positions, setting them off to signal the start of the final assault. The huge hole they made is still visible. Chi, a witty old fellow, recalled the first hours of victory. Though not the first to enter the main command post, he saw it shortly after the French surrendered. The smell of death but also rotting flesh with all the wounded French soldiers lying there. She made a sign with her hand: The photograph of Vietnamese troops raising the red flag with a yellow star over the HQ did not really happen, according to Dao Thanh Huyen, a French-speaking journalist who coordinated the book *Dien Bien Phu: Another controversy centres on the issue of whether the French surrendered or not.*

The chief of staff had ruled out such humiliating behaviour, but the Vietnamese account differs.

**Chapter 4 : Hallowed Ground: Dien Bien Phu, French Indochina | HistoryNet**

*Dien Bien Phu was surrounded by jungle that had not been secured by the French. Five Viet Minh divisions (50,000 men) surrounded the French. Viet Minh artillery, based in the jungle, was virtually invisible and fired on the French for the first time on January 31 st*

A Vietnamese insurgency controlled much of the countryside and was steadily increasing in strength. The French were facing defeat in Indochina, a defeat that would represent one more stain on the honor of an army once the envy of all Europe. France had suffered hideous casualties in World War I, the result of a strategy so inept and leadership so brutally insensitive that after one failed campaign about half the army had mutinied. In the mythic battle of that war, Verdun see P. But the repercussions of that battle, with its , French casualties, mired the nation and, indeed, the army in a defensive stance that bordered on defeatism and led to construction of the static Maginot Line; in German armor had made short work of the French army that manned it. Now, in Indochina, the French army was eager to reclaim la gloire, and it believed it had the necessary troops, particularly paratroopers and legionnaires. The government back in Paris was less sure. The army needed a bold plan. The French would build a fortified airhead in a valley near the Laotian border, some miles from Hanoi. This advance base would lie within striking distance of three main enemy supply routes and other targets. If the enemy should try to eliminate the threat by a direct attack, it would spark the set-piece battle on open terrain for which the French command longed. They had the aircraft, and given their superiority in artillery, the battle would have to go their way. In November , the first French troops arrived by parachute and chased off Viet Minh units training in the area. The French improved the existing airstrip, then began a buildup of troops and supplies, including a dozen tanks disassembled for air transport and then reassembled back on the ground. With a force of more than 15,000 troops, they also established a chain of strongpoints around the perimeter. The strongpoints anchored a perimeter of some 40 miles – too much ground for just six battalions to hold. But the French were counting on superior firepower. Their artillery commander, Colonel Charles Piroth, who had lost an arm in prior combat in Indochina, had assured both himself and his superiors that enemy artillery was no threat. French counter-battery fire would suppress any Viet Minh artillery that made it through the jungle to the battlefield. The airfield would remain open, enabling resupply by American-made C-47 transports. On March 13, – almost four months after the first paratroopers had jumped into Dien Bien Phu – Viet Minh artillery opened fire on Beatrice. Until then, the campaign had comprised inconclusive sorties that had cost the French more than 1,000 casualties. But they retained control of the valley, and the airfield remained open. The attack on Beatrice marked a shift to a different kind of warfare – a siege. On March 15, he committed suicide with a hand grenade. For two months, the Viet Minh dug toward French lines under the cover of artillery fire the French could not suppress – not with counter-battery fire and not with airstrikes. This mode of combat marked the furthest thing from modern mobile warfare. It was Verdun all over again. And again the French soldier fought furiously and desperately – this time to defeat. French losses at Dien Bien Phu totaled 2,000 killed, 5,000 wounded and 10,000 captured. Viet Minh casualties exceeded 23,000. With the battle lost in early May, the French government agreed, at Geneva, to a peace that led to creation of an independent Vietnam, partitioned into North and South. Unification was forcibly accomplished 21 years later when an army commanded by Vo Nguyen Giap – the same general who led Viet Minh forces at Dien Bien Phu – rolled into Saigon. Fifty-five years after the French defeat, Dien Bien Phu remains a popular destination for international visitors. Accessible by weekly flights from Hanoi, it has grown into a modern town with paved roads, a hotel and a small but impressive museum displaying equipment, weapons and uniforms of both sides. All the main battle positions are maintained in their immediate post-battle condition.

**Chapter 5 : What happened at Dien Bien Phu in ? | Socratic**

*Dien Bien Phu falls to the Viet Minh. In March, a force of 40, Viet Minh troops with heavy artillery had surrounded 15, French soldiers, holding the French position under siege.*

By mid the conflict was in its seventh year, with no obvious prospect of victory for either side. French generals had tried a variety of tactics to eradicate the Viet Minh, to no avail. Exhausted and devoid of ideas, the CEFEO had no long term vision or military objectives; its officers simply defended their positions and reacted to Viet Minh attacks when they occurred. In France itself, the war had become very unpopular. The French war effort was being propped up by American aid. During the seven years of war, there were 16 changes of government and 13 changes of prime minister – but none offered any satisfactory strategy or long term objectives for Indochina, or took any responsibility for the military failures there. There was also a string of scandals involving military incompetence, corruption, currency deals and arms trading. By Paris was desperately seeking an honourable solution to what now seemed an unwinnable war. Unable to corner or destroy the Viet Minh, French commanders planned a series of fortified positions across Tonkin northern Vietnam. The CEFEO could not hope to compete with the Viet Minh in the jungles or the mountains – but a string of bases could be heavily defended and used as staging points for mobile operations. French strategists did not think the Viet Minh or its leaders would risk attacking bases protected by high terrain, artillery and air cover. Even if they did, it would play into French hands. To halt this flow, French commanders decided to garrison and fortify an old Japanese airstrip at Dien Bien Phu, 10 kilometres from the Laotian border and kilometres west of Hanoi. In November almost 2, French paratroopers were dropped into the area. They set to work extending and improving the airstrip, to allow more men and supplies to be flown in. Within a few weeks, Dien Bien Phu had been transformed into a major military base. A map of northern Vietnam, showing the location of Dien Bien Phu The Dien Bien Phu base covered five square kilometres and contained nine separate camps. According to legend, French commander Colonel Christian de Castries named the camps after his nine mistresses. It also contained a makeshift brothel, which flew in prostitutes from Hanoi to service 15, French troops stationed there. The base sat on the floor of a large valley, surrounded by steep mountains and cliffs, some up to a mile high. Apart from one narrow track leading to the local village, there were no roads or paths into the base. Any enemy offensive against Dien Bien Phu would require a long and arduous trek through the mountainous jungle. The high mountains and inaccessible forest around the base seemed to negate any chance of an artillery assault. French officers thought the location and surrounding terrain made Dien Bien Phu unassailable. The region was also subject to low lying cloud and dense monsoonal rainfall, which hampered visibility and flights in and out of the base. They were also aware of the difficulties of mounting an attack in that area. If an attack could be launched from the mountains around the base, the French could be besieged and starved to surrender. But it would take a monumental effort for the Viet Minh to even reach the mountaintops around Dien Bien Phu, let alone position heavy artillery there. By the start of , Giap had organised around 50, Viet Minh troops, almost one-third of his entire army, and marched them to the hilltops around Dien Bien Phu. They were supported by thousands of local peasants, including many women, who provided labour, building roads, clearing jungle and hauling equipment. Among the cargo were several dozen heavy artillery guns, obtained by Giap from the Chinese, as well as Soviet-supplied trucks and tons of small arms, munitions and supplies. All were hauled up steep mountain gradients by hand. Artillery pieces were pulled apart at the foot of mountains and reassembled at the top. Stone, historian By March , Giap felt secure enough to launch his main offensive. Within 12 hours the camp was destroyed, more than French soldiers were dead and the airstrip was unusable. Giap ordered trenches to be dug at strategic points around the valley and the French followed suit. Days of heavy rain flooded the valley floor and filled trenches with mud and water; the battlefield at Dien Bien Phu began to resemble something from the Somme or Passchendaele. With planes unable to land because of the weather and ongoing battle, the French had to be supplied with parachute drops – but the low cloud and poor visibility – saw many fall into the hands of the Viet Minh. The rest of the world, deep in the grip of the Cold War , watched this struggle between a European power and an Asian

communist insurgency. There were repeated calls for military intervention from the United States, in order to save the French at Dien Bien Phu. For a time this was strongly considered in Washington. American military commanders quickly devised a strategy to save the French base. President Eisenhower, however, refused to approve this operation without the support and participation of the British. When London refused, the operation was shelved. French prisoners marching out of the valley at Dien Bien Phu By early May the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu was perilously short of men, munitions, food and medical supplies. On May 7th – the day before the Geneva Conference opened in Switzerland – Giap ordered one final assault. More than 20, Viet Minh soldiers swarmed against positions held by around 3, able-bodied French troops. By nightfall, they had been overrun, prompting French officers to formally surrender. Giap found himself with more than 11, prisoners, including 7, Frenchmen; more than a third of them were injured or seriously ill. These prisoners were forced to march more than kilometres to Viet Minh bases in the north-east. Fatigued, brutalised and malnourished along the way, only half reached their destination alive. Of the 11, French soldiers stationed at Dien Bien Phu at the start of , fewer than 3, would survive. By the war in Vietnam was going poorly for France, costing both lives and money. Paris began seeking some form of political solution that would allow an honourable withdrawal. In the French began fortifying an old Japanese airstrip, around 10 kilometres from the Laos border, an attempt to restrict the movement and supply of Viet Minh soldiers. The French considered the base at Dien Bien Phu to be easily defensible. It was isolated, surrounded by high mountains and seemingly impregnable to artillery. His forces cleared jungle and hauled artillery up mountains then laid siege to the base in March Content on this page may not be republished or distributed without permission. For more information please refer to our Terms of Use. To reference this page, use the following citation:

Chapter 6 : 1 result in SearchWorks catalog

*The battle at Dien Bien Phu, a symbolic defeat for the French expeditionary force. Photograph: Frederic J. Brown/AFP  
Dien Bien Phu: three words that in France are still synonymous with a symbolic.*

By Mike Scruggs " Vietnam was dominated by the Chinese for over a thousand years until , when the province of Tonkin, the northern region of North Vietnam surrounding Hanoi, gained its independence. There followed a long process of wars and political intrigues before the southern provinces of Annam and Cochin China were completely consolidated into Vietnam in . By , the French had already begun consolidating Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos into their colonial empire. This was known as French Indochina and was complete by . Following the end of the war and reoccupation of Indochina by the French, the Communist Viet Minh, who had come to dominate the northern half of Vietnam, began to agitate for independence. This led to eight years of war, ending with the Battle of Dien Bien Phu and French withdrawal in . President Eisenhower and the CIA did not want to be directly involved, but they rightly believed that a Communist government in North Vietnam meant trouble for peace and freedom in Southeast Asia. They never mentioned the CIA, but they sometimes reminisced about their attempt to stave off French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, in northern Vietnam near the border of Laos. My impression was that the fate of their legendary comrade, Earthquake McGoon, was unknown. His strategy for driving out the French was to create many military diversions in the outer periphery of French military concentrations, forcing the French to divide their forces to maintain control of the countryside. By these means he hoped to lure a major French force far enough from support to cut it off and annihilate it. With the French already involved in a costly civil war in Algeria, he correctly calculated that the French people were so war-weary that a major military catastrophe in Indochina would collapse the resolve of French political leaders to maintain a presence in Indochina. In November , seeking to cut off Viet Minh supply routes to and from Laos, the French dropped over 5, paratroopers on an old Japanese airfield and military base surrounded by mountainous terrain near the border of Laos and northwestern Vietnam. The name of the valley and small village near there was Dien Bien Phu. By March , the French expeditionary force "which could only be supplied and reinforced by air" had grown to nearly 12, men. Giap viewed the isolated French garrison at Dien Bien Phu as a fortuitous opportunity to implement his military and political strategy and subsequently invested the surrounding mountains with nearly , men. This was a remarkable military feat in itself, but most astonishing to the French was that this enormous Viet Minh force was well equipped with Soviet and Chinese heavy artillery and nearly anti-aircraft guns. In the next fifty-seven days of hell, the French brought in another 4, men, but by May 6, despite heroic efforts, logistical support and reinforcement became almost impossible. On May 7, with little ammunition left, the remaining 11, French troops, almost half of them French Foreign Legionnaires, including 4, wounded, were overrun and captured. Fewer than 5, French POWs were ever returned. The resulting military catastrophe and accompanying Leftist political agitation in France broke the French political will as expected. He negotiated an agreement to withdraw French forces from Indochina and to establish the Communist government of Ho Chi Minh as the ruler of Vietnam, north of the seventeen parallel. Over one million people fled to South Vietnam. As he turned from the drop area, however, his C Boxcar was hit twice by a Viet Minh Communist mm anti-aircraft gun. He managed to fly the aircraft 75 miles, but just a few hundred yards before reaching a landing strip in Laos, his wingtip clipped a tree. Two others were thrown clear of the crash, a Malay paratrooper and a French officer. The Malay paratrooper died of injuries. The French officer survived. In December , he crash-landed an aircraft in Quangxi Province in China, and he and his passengers were captured by Communists. He was released by the Communists, however, in May . Often our readers have comments they wish to make in response to commentaries in The Tribune Papers. We welcome such response.

**Chapter 7 : Dien Bien Phu: Books: French Paras in Indochina**

*The end of French colonialism in Indo China.*

He graduated from the French Military Academy at St. Trained by the British in special operations, he parachuted into France in June during the D-Day invasion. At the end of the restored French government sent Fauroux to Indochina to prepare for the return of French forces at the end of the war. He participated in many clandestine reconnaissance missions until he returned to France in late Fauroux returned to Indochina in as the executive officer of a parachute battalion and fought at Dien Bien Phu, a French defeat that set in motion a series of political and military decisions in the United States that would send U. Fauroux was captured by the Viet Minh, a Communist-controlled organization fighting for independence from colonial rule. He was repatriated in September and later served in Algeria. Fauroux died in His memoir written six years earlier includes the following account of the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, translated by retired U. Army Colonel Stephen Smith. Pierre Fauroux receives the Silver Star in for his service to the U. Army in World War II. In November we went to Marseilles to embark for Saigon. While in Marseilles we received orders reflagging us as the 2nd Battalion, 1st Regiment of Paratroop Chasseurs. Shortly after our arrival in Hanoi around Christmas , we were transported to Na San in Tai territory [a section of northern Vietnam inhabited by people of the Tai culture], where an important strongpoint had been organized over the previous several months. Two Viet Minh divisions had knocked themselves out trying to attack it. The French Foreign Legion paratroops distinguished themselves there. Na San was without question a French victory that cost the Viet Minh very dearly. By the time we arrived, the worst of the fighting was over. We assumed responsibility for conducting all the patrols within a kilometer radius around Na San. The objective was to make contact with the Viets there, who at that time refused to fight us. That, however, did not prevent us from having our first major engagement on April 1, We fell upon a large enemy battalion and the fighting was violent. We suffered 10 killed, including one officer, 70 wounded and five or six missing. The Viet Minh battalion was practically annihilated, first from our fire and then from fighter aircraft that machine-gunned the entire area. We remained in Tai territory until Easter, April 5, , and then went back to Hanoi to rest and reorganize for one week. For the next several months we took part in various operations in the Red River delta and other places in Tonkin. I still have bitter memories of two affairs we were involved in. There was a category of promotable colonels who commanded large Mobile Reconnaissance Groups, composed of various types of battalions. Before ending their tours of duty in Indochina and returning to France, they would mount an operation to burnish their campaign credentials. Command of a paratroop battalion lent a certain sparkle to their tenures. Twice, each time for a dozen days, we were the paratroop battalion involved, and it cost us two company commanders, among others. We paid dearly for this kind of foolishness, which contributed nothing to the wartime mission. In the spring of the French government decided to look for an honorable way out of the war that was bogging down. Unable to achieve victory over the Viet Minh, who were supported by Soviet Russia and Communist China, the government designated a new commander in chief and gave him the task of reinforcing the Franco-Vietnamese troops. It also undertook a series of diplomatic initiatives aimed at achieving a negotiated solution to the war. The new commanding general, General Henri Navarre, was given a mission that included countering the threat while holding the Viet Minh divisions in the Red River delta, mounting precision operations in the heart of their supply zone and against Communist-infested areas in the center of Annam [a region in the central portion of what is now Vietnam] and organizing a large offensive supported by landings along the coast. Navarre replaced General Raoul Salan, who had been in Indochina since The senior commander in northern Vietnam was Lt. His designated replacement was Maj. It was Cogny who advised Navarre on the choice of Dien Bien Phu, though he later disavowed having done so and resisted sending reinforcements from the Red River delta. As soon as Navarre assumed command, his most immediate problem was northern Laos. If the Viet Minh infiltrated that area from the Mekong Valley and from middle Laos, they would threaten all of southern Indochina. Not defending northern Laos would amount to accepting a general catastrophe within a few months. Thus, the decision was made to reoccupy Dien Bien Phu, a jungle crossroads

and a strategic point that the French had occupied periodically since the beginning of the century. Dien Bien Phu would be occupied this time by means of an airborne insertion. We understood that something important was going on. We learned that an airborne operation named Castor would plant us in the middle of Dien Bien Phu. The officers present, from various units, felt a sense of relief. At last we would be face to face with the entire Viet Minh army, and we were confident we would deliver a knockout blow. The drop zone terrain formed an elongated basin whose long axis was roughly north-south, with an average altitude of 100 meters. It was surrounded by wooded hills that overlooked the valley to the north and to the east, where a landing strip was located. The initial operation consisted of three elements. The Airborne command post was under Brig. Jean Giles, the commander of airborne troops in Indochina. The post directly controlled an airborne artillery group consisting of two batteries of 75mm guns, an airborne engineer company and an airborne surgical team. The 1st Airborne Task Force, under Lt. Louis Fourcade, consisted of the 1st and 6th battalions of Colonial Paratroops and the 2nd Battalion, 1st Paratroop Chasseurs. The 2nd Airborne Task Force, under Lt. The number of men dropped would be 4, It was the most important airborne mission ever executed by the French army. The drops would be executed in two waves at an altitude of 100 meters. The launch time was scheduled for 7:00. Intelligence estimated the enemy strength on the ground at eight companies and one heavy-weapons company with four mm mortars. The 2nd Battalion, 1st Paratroop, was part of the first wave, carried in 27 Cs. I did not take part in that initial jump of Operation Castor. All forward-deployed parachute units require a solid rear detachment, ready to immediately resolve any resupply and replacement problems. The battalion encountered no resistance when it arrived on the ground and took two prisoners. Six soldiers were lightly injured in the jump. The Viet Minh suffered dead, but most of their fighters fled into the mountains. Within three days the landing strip was improved enough to accommodate Cs. After November 26, air-landed infantry units came to reinforce and relieve the paratroops. As the arrival of reinforcements permitted, the paratroop units were transported by air back to Hanoi December 1. The 2nd Battalion was withdrawn on December 1. By December the garrison totaled some 12,000. A general sense of optimism reigned at the headquarters in Hanoi and Saigon. The intention was to finish off the Viet Minh. Drawing the Viets into the valley was the dream of the entire staff. We would finally have what we wanted—a concentrated target that we could hammer. The entrenched camp appeared impregnable, and none of the civil and military dignitaries who visited it raised any concerns. Very reliable military intelligence reports indicated the enemy was bringing in heavy artillery. All too late he understood that the coming battle required support from a much more powerful air force. Even worse, the entrenched camp could only receive aerial support from distant bases in the Red River delta, which would mean delays in getting assistance. While we waited for the Viet Minh to attack Dien Bien Phu, an event of great importance changed everything. We learned on February 18 that our national leaders had decided to meet to discuss the Indochina issue in Geneva at the end of April. General Navarre had not been forewarned. He later placed much of the blame for the failure at Dien Bien Phu on that conference: The news encouraged the Viet Minh to pull out all the stops so they could go to the conference carrying a big military victory to bolster their position in the negotiations. By the beginning of March the Viet Minh had encircled Dien Bien Phu with 60,000 to 80,000 troops from 28 infantry battalions, three artillery regiments, an anti-aircraft regiment and an engineer regiment. They had enormous stockpiles that were being augmented at the rate of 50 tons a day by an interminable supply chain that included coolies, heavily loaded bicycles and Molotova trucks provided by Soviet Russia. In addition to our infantry forces, we had two battalions of 105mm artillery and one battery of 150mm artillery, two 120mm mortar companies, 10 M24 light tanks and two engineer companies. We had nine days of rations, eight of fuel and five of artillery ammunition. Colonel Christian de Castries commanded the garrison, and Langlais, the 2nd Airborne commander, led the paratroops. As the battle unfolded, however, it became primarily a fight conducted by lieutenants and captains. We were really surprised to see that the Viet Minh had such artillery, which were sheltered in practically invulnerable tunnels hollowed out of the surrounding mountains. Every time they fired, they managed to hit something, and the French artillery at Dien Bien Phu was neutralized quickly. Faced with this failure, the French artillery commander, Colonel Charles Piroth, committed suicide in his bunker. The position fell just after midnight. On March 14 the 5th Battalion, Vietnamese Paratroops, dropped back in as reinforcements.

## Chapter 8 : Dien Bien Phu - History Learning Site

*The Battle of Dien Bien Phu was the climactic confrontation of the First Indochina War between the French Union's French Far East Expeditionary Corps and Viet Minh communist-nationalist.*

For more information, please see the full notice. Despite financial assistance from the United States, nationalist uprisings against French colonial rule began to take their toll. After the fall of Dien Bien Phu, the French pulled out of the region. Concerned about regional instability, the United States became increasingly committed to countering communist nationalists in Indochina. The United States would not pull out of Vietnam for another twenty years. French Foreign Legionnaire in French Indochina Southeast Asia, with Indochina at the center, had long been a region of interest to outside powers. Most of the region fell under European colonial control after the mid-century. During World War Two, Japan also sought the resources the area had to offer. After Japanese defeat, many of the countries of Southeast Asia occupied by Japan protested their return to colonial status, resulting in a surge of nationalism. American officials involved in the U. Like the other colonial powers, France attempted to reestablish its position in Indochina after , but found that it was difficult. Laos gained its independence in , and Cambodia became independent in . France promised Vietnam its autonomy by , but only offered limited independence, with France continuing to oversee defense and foreign policy. Bao Dai eventually abdicated a second time and lived out his life in exile in France. Ho Chi Minh Although Ho Chi Minh would become famous for leading the North Vietnamese forces against the United States in the s, despite his communist leanings, he was not at the outset anti-American. He had been disappointed by the lack of support given native peoples struggling for independence from colonial rule at the Versailles Conference that ended World War I. In the s, he made repeated requests for American aid and campaigned for independence. By the time of the Korean War armistice in , the United States was already irrevocably committed to defending the French against the increasingly aggressive Viet Minh forces. In early , the French Army was encamped at Dien Bien Phu, a heavily fortified base located deep in a valley and near communications links on the Laotian border. By mid-March, it was clear that the French were struggling under a Viet Minh siege and that only outside intervention in the form of fresh troops or airstrikes could save them. Though President Eisenhower was determined to prevent a communist victory in Vietnam, the U. Congress and officials in the Administration were equally determined not to intervene unless they could do so as a part of a larger coalition. Britain and other members of NATO declined to participate in rescuing what they thought was a lost cause. In the wake of the French defeat, the French and Vietnamese, along with representatives from the United States and China, met in Geneva in mid-1954 to discuss the future of Indochina. They reached two agreements. First, the French and the Viet Minh agreed to a cease-fire and a temporary division of the country along the 17th parallel. The second agreement promised that neither the North nor the South would join alliances with outside parties, and called for general elections in . Laos and Cambodia were to remain neutral. The United States did not sign the second agreement, establishing instead its own government in South Vietnam. Like Bao Dai, Diem was an unpopular choice in Vietnam as he had waited out the nationalist struggle against France abroad. Diem had also collaborated with the Japanese occupation, but his Catholicism appealed to the Western powers. The United States also supported the formation of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, designed to respond if there was an armed attack on any nation in the region.

## Chapter 9 : Dien Bien Phu - Wikipedia

*1 to 3 instead of 6 to 1. Let me explain: the French army at Dien Bien Phu was hopelessly outnumbered, about 1 to 6. Yes, the French fought far better but superior numbers end up winning battles - the WW2 Eastern front would be a good example of that.*