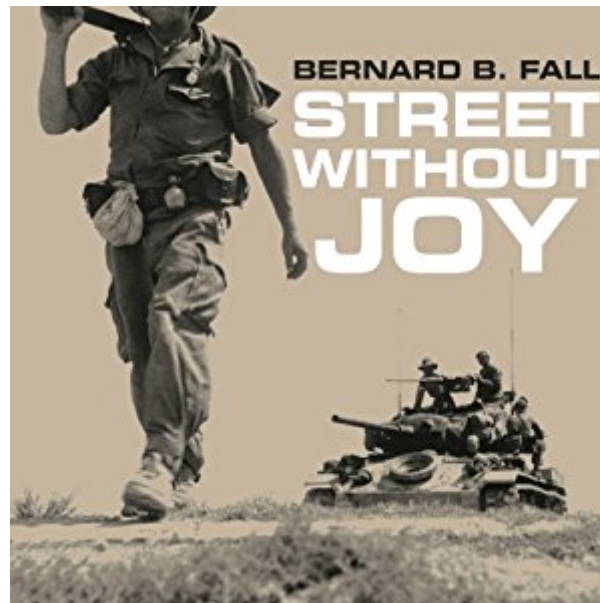




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# Street Without Joy: The French Debacle In Indochina



## Synopsis

In this classic account of the French war in Indochina, Bernard B. Fall vividly captures the sights, sounds, and smells of the savage eight-year conflict in the jungles and mountains of Southeast Asia from 1946 to 1954. The French fought well to the last, but even with the lethal advantages of airpower, they could not stave off the Communist-led Vietnamese nationalists, who countered with a hit-and-run campaign of ambushes, booby traps, and nighttime raids. Defeat came at Dien Bien Phu, in 1954, setting the stage for American involvement and opening another tragic chapter in Vietnam's history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Being a military historian I cannot more highly recommend this book to anyone who wants a complete understanding of this war. Had those in the administration of Pres. Johnson read and followed the analysis and recommendations in this book, the outcome would have been much different. I interviewed Gen. Westmoreland for two hours in 1981. He had read the book and directed all in his command to read it. Unfortunately the advisors at Defence and State were ignorant of Mr. Fall's book. Mr. Fall spent considerable time gathering facts from all involved in this conflict. He presents the military actions in a highly readable manner, with in-depth explanations of the tactics used by all sides and the consequences of the battles tactically and politically. He gives an excellent view of the strategic issues and the political motives of the French and North Vietnamese. His recommendations and observations to those who fight in Revolutionary Wars as he calls them, are applicable to the several wars currently being fought by the United States, wars which he predicted the U.S. would be almost constantly involved in after our defeat in Viet Nam. Will

we ever learn from history?

A classic. I re-read it to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Fall's death in Vietnam. A must read for students of military history. Fall's writing style makes it worth reading for those interested in gifted prose. His description of a French officer stopping by his wife's grave in the Vietnamese countryside brought tears.

This classic book gets better with every reading. Fall nails the Vietnam war from every angle, through the French Indochina war through the beginning of US involvement there. His grim descriptions of the defeat of the French are unmatched and heartbreaking. A must read for any student of Vietnam.

Arrived promptly and in good condition. Bernard Fall has few peers as this is an excellent book on Indochina. I wish he had gone into more of the situation before the Japanese invasion of the area, but few could bicker with his coverage of this period.

Back in the early 1960s someone should have given our American politicians Bernard Fall's book titled *Street Without Joy*. Unbeknownst to me I traveled down the street without joy nine years after this book was written. This street is Highway 1, which follows through the Hai Van Pass running almost parallel to the South China Sea, on its way to Da Nang and further South. It is an area of Southeast Asia which has seen some of the bloodiest conflicts of the French-Indo China War and later the Vietnam War when there was the American presence. It is also rather ironic that the author met his demise in 1967 travelling as his native language would describe the road as "la rue sans joie" when his American Marine jeep hit a land mine. What Bernard Fall has done in this very detailed and comprehensive study of the military strategies and tactics used by both the French and Viet-Minh is to show that wars of revolution cannot be won with standard conventional European military protocol. Mr. Fall paints a broad canvas which he shows how the Viet-Minh methodically and very patiently won this long war of attrition. He shows a proud and determined French Army made up of an eclectic group of military professionals from the basic French National Army to the French Foreign Legion to the Vietnamese faithful to Colonial France. What struck me as almost medieval was how the French chose to combat the Viet-Minh. Up in Northern Vietnam were a string of French forts made up of primarily concrete pill boxes that had interlocking fields of fire and were primary targets for local Viet-Minh militia and also for crack units roaming the Red River Delta.

During the French-Indo China War the French did not have access to the mobility of helicopters. What they did have were mobile units utilizing gun trucks trying to travel through the rough road system that existed in Vietnam in the mid 20th century. Mr. Fall describes the major engagements between the French forces and the Viet-Minh. The most haunting of these engagements was the utter destruction of the French Mobile Force G100. This unit had two battalions which had fought alongside the American (Indianhead) 2nd Infantry Division in Korea. These veterans were hardcore combat infantrymen who were very experienced. As this force was going down highway 19 toward Pleiku the author describes how the Viet-Minh 803rd destroyed this proud unit piecemeal. The author shows how the strategies and tactics of the Viet-Minh were ultimately not to be defeated by the French Army. The French lacked mobility and even though they had the superior weaponry their maneuverability was severely lacking and really had no clue as to how to fight in a thick jungle terrain. Fall also makes a point that the Viet-Minh tactics and strategies were not guerilla warfare but rather it was revolutionary warfare, yes there is a difference and you will have to read the book to gain knowledge of this very basic concept. Tactically speaking, later on the American Forces were very much savvier than their French predecessors. In the 8 years that the Americans had combat military units in Vietnam they had learned how to fight and contain the vicious combat of the VC and NVA. The use of constant mine sweeps, stay behind ambushes, H&I artillery fire along with swift helicopter insertions and extractions made for a more effective fighting force against the Communists. The Americans never lost a major battle engagement. Nevertheless as we won the battles and left the fighting to the South Vietnamese it was a no brainer that they (The South Vietnamese} would lose the war. It all has to do with the term revolutionary war. In order to win such a struggle one has to understand what one is fighting against and for. Such is the case in Iraq and in Afghanistan. Wars such as these have more to do with the cultures and mindset of the enemy than of military hardware and conventional military forces.

I have been meaning to read this book for a long time. I have not been disappointed. It is a must read for those trying to understand why western powers failed to understand why Hanoi was able to prevail, and why the end result was inevitable.

Excellent history lesson. Since I served in Vietnam one must wonder how we didn't have this figured out. Of course we believed in the "Domino Affect" at the time. A shame for more than 50 thousand men and women.

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