



Rolling Thunder in a Gentle Land: The Vietnam War Revisited (Companion)

Andrew Wiest

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From the Introduction

In the end, then, the Vietnam War was a conflict of myriad complexities. It was a colonial war and a regional war. It was a total war and a limited war. It was a civil war, an insurgency and a conventional war - and indeed it varied from one form to another at different times and in different places. It was a war in mountains, jungles or open rice paddies depending on the location of the battlefield. It was a war of high technology and no technology. It was a war of airpower and a war of footpower. It was a helicopter war and a brown-water war. It was a war won on the battlefield and lost on the homefront. One thing that the Vietnam War was not was simply an American War. It was a war of varying and mutable contexts - a chameleon of constant change. The greatest American failure in the conflict was a failure to understand context. For far too many important American planners the Vietnam War had but one context - the black and white context of the Cold War; a context that begged an inexorable singular military logic and solution. A military solution that was so overly simple that it proved to be no solution at all.

_____ The present study takes as its main goal to place the Vietnam War into its proper contexts. Though Rolling Thunder in a Gentle Land cannot pretend to answer all of the nagging questions that still surround the conflict, it can at least begin to pose new questions that have too often been left unasked or ignored. Through the work of a unique collection of historians, journalists, and war participants Rolling Thunder in a Gentle Land also seeks to spark historical debate and research by searching for new contextual answers to questions that many historians had thought long since answered - sometimes calling for a needed revision of the historical orthodoxy of the conflict. Thus the present study proposes to take fresh looks at several of the most important aspects of the Vietnam War and hopes to demonstrate that the field remains one of the most vibrant and important fields available to future historical inquiry of all types by scholars and laymen alike who seek an opportunity to help define a war of unending complexity.

CHAPTER HEADS An American war? The French experience. The North Vietnamese experience. The Ho Chi Minh Trail. The war outside Vietnam: Cambodia and Laos. The South Vietnamese experience. The civilian experience. Vietnam ANZACs. US doctrinal critique. The US experience. The river war. The air war. Vietnam tactics. Vietnam in the media. The legacy of war.

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