



Valley of Decision: The Siege of Khe Sahn

By Ray Stubbe, John Prados

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The remote mountain plateau of Khe Sahn provided a base for U.S. Intelligence, but was heavily surrounded by VC tunnels and fortifications. The isolated camp could only be supplied by dangerous air missions that, over a two-year period, would cost the Army and Marines dearly. "The definitive history of Khe Sahn."-- Publishers Weekly. HC: Houghton Mifflin. (Military History)

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The battle for the American combat base called Khe Sanh, in the northernmost province of South Vietnam, is one of the more coherent and fathomable developments in the bewildering complications of the Vietnam War. Here is the definitive history of Khe Sanh, built on interviews, documentary research and the personal experiences of one of the authors. Early French plantations, the Viet Minh, the Bru tribespeople, geology, wildlife and many other aspects of one of Asia's most interesting regions are described. The authors explain why the American military came to Khe Sanh and remained there for six years despite North Vietnamese efforts to drive them out. Most of the narrative deals with the siege, but Stubbe, chaplain to Marines at the Khe Sanh, and Prados (*Keeper of the Keys: A History of the National Security Council from Truman to Bush*) also dramatize relevant discussions at the White House, the Pentagon and U.S. military headquarters in Saigon. The book also analyzes the deep commitment of the North Vietnamese to the siege. Photos.

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From Library Journal

Khe Sanh exemplifies many of the confusing aspects of the Vietnam War. The plateau was deemed of dubious military value but was held fiercely by U.S. forces for political purposes. It is difficult to imagine a more detailed account of Khe Sanh being written, at least until Vietnam opens its archives, and all American material on the subject is declassified. The authors have used documents (including some declassified especially for this volume), books, articles, reports, and personal interviews to provide the reader with a comprehensive and definitive analysis of the battle for Khe Sanh. While emphasis is placed on the story of the battle's direct participants, the broader military and political aspects of the subject are also examined. This book does for Khe Sanh what Gordon Prange's *At Dawn We Slept* (LJ 11/1/81) did for Pearl Harbor. For scholars and military history buffs.

- Jim Cunningham, Northern Illinois Univ. Lib., DeKalb

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From Kirkus Reviews

A blow-by-blow overview of the Khe Sanh siege, which, more than 20 years after, still ranks among the Vietnam War's most controversial episodes. Prados (Keepers of the Keys, The Sky Would Fall, etc.) and Stubbe (a retired Navy chaplain who served at Khe Sanh) meld narrative and oral history to provide a stunningly detailed record of the bitter engagement. Combining big-picture perspectives with vivid accounts of small-unit actions, they pay effective tribute to the men who fought in one of the few pitched battles between American troops and North Vietnamese regulars, while giving US commanders the benefit of precious few doubts. Khe Sanh straddled Route 9, an old colonial road linking coastal Vietnam to Laotian market towns along the Mekong. During 1967, General Westmoreland began expanding the Special Forces camp there in hopes of using it as a springboard for an assault on Communist sanctuaries across the border--a scheme eventually rejected by LBJ. In the meantime, during the Tet offensive of 1968, the fortified outpost became the site of a major confrontation pitting about 6,000 Marines against two reinforced NVA divisions. Despite obvious differences, the American media likened the protracted encounter to Dien Bien Phu, where the French suffered a crushing defeat in 1954. As a practical matter, though, air superiority and a decisive advantage in firepower gave outnumbered US forces a substantive victory; the subsequent abandonment of the combat base after it had served its purpose, however, clouded this perception. Nor do the authors shed new light on the clash's outcome. Indeed, they leave essentially open the question of what both sides hoped to accomplish. Pending declassification of archives or the emergence of yet-unknown sources, Prados and

Stubble provide as well-rounded a briefing as is available on a bitterly debated campaign. The engrossing text (marred only by a patent reluctance to trust the motives of military brass and their civilian masters) includes 64 photos (not seen), plus 16 helpful maps. -- *Copyright ©1991, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

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