



ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army (Modern War Studies (Hardcover))

Robert K. Brigham

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Scorned by allies and enemies alike, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) was one of the most maligned fighting forces in modern history. Cobbled together by U.S. advisers from the remnants of the French-inspired Vietnamese National Army, it was effectively pushed aside by the Americans in 1965. When toward the end of the war the army was compelled to reassert itself, it was too little, too late for all concerned.

In this first in-depth history of the ARVN from 1955 to 1975, Robert Brigham takes readers into the barracks and training centers of the ARVN to plumb the hearts and souls of these forgotten soldiers. Through his masterly command of Vietnamese-language sources—diaries, memoirs, letters, oral interviews, and more—he explores the lives of ordinary men, focusing on troop morale and motivation within the context of traditional Vietnamese society and a regime that made impossible demands upon its soldiers.

Offering keen insights into ARVN veterans' lives as both soldiers and devout kinsmen, Brigham reveals what they thought about their American allies, their Communist enemies, and their own government. He describes the conscription policy that forced these men into the army for indefinite periods with a shameful lack of training and battlefield preparation and examines how soldiers felt about barracks life in provinces far from their homes. He also explores the cultural causes of the ARVN's estrangement from the government and describes key military engagements that defined the achievements, failures, and limitations of the ARVN as a fighting force. Along the way, he explodes some of the myths about ARVN soldiers' cowardice, corruption, and lack of patriotism that have made the ARVN the scapegoat for America's defeat.

Ultimately, as Brigham shows, without any real political commitment to a divided Vietnam or vision for the future, the ARVN retreated into a subnational culture that redefined the war's meaning: saving their families. His fascinating book gives us a fuller understanding not only of the Vietnam War but also of the problems associated with U.S. nation building through military intervention.

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