

Jacques Dalloz, *Dictionnaire de la guerre d'Indochine, 1945–1954*, (Dictionary of the Indochina War, 1945–1954), Paris: Armand Colin, 2006, 282 pp. ISBN 2-200-26925-0.

Jacques Dalloz has written the best dictionary of the Indochina War (1945–1954) currently available. It is a major contribution to the existing scholarship on the Indochina War and will be of great use to specialists, students, and the more general reader.

Jacques Dalloz is an *agrégé* in history, the French Republic's way of certifying its best and brightest in the field. For years, this Frenchman has taught preparatory classes for high school students wishing to enter France's *Grandes écoles*, above all the *Ecoles normales* and the *Institut d'Etudes politiques de Paris* (SciencesPo), where he has also lectured. He has published important historical studies on French foreign affairs, 20th century French politics and history, and on the Indochina War. His history of *La guerre d'Indochine* (Le Seuil, 1987) remains the best synthesis of this war available in French and in English translation. He has also written path-breaking articles on the French Socialist Party and the Free Masons in Indochina.

While Michel Bodin published a dictionary of the Indochina War in 2004, Dalloz's work is superior. Most importantly, Dalloz has provided more than a simple military dictionary. Of course, he includes the major military and political figures involved in the war, as well as its key battles. However, he draws upon his wider work on non military, social and intellectual aspects of the Indochina War and French history to provide some original and elucidating entries, ranging from the British novelist Graham Greene in Indochina to the extraordinary French missionary Léopold Cadière. He rightly includes entries for anticolonialists touched by the war, such as Daniel Guérin. Dalloz also pens some excellent entries for the political leaders involved in the conflict (I am thinking of Léon Pignon, colonial administrator, High Commissioner and godfather of the Bao Dai solution). Dalloz also provides new information on Free Masons and the SFIO in Indochina: Lionel Nosmas and Louis Caput are two respective examples. Dalloz's absorbing and fluid prose only makes these discoveries all the more memorable.

While this is an important dictionary, it also has its problems. The stimulating entries he includes for the "Western" side are not matched on the "Indochinese" side. Dalloz clearly did not exploit the mass of new biographical information pouring off Vietnamese presses stretching from Hanoi and Saigon to Paris and Houston. On the Vietnamese side, the short and shoddy entries for Le Duan, Nguyen Van Linh, Le Duc Tho and others leave no doubt about

this. His long entry for Truong Chinh, the General Secretary of the party, does not mention many of the new facts which have come to light over the last decade. Would one accept this for the French entries? And for those interested in the Laotian and Cambodian sides, they will be disappointed, too. Dalloz gives better treatment to non-communist nationalists with excellent entries for Tran Van Huu, Vu Hong Khanh and Bao Dai among others. However, Dalloz's entry for General Nguyen Binh, second in military importance only to Vo Nguyen Giap, is particularly disappointing.

Dalloz also provides a series of welcome thematic entries. We learn much, for example, about the Indochina War thanks to themes such as “torture”, “cinema (French and American)”, “piastres”, “start of the Indochina War”, “Free Masons”, “novel” and others.

It is regrettable, however, that Armand Colin, one of the best academic publishing houses in France, did not ask Dalloz to introduce his dictionary with a “state of the field” essay on the historiography of the Indochina War. His colleague, Bernard Droz, tries to do this implicitly in the preface to the dictionary; but why the author, the acknowledged specialist of the war, did not do so is baffling. Another welcome addition to this dictionary would have been a *selected* bibliography on the Indochina War, with some, not all, of the most up-to-date and relevant titles included. Instead what we get is a sloppy, skimpy *two page* “bibliographical orientation”, without any sort of explanation at all. And how Dalloz can forget to cite the path-breaking works of Chinese scholars working on the Indochina War, such as Chen Jian and Qiang Zhai, is beyond me. These are all things editors at Armand Colin should have addressed before publishing this book.

Despite its shortcomings, this dictionary has made an important contribution to the field and to our knowledge of the Indochina War.

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