



Uphill Battle: Reflections on Viet Nam Counterinsurgency (Modern Southeast Asia Series)

Frank Scotton

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How could the United States lose a war that seemed easy to win?

When the Viet Nam War ended, with the United States of America defeated, many wondered how a military powerhouse lost to a “raggedy-ass, little fourth-rate country,” as President Lyndon Johnson called North Viet Nam. Frank Scotton knew why. A young Foreign Service Officer assigned to Viet Nam in 1962, Scotton drove roads others avoided, walked trails alone, and spent nights in remote hamlets. Learning the Vietnamese language, carrying a carbine, and living out of a rucksack, he proved that small teams, correctly trained and led, could compete with communist units.

In 1964, Scotton organized mobile platoons to emphasize political aspects of the conflict. Those special teams, adopted by the CIA, became models for the national pacification program. He prepared units in some provinces at the request of General Westmoreland, and in 1965 and 1966 worked with Special Forces. While organizational assistant and troubleshooter for Robert Komer in 1967, and subsequently with William Colby in the military headquarters (MACV), Scotton reluctantly concluded that improved counterinsurgency techniques could not beat back the challenges posed by North Viet Nam resolve, lack of political energy in South Viet Nam, and the dissolving American commitment. For the first time Scotton shares his important observations and reasoned conclusions about the United States’s involvement in the Viet Nam War.

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