



First A Torch

Richard Baker

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Bix, just graduated from a South Dakota high school, looks for his big adventure before settling for a lifetime on the farm. He rescues Chau, a wealthy French-educated Vietnamese, from the racist violence that permeates American society in the early 1950's. As their friendship grows, Chau explains his education to European culture and convinces Bix to join the French Foreign Legion and help save his country from the communist Viet Minh. After teaming up with Steve, a street-wise ex-con, they take a wild ride across America before delivering Chau to a ship in San Francisco. Chau soon discovers his country has changed forever. Bix and Steve eventually join the Legion and befriend a German Legionnaire and his prostitute lover. Bix finds Chau during the siege of Dien Bien Phu. But something has changed. Chau is now fighting for the Viet Minh. Dien Bien Phu marked the end of French colonialism in Vietnam and the accelerated U.S. involvement in the region. Although they supplied Ho Chi Minh and his struggling army with arms and training to fight against the Japanese, U.S. intentions quickly deteriorated after World War II in an effort to stem the spread of communism. At Dien Bien Phu the finest European-trained French officers, and their professional military, backed by the U.S., were defeated by a history professor, a ship's cook, and a highly determined peasant army.

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