



# The Battle of Ap Bac, Vietnam: They Did Everything but Learn from It

*David M. Toczek*

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On January 2, 1963, the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) and its American advisors were soundly defeated by Viet Cong guerrilla forces at Ap Bac. The loss should have caused U.S. policy makers to question the value of their efforts to train and equip the ARVN troops, but they failed to perceive the battle's significance. In this book, a longtime U.S. Army officer and history professor at West Point provides the most comprehensive treatment of the battle in print. David Toczek not only analyzes the operation in detail but places it in the larger context of the war to better evaluate the meaning of what happened. He shows that U.S. civilian and military leadership missed an opportunity early on to learn from their mistakes when they failed to draw any connection between the ARVN's dismal performance at Ap Bac and American policies toward South Vietnam. Toczek notes that while a few tactical changes resulted from the battle, no policy changes were made, not even to the structure of the advisory system. The author also takes a look at the actions of John Paul Vann, the outspoken U.S. Army advisor at Ap Bac that Neil Sheehan wrote about in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book *A Bright Shining Lie*. Such a careful examination of a battle seen as a metaphor of the entire Vietnam War will prove useful to readers today eager to avoid the pitfalls of the past as they consider how best to fight insurgents of the 21st century.

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