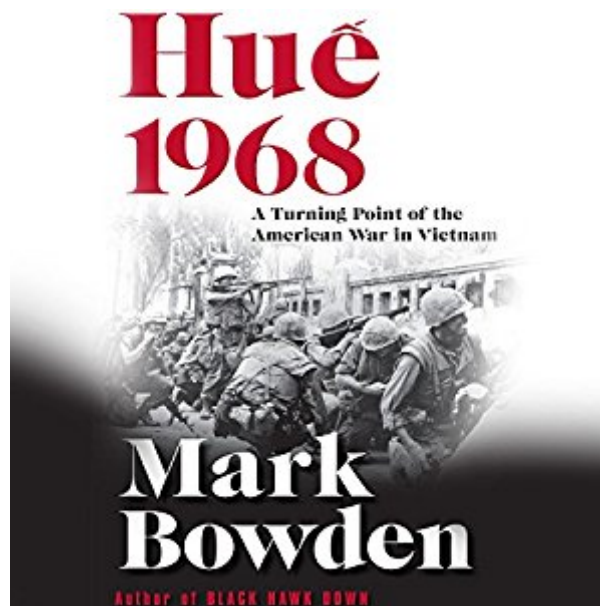




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# Hue 1968: A Turning Point Of The American War In Vietnam



## Synopsis

Not since his New York Times best seller *Black Hawk Down* has Mark Bowden written a book about a battle. His most ambitious work yet, *Huáꞵ 1968*, is the story of the centerpiece of the Tet Offensive and a turning point in the American War in Vietnam. By January 1968, despite an influx of half a million American troops, the fighting in Vietnam seemed to be at a stalemate. Yet General William Westmoreland, commander of American forces, announced a new phase of the war in which "the end begins to come into view". The North Vietnamese had different ideas. In mid-1967, the leadership in Hanoi had started planning an offensive intended to win the war in a single stroke. Part military action and part popular uprising, the Tet Offensive included attacks across South Vietnam, but the most dramatic and successful would be the capture of Huáꞵ, the country's cultural capital. At 2:30 a.m. on January 31, 10,000 National Liberation Front troops descended from hidden camps and surged across the city of 140,000. By morning, all of Huáꞵ was in Front hands save for two small military outposts. The commanders in country and politicians in Washington refused to believe the size and scope of the Front's presence. Captain Chuck Meadows was ordered to lead his 160-marine Golf Company against thousands of enemy troops in the first attempt to reenter Huáꞵ later that day. After several futile and deadly days, Lieutenant Colonel Ernie Cheatham would finally come up with a strategy to retake the city, block by block and building by building, in some of the most intense urban combat since World War II. With unprecedented access to war archives in the US and Vietnam and interviews with participants from both sides, Bowden narrates each stage of this crucial battle through multiple points of view. Played out over 24 days of terrible fighting and ultimately costing 10,000 combatant and civilian lives, the Battle of Huáꞵ was by far the bloodiest of the entire war. When it ended, the American debate was never again about winning, only about how to leave. In *Huáꞵ 1968*, Bowden masterfully reconstructs this pivotal moment in the American War in Vietnam.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Reading this book made me uncomfortable for a lot of reasons. I was a young marine and part of the volunteer group that first went into Hue at the beginning of the battle. My outfit was 2/1, then at Con Thien, so I was only in Hue at the beginning and took no part in the serious fighting that came later. I thought the book was carefully researched, and well written, and as honest as he could be. My criticism is only that the author glosses over the fact that journalists did have a staggering effect on the fighting, and often their stories did fuel the anti-war movement back home. It occurs to me that if journalists had written about the Battle of the Bulge in the same tone that Walter Cronkite and others portrayed Hue, we would have sued for peace with Germany. However, the book is painfully accurate about what it was like to be in Vietnam, in the Tet of 1968, and what it was like to be in a firefight. I took no exception to his portrayal of those in leadership as being both competent and incompetent because it's true of any organization. And I appreciate the portrayal of marines and soldiers who might not have ever gotten a thank-you back home, but who proved themselves heroes every day. I recommend this book to anyone interested in the history of the battle.

5 Stars If you only ever read one book about Vietnam, you could do a lot worse than Bowden's *Hue 1968*. Other good choices would be Karnow's *Vietnam: A History* and Sheehan's *A Bright and Shining Lie*. However, *Hue 1968* delivers not only the facts of the American tragedy in Vietnam, or even a particular point of view of the facts, but it also accurately depicts the feelings of the Americans serving in Vietnam, as well as those of Americans at home, and the Vietnamese who could not escape the war. I was a young marine in Vietnam at the time of the Tet offensive in 1968. I was not an officer and had no strategic view of the conflict. I didn't even have a clear tactical view of the events in which I was directly involved. That said, Mr. Bowden's book is such a profound telling of the events that I can almost smell the rice paddies. It is exactly this ability of Mr. Bowden that allows us the readers to either relive events from our own past or experience them, as nearly as possible, as events that are worlds apart from our experience. He did it in *Black Hawk Down* and again in *Guests of the Ayatollah*. And now he may have written

the best book of his lifetime. Recommended: Absolutely.

This is an excellent book about a decisive battle in the Vietnam war that I had never really known much about despite reading several books about the war. If you've read any of the author's other books, you'll know what to expect--excellent research, good writing, accounts of both the macro and the micro issues. In this book, while the author provides some coverage of both the North Vietnamese and US (as well as civilians), most of the book concentrates on the US, in particular the Marines. The book is pretty even-handed between the sides, although there are few accounts of the actual fighting from the Vietnamese side. The author also provides an epilogue in which the subsequent fates of many of the people is described, which is always nice. While the author paints a very sympathetic portrait of most of the marines and soldiers caught in the fighting, he generally has a very unflattering view of US higher commanders, who simply wouldn't believe that the North Vietnamese could take and hold a major city, because it did not conform to their preconceptions of what the enemy was capable of, or what strategy they would adopt. As a result, for several days after the city had fallen, US commanders sent laughably small contingents--individual companies of a couple of hundred men--to retake the city, occupied by up to 10,000 enemy troops. Commanders on the ground were ridiculed for their incompetence and timidity for their failures to retake the city, and ordered again and again into futile attacks. Westmoreland in particular comes in for withering criticism; he seems to have been so completely hoodwinked by the North Vietnamese that they were planning a major attack on Khe Sanh (which never came), that he dismissed the rest of the Tet offensive, and the battle in Hue in particular, as diversions by the crafty enemy to distract the Americans from the impending battle at Khe Sanh. I wanted to mention a few minor criticisms which didn't detract much from the book for me, but maybe more important to others:--the book includes too many characters which are mentioned a couple of times in the book, but that's it. This is particularly true for many of the civilians trapped in the city, but also for many of the soldiers, such as a Marine captain who was there from the first day of the battle and then rejoined the ARVN unit he advised in the citadel for the second half of the fighting--what was his experience with the ARVN troops like? Generally, it would have been interesting to find out more about the experiences of more people mentioned in the book.--speaking of ARVN, for some reason the author does not really cover them at all;--the author focuses almost exclusively on infantry, marines, and tankers, but it might have been interesting to hear from some of the sailors on the Mike boats, the helicopter pilots, etc.--while the book includes some maps, I think that more maps would have been helpful.

After his best-selling book "Black Hawk Down," the author has outdone himself with this comprehensive history of the single greatest battle of the Viet Nam War. It is not only first-rate military history, it is superb reporting as well, with many original details of the fight that do not appear in previous accounts ("Phase Line Green," "The Cat from Hue," etc.). Bowden gives us the unvarnished truth about the colossal bloodbath that sent hundreds of U.S. Marines, their ARVN allies, and their North Vietnamese and Viet Cong enemies to their deaths. The book also reveals how thousands of innocent civilians were killed by gunfire and explosions, not all of them by accident. 10,000 people died in 26 days of ferocious fighting. Bowden gives us the best explanation of why the battle of Hue was the key turning point of the war, how U.S. government and military leaders deliberately lied to the American public about progress, and how carefully the Peoples Army of (North) Viet Nam and the National Liberation Front troops deceived the Americans into believing the big attack would come along the borders rather than the cities like Hue. The stories of dozens of North Vietnamese and NLF troops, especially women fighters, are told in detail. Brilliantly researched and intelligently written without bias, this is one of the very best books about the American war in Viet Nam.

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