

Why didn't America win the Vietnam War?

Guerrilla War

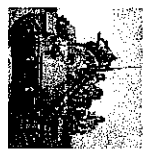
The Viet Cong used the following tactics:

- If the enemy attack -- retreat
- Raid all enemy camps
- Attack when the enemy is tired
- If the enemy retreats -- follow

The only way to win against guerrilla warfare is to gain the support of the local people. Many Vietnamese supported the Viet Cong.



John F. Kennedy



Why did America get involved in Vietnam?

Background to the War in Vietnam

Vietnam, a French colony, had been invaded and occupied by the Japanese during the second World War. Ho Chi Minh was the leader of a group of Vietnamese, called the Vietminh, who opposed the Japanese. Ho Chi Minh supported Communism and by the end of the war the Vietminh had gained control of North Vietnam.

After the defeat of the Japanese in 1945, the French returned to re-take control of Vietnam. Communist China sent aid to the Vietnamese. The US, fearing that the Communists could take control of south-east Asia, sent aid to the French.

In 1954, the French were defeated. Elections were held in the North and it became Communist led by Ho Chi Minh. The US stopped elections being held in the South because they were afraid that the Communists would win.



Ho Chi Minh

Ho Chi Minh was upset that elections had not been held in the South and launched a guerrilla war against the government in the South. The Americans sent money, arms and advisors to help the south but the Viet Cong (Vietnamese Communists) could not be defeated.

In 1963, President Kennedy was assassinated and Vice President Johnson became President of the USA. Johnson believed that if the Communists took South Vietnam they would then go on to take control of South-East Asia. This would mean the loss of important military, political and commercial interests.

By 1965 the government in the South was on the verge of collapse and Johnson made the decision to send American troops into Vietnam.

American Bombing

As casualties among soldiers rose, the Americans launched huge bombing raids that devastated North Vietnam. Chemicals were used to destroy the South Vietnamese jungle where the guerrillas were hiding. Tens of thousands of civilians were also killed. Although the Viet Cong suffered losses in equipment and materials, they were given aid by China and Russia to counter their losses. The North Vietnamese also hid key industries in remote places and women and children worked to keep supply routes open.

Loss of American Public Support

The Vietnam War was heavily televised and the images of the death of civilians and destruction of Vietnam did not gain the support of the American public. Anti-war protests broke out all over the country.

By 1969 the question facing American politicians was how to get out of Vietnam without accepting defeat. The solution was to provide training and equipment for South Vietnamese so that they could replace the American soldiers.

In 1973 a peace treaty was signed which allowed the last American soldiers to leave. However, the Viet Cong did not honor the peace treaty and without American help the South Vietnamese could not stop them. By 1975 South Vietnam had fallen to the Communists.

Activities

1. Why was guerrilla warfare so successful against the Americans?
2. How did the Viet Cong deal with American bombing raids?
3. Why was public opinion against the Vietnam war?
4. Why didn't we win?

Activities

5. Copy the words in the glossary to your page.
6. In which two countries controlled Vietnam?
7. In which year were the French defeated?
8. Why did the Americans stop elections in South Vietnam?
9. What did the North Vietnamese call themselves?
10. Why was South-East Asia important to the Americans?
11. In which year did President Johnson make the decision to send troops to Vietnam?

GLOSSARY

- Communism
- a classless society where everything is theoretically equally owned and controlled, usually by the government
- Guerrilla War
- small bands of soldiers harass and make sudden strikes on a army

The Peace Movement

The peace movement in the 1960s was directed to stopping all forms of war. The numbers of Americans that died in the Vietnam War was used by the movement to persuade people that war was wrong. By the end of the 1960s, opposition to Vietnam was so strong that an anti-war statement was effective and powerful. As the sixties wore on the movement also came to stand for equal rights.

The Black Panthers

The Black Panther Party was founded in 1966 in California by two black men. They wanted control of schools, medical centres and welfare programmes as well as demanding policing of black areas. They also wanted blacks to be exempt from military service. The Black Panthers were a militant group and they had many confrontations with police that led to shootings and arrests.



A Black Panther Poster

The SDS

The Students for a Democratic Society was founded in Chicago in 1962. They began as a civil rights movement but later became more concerned with ending US involvement in Vietnam. They often worked with the Black Panthers. A small group of SDS members known as the Weathermen believed in violent revolution and were associated with a number of bombings at colleges and government institutions.



Woodstock

This was a three-day music festival held in August 1969 to promote peace. Around 450,000 people attended the festival. The music played by top rock stars including Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin, was almost non-stop. It poured with rain turning the field into a mud bath. Drug use was widespread and sanitary conditions were primitive. The festival, which promoted 'Make love not war' has come to symbolise the peace movement of the sixties.



The Hippy Movement

Young men wore their hair long; young women dressed like peasants and wore psychedelic colours. All of them seemed dirty, drugged, and disrespectful of their elders and society at large. They dropped out of college, started up rock bands and lived in communes. All in the name of peace!



Music and Flower Power

People decorated themselves and their vehicles with flowers to show their commitment to peace. Rock musicians wrote songs of peace and love.

Activities

1. Which groups used violence to protest?
2. What forms of peaceful protest were used?
3. What was the message of the Black Panthers?
3. What were the main features of hippies (what were they known for)?