

History Year 9 Summer Term 2 'Knowledge Organiser': Vietnam War.



Summary:

The Vietnam War began as a civil war between the Communist state of North Vietnam and the non-Communist state of South Vietnam. The US supported South Vietnam fearing the spread of Communism into Asia if the South fell to the North. North Vietnam wanted to unite with the South as a single communist state. America was opposed to communism – it was a capitalist country, with a democratic government. The Domino Theory was something in which the US wanted to prevent – this is if South Vietnam falls to communism, other Asian countries will too. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the US gave military and financial support to South Vietnam. Troops were then sent to Vietnam in 1965 under President Johnson instructions. US forces increased steadily and by the time Johnson left office in 1968, 30,000 troops had been killed. Americans struggled to win, even with their superior military strength, money and resources. This was because the Vietnamese were using guerrilla tactics and had superior knowledge of the area. American troops were badly trained for this type of combat which meant that they were ineffective and resorted to tactics which bordered on 'war crimes'. The war ended in 1975 with the US withdrawing and North Vietnam taking over the South. 58,000 US troops had died and 3 million Vietnamese.



American Tactics.

- **Search and Destroy** - They searched Vietnamese villages for Viet Cong fighters. If they suspected there were any there, they would destroy the village. This led to the death of innocent people and helped increase support for the Viet Cong.
- **Napalm** - Napalm was a very flammable fuel that would burn through almost anything. It often hit civilians as the Americans used it on suspected Viet Cong bases.
- **Operation Rolling Thunder** – These were bombing raids on Vietnamese towns and designed to break the morale of the people.
- **Agent Orange** – To uncover the Viet Cong, their bases and supply routes hidden in the thick forest the Americans used a chemical called Agent Orange. This was sprayed onto the forests from aeroplanes. It killed the trees so that the Americans could find their enemy. It killed crops, causing people to go hungry. It also caused birth defects in children born to people who were exposed to the chemical.

Viet Cong Tactics.

- Their tactics were not very high-tech: they relied on knowing the landscape and having the backing of the ordinary citizens.
- **Booby Traps** – The Viet Cong would place trip wires or dig holes filled with spikes, sometimes coated in human excrement, and then they would cover the hole with leaves to deceive the enemy.
- **Tunnels** – Used by the Viet Cong guerrillas as hiding spots during combat, as well as serving as communication and supply routes, hospitals, food and weapon stores. They also acted as living bases for numerous guerrilla fighters.
- **Ho Chi Minh Trail** – This was a network of paths that served as a hidden route through the jungle. It was used by both Viet Cong fighters as well as civilians. The Viet Cong used it to move troops, weapons, and other supplies into and around the country without being detected by the American. The Americans constantly tries to find the trail, but it was too well hidden and frequently changed. It proved to be essential to the North Vietnamese campaign against the Americans.

Concept: Change and Continuity.