

US History

The Vietnam War

Learning Target:

I can examine how a war of attrition in Vietnam was conducted by the Vietcong and the United States and analyze how this impacted U.S. troops.

5. A War of Attrition

-A strategic concept that to win a war, one's enemy must be worn down to the point of collapse by continuous losses of personnel and supplies to they no longer have the will to fight.

Types of Vietnamese Troops –

Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) –

- The South Vietnamese regular army
- American allies

Vietcong (VC) –

- South Vietnamese Communists
- Guerilla Soldiers
- Enemies of the US

North Vietnamese Army (NVA or Vietminh) –

- The North Vietnamese Regular Army
- Enemies of the US

The Air War –

- Hoped that US air power would secure a quick victory

Operation Rolling Thunder-

- Bombing campaign against military targets in North Vietnam

-2 Goals:

- Weaken the enemy's will to fight
- Assure the S. Vietnamese of the US commitment to them

- Ho Chi Minh trail was a key target of the operation
- Air strikes intensified when they did not bring desired results
- Broadened to include Laos and S. Vietnam

Types of Weapons used in the Air War –

- Napalm – a jellied gasoline mixture used in firebombs
- Cluster bombs – sprayed razor sharp metal fragments when they exploded
- Agent Orange and other defoliants – chemicals to kill vegetation to see troops

The Ground War –

-“The Americans thought that the more bombs they dropped, the quicker we would fall to our knees and surrender.” – North Vietnamese Leader

Vietnamese Troops –

- North Vietnam sent more troops south and many South Vietnamese joined the Vietcong
- Vietcong eventually consisted of more South Vietnamese than North Vietnamese

NVA & Vietcong Tactics –

-Booby traps

- goal to demoralize (terrorism)
- Pungi sticks, wait-a-minute vine

-Tunnel System

- Cu Chi
- Tunnel Rats

-Ho Chi Minh Trail

- 3 month journey
- Moved troops south

-Political Officers

- Boosted morale
- Preached communism

American Troops –

- US countered by launching a ground war
- Troop strength increased from 185,00 to 486,000 from 1965 – 1967

American Tactics –

-Search-and-destroy missions –

- US attempts to drive Vietcong from their hideouts

-Pacification –

- US moved civilians to secure locations and destroyed villages known to harbor Vietcong

-Sign of progress for the ground war was body count – often misleading due to counting all dead Vietnamese not just Vietcong

US Morale Declines –

-US morale went from high to low quickly – Did not learn from French

-US planned on superior technology and air power to win this war of attrition

-Marine lieutenant Philip Caputo – “When we marched into the rice paddies on that damp March afternoon, we carried, along with our packs and rifles, the implicit convictions that the Vietcong could be quickly beaten. We kept the packs and rifles, the convictions we lost.”

-Ho Chi Minh – “You can kill ten of my men for every one I kill of yours, but even at those odds, you will lose and I will win.”