

### **What is meant by the term "no front line" in the Vietnam War?**

In a conventional war, like World War I, there is a definite "front"; the enemy are in front of you behind defences which you can see. What's more, he wears a uniform. so you know both *where* he is and *who* he is.

But in Vietnam most of the fighting wasn't like that. It was a **guerilla war** in which the enemy wasn't in uniform and could be anywhere. So there was no definite enemy army and no front line.

### **What tactics were used by both sides in an attempt to win the Vietnam War?**

Until the French left the USA merely paid the bills while the French fought and lost against the guerilla tactics of the Viet Minh. As the opposition of the NLF (Northern Vietnamese forces) and the Viet Cong (South Vietnamese Communists) to President Diem grew the USA sent military advisers to help the South Vietnamese army. Under President Kennedy fighting units of the American army were sent secretly to South Vietnam. When that failed Congress allowed President Johnson to send massive forces openly to South Vietnam and to bomb North Vietnam.

The Americans used methods designed to beat another army (German or Russian) in set-piece battles. But their opponents avoided big battles. Instead the North relied greatly on the Viet Cong's guerilla tactics.

The guerilla nature of the Vietnam War made it very difficult for the South Vietnamese and the American allies who were trained for conventional warfare. The South Vietnamese and the Americans couldn't control all of the rural areas. The roads through these areas were very dangerous and open to attack. Consequently, it was decided to fortify certain villages and hamlets (The Strategic Hamlet Policy). The peasants would be brought into these where they would be easier to control. It was also thought it would be easier to defend fortified positions. With American airpower - especially helicopters they could be supplied and reinforced. Unfortunately, they simply attracted the Viet Cong who were presented with targets for their attacks.

The Americans misunderstood the kind of war they were fighting. Far from being an invasion of South Vietnam by the North, it was a war of national independence. So the communists had a lot of popular support. The Americans and their allies were neither able to defeat the NLF in battle, or persuade most South Vietnamese to join them.

### **How did the geography of the land in Vietnam affect the tactics used by both sides in the Vietnam war?**

With large areas of Vietnam covered by tropical rainforest (jungle) there was ample cover for the Viet Cong (Communists) to pursue a guerilla war. After attacking static US or South Vietnamese targets they could disappear into the forests. Following these tactics and generally avoiding pitched battles, much of the countryside came under Viet Cong control. To "save" the peasants from the Viet Cong, the South Vietnamese and Americans organised a system whereby whole villages were moved into defended camps - known as fortified villages. This policy backfired as the peasants did not want to be removed from their land and as such the policy played into the hands of the Viet Cong who were promising the peasants more land once communism have taken root in the south. It also provided a number of targets for guerilla attack and the US had to use men and resources defending them.

To counter the guerilla war and because of the poor communication routes, the US developed tactics based on the use of air cavalry. They would fly in troops, using helicopters, where they believed the enemy to be, fight and then fly out again. Unfortunately for the US it often meant they were unable to bring their full military power into battle. Tanks and armoured vehicles were often irrelevant. The US also employed high level bombing of the jungle areas (high-level to avoid the risk of being shot down) – this was an attempt to disrupt the movement of Viet Cong soldiers and supplies. They also employed defoliants (Agent Orange) and napalm to kill off the jungle and so remove cover for the Viet Cong guerrillas.

### **WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE VIETNAM WAR FOR CIVILIANS, BOTH VIETNAMESE AND AMERICAN?**

This is a difficult question to answer, as not all civilians would face the same consequences.

In the US the Vietnam led to the development of a Peace Movement comprised mainly of students and liberals opposed to the war (and increasingly opposed to the US government and its foreign policy). Spending on the war caused a decline in the value of the dollar, an economic downturn (inflation and unemployment) and forced President Johnson to cut back on his social welfare programmes. Further it led to an increase in Black activism and a growth of radical movements such as the Black Panthers. Blacks were over represented in the forces in Vietnam and increasingly took the view, ' Why should we fight for freedom in Vietnam when we are not free at home?'

For the Vietnamese the consequences were varied. Those living in cities in the north would have had to face US bombing. Those living in cities in the south would have had to face terrorist guerilla war. In the countryside many peasants found themselves taken from their homes and placed in 'secure villages' as part of the Strategic Hamlet Policy.

### **Explain the reason why the USA became increasingly involved in Vietnam's affairs between 1964-1965.**

US involvement stemmed from the 'Domino Theory' an American belief that if one state (e.g. Vietnam) fell under communist control, other neighbouring states would also fall to communism. President Kennedy had increased the number of US advisers (to 15,000) in Vietnam as South Vietnam became involved in a civil war with communist Viet Cong rebels. At the same time there was an increase in military and technical aid.

In August 1964 North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked US warships in the Gulf of Tonkin. The US saw this as a direct challenge and feared the north was about to launch a full-scale invasion of the south. The US retaliated by bombing North Vietnamese naval bases. In the south the Viet Cong attacked the American airbase at Bien Hoa and destroyed many planes. President Johnson now sent US troops to Vietnam – unlike those sent by Kennedy these were to play an active part in the war. Three years later, by 1967, over 400,000 US troops were actively involved in the war.

**I have to write an essay describing in detail the process of America's involvement in Vietnam. Did the domino theory justify this?**

Well, at the time the US did not have the benefit of hindsight. They had seen China fall to communism and were not prepared to accept its spread. They had also seen that taking a hard line (as over Berlin and Korea) had proved more successful than protest (Czechoslovakia).

US military involvement came about when they realised that the communists might win elections promised as part of the Geneva Settlement in 1954. As part of the Domino Theory they were not prepared to accept a communist victory. It was the failure to hold these elections that caused the war in the South where communist guerrillas – the Viet Cong – fought against the South Vietnamese government. From this point onwards US involvement gradually increased – particularly as the corrupt and unpopular South Vietnamese government proved unable to defeat the Viet Cong. Without US forces the South Vietnamese government would have collapsed (as it eventually did in 1975).

**Why did America become increasingly involved in Vietnam ?**

American policy was influenced by the 'Domino Theory' - if one country fell to communism then so would the next. They believed that if South Vietnam went communist, so would the rest of south-east Asia, then Thailand and eventually India.

After the withdraw of the French in 1954 Vietnam became partitioned. A communist government ruled in the North while a non- communist government ran the south. The United States was the only power in south-east Asia that could resist the communists and as the South Vietnamese became involved in a 'civil war' with communist Viet Cong rebels the US sent 'advisors'

In August 1964 the communists attacked US warships in the Gulf of TONKIN. In response President Johnson sent US troops into South Vietnam. By 1967 they numbered 400,000 and were no longer 'advisors' but openly fighting a war against Viet Cong rebels and North Vietnamese troops.

**How did the media play a role in changing people's attitudes to the Vietnam War?**

The media had a massive impact on the war and people's perceptions of it.

Check out the following site :

CNN and the Vietnam War <http://www.wsws.org/news/1998/july1998/cnn-j03.shtml>

**Did television play an important role in changing people's attitudes to the Vietnam war? If so how?**

The answer is a very big YES!

Television was able to broadcast nightly pictures of the war into US homes. Reporters in Vietnam operated with far fewer controls and censorship than ever before and what they broadcast tended to shock the public – especially the young – and turn public opinion against US involvement. Graphic images of the horrors of modern warfare were bad enough but the US also saw the effect on the civilian population. Generally the public was affected by the images of bombing – which didn't seem to bring victory any closer, by the sight of "body bags" and wounded US troops (parents were immediately reminded of the dangers their sons faced) and the brutalising effect the war was having on US forces (including the increasing use of drugs amongst US forces). They were also able to see how brutal elements of the South Vietnamese were – the government they were supporting. The public execution of a suspected communist by the Saigon police chief did not go down well with liberal America or the young.

Because of television, liberals and students opposed the war on moral grounds – the US should not be involved in maintaining a corrupt South Vietnamese government in what they considered to be a civil war. Blacks began to oppose the war when they saw how many of the Americans fighting ( and dying) in Vietnam were black – why should they fight when they didn't have equal rights at home? Parents began to oppose the war – worried because it might be their son who became the next casualty. Elements in the military began to oppose the war when they realised they weren't going to win and the effect it was having on the armed forces – a loss of morale.

**How and why did opinions in the USA about the war in Vietnam alter between 1967 and 1970?**

Before 1967 US involvement was limited although it had been growing since the Tonkin Incident of August 1964. Increasing US involvement saw INCREASING US CASUALTIES. Increased involvement required more troops and CONSCRIPTION (OR THE "DRAFT") WAS RESENTED by the young – students and especially Blacks who were over-represented and who took the view why should they fight in Vietnam when they didn't have equal rights at home.

As the war progressed it was BROADCAST NIGHTLY ON TELEVISION. America saw what was involved in fighting the war and they didn't like what they saw especially the casualties, the brutalising effects of the war on US troops with reports of civilian massacres (as at My Lai), the bombing of the north and the increasing use of drugs by soldiers.

The war cost increasing sums of money which led to INFLATION & A FALL IN THE VALUE OF THE DOLLAR was created causing welfare programmes to be cut back.

The US began to ask WAS THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT WORTH FIGHTING FOR – it was increasingly corrupt, undemocratic and brutal.

Finally it became clear the US WAS FINDING IT DIFFICULT TO WIN. In January 1968 the Viet Cong launched devastating attacks in the south. In this Tet Offensive (so-called because it occurred during the Tet or lunar new year holiday period) the Viet Cong captured 75% of the main towns in the south including parts of Saigon. Eventually 750,000 South Vietnamese and 500,000 US servicemen were able to defeat the Viet Cong but it took nearly two weeks to do so completely.

For many Americans who had believed that the war was being won, the sight of Viet Cong troops holding the US embassy was a rude awakening, and forces them to question the US "true" position.

**Please could you tell me about the peace movement during the Vietnam war - what sort of things triggered it off? Also the War Veterans Association for Peace?**

As with so many events in history there is a combination of causes:

Firstly, many young (especially young) Americans did not agree with the war. They believed Vietnam to be an internal war and not something they should become involved with. The young were also opposed to the "draft" (conscription) – the US forces in Vietnam were not all volunteers.

Television reporting of the war turned many against. Daily images of the fighting and the death of Americans turned much of the public against the war. Parents became increasingly concerned about what would happen to their sons.

There was a disproportionate number of Black Americans in Vietnam. Many Blacks asked the question, Why are we fighting for freedom in Vietnam when we don't have equal rights at home?

For the final part of your question pay a visit to:

**[http://lists.village.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML\\_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter\\_Soldier/VVAW\\_entry.html](http://lists.village.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter_Soldier/VVAW_entry.html)**

It is a little complex but you should find what you are after.

**Hi, I'm trying to find some anti-war songs that were sung in protest of the Vietnam War. Could you help please?**

Have a look at these websites, which should help you with your research.

**<http://www.rockinwoman.com/protest.html>**

**<http://www.countryjoe.com/cjmbio.htm>**

I hope this helps.

