

Year 9 History: The Vietnam War -Turning points Knowledge organiser.

The Battle of Dien Bien Phu 1954



The battle of Dien Bien Phu was a decisive battle which ended the war between the French and the Viet Minh. A large, well-armed force of French paratroopers were comprehensively defeated. The battle had several important consequences. The French lost 3000 men and 8000 more died in captivity. The French had been defeated by the Viet Minh in open battle with the help of modern weapons from the USSR and China. A small Asian state had defeated a rich European state through a combination of effective leadership, the right tactics and sheer determination (for example, the equipment and supplies for the 40,000 Viet Minh soldiers was carried by hand by peasants). A peace conference in Geneva was held after the battle which divided the country into North and South until elections could be held to decide its future.

The Gulf of Tonkin incident - 1964



Lyndon Baines Johnson became president of the United States in 1963, after the assassination of John F. Kennedy. He was more prepared to commit the USA to a full-scale conflict in Vietnam to prevent the spread of Communism. In August 1964, North Vietnamese patrol boats opened fire on US ships in the Gulf of Tonkin. In a furious reaction, the US congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. The Resolution gave Johnson the power to 'take all necessary measures to prevent further aggression and achieve peace and security'. It effectively meant that Johnson could take America into a full-scale war. On 8 March 1965, 3500 US marines, came ashore at Da Nang. America was at war in Vietnam.

The Tet Offensive - 1968



In 1968, the Communist launched a major offensive. During the Tet New Year holiday, Viet Cong fighters attacked over 100 cities and other military targets. One Viet Cong commando unit tried to capture the US embassy in Saigon. US forces had to fight to regain control room by room. The Tet Offensive was a military disaster for the Communist, they lost around 10,000 fighters and were badly weakened by it. However, it proved to be a turning point in the war because it raised hard questions about the war in the USA. The USA was spending \$20 billion dollars a year on the war and there were nearly 500,000 troops. So how were the Communist able to launch a major offensive which took US soldiers by surprise? Many civilians were killed in the offensive. Was this right? As a result, public opinion started to turn against the war.

My Lai Massacre - 1968



In March 1968, a unit of young American soldiers called Charlie Company started a search and destroy mission. They had been told there was a Viet Cong headquarters and 200 Viet Cong guerrillas in the My Lai area. The soldiers had been ordered to destroy all houses, dwellings and livestock. They had been told the villagers had left for market because it was a Saturday. Most were under the impression that they had been ordered to kill everyone they found in the village. Early in the morning of 16 March, Charlie Company arrived in My Lai. In the next four hours, between 300 and 400 civilians were killed. These were mostly women, children and old men. No Viet Cong were found in the village. Only three weapons were recovered. At the time, it was treated as a success. However, a year later an investigation was carried out which led to many soldiers being charged. The My Lai massacre deeply shocked the American public and led to mass demonstrations against the war.