

Jamie Dickens (Y10)

*"The most important reason why the Vietcong were able to fight the much more powerful USA was because of their guerrilla tactics". How far do you agree with this statement?*

The use of Guerrilla tactics could be seen as the most important reason why the Vietcong were able to fight the USA successfully. This is because they were able to use these tactics to undermine and slowly pick off the Americans who had superior technology and numbers to the Vietcong. For example, the Vietcong would leave booby traps in the dense forests for American troops to run into. This included sharpened bamboo sticks known as punji sticks which would be put in pits and covered in venom and faeces to infect the wounds of any unlucky soldier that landed on one. The Vietcong would also help peasants to attach punji sticks to their doors so that when Americans came into their homes when the doors shut behind them, they would be impaled. Other booby traps included mines that would be buried in the ground and wired up so when an American soldier stepped on it, it would explode sending shrapnel and crude bits of metal flying everywhere and potentially severely wounding several American soldiers. These mines were particularly effective because very often an American soldier wouldn't even realise that they had stepped on the mine. On the whole the use of these crude booby traps was extremely successful as 10% of American deaths were due to booby traps and it created great psychological fear in American soldiers which made them scared to leave their camps. Furthermore, The Vietcong had a huge network of underground tunnels that stretched for hundreds of miles underneath the jungle. These networks were underground cities and had everything that Vietcong needed like storage rooms, hospitals, barracks and kitchens. These tunnels aided another Guerrilla tactic which was the idea of hit and run. This was when the Vietcong would appear from their tunnels ambush the American when they least expected it or were at their weakest and then run back into their tunnels leaving the Americans with many casualties and in extreme confusion. This worked so effectively because the entrances to the Vietcong tunnels were extremely well camouflaged that unless you knew where the entrances were you wouldn't be able to find it. Therefore, the use of guerrilla tactics could be seen as the most important reason that the Vietcong were able to fight America successfully because it meant they didn't have to face them head on and rather picked them off slowly while keeping their own casualties low.

Another factor that made the Vietcong successful against the USA was the support of the local population. This is because it gave them further support and advantage against the Americans. For example, the Vietcong didn't wear any kind of uniform which meant they could easily blend in with the peasant farmers so the Americans wouldn't be able to distinguish them from an innocent civilian. They could also hide weapons in villages and in people's homes to help them ambush American soldiers and in some cases, peasants would let the Vietcong into their homes to hide and protect them from the Americans. Peasants were also willing to sell their crops to the Vietcong and would sometimes give them supplies for free. The Vietcong were able to do this because they had won the support of the Vietnamese people by following a set of rules that simply put meant the Vietcong had to be respectful of farmers and their land and help with the farming of said land when possible, tell stories to the peasant to keep morale up and to always be respectful and never to pressure peasants into selling them things they don't want to. By doing this the

Vietnamese people soon learned to love the Vietcong which turned them against the Americans who were destroying their land and killing their people which meant the peasants were happy to resist the Americans and put up a fight in order to aid the Vietcong. This became a big enough problem for the Americans that they had to start the strategic hamlet program which forcibly moved peasants into villages that were guarded by American troops. However, this backfired as it further made the Vietnamese people resent the Americans and support the work of the Vietcong even more. Moreover, this was also an important reason why the Vietcong were able to fight the USA because it gave them another advantage over the Americans and aided their hit and run tactics which were every effective against the Americans because they could hide both themselves and their weapons in villages.

A final factor that made the Vietcong successful against the Americans was the many weaknesses of the American army. For example, the Americans were not equipped for the humid dense jungle conditions of Vietnam. Their uniform went mouldy in the extreme heat, they had heavy packs that were weighed down with water and food and the standard issue guns were incredibly unreliable. This was because if the guns got wet or knocked around, they would simply stop firing and would jam. Another of their weaknesses was that they had a young and inexperienced army, and their soldiers came mainly from the draft which meant that many of them didn't want to be in Vietnam in the first place. This led to a low morale among the American troops as none of them had a cause to fight the Vietnamese and they would rather stay at in their camps were they were at least risk of getting blown up by mine or ambushed by a Vietcong soldier. This led to many running from the draft and refusing to serve in the army which led to many young men being fined and put in jail. Furthermore, for those already in Vietnam with commanders who were eager to go out and hunt the Vietcong there were incidents were soldiers would blow up their officers using grenades and then report back saying it was a Vietcong booby trap. Additionally, Operation rolling thunder was an American operation that aimed to bomb as much North Vietnamese infrastructure as possible to try and knock out the Vietcong. However, this failed for a multitude of reasons such as: The Vietnamese rebuilt incredibly fast which meant American pilots found themselves bombing the same areas over and over again which caused great frustration. Additionally, The Vietcong were not actually affected by the bombing as their tunnels were too deep underground to be affected by the bombs. The bombing also caused great resentment for the Americans within the Vietnamese people turning them against the Americans which goes directly against the American mission to 'win the hearts and minds' of the Vietnamese people. This was another important reason why the Vietcong were successful in fighting the Americans because it meant that their enemy was disorganised, ununified, had bad morale and were not equipped correctly for their environment.

In conclusion, I think that while the weaknesses of the American army was an important reason because it made them vulnerable to Vietcong attack. However, I believe that the most important reason is the use of guerrilla tactics as it utilised their jungle surroundings and the Vietcong's knowledge of their homeland, caught the Americans off-guard as well as creating great phycological fear in the Americans that in some cases turned them against each other Additionally, I believe that the support of the local population was an important factor that helped the Vietcong to fight the USA because it gave them that extra bit of

leverage over the Americans but I do not believe that is as important as the use of guerrilla tactics and the weaknesses of the American army.