

Great Battles for Boys: The Vietnam War

Study Guide Answers

INTRODUCTION

1. Which three countries were known as “French Indochina”?

Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

2. Who was Ho Chi Minh? And what kind of government did he want for Vietnam? (Extra points if you can explain that form of government!)

Ho Chi Minh was the leader of the Vietnamese independent movement.

He wanted a Communist government to rule the country. (Extra points for any of the following: Communism is a political theory developed by Karl Marx. Under Communism, the government owns everything — from lands and farms to businesses, hospitals, and manufacturing. The government provides the salaries, and determines what each person’s work is worth. There is no private property allowed under Communism.)

3. In 1961, which US President sent several hundred troops to Vietnam?

John F. Kennedy

THE BATTLE OF DIEN BIEN PHU

Just before the United States and its allies entered the Vietnam War, the Vietnamese people were fighting against which country?

France.

Which two countries were supplying the Viet Minh?

China and the Soviet Union (Russia)

What were some of the problems with the Dien Bien Pho's base and its location?

The base was located in a remote region. The forts were spread out from each other. And the guerrilla fighters populated the area and knew the terrain much better. The guerrilla fighters were also located on the high ground, which is always an advantage in battle.

THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL

By 1968, roughly how many NVA troops had passed through the Ho Chi Minh Trail?

100,000 troops

2. Which two neighboring countries helped the NVA travel on the Ho Chi Minh Trail?

Cambodia and Laos.

3. Can you recall some of the tactics used by the United States to destroy the Ho Chi Minh Trail? Were those efforts successful? Why not?

Various answers: Bombing from the air. Spraying the poisonous defoliant Agent Orange. Seeding the clouds to create rain that would cause muddy roads. And even more than 100 pounds of powdered soap to create a gooey muck on the trail.

None of these efforts were successful. The people and political forces supporting the trail always repaired and rebuilt the routes.

THE BATTLE OF VAN TUONG

What year did the United States send its Marines to Vietnam?
May, 1965.

What type of rifles did the Marines carry?

M-14s.

The M14 was the standard infantry rifle for all Army and Marine units that deployed to Vietnam in 1965.

After the Battle of Van Tuong, how did politics enter into the military decision-making process?

Before this battle — Operation Starlite, a surprise attack — the United States had a policy of not sharing military plans with the South Vietnamese Army.

After this battle, America changed its policy. The SVA was briefed before missions and operations. Later, it was revealed that spies were working on behalf of Ho Chi Minh in the SVA and relaying the information to the North Vietnamese forces.

TUNNEL RATS

1. Were all the tunnels the same size?

No. Some were small and designed for one man, but others could stretch for miles.

2. What did the largest tunnels contain?

The larger complexes contained rooms for many men (thousands) and large stores of supplies such as food, water, and ammunition. Some of the tunnels were even equipped with hospitals to tend to the wounded.

3. What were some of the traps inside the tunnels?

Many answers: Poisonous snakes. Trap doors that locked a man inside the tunnel. Spiders. Scorpions. Rats infected with

bubonic plague. And enemy combatants waiting for a tunnel rat...

BATTLE OF LONG TAN

1. What color and style of uniforms did the Viet Cong soldiers wear?

Black “pajamas.”

2. The Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs) were equipped with what caliber of machine gun?

The APCs were equipped with 50-calibre machine guns.

3. What does “danger close” mean?

When a soldier orders artillery fire to strike so closely to their own position it risks their lives.

GENERAL GIAP AND SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ROBERT MCNAMARA

1. What brilliant tactics did General Giap use to defeat the French Army?

Guerilla tactics: ambushes, hit-and-runs, and keeping his forces hidden in the jungle, never fighting out in the open.

2. Which US presidents did Secretary McNamara serve under?
John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson

3. What was McNamara's strategy and plan for the Vietnam War? Was it effective?

McNamara's strategy was known as "limited warfare."

In the past, the US had used a philosophy of "overwhelming force." McNamara wanted to contain the battles and conflicts.

But limited warfare was not effective in Vietnam; it almost guaranteed loss because the enemy wasn't fighting within limits.

Also, McNamara later learned the Johnson administration had lied about using it — in secret, the US military was launching attacks in North Vietnam.

McNamara later became an outspoken critic of the Vietnam War.

TET OFFENSIVE AND THE BATTLE OF HUE

1. What is "Tet" in Vietnam?

"Tet" is the Lunar New Year celebration. It is Vietnam's most important holiday.

2. Why were the South Vietnamese and American forces surprised by this attack?

Both sides had agreed to a temporary ceasefire, January 27 to February 3rd, so that the Vietnamese soldiers could celebrate the Tet holiday. Many SVA soldiers were on leave when the offensive began.

3. Why was the Battle of Hue different from the other Vietnam War battles before it?

Prior battles had all been fought in the jungle. The Battle of Hue took place in a city and demanded street fighting and urban warfare tactics.

MEDIA AND POLITICS

1. Who was the U.S. president at the time of the Tet Offensive?
Lyndon Johnson.

2. Even though the US won a major victory in the Tet Offensive, why did the battle later turn into a political victory for the North Vietnamese forces?

For the first time in history, the media — newspapers and television news programs — could broadcast reports straight from the battlefield.

These reports often included graphic images of war. Many Americans were bothered by the images, and began to withdraw support for the war. But even more persuasive was TV broadcaster Walter Cronkite. He traveled to Vietnam and announced on air that America was losing the Tet Offensive and the war in general.

Meanwhile, US troops won the Tet Offensive. But the NVA used this anti-war sentiment against the US and its allies. They were able to turn the military loss of the Tet Offensive into a political victory.

STAFF SERGEANT ROY PEREZ BENAVIDEZ

1. Staff Sergeant Roy Benavidez took two items with him on the helicopter to help the Recon team. What were those items?

A medical bag and a knife.

2. What was a CIDG? What was their role with American forces?

CIDG stood for “Civilian Irregular Defense Group.” Native South Vietnamese men, they were trained as support for the American Special Forces.

3. What medal did Sergeant Benavidez receive in 1981 — and why was the award delayed?

The Medal of Honor.

The award was delayed first because Benavidez’s commander wanted him to receive a quicker award — Distinguished Service Cross — in case Benavidez died soon from his injuries.

When it was clear Benavidez had survived, his commander petitioned the army to upgrade the award to the Medal of Honor — but he was told no American had survived that mission to confirm what happened. Eyewitnesses are necessary for the Medal of Honor.

However, thousands of miles away in the remote Fiji Islands, survivor Brian O'Connor heard about Benavidez's situation and wrote a detailed description of the battle and Benavidez's heroism.

DOGS OF WAR

1. How many dogs served in Vietnam from 1964 to 1973?
About 4,000 dogs.

2. These dogs were given different duties. Can you name those duties?

Scouting. Tracking. Sentry-Patrol.

3. What did Nemo do?

Despite being seriously injured (shot in the eye), Nemo protected Airman Throneburg and attacked the enemy soldiers. Nemo also crawled up on top of Throneburg to protect him and refused to leave him until a soldier arrived who knew how to handle dogs.

MISSION TANGO 51

1. In which country did this mission take place?

Cambodia

2. How did the Special Forces conceal their American identities from enemy combatants?

They dressed in plain clothing (no uniforms), carried foreign-made weapons, and didn't carry identification from the United States.

3. Why do you think some military combat veterans would prefer not to talk about their experiences on the battlefield?

Answers will vary. Basically, the memories are painful for many of these servicemen. Talking about it can re-open old wounds.

But it's always good to thank them for their service!

THE HOA LO PRISON

1. What was the Hoa Lo prison's nickname?

The Hanoi Hilton.

2. Which country built the prison?

France.

3. Name some of the habits and behaviors that helped POWs survive captivity in the prison.

Answers will vary. POWs relied on their faith in God, inner strength, and the support from other prisoners. POWs played mental games, too, such as "build your dream house." They thought about complex mathematical problems. They recited poems that they had memorized and told stories. They also developed a "tap code" which was like Morse code to communicate with each other despite being in separate cells.

FIRE SUPPORT BASE RIPCORD

1. Who was the president of the United States during the Battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord?

Richard Nixon.

2. How did this battle resemble the French fight at Dien Bien Phu?

The location was very remote. It was a mountainous area. The only way in or out was by helicopter. And the NVA had the area surrounded.

3. After evacuating the base, how did the United States destroy the base and surrounding area?

B-52 heavy bombers flew in and decimated the area.

THE END(S) OF THE VIETNAM WAR

1. In which country did the peace talks take place?

France (Paris, specifically)

2. Can you name some of the reasons why the United States lost the Vietnam War?

Answers vary.

The US was fighting a limited warfare campaign instead of using overwhelming force to destroy a military enemy.

The US underestimated the passion of the Vietnamese people to defend their homeland.

American troops were sent into the war with only partial training for guerrilla warfare.

The war was highly irregular — there was never a “front line.” Most battles took place at remote bases, a situation that scattered forces and made resupplying very difficult.

3. After the fall of Saigon, the city was renamed. Do you know its new name?

Ho Chi Minh City.