Tactics During Vietnam Essay, Research Paper

From the beginning of the war the NFL realised that in order to win they must win “the hearts and minds” of the peasants. This way they could be provided with shelter, food and such like, also they would be able to enlist more fighters for their cause and above all else the peasants would see that communism was the way their country should be heading. To do this they operated by a special code when dealing with the peasants: “(1) Not to do what is likely to damage the land and crops or spoil the houses and belongings of people; (2) Not to insist on buying or borrowing land that people are not willing to sell or lend; (3) Never break our word; (4) Not to do or speak what is likely to make people believe that we hold them in contempt; (5) To help them with their daily work. These rules ensured that the peasants would support the NFL and help them at any opportunity. As well as these gestures of kindness towards the peasants they would also educate them as to why they were so poor and, of course explain how much better communism would be to them. The Americans on the other hand although realising to some extent that the war was only going to be won with the support of the peasants were far less active in their approach to helping, and indoctrinating them. On the news and publicly they were seen to be helping them but the soldiers were far less willing and the peasants were already prejudiced against the USA involvement in the war. An example of the Americans focussing on the peasants was the “Strategic Hamlet” programme (although technically an ARVN tactic it was masterminded by the USA‚s CIA). Under the guidance of the CIA they uprooted whole villages and took the peasants to an enclosed area and kept them under guard. The idea was to stop the peasants being influenced by the NFL. This was understandably a very unpopular tactic and probably turned more peasants against the Americans than it did win support. The Military tactics used by each side were also very different. America used high technology weapons that were capable of destroying practically anything. They were particularly keen on using their advanced planes and bombs. For example “operation rolling thunder” was a bombing campaign that was put over the North of Vietnam in 1964. It was originally set up to last about 8 weeks but in actual fact it continued for over 3 years. The NFL had no such armaments and technology, so relied on using Guerrilla tactics. Originally adapted by Mao Zedong for use by China, Ho Chi Minh exploited Chinas tactics very carefully. The hit and run tactics were designed to put small holes in the enemy that eventually amounted to winning the war. The NLF‚s resources from the beginning were stretched, not necessarily manpower but weapons and other such resources were scarce. So the NLF used unexploded bombs to produce traps such as “bouncing bettys”, mines that once triggered would jump up and explode around waist level to main any victim that stands on it. Pungi pits were also used; a hole in the ground that was full of sharpened bamboo sticks and covered with foliage to stop people from seeing them. The idea of these traps was not to kill the enemy but maim them. The idea was that if someone is dead then they only need a body bag, but if they are injured the enemy has to spend time and resources healing them instead and the other troops have to hear their comrades scream with pain, which is very draining on morale. When fighting the guerrillas would go out in groups and only engage in ambush situations. They would use the terrain to their best advantage appearing from nowhere striking and then disappearing back into the undergrowth. This led the Americans to develop chemical weapons that were used to make the NLF more visible. Agent orange was a chemical defoliant that was used to clear areas of terrain where the NFL was suspected to be, but it also caused birth defects among women. Another favourite weapon used by the USA was Napalm. It was a mixture of petroleum jelly mixed with phosphorous that was dropped from fighter-bombers over suspected NFL inhabited areas. All that was needed was one drop and then it would burn through to the bone and then the victims would die of phosphorous poisoning. America would use a combination of troops that were closely supported by planes and helicopters. The planes would be mounted with a gun known as “Puff the magic dragon”, a devastating 30mm cannon that could rip up any thing with a “wall of lead” (nowadays using depleted uranium). The NLF were ill-equipped compared to the Americans but they had an established route called the “Ho Chi Minh Trail” that was a complex web of jungle tracks that ran from North Vietnam to Saigon carrying about 60 tons of aid per day. In the beginning of the war it would take around six months for a soldier to navigate his way through the trail but as the route became used more often the more experienced solders could get through it in six weeks. The Americans would desperately try to bomb the route but it was invisible from the air so it was impossible to hit with any accuracy. As the war progressed USA became more and more frustrated by the increasing numbers of wounded soldiers they were getting, and the tactics they used became more aggressive. They started to use policies of search and destroy, where groups of troops would go out with the aim of killing any members of the NFL they could find. The troops were trained to think of the NLF as scum and had no problem in slaughtering them, and any NLF supporters were also killed. Jets, boats, tanks, and helicopters would support all of these patrols if they found a suspect target. Whole villages were often raised to the ground to stop a couple of NLF members or supporters. USA also used “fire zones”, where a village was warned that they were going to be destroyed by leaflet drops or by word of mouth etc. Anyone then found in the area after a specific time was either shot, napalmed, or pineapple bombed, (a single bomb that would explode into thousands of tiny fibreglass balls, so they couldn‚t be picked up by x-ray). In another attempt to stop the NLF Operation Ranch Hand was used, planes would drop chemicals (agent blue) that would destroy crops, the idea being to starve the NLF, but unfortunately it just turned more and more of the peasants against the USA. By 1967 the career soldiers had almost all been used and so the government introduced conscription. This meant that many soldiers were there against their will and wanted only to finish their tour of duty. They started to care less and less about winning the war as they were more occupied with staying alive. Consequently the morale suffered, fragging occurred more often for unpopular commands. The Vietcong on the other hand were highly motivated, they were fighting for a cause they believed in, and were there on their own free will, even women were allowed and willing to fight. As the war went on they became more confident, better armed and trained. This led to the Tet offensive. On January 31st, 1968, more than 70,000 Vietcong troops launched an attack on more than a hundred cities and towns. In Saigon they managed to enter The US Embassy building and kill 5 marines, and take over a local radio station. In military terms the Americans won, an estimated 37,000 NLF soldiers were killed compared to the 2,500 American troops, but it proved to the soldiers and the American public that the NLF had an inexhaustible supply of people and that the Americans would not win he war.