

Driving Question:

What was the legacy and influence of the Battle of Dien Bien Phu on Vietnam and their role in future wars?

Overview:

The Battle of Dien Bien Phu occurred during the First Indochina war. The War was fought by colonial French forces and nationalist/communist lead Viet Minh. The Viet Minh were fighting for Vietnamese independence after going through years of colonial rule under the French. Years of fighting culminated at the Dien Bien Phu valley. The French had set up a defensive fortification in the valley basin to cut off the Viet Minh from moving into the neighbouring country of Laos. The French underestimated the Viet Minh, thinking them incapable to conduct a modern war, operate in an organized manner and having lesser firepower. The Viet Minh were backed by communist China and were provided with heavy artillery and anti-aircraft artillery. The battle began in March 1954 and by April it was clear that French defeat would be the outcome. The battle finished on May 7 with the French surrender. Both sides suffered immense casualties, but the Viet Minh was still in high spirits with the victory. They had defeated a western power and had something substantial to bring to the Geneva Accords later that year. The French and the Viet Minh delegate and leadership, Ho Chi Minh, came to an agreement in which Vietnam was divided to a north and south half, along the 17th parallel. Ho Chi Minh would have communist power over the north and the south would be a democratic state. This set into motion the ensuing Second Indochina war, a continued struggle for Vietnamese independence and now unification.

Thesis:

The outcome of the battle of Dien Bien Phu lead to the division of Vietnam, despite the increased national pride, and ultimately lead to the Second Indochina War.

Essential Points:

- The Vietnamese national pride in the independence movement
- The division of Vietnam, physically, culturally and politically
- The Second Indochina war and American involvement in the country after the fall of Dien Bien Phu

Communication:

The next step for me is to move forward with the communication aspect of the project. I will begin with crafting a script and a rough story outline of how I want to structure the Explain Everything. From there I will gather visual resources (photos, videos, etc...) and begin to physically create the video from there. My general idea for how to structure it is too start with my thesis and use a metaphor, probably dominos, to explain the three key points. I want to go through the events in a general linear order so as not to make it confusing, while focusing on the three main points.

Yu , Miles Maochun. "The Lessons Of Dien Bien Phu." *Hoover Institution*, 22 Dec. 2017, <https://www.hoover.org/research/lessons-dien-bien-phu>. Web. Accessed 11 January 2020.

- Dien Bien Phu took place in the Dien Bien Phu valley, near the Chinese-Vietnamese border in 1954
- Fought between French forces and communist/nationalist Viet Minh forces
- "Most consequential military engagement in Southeast Asia in the 20th century"
- Battle result was humiliating for the French, brought down the French government and ended colonial rule in Indochina
- Brought in American military involvement and changed the global geostrategic landscape
- French were never clear on who their enemies were, just like their American counterparts later on
- The Viet Minh weren't apart of the Cold War, but nationalist peasants who wanted to challenge the French rule
- Last 4 years of the conflict was a "proxy confrontation" between Communist bloc and the West
- Planned in early 1950 by Stalin, Mao and Ho Chi Minh
- The French underestimated the Viet Minh, they thought the Viet Minh didn't have the capability to operate in a modern, division and corps campaign style
- Similar to the Americans in the Second Indochina war up until the infamous Tet offensive in 1968
- In regard to Dien Bien Phu the French wanted to fortify the valley in order to draw out the seemingly disorganized guerrillas to draw their firepower on the French fortress
- The plan was to defeat them with advanced fire power the Viet Minh couldn't match
- They thought this would be a huge blow to the Viet Minh which would ultimate win them the war
- The plan failed immensely, it's compared to Hitler's plans for Stalingrad in WWII
- In was heavily dependent on the inability of the enemy to operate with siege tactics and the French air support to consistently bring in weapons, supplies and reinforcements
- 16,000 French soldiers were surrounded and contained in the valley by 50,000 Viet Minh
- The French were set up within the valley while the Viet Minh contained the overlooking mountains and used Chinese heavy artillery to weaken the French defences
- Viet Min also had anti-aircraft artillery preventing effective air support to the French
- Gave little choice for the French troops but to surrender
- Battle began in mid-March of 1954 and ended on May 7
- Fewer than 100 French troops broke through the siege the rest of the 16,000 were killed, wounded or captured

Paul, James. "Dien Bien Phu, Symbol For All Time." *Dien Bien Phu, Symbol For All Time*, <https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/155/25981.html>. Web. Accessed 11 January 2020.

- Three months after the Geneva accords Algeria rose up to combat colonial rule, The accords result was a signal to other colonials who wanted independence
- The Geneva accords happened in July 1954 and along with French and Vietnamese delegations, USA, Britain, USSR and China were all reluctantly present
- The Vietnamese had defeated one of the largest western armies at Dien Bien Phu
- Jean Sainteny and Ho Chi Minh signed an agreement in Hanoi on 6 March 1946, 9 years before the events of Dien Bien Phu, The agreement had France recognizing the Republic of Vietnam as a free state with its own government, parliament, army and finances within the French Union
- The agreement also gave the impression that France wanted to establish new relations with its colonies
- There was a general feeling that another agreement specifically on independence could be made on French goodwill, Ho Chi Minh went to Paris but didn't get anything out of it

- Other colonial uprisings looked to the Viet Minh and Ho Chi Minh as an example, they dared to challenge their rulers and the events following their uprising were closely watched to see the final outcome
- Due to the set backs by the army in Indochina the other colonies in the French Union began to feel empowered to go against the French rulers, they opposed the French in the war in Indochina they refused to load materials onto vessels bound for Vietnam and openly supported the Viet Minh's success
- Many French anti-communist people thought that if they were to win in Indochina they wouldn't have to have any wars elsewhere, it was vital in the French maintaining rule over their colonies
- No study has been done on the effect of the defeat at Dien Bien Phu but clues suggest people were pleased with the outcome in some African colonies
- The battle symbolizes anachronistic obstinacy leading to disaster and defeat for the French and for the Vietnamese it was the reconquest of national independence
- The battle was also seen as foreshadowing for other conflicts, the "oppressed" could and will fight against their rulers to achieve independence
- "The fall of Dien Bien Phu marked the end of the colonial period and the beginning of the era of third-world independence. Today there is not a revolt, rebellion or uprising in Asia, Africa or America that fails to invoke General Giap's victory. Dien Bien Phu has become decolonization's 4th of July" - Jean Pouget a former officer in the Expeditionary Corps

Philip, Bruno. "Battle against Oblivion: the Defeat That Ended French Colonial Rule in Vietnam." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 1 July 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/01/dien-bien-phu-battle-france-vietnam-indochina-war>. Web. Accessed 11 January 2020.

- "The only pitched battle to be lost by a European army in the history of decolonization" Jean-Pierre Rioux
- Signalled the beginning of the end for France's empire
- The battle be a weight on the Geneva accords which lead to the agreement ending the war
- The First Indochina War left 3,420 French military personnel dead and a lot more Viet Minh
- Dien Bien Phu was referred to as a large bathtub with surrounding hills and mountains forming the sides of a broad valley
- Viet Minh veterans think of it as one of the great victories of modern times
- French were heavily convinced that their firepower was far superior to that of the Viet Minh and they would ultimately drive them back
- Both sides wanted the battle to be a large deciding one
- French thought they could drive them back into Laos
- General Giap saw the valley as a trap, for the French
- Viet Minh were primarily a force of peasant soldiers fighting for independence, they knew the victory would change their lives, high morale force and motivation. Much more than the French

"China Contributed Substantially to Vietnam War Victory, Claims Scholar." *Wilson Center*, 7 July 2011, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/china-contributed-substantially-to-vietnam-war-victory-claims-scholar>. Web. Accessed 11 January 2020.

- Interview between Web Intern from Woodrow Wilson Center and author who wrote a book on the Chinese involvement in Vietnam War
- Vietnamese don't talk about Chinese involvement and contribution because of their nationalism ideals and pride, they don't want to acknowledge they had help winning the war

- China and Vietnam were very close, when China became communist in 1949 Ho Chi Minh went to China to request help and Mao was eager to help, he wanted to spread his “formula” for revolution to other asian countries to spread communist ideals in the Far East
- There was also a division of work between China and the Soviets. China would focus on supporting communism within Asia and USSR would focus on Europe
- Soviet support with Vietnam was quite minimal due to that division, no evidence of physical support by way of materials and advisors
- China on the other hand sent political and military advisors, weapons and supplies to help against the French
- China also provided a lot of the training for commanders, helped with their defence systems and financial organization
- Helped them establish an economic base
- Small conflicting ideas between Ho Chi Minh and China. Minh was not going to be a Chinese puppet but welcomed their support while China partially wanted him as their puppet
- After Geneva Accords Ho Chi Minh wanted to unify the north and south portions of Vietnam to have one unified nation
- China grew more and more fearful that would lead to American Involvement
- China did not want to get into another conflict with the US after Korean War which placed a lot of stress on China’s economy
- China worked to relax tension in Vietnam after the French withdrew
- Soviets also expressed they didn’t want another Asia war
- They both pressured for North Vietnam to go no further than the 17th parallel
- Encouraged Ho Chi Minh to wait and work to win the election a few years later to reunify the country through agreed upon peace terms
- When the election didn’t take place, due to South Vietnam refusing, Ho blamed the Chinese of betraying their interests
- Viet Minh commanders also were very fearful of losing their independence to China after French defeat so they had trouble getting along with Chinese advisors
- During the Second Indochina war LBJ was very weary of Chinese involvement and worked with the commanders to ensure they remained within their respective boundaries to not provoke Chinese aggression
- There was an agreement between North Vietnam and China that if the US had a ground invasion of North Vietnam China would send troops and would prevent the US from taking Hanoi
- Mao made serious preparation for war against the US in China as well, moving industries and universities away from coastal areas, encouraging the building of bomb shelters etc...
- Mao believed in revolutions beginning in rural areas and then spreading to the cities which the Vietnamese used in the South to successfully move against American forces
- The relationship with China can be attributed to the Cold War, the situation at the time was what brought and maintained the two sides continued relationship
- Vietnam continues to look to China for inspiration on dealing with economy and governing
- Vietnamese are still very proud of their accomplishments and tend not to discuss external aid, Vietnam insists they were the ones achieving the victories and brought themselves independence

United States, Congress, “The Pentagon Papers.” *The Pentagon Papers*, Gravel ed., vol. 1, 1954. <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/doc40.htm>. Web. Accessed 11 January 2020.

- This document was written 28 April 1954 as an analysis of the battle and possible outcomes
- The repercussions of a defeat at Dien Bien Phu would be far-reaching and adverse

- Wouldn't be the end of French involvement within Indochina
- A huge factor in the aftermath military situation would be the Vietnamese units working with the French, there would be increased desertions and there is a possibility for the Vietnamese units to disband, in the two or three months following the battle it is unlikely to have much occur to the units but over time it would be a factor
- The current situation in Dien Bien Phu halted any overrunning of Laos and inflicted serious casualties on the Viet Minh, so it has been in part successful
- After Dien Bien Phu to concentration of Viet Minh would be very high in the area and it would be some time before they could reorganize to face a battle of similar nature
- French union forces could still maintain control of major cities within Indochina for the next two or three months because of this
- Political consequences would be a lot more catastrophic than military consequences in the region
- Would increase the rate of decline of French influence in Indochina
- There would also be a decline in Vietnamese support to continue the war
- Believe that general collapse of French rule in the next two-three months would be prevented by continued presence of French troops and continued hope that USA would intervene
- The Fall of Dien Bien Phu would accelerate the deterioration of French control in Indochina
- If the trend is not corrected then the French position would collapse in the last half of 1954 if the Geneva accords were not occurring during that time
- If French forces were to surrender the consequences could be greater in intensity than if they were fight their way out
- Viet Minh losses would of course be less than if fighting were to continue
- Estimated Viet Minh casualties to date 13,000, 50% killed or permanently ineffective
- Due to half-trained reinforcements there would be a reduction on the offensive force of the Viet Minh in the next two-three months
- Morale of French forces would be heavily lowered if Dien Bien Phu falls
- Probably wouldn't impact the combat effectiveness of the forces but the reliability of Vietnamese forces would be in question
- The political outcome could result in a cease-fire/peace settlement within Geneva Accords bringing an end to the conflict
- Viet Minh would capitalize on victory and concentrate on propaganda efforts. Working to project the idea that it is time for colonial rule to end, would also seek to enhance the "People's Governments" of Laos and Cambodia

Burns, Ken and Lynn Novick , directors. *The Vietnam War*. PBS, 2017.

- Before Geneva both sides wanted to improve their standing
- wanted to lure Viet Minh into decisive battle
- General Navarre saw no need to worry about the jungle surrounding the French defences
- French artillery commander was extremely confident as well saying he had more guns than he needed
- The French were incredibly confident in the success of the battle
- Giap planned to wipe out all French forces in Dien Bien Phu
- 1/4 civilians porters moved all supplies on foot through the jungle to surround the valley
- 200 big guns and 50,000 Viet Minh were set up overlooking the French base
- They were fully camouflaged so that they couldn't be spotted from the air
- March 13 1954, artillery began reigning down 50 shells a minute on the French position, marking the beginning of the battle
- They destroyed the air strip preventing any air support to land
- The French forces could then only be reinforced by airdrop

- The French artillery commander who was overconfident originally, committed suicide
- The French government then began begging Eisenhower to intervene and aid the French forces in the valley
- Britain and US said no
- US believed independence should be given to the people before they move in
- President still sent more transport planes to resupply French
- Believed Vietnam wasn't much but if it fell the rest of Asia would be communist
- Domino effect, Vietnam was the first domino
- Half the country was liberated by the victory
- The victory instilled a belief in the Viet Minh that they could win and had the ability to do so
- Everyone was proud they defeated the French
- French supporters grew very fearful because they helped the French and they were suffering a huge defeat and could rise to power now more than ever
- West saw it as a defeat for the free world
- The day after the defeat Geneva accords began
- Talks went on for 2.5 months
- Despite the victory they needed more support from USSR and China
- Both were not looking for war
- They urged Ho Chi Minh to agree to a settlement
- Vietnam was then divided at 17th parallel
- All French troops moved to the south and Viet Minh moved to the north
- DMZ was put in place along the 17th parallel
- Agreed there would be an election in 2 years to reunify
- Everyone thought Ho Chi Minh would win
- Roman Catholic and Buddhists moved to the south because they could not live in communist controlled area, they faced imprisonments or death
- Separated the whole country, communists and nationalists in the north and Christian's and Buddhist's and democrats to the south
- Those who fought the French and those who supported them on either side
- US moved in to support a government in the South
- Thus began US involvement in Vietnam, they were going to help build South Vietnam into an extension of the western ideals. Split the country even further and build that dividing line between communism and capitalism

United States, Congress, "The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The First Indochina War 1947-1954."
The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The First Indochina War 1947-1954, 2004. https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/History/Vietnam/Vietnam_1947-1954.pdf. Web.
 Accessed 11 January 2020.

- In regards to Dien Bien Phu and it's initial choosing of position, the French wanted a way for air support to land and take off and really the other requirements were disregarded
- Eisenhower agreed to send C-47's (transport aircraft) to aid the French during the battle and in preparation
- Some French were fearful that China would commit jet aircraft to the conflict
- The desire by the US if they were to intervene and China would send in their forces would be to eliminate all communist units and work to establish each state (Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam) with stable governing bodies to be independent. Pretty much they would aid them (by French request) to set up non-communist affiliated governments to ensure that communism is out of Southeast Asia
- There were plans in place to move into Vietnam to aid the French forces in 1954, to prevent spread of communism.

History.com Editors. "Vietnam War." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 29 Oct. 2009, https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history#section_1. Web. Accessed 13 January 2020.

- Under Japanese occupation in WWII, Ho Chi Minh formed Viet Minh
- Viet Minh began with communist and nationalist ideals and fought as a resistance cell in Vietnam
- Once Japan surrendered it pulled its troops out of the area and left French-educated Vietnamese emperor Bao Di in control over the country
- Ho Chi Minh moved to take the capital and declared a Democratic Republic of Vietnam
- France wanted to re-establish control over its colonies and so they backed Bao and began to set up the state of Vietnam in the hopes of returning to colonial rule
- Both wanted a unified Vietnam, just under different leaders and government ideals
- US became involved in Vietnam in 1954
- They saw the conflict as a Cold War proxy war and wanted to aid with preventing the tide of communism in the country
- After the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu the Geneva Accords led to the agreement to divide Vietnam
- Ho Chi Minh has rule over the north and Bao had control over the South
- Elections were to be held in 56
- In 1955 Ngo Dinh Diem pushed Bao out of power and he became president of the South
- Cold War had increased intensity and the US had renewed efforts to stop communism and the spread of Soviet influenced states
- Due to that Eisenhower pledged his support to Diem's government marking the movement of American influence into the country and leading to the Second Indochina War, the Vietnam war
- US gave military equipment and training to improve Diem's forces
- Viet Minh still had presence in the south and were later termed Viet Cong
- Diem's forces began to crack down on Viet Cong sympathizers
- 100,000 people were arrested
- Many were killed and/or tortured
- In 1957 the Viet Cong began to attack government officials and various other targets to combat Diem's regime
- By 1960 all of the various groups in the south came together to form National Liberation Front to fight against Diem
- Most members were not communist but US deemed them puppets of the North
- A team was sent to Vietnam and came back saying the Kennedy should build up military, economic and technical aid to Diem to combat the Viet Cong
- By 1962 9,000 American troops were in Vietnam, ramping up drastically.