

- 5 To help them in their daily work (harvesting, fetching firewood, carrying water, sewing, etc.).
- 6 In spare time, to tell amusing, simple, and short stories useful to the Resistance, but not to betray secrets.
- 7 Whenever possible to buy commodities for those who live far from the market.
- 8 To teach the population the national script and elementary hygiene.

Source D

Ho Chi Minh, July 1952
Ho's Selected Writings

"Army cadres concern themselves solely with military affairs, Government cadres with administrative jobs, Party cadres with Party business. They are like men standing on one leg. It is wrong for a cadre to be acquainted only with one field. He will not be truly proficient because army, mass, government and party work forms a whole which would not be strong and complete should one of its components come to miss."

Questions

- 1 a To what extent is Ho's contention "Our people have broken the chains, which for nearly a century have fettered them and have won independence for the Fatherland" [Source A] accurate?
 - b What message is being conveyed by Source D?
- 2 With reference to its origin, purpose and content, analyse the values and limitations of Source C for historians studying the methods of the Viet Minh.
- 3 Compare and contrast what Source A and Source D tell us about Ho's strategy for independence.
- 4 Using the sources and your own knowledge evaluate the role of ideology in Ho's guerrilla strategy.

In this sense then, the French Indo-China War was among the first of the wars of decolonization that would sweep the world in the post-war era. It would also be among the first, along with the ongoing Chinese Civil War, that would add the Cold War notion of ideology to the mix of motives. In the end though, ideology played a secondary role in the motives of the two main combatants. Ho and the Viet Minh wanted a Vietnam free of foreign control and in the years 1945–1954 this meant ousting the French. For their part the French wanted to reassert their imperial control over South-East Asia and by extension reclaim their pre-war world power status. In a way the French wanted to turn the clock back and the Viet Minh were willing to fight and die in large numbers to prevent that.

3.2 Combatants

Conceptual understanding

Key questions

- How were the French hampered in the early years of the war?
- What were the advantages and disadvantages of the Viet Minh structure?
- How did political considerations affect both the French and the Viet Minh?
- What role did foreign involvement play for both the French and the Viet Minh?

Key concepts

- Perspective
- Significance

The Viet Minh

To say that any part of this war was strictly a guerrilla war is inaccurate and this is well illustrated in the design of the Viet Minh forces. From the late 1940s, the Viet Minh had the ability to conduct local, small-scale guerrilla operations while at the same time maintaining large-unit organization and combat capability. The Viet Minh forces were structured into three components, organized hierarchically. At the bottom were local, part-time guerrilla forces – the Dan Quong or Popular Forces. The Dan Quong were recruited and based in small villages and hamlets. These units were used as porters and maintained transportation routes while providing intelligence on enemy positions and movements as well as on their neighbours. For instance, when regular force units moved through an area, the local Dan Quong force would be required to supply porters to support the movement of the larger force, always on the lookout for abandoned French material that could be scavenged.

In terms of combat, the Dan Quong conducted small force ambushes, sabotaged transport and set booby traps. While these units were local, they were directed from the Viet Minh central command. Distinguish yourself at this level and you were eligible to serve in the next level of Viet Minh military organization, the full-time guerrilla forces that were organized regionally and were better equipped than the local forces. They operated in battalions of up to 1,000 men later in the war. In the years 1946–1950 these units shouldered much of the Viet Minh's military operations using "traditional" guerrilla hit and run tactics. As the regular force grew in size and sophistication, these regional forces were occasionally used in support of large-scale operations.

The highest level of the Viet Minh forces was the regular force. As in most western armies, the Viet Minh regular or main force was organized into divisions, which contained all the elements needed to conduct large-scale operations – intelligence, artillery, supply and eventually armour and air support. Divisions were sub-divided into regiments and battalions. For the

majority of the war a Viet Minh division would have a strength of around 10 000 men. It is no coincidence that these larger units such as divisions were formed in the period after 1949 when equipment and expertise began pouring south from Mao's recently conquered China.

Commanding these various components was a command structure centred on a commander-in-chief who controlled the whole military organization through a system that grouped several regions into territories – the so-called **interzone system**. This interzone system was more comprehensive than simply another level of military organization and reflected the Viet Minh philosophy of revolutionary warfare. The interzone managed all aspects of the conflict including elections, assassinations, taxation, recruiting, propaganda and supply.

The total strength of the Viet Minh changed over time. In 1947 Giap, the Viet Minh commander, had about 50 000 regular force troops and about 40 000 popular and regional troops at his disposal. By 1951 this strength had swelled to 110 000 regular force and about 225 000 regional and popular forces. As the war reached its crescendo in 1953, Giap commanded 125 000 regulars, 75 000 regional troops and 250 000 popular force troops.

Viet Minh equipment

Just as with the French, the Viet Minh were armed with a motley assortment of small arms including French, Japanese, Czech and American rifles. When the war broke out in 1946 the Viet Minh had around 60 000 rifles and a few thousand light machine guns as well as some mortars, grenades and about six small artillery pieces. They would continue to use whatever weapons they could lay their hands on, such as Chinese cast-offs including US material captured during the Korean War. Each victory over the French brought new weapons into the Viet Minh arsenal. After 1950 each month brought ever-larger shipments of weapons south from China. Early in 1952, 250 tons of munitions and other supplies reached the Viet Minh's main base area, a territory called the Viet Bac, north-east of Hanoi, each month. By the time the two sides faced off at Dien Bien Phu this number had risen to 4,000 tons per month. As the Korean War wound down this monthly shipment contained large quantities of artillery and recoilless rifles, many of which would prove crucial to the Viet Minh victory at Dien Bien Phu.

Material wasn't the only assistance the Chinese offered their new clients. After 27 years of nearly constant warfare the People's Liberation Army (PLA) had gained a considerable amount of practical military experience and they seemed more than willing to share it. In 1950 the PLA sent 79 officers south to help the Viet Minh with planning and logistics. Although handfuls of Viet Minh fighters had trained at PLA schools since 1946, this increased dramatically after the PLA's victory in 1949. In the period 1952–1953, 10 000 Viet Minh officers and 40 000 soldiers were trained in China.

The French

The French forces in Indo-China suffered political and structural issues every bit as daunting as those faced by the Viet Minh. Political fractures ran deep in post-war France. Retribution for collaborators,

interzone system

Short for integrated zones, these were administrative zones used by the Viet Minh. Within each zone, a central committee coordinated ideological, political and administrative functions of the Viet Minh. There were six of these zones in Vietnam.

Class discussion

How might the Viet Minh recruit its members?

ideological divisions, economic weakness, and dependence on Marshall Aid made a unified approach to the war in Indo-China impossible. The **Fourth Republic** was plagued by weak coalition governments – 19 in total during the course of this war. The fact that the French Communist Party was a member of some of these governments and a vocal opponent of the war added a level of contradiction and confusion to the situation that made any effective military action close to impossible.

Throughout the war the French forces suffered a chronic shortage of manpower. Yalta had tied a sizable portion of France's post-war army to the French zone of occupation in Germany. Conscripts were legally forbidden from serving in colonial theatres of war. As a result the French Far East Expeditionary Corps was cobbled together from diverse military units from all corners of what was left of the French Empire. Only about 42% of the French forces in this war were born in Metropolitan France. Instead the troops came from France's North African Army and colonial regiments from Africa and Asia. The legendary **French Foreign Legion** provided a reliable professional formation, as did the regular parachute units of the French army. The French attempted to augment these units with locally recruited but French-led auxiliaries – generally local tribesmen who had various reasons for fighting the Viet Minh. These auxiliaries were trained in secret camps by covert western operatives.

Local Vietnamese men could find themselves recruited into French army units or conscripted into the new Vietnamese National Army (VNA), created at the behest of the Americans who wished to see the war "Vietnamized" – presaging Richard Nixon's 1969 policy. The VNA was generally poorly led, poorly equipped and added little to the French war effort. It was the unenviable lot of these soldiers to be caught between the increasingly popular Viet Minh with their system of brutal retaliation for collaborators and the "official" and often equally brutal oppressive force of the French overlords enforcing conscription.

Fourth Republic

The French government from 1946–1958. It was created by a constitution after the Second World War.

French Foreign Legion

This is a formation of the French army founded in 1831, made up of non-French nationals who wish to serve in the French army. Initially the Legion's officers were French, but over time the officer corps contained many nationalities. Likewise many French citizens make up the rank and file of the Legion. The Legion has served in every major French conflict since 1831.

ATL Thinking and research skills

As a condition of continued military and financial aid, the United States insisted that the French turn more and more of the fighting over to the Vietnamese National Army (VNA), a process they called "Vietnamization". President Richard Nixon would use this same goal and name in 1969 as a plan for reducing the United States' military commitment to South Vietnam. The notion of replacing foreign occupying troops with local security forces was to be used in other wars.

Research the events of the following wars and answer the questions that follow.

- Vietnam 1969
- Bay of Pigs 1961
- Yugoslav Civil War 1994

- Iraq 2010
 - Afghanistan 2010
- 1 What foreign forces were involved? What was the level of military commitment at its height?
 - 2 What were the motives of the foreign powers?
 - 3 What were the tasks assigned to the local forces? How were local troops prepared for these tasks?
 - 4 What challenges did the local troops face? What challenges did the foreign troops face?
 - 5 How did the foreign power disengage from the country? How well did the local troops accomplish their security goals?



Class discussion

Why would the Vietnamization of the war be important to the United States government?

At the beginning of the conflict the French forces had a total strength of 115 000. In the last years of the war this had grown to 175 000 (French, Africans, Asian and Foreign Legion). To this could be added 55 000 local auxiliaries and 150 000 VNA troops. Again, it is important to remember that these forces were far from equal in fighting ability. This fact is compounded by the nature of the war, requiring as it did a high degree of mobility, a capability of only a fraction of the French forces.

French equipment

On paper the French had a modern army, but in reality its material situation suffered in much the same way as its personnel situation did. This problem was especially acute in the first years of the war when material was gathered and scavenged from diverse sources. British, American, even German and Japanese equipment found its way into the French war effort. It was not uncommon for French units to be armed with a variety of small arms using non-regulation ammunition. As the United States began to bankroll more and more of the French effort after 1950 – they would eventually spend US\$3 billion keeping the French in the field – weapons and equipment became more plentiful and standardized.

The French had about 275 artillery pieces that remained in place and about 250 pieces of mobile artillery. The mobility of the French forces was limited, however, by a road system that was crude at best. On these unreliable roads the French moved their armoured cars and gun carriers. After 1950 they had a steady supply of armoured personnel carriers and some tanks, the effectiveness of which was severely hampered by the topography of the country. Amphibious units were active in the south and used M29C armed amphibious vehicles (Weasels) made in the United States.

The limitations forced upon French mobility by the terrain of Indo-China could have been partially overcome by what later would be known as air mobility using newly developed helicopters. These, however, were severely limited in number and capability and were reserved for medical evacuations in the years 1949–1954. The only other air mobility option available to the French forces was paratroop drops. Throughout the war the French paratroop units were frequently dropped into dangerous situations to rescue other elements of the army and conduct operations against the Viet Minh. In reality, however, this solved only half the mobility issue. Dropping from planes such as a C47 worked well for inserting troops into a combat situation, but airplanes could not be used to extract these same troops when needed in the way that helicopters can. This hard fact condemned paratroopers to grueling and dangerous marches out of remote areas that further limited their effectiveness. The lesson would be learned before France's next war; helicopters would be used to give the French troops in Algeria mobility unknown to those who fought in Indo-China.



▲ French soldiers improvise a raft for a river crossing in 1950. What was the relationship of primitive to new technology during this war?

One nominal advantage that the French enjoyed over their enemy was air power. This air power, however, was seldom sufficient to the task. Fast Bearcat and Hellcat fighter-bombers could strafe and drop underwing mounted bombs, but without any bombsights the accuracy was dubious. Small Morane aircraft made of metal and wood were used for artillery spotting. There were a number of larger level-flight bombers and these could be very useful, but were often hindered by the bad weather, especially in the spring as the Battle of Dien Bien Phu demonstrated. One of the more terrifying weapons employed by the French air services was napalm – jellied petroleum which ignited everything in its path.

Technology and war: paratroopers

Parachute technology existed from the First World War, but in the absence of aircraft that could carry significant numbers of soldiers, the idea of using it to inject troops to places otherwise inaccessible by ground was debatable. As such aircraft became more plentiful in the inter-war period, military thinkers around the world began to imagine how paratroopers might be used in offensive operations. In the Second World War paratroopers played significant roles in the German invasion of both Belgium and Crete. Allied paratroopers were integral to the invasion of Normandy and Operation Market Garden, the ambitious plan to capture the Rhine Bridges intact.

Paratroop operations had a number of elements that were attractive for military planners.

- An airdrop increased the possibility of surprise, expanding as it did the points of possible attack.
- Transport by aircraft minimized the effect of difficult terrain.
- By landing troops behind the front line, the enemy would be forced to defend in multiple directions.

Paratroop operations also had a number of serious drawbacks.

- The number of aircraft required to transport large numbers of troops often eliminated some of the element of surprise.
- Because paratroopers operated independent of supply lines they would have to jump with all the supplies required to sustain them as a fighting unit. This often limited both the time paratroopers could operate without resupply from the air or a link with ground forces as well as the size of munitions they could use – artillery and armour were often beyond their capability.
- In the brief period between exiting the aircraft and gathering into operational units on the ground, the paratroopers were incredibly vulnerable to enemy fire.
- While paratroopers could be inserted into a combat zone by airplanes, airplanes could not extract them. This was a fact of life brutally evident to French paratroopers operating in Indo-China.

Class discussion

To what extent did the United States support the French war effort with money and material? How and why did this support change over the period 1946–1954?

Technology and war: napalm

Napalm is a jellied form of petroleum used in aerial bombs and flamethrowers. Its name derives from its two principle components: naphthenic and palmitic acids. Developed in 1942, napalm was used in the Second World War and became a standard, if terrifying, element of all modern military arsenals. In Vietnam it was generally used in close support of ground troops. When dropped from aircraft it produces a terrifying and deadly spectacle, incinerating large areas of jungle and any people unfortunate enough to be there. Far from a precision weapon and fairly unpredictable once unleashed, napalm was the cause of many civilian casualties during all phases of the Vietnam War.

... All of a sudden hell opens in front of my eyes. Hell comes from large egg-shaped containers, dropping from the first plane followed by others, eggs from the second and third plane. Immense sheets of flame extending to over one hundred metres, it seems, strike terror in the ranks of my soldiers. This is napalm, the fire that falls from the skies. ... [A] bomb falls behind us and I feel fiery breath touching my whole body. The men are now fleeing and I cannot hold them back. There is no way of holding out under the torrent of fire, which flows in all directions and burns everything in its passage. On all sides flame surrounds us ... I stop at the platoon commander ... his eyes are wide with terror. 'What is this? The atomic bomb?' 'No this is napalm.'

Viet Minh Officer

Bernard Fall, *Street Without Joy: The French Debacle in Indo-China* (Harrisburg, 1961), 39–40 cited in Michael Burleigh, *Small Wars, Faraway Places: Global Insurrection and the Making of the Modern World*, (New York, Viking, 2013) 224.

3.3 Strategy and tactics**Conceptual understanding****Key questions**

- To what extent did the French have the requisite material to conduct its strategy?
- To what extent did the French actually control territory in Vietnam?
- To what extent did effective strategy depend on political control of territory?

Key concepts

- Cause
- Consequence

The French

Despite generally haphazard and inconsistent supply, the one strategic advantage the French forces enjoyed in the early years of the war was in material. In order to make use of that conventional military advantage, French strategic planning sought to bring about one big engagement in which they would defeat the bulk of the Viet Minh forces, thus forcing an end to the war.

While this may have been a militarily sound plan, it neglected the fact that while waiting for such a decisive battle, the French had to govern their holdings in Indo-China. How could this be done in areas they did not control militarily? The French answer was a direct contradiction of their “big battle” strategy. They built blockhouses and observation posts throughout the country and manned them with locally recruited and colonial troops. On a map these outposts indicated French “control” of the country. In reality these poorly armed detachments were easy targets and played right into the hands of the Viet Minh and created the type of war they wanted in the years 1946–1950. Some of the larger outposts were less vulnerable, but the French could only control the area the light artillery or mortar fire could cover.

A string of three such large posts figured prominently in another aspect of French military strategy in Indo-China – interrupting supply routes from China to the Viet Minh. In 1950 these three outposts would be the site of the first large-scale Viet Minh victory – the Battle of Route Coloniale 4 (RC4). Between these and other such posts the Viet Minh guerrillas moved with relative ease. As the war progressed, this outpost mentality created a situation in which the French controlled large cities and the strong outposts, while the Viet Minh controlled the countryside. Areas surrounding the smaller outposts may have been relatively safe for the French forces during daylight hours, but hazardous in the extreme at night. The French military instinct, one specifically rejected by the Viet

Class discussion

To what extent was the Viet Minh victory at RC4 a result of mistakes made by the French command?

Minh itself, to commit resources to the rescue of trapped and isolated units, also favoured the Viet Minh commitment to a long, drawn-out, attrition-style conflict.

In the end, the French needed to bring the war in Indo-China to a resolution quickly. Their domestic political, economic and social situation could not and would not sustain a protracted war in a far-flung corner of an empire in decline.

The French departed from this strategy only briefly. In 1949 General Alessandri, the French Commander in the Tonkin region, sought to deprive the Viet Minh of the local support that is so crucial to effective guerrilla operations. The Viet Minh depended on local support for rice, recruits and taxes. Using French troops to push Viet Minh forces out of small areas and then using local French recruits to destroy Viet Minh infrastructure and support, General Alessandri sought to deny the Viet Minh these essentials. Gradually this system seemed to work. Unfortunately for the French they lacked the resources to hold these areas against the inevitable re-infiltration by Viet Minh guerrillas over time.

Throughout the conflict the French military strategy was precisely that and nothing more – a military approach. By failing to win local support from the Vietnamese themselves with any sort of reform programme, they were essentially saying to the population that if the French were victorious the Vietnamese could expect much the same misery as they had experienced for the past 100 years. They saw the war as a method of regaining administrative control over territory. The Viet Minh, however, saw the conflict as an integrated political, economic, social and psychological struggle and victory could only be won by concentrating on all these facets.

ATL Thinking and research skills

Research the careers of the following French commanders in Indo-China and complete the following table. Remember, before anything can be evaluated, it must be set against a criterion. Be sure to describe the criterion against which you evaluate each commander.

Commander	Dates in Indo-China	Previous postings	Subsequent postings	Evaluation
Philippe Leclerc de Hauteclocque				
Jean-Étienne Valluy				
Roger Blaizot				
Marcel Carpentier				
Jean de Lattre de Tassigny				
Raoul Salan				
Henri Navarre				

The Viet Minh

Ho and his military commander Vo Nguyen Giap developed a comprehensive and detailed plan for what they envisioned as a long war with the French. The plan was based on the writings of Mao Zedong and adapted by the two men to the Vietnamese situation. In this vision, the war would be won by the effective and integrated deployment of two forms of force – military and non-military.

Non-military power encompassed political, diplomatic, economic, psychological and social influence on the enemy, but also the Vietnamese population and even the enemy civilian population. The primary objective of this aspect of the plan was to gain the support of the Vietnamese people through propaganda, indoctrination and intimidation. With this support the Viet Minh could ensure their army a supply of recruits, food, information and taxes. For example, money gained through direct taxation and the sale of locally grown rice or opium was used to purchase weapons smuggled through neighbouring states.

Of course, for the Viet Minh this non-military effort was focused through the lens of communist ideology, albeit with a strongly nationalistic component. Political pamphlets and tracts were regularly distributed and read to a largely illiterate population. A literacy programme tried to address this issue. The army itself was not immune from ideological propaganda and indoctrination. In fact, Ho and Giap saw the ideological consciousness of each soldier as integral to his or her military effectiveness. To ensure this consciousness, all Viet Minh units had political **commissars** who participated in tactical discussions and operated a system of informants among the ranks. The end result of this was a deeply motivated fighting force, the members of which could each place their individual actions within the context of the broader struggle for independence. Viet Minh soldiers knew exactly what they were fighting for. The same could not be said for French recruits or the US soldiers who would follow them.

The military form of force was to be deployed in three fairly distinct phases. The first phase was based on the assumption that the revolutionary force, in this case the Viet Minh, was weaker than the occupying force. To that end, Giap's main objective was to avoid any direct, large-scale confrontation with the superior firepower of the French. This "guerrilla phase" of the war was characterized by small actions generally carried out by Giap's regional force. Ambushes, assassinations, and booby traps plagued the French forces. While the French occupiers were relatively safe holed up in the larger outposts, others in watch towers and additional small detachments were prey for the very mobile guerrillas who melted away into the countryside after attacks. When the French emerged from their positions to hunt the Viet Minh they were often defeated by the vast overgrown landscape, a landscape their enemy knew very well.

While the Viet Minh's regional force shouldered much of the fighting in the guerrilla phase of the war, Giap steadily built his regular force. This meant recruiting, mostly from the regional forces, training and supplying them. A number of Viet Minh officers were trained in China

Class discussion

What would it be like to be a civilian caught between these two sides during the war?

commissars

Communist political officers. In many communist governments, "commissar" is used to denote rather low-level functionaries up to cabinet "ministers".

at Mao's combat school. Giap stockpiled weapons and food stores in Viet Bac. In this base area Giap and Ho established a strong communication infrastructure and even "factories" that produced small arms, mines and hand grenades.

When Mao's PLA swept the Nationalist Forces from mainland China, it almost instantly transformed the nature of the war in Indo-China. By August 1950 about 80 commanders from the PLA trekked south to advise the Viet Minh. Material also began to flow south. Artillery, ammunition, small arms and anti-aircraft guns were delivered regularly, eventually on a fixed rail link. In short the Chinese supplied everything Giap needed to move to the "mobile" phase of the war.

The mobile war phase mixed guerrilla actions with more conventional large-unit actions and was to be the responsibility of both the Viet Minh's regional and regular forces. Giap moved his large forces around northern territories looking for targets of opportunity. As the Viet Minh's strength and experience grew it ranged over larger tracts of land, seeking to drag French forces along, thereby lengthening supply lines and isolating them. It would then be easier to destroy these isolated formations and outposts. Giap's ability to move division-size units and all the supplies they required, including artillery, over harsh landscape was absolutely crucial to the success of this strategy. It was a capability that the French could never emulate, tied as they were to the crude road system or paratroop operations.

The final phase of revolutionary war according to Giap's plan was a general offensive in which the Viet Minh would wage pitched, conventional battle with the French and sweep them from the country. This phase would broadly correspond to the campaign at Dien Bien Phu.

Class discussion

How is Mao's doctrine reflected in the organizational structure of the Viet Minh? What are the advantages and disadvantages of such an approach?

ATL Thinking and research skills

Mao Zedong developed a model of revolutionary war that directly and indirectly affected the thinking of revolutionary leaders from Giap to Castro. For each of the following wars complete the table below, outlining the phases of revolutionary war as adapted by Ho and Giap. Based on this comparison, discuss with a partner the extent to which the model is effective.

War	Guerrilla phase		Protracted/mobile phase		Offensive phase	
	Military activities	Non-military activities	Military activities	Non-military activities	Military activities	Non-military activities
Algeria 1954–1962						
Cuba 1957–1959						
Congo Crisis 1960–1965						
Nicaraguan Revolution 1974–1979						

3.4 Operations

Conceptual understanding

Key questions

- How well did Viet Minh operations correspond to their strategy?
- How well did French operations correspond to their strategy?
- How did the nature of combat in Vietnam change as the war wore on?

Key concepts

- Continuity
- Change

1946–1950

When it became evident that it would be war and not negotiation that would determine the fate of Vietnam, the Viet Minh concentrated on moving their regular force out of harm's way. This meant retreating from the French-controlled urban areas such as Hanoi into the wilderness of Viet Bac where they would base their operations in the north for the rest of the war.

After the monsoon subsided in October 1947 the French would try to achieve the knockout punch upon which their strategy depended. In an operation codenamed Lea, 1,000 French paratroopers would attempt to surprise their enemy by dropping virtually right on top of the Viet Minh headquarters area in Viet Bac. Meanwhile a column of motorized infantry would move 225 kilometres up a road to link up with the paratroopers. An amphibious force moving up the Clear River would support these movements. The paratroop drop surprised the Viet Minh and Ho himself narrowly escaped capture. After this initial success, however, the paratroopers became an island, fighting for survival while awaiting the relief column. The armour and trucks moving up the road were making sluggish progress, hampered by constant ambush and road sabotage. The rivers were not navigable by the amphibious forces and they had to finish their journey over land on foot. The Viet Minh forces disengaged and slipped away. While they lost more soldiers than the French, they achieved their goal of avoiding a large-scale battle with the superior French forces. Further French operations in November and December 1947 yielded little lasting impact on Viet Minh fighting ability or territory controlled.

There were no major military efforts by either side in 1948, simply the incessant and frustrating routine of guerrilla war – patrol, pacify, ambush, repeat. Slightly larger Viet Minh regional or regular force units attempting, with varied success, to overrun French outposts, occasionally interrupted this brutal routine. On RC4, the dominant road in the north-east, there were 28 large ambushes in 1948 alone. French General

Class discussion

What does the outcome of Operation Lea indicate about the nature of the war?