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Description

One of the most important events to precede the Vietnam War was the Battle at Dien Bien Phu on May 7th, 1954, when an organized Vietnamese army defeated the French, thus ending French colonial rule in Southeast Asia. Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap remembers the battle on the 30th anniversary of the Vietnamese victory.

Keywords


Transcript

30th Anniversary of Vietnamese Victory at Dien Bien Phu
BRYANT GUMBEL, anchoring:
Today marks the thirtieth anniversary of one of the most important battles in Vietnam’s history. On May 7, 1954, the Vietnamese army defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu. That battle is significant because it virtually ended French colonial rule in Southeast Asia. Neil Davis has more.

NEIL DAVIS, reporting:
The French believed that the mountains surrounding Dien Bien Phu would be an insurmountable barrier. But thirty years ago, Ho Chi Minh’s guerilla army holed their heavy artillery paces up and over a series of precipitous ranges and lay seeds to the French forces in the valley below. The Vietnamese commander was General Vo Nguyen Giap considered by experts to be a genius in guerilla warfare. Giap, now seventy-one years old, put into effect a plan that concentrated most of his irregular units on that one battle, a battle the Vietnamese believed could end the war.

General VO NGUYEN GIAP (translation): When the French first parachuted into Dien Bien Phu, President Ho and the central committee saw it as a good opportunity to destroy them. So when the French sent more troops to make it a stronger base, we saw it was going to be the decisive battle of the war against the French.

DAVIS: The French strategy was to lure the bulk of the Vietnamese guerilla army to a set peace battle at Dien Bien Phu and then destroy them with superior fire power, tanks, artillery, and air strikes. That decision by the French, according to General Giap, was their biggest mistake.

GIAP (translation): We can say that all French and American generals have a high opinion of their abilities, their armies, their tanks, their artillery and all their sophisticated weapons, and have a low regard for the ability of the Vietnamese forces and of the whole nation standing up to liberated itself.

DAVIS: Today, in the valley of Dien Bien Phu, there are many reminders of the battle. French tanks and artillery pieces remain in the positions where they were abandoned by their crews. More than eight thousand Vietnamese died in the battle, and the French lost about twenty-five hundred soldiers. Dien Bien Phu is at peace, but Vietnam is still at war, this time fighting in neighboring Cambodia, which was invaded by Vietnam late in 1978. For them, the war in Indochina is not yet over. For today, this is Neil Davis, NBC News, Dien Bien Phu.