**MWH: Vietnam**

* After WWII, many SE Asian states received independence from colonial powers.
  + July 1946: Philippines received independence from the USA
  + 1948 & 1957: Burma and Malaya receive independence from GB
* NETH and FR less willing to let go
  + NETH (Dutch) in Indonesia: After fighting the Indonesian Communist Party and being pressured by the USA, NETH granted independence and recognized a non-Communist gov’t, the Nationalists (led by Achmed Sukarno)
  + FR in V: Ho Chi Minh led the Communist party fighting against FR rule. August 1945: the Vietminh seized power in V. Ho Chi Minh became president of a new republic in Hanoi in the North. FR retook the Southern part of Vietnam.
* Vietnam War: FR fought the Vietminh for years…
  + 1954: FR agreed to peace and V was divided. N: Comm., based in Hanoi; S: non-Comm., based in Saigon.
  + The goal was reunion. Elections didn’t work and conflict continued.
  + The USA, fearful of Comm. spreading (hello Cold War!), sided with South V.
    - Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (1964): gave congressional approval for expansion of the Vietnam War, which authorized Johnson to take “all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.”
  + American aid wasn’t enough to stop the Viet Cong (Comm. guerillas from the N fighting in the S) from almost taking control of the country by 1965.
  + 1965: US Pres. Johnson sent US troops to South V to prevent a Comm. victory. The N responded by sending more troops to the S.
  + End of 1960s: war was a stalemate. War was incredibly unpopular in America (protests).
  + 1973: Pres. Nixon reached agreement with North V to allow the US to withdraw its forces.
  + 1975: Communist armies forcibly reunited Vietnam.
* Effects of war
  + 1975: Laos and Cambodia had Comm. gov’ts
    - Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, killed over a million
  + No more “falling dominoes,” though

Vietnam War subtopics (from textbook and various sources):

My Lai Massacre

Use of Agent Orange/chemical defoliants

The War through Photographs (see corresponding PPT)

>>>>>>>>>>>The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (August 7, 1964) gave congressional approval for expansion of the Vietnam War. During the spring of 1964, military planners had developed a detailed design for major attacks on the North, but at that time President Lyndon B. Johnson and his advisers feared that the public would not support an expansion of the war. By summer, however, rebel forces had established control over nearly half of South Vietnam. This produced a difficult situation.

On August 2, shortly after a clandestine raid on the North Vietnamese coast by South Vietnamese gunboats, the U.S. destroyer *Maddox* (conducting electronic espionage/spying nearby) reported that it was fired on by North Vietnamese torpedo boats. Two days later, in the same area, the *Maddox* and another destroyer reported that they were again under attack. Although these reports now appear to have been mistaken (not the only time in US history that a ship was “fired upon” prior to us declaring war—hark Spanish American War!), Johnson proceeded quickly to authorize strikes against North Vietnam in retaliation. The next day he gathered congressional leaders and, without divulging the exact circumstances around the supposed attack, accused the North Vietnamese of “open aggression on the high seas.” He then submitted to the Senate a resolution that authorized him to take “all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.” The resolution was quickly approved by Congress. Later, when more information about the Tonkin incident became available, many concluded that Johnson and his advisers had misled Congress into supporting the expansion of the war.

The Gulf of Tonkin resolution was terminated six years later (December 31, 1970). The resolution had become a symbol of escalation within Vietnam.

MASSACRE AT MY LAI

The My Lai hamlet, part of the village of Son My, was located in Quang Ngai province, which was believed to be a stronghold of the National Liberation Front (NLF) or Viet Cong (VC) and was a frequent target of U.S. and South Vietnamese bombing attacks. In March 1968, Charlie Company of the 11th Infantry Brigade received word that VC guerrillas had taken control of Son My. Led by Lieutenant William L. Calley, the unit was sent to the village on a search-and-destroy mission on March 16. At the time, morale among U.S. soldiers on the ground was dwindling, especially in the wake of the North Vietnamese-led [Tet Offensive](http://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/tet-offensive), which was launched on January 31 1968. Charlie Company had lost some 28 of its members to death or injuries, and was down to just over 100 men.

Army commanders had advised the soldiers of Charlie Company that all who were found in Son My could be considered VC or active VC sympathizers, and ordered them to destroy the village. When they arrived, the soldiers found no Viet Cong, but rounded up and murdered hundreds of civilians–mostly women, children and old men–in an extremely brutal fashion, including rape and torture. Calley was reported to have dragged dozens of people, including young children, into a ditch before executing them with a machine gun. Not a single shot was fired against the men of Charlie Company at My Lai.

COVER-UP OF THE MY LAI MASSACRE

The My Lai massacre reportedly ended only after Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson, an Army helicopter pilot, landed his aircraft between the soldiers and the retreating villagers and threatened to open fire if they continued their attacks. Knowing news of the massacre would cause a scandal, officers higher up in command of Charlie Company and the 11th Brigade immediately made efforts to downplay the bloodshed. The cover-up continued until Ron Ridenhour, a soldier in the 11th Brigade who had heard reports of the massacre but had not participated, began a campaign to bring the events to light. After writing letters to President Richard Nixon, the [Pentagon](http://www.history.com/topics/pentagon), State Department, Joint Chiefs of Staff and several congressmen, with no response, Ridenhour finally gave an interview to an investigative journalist, who broke the story in November 1969.

Amid the international uproar that followed Ridenhour’s revelations, the U.S. Army ordered a special investigation into the My Lai massacre and subsequent efforts to cover it up. The inquiry, headed by Lieutenant General William Peers, released its report in March 1970 and recommended that 28 officers be charged for their involvement in covering up the massacre. The Army would later charge only 14, including Lt. Calley, with crimes related to the events at My Lai; all were acquitted except for Calley, who was found guilty of premeditated murder for ordering the shootings, despite his contention that he was only following orders from his commanding officer. Calley was given a life sentence for his role in directing the killings at My Lai. Many saw Calley as a scapegoat, and his sentence was reduced upon appeal to 20 years and later to 10; he was paroled in 1974 after serving three years.

IMPACT OF MY LAI

By the early 1970s, the American war effort in Vietnam was winding down, as the administration of Richard Nixon continued policies of “Vietnamization” of the war, including the withdrawal of troops and the transfer of control over ground operations to the South Vietnamese. Among the American troops still in Vietnam, morale was low, and anger and frustration were high. Drug use increased among soldiers, and an official report in 1971 estimated that one-third or more of U.S. troops were addicted.

The revelations of the My Lai massacre caused morale to plummet even further, as GIs wondered what other atrocities their superiors were concealing. On the home front in the United States, the brutality of the My Lai massacre and the cover-up by higher-ranking officers exacerbated antiwar feelings and increased the bitter divide among the population regarding the continuing U.S. presence in Vietnam.

## OPERATION RANCH HAND AND AGENT ORANGE

From 1961 to 1972, the U.S. military conducted a large-scale defoliation program aimed at destroying the forest and jungle cover used by enemy North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops fighting against U.S. and South Vietnamese forces in the [Vietnam War](http://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war). U.S. aircraft were deployed to spray powerful mixtures of herbicides around roads, rivers, canals and military bases, as well as on crops that might be used to supply enemy troops. During this process, crops and water sources used by the non-combatant peasant population of South Vietnam could also be hit. In all, Operation Ranch Hand deployed more than 19 million gallons of herbicides over 4.5 million acres of land.

The most commonly used, and most effective, mixture of herbicides used was Agent Orange, named for the orange stripe painted on the 55-gallon drums in which the mixture was stored. It was one of several “Rainbow Herbicides” used, along with Agents White, Purple, Pink, Green and Blue. U.S. planes sprayed some 11 million to 13 million gallons of Agent Orange in Vietnam between January 1965 and April 1970. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Agent Orange contained “minute traces” of 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin (TCDD), more commonly known as dioxin. Through studies done on laboratory animals, dioxin has been shown to be highly toxic even in minute doses; human exposure to the chemical could be associated with serious health issues such as muscular dysfunction, inflammation, birth defects, nervous system disorders and even the development of various cancers.

## AGENT ORANGE: VETERAN HEALTH ISSUES AND LEGAL BATTLE

Questions regarding Agent Orange arose in the United States after an increasing number of returning Vietnam veterans and their families began to report a range of afflictions, including rashes and other skin irritations, miscarriages, psychological symptoms, Type-2 diabetes, birth defects in children and cancers such as Hodgkin’s disease, prostate cancer and leukemia.

In 1979, a class action lawsuit was filed on behalf of 2.4 million veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange during their service in Vietnam. Five years later, in an out-of-court-settlement, seven large chemical companies that manufactured the herbicide agreed to pay $180 million in compensation to the veterans or their next of kin. In 1991, President George H.W. Bush signed into law the Agent Orange Act, which mandated that some diseases associated with defoliants (including non-Hodgkin’s lymphomas, soft tissue sarcomas and chloracne) be treated as the result of wartime service.

## EFFECTS OF AGENT ORANGE ON VIETNAM

In addition to the massive environmental impact of the U.S. defoliation program in Vietnam, that nation has reported that some 400,000 people were killed or maimed as a result of exposure to herbicides like Agent Orange. In addition, Vietnam claims half a million children have been born with serious birth defects, while as many 2 million people are suffering from cancer or other illness caused by Agent Orange.

##### In 2004, a group of Vietnamese citizens filed a class-action lawsuit against more than 30 chemical companies, including the same ones that settled with the U.S. veterans in 1984. The suit, which sought billions of dollars’ worth of damages, claimed that Agent Orange and its poisonous effects left a legacy of health problems and that its use constituted a violation of international law. In March 2005, a federal judge dismissed the suit; another U.S. court rejected a final appeal in 2008.

**End of Cold War and breakup of USSR**

- Khrushchev

- Space Race

- Nixon and detente

- Gorbachev/Reagan/Wall

- Breakup of USSR and independence for satellite nations

- Example: Czechoslovakia

- Khrushchev was ousted in 1964 after the Cuban Missile Crisis (review)

- Brezhnev and others led in short bursts and the Cold War continued through the 1960s and 70s (we will address Afghanistan etc. later)

- Space Race: USSR first into space in 1957; sent Sputnik, then a dog and a monkey; demonstrated their superiority and lit a fire under America to press for more science education and advancements

- US put a man on the moon in 1969- many in America saw this as us “winning” the space war; moment of national celebration and pride

- Nixon practiced détente, a lessening of Cold War tensions. Example: SALT I

- During the 1980s, Reagan began building a relationship with Mikhael Gorbachev, who led the USSR from 1986-1991. They became friendly and “thawed” the Cold War with agreements to limit nuclear testing and weapons holdings more. 1989: The Berlin Wall fell (Gorbachev let it happen); USSR broke up in 1990-1991 under Gorbachev’s leadership. Many nations became independent and held democratic elections (first time Communism was voted out of power and left peacefully—momentous occasion). There was a coup in 1991 (Boris Yeltsin helped put Gorbachev back in power) and within a year Gorbachev officially ended the USSR, eliminating his own position. And thus, the US’s perennial enemy was suddenly no more, and the Cold War sputtered out… OR DID IT????

>> Example: Czechoslovakia, the Prague Spring (Czechoslovakia moved for greater freedom and democratic reforms; these were forcibly put down by the USSR, as Czechoslovakia was a satellite nation and under the power of the USSR), and the Velvet Revolution (end of 1980s/beginning of 1990s; peaceful revolution and transfer of power to democratic institutions; Czechoslovakia also split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia after this Revolution).