

An Overview of the Vietnam War

Overview

In this lesson, students will be introduced to the Vietnam War through a simulation regarding the anxiety of combat and will then receive an overview of the war via a teacher Power Point presentation or lecture (provided), or a text book reading followed by class discussion. Students will then create an illustrated timeline picturing the prominent events from the years of conflict.

Grade

Middle & High School

Materials

- Scrap material that can be used as blindfolds
- Chart paper and Post-it notes
- Teacher reference document: “A Short Summary of the Vietnam War”, attached
- Optional: “An Overview of the Vietnam War,” Power Point; available in Carolina K-12’s Database of K-12 Resources (in PDF format): <https://k12database.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2012/05/VietnamWarPPT.pdf>
 - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click “View” in the top menu bar of the file, and select “Full Screen Mode”
 - To request an editable PPT version of this presentation, send a request to CarolinaK12@unc.edu
- Optional: “Student Notes: A Short Summary of the Vietnam War,” questions and answer key attached
- Vietnam War Timeline strips, attached
- Art paper and markers, crayons, or colored pencils
- Optional homework: “Afghanistan haunted by ghost of Vietnam,” CNN article attached

Essential Questions:

- What were the causes of the Vietnam War?
- Why did the United States become involved in the conflict?
- What were the major events of the Vietnam War?
- How did the Vietnam War change the United States and Vietnam?

Duration

- 60 minutes

Procedure

Beware of Landmines! (Optional Warm-Up Simulation)

1. At the beginning of class, break students up into partners and have them choose to be A or B. Instruct the A’s to line up on one side of the room side by side. Tell them to turn their back to the center of the room and use the provided material to blindfold themselves.
2. Next, have the B’s place items on the floor that would block the path of the A’s if they were to walk across the room (books, a pile of pencils, jackets, backpacks, etc.). The teacher should just make sure that none of the objects used could cause harm. Ensure the students spread the objects around the whole room, so that the floor is evenly covered. If possible, turn on a recording of war sound effects.

3. Once all items are placed, tell the group that all of the items on the floor, which the B's can see and the A's cannot, represent landmines. If they are stepped on or moved in anyway, they will explode and obliterate the poor person who has hit it.
4. Explain that A's must navigate across the room without opening their eyes and without hitting a landmine. The only assistance they will have is their partner B yelling warnings to direct them when they are close to danger. B's may not steer their partners physically in any way. In addition to the war sound effects (if available), B's can also be instructed to add to the stress of the activity by yelling warlike slogans, such as "Incoming!; Retreat!; We are under attack!;" etc.
5. Once students understand what to do, the teacher should assume the role of a sergeant and yell directives. Have A's begin moving across the room by yelling, "Alright soldier's, move out! We've got enemies on our trail, but proceed with caution! Let's MOVE!" The teacher and B's should continue making the simulation as stressful as possible for A's, while still ensuring students are not literally harmed in anyway. The teacher and B's should pay close attention to the A's and if any run into any of the landmines, yell and let A's know they have been blown up.
6. Once all A's have navigated through the landmines or been blown up, discuss:
 - What did that experience feel like?
 - Imagine the landmines you were circumventing were real. What would this experience have been like then?
 - You were blindfolded to illustrate how soldiers did not necessarily know where landmines were when traveling on ground in enemy territory. How do you imagine this uncertainty affected them?
 - Based on what we have discussed in terms of war in general, and based on this activity, what do you imagine ground combat would have been like during war?
 - Can you think of any wars where landmines were likely used? What other dangerous aspects of warfare have been employed throughout history?

Overview of the Vietnam War

7. Tell students that they will be learning about one of the most dangerous and controversial wars in the history of the U.S., the Vietnam War, which lasted from 1964-1973. Explain to students that while they were just playing a game, in reality, soldiers fighting in Vietnam, both American and Vietnamese faced dangerous conditions every day. Tell students you'll discuss the actual use of landmines during the war a bit later, but that you first want to hear what they already know about the Vietnam War. To gauge students' prior knowledge, draw a word web on a piece of chart paper with the words "Vietnam War" in the center. Give each student three Post-It notes and instruct them to think about the phrase and then write down the first three things that come to mind on the Post-Its provided. Students should then add their Post-It notes to the word web. After the allotted time, discuss what students have posted. Dispel any misinformation before introducing students to a general overview of the conflict.

Since there are numerous components to the Vietnam War era, teachers should choose which aspects of the war to highlight with their students. Options for providing an overview of the war include:

- Use Carolina K-12's Power Point, "An Overview of the Vietnam War," which can be found in the Database of K-12 Resources (k12database.unc.edu) or by e-mailing a request to CarolinaK12@unc.edu. This PPT provides a general overview of all major aspects of the conflict; teachers should pick and choose which components of the presentation they wish to share with students.
- Deliver an interactive lecture to students based on the attached teacher resource document, which offers a condensed summary of the events of the Vietnam conflict. Teachers can also provide the attached discussion questions for students to fill out throughout the lecture.

- Provide an introductory reading to students regarding Vietnam, such as the information provided in their text book. Go over the reading with students by asking clarifying questions to ensure students gain a basic foundation of knowledge regarding Vietnam.
8. Whether using excerpts from the Power Point, delivering a lecture overview, or discussing after a reading, keep the overview of the Vietnam War as interactive as possible. For example, pose basic questions to the class that follow a basic history of the Vietnam War, including why the United States got involved and the final outcome of the conflict. Talk about the different effects the Vietnam War had on America, and encourage the students to brainstorm how they think the war might have affected Vietnam. For example:
- Who fought against whom in the Vietnam War?
 - Does anyone think they know why the United States became involved in Vietnam? Why did it increase its involvement into the 1970s?
 - What specific events marked the beginning of the United States' active military campaign against North Vietnam? (e.g., the **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution**)
 - What was the initial public sentiment in the United States regarding U.S. involvement in Vietnam?
 - What was **President Johnson's** attitude toward U.S. involvement in Vietnam? What was **President Nixon's** attitude toward the war?
 - How did the war change under President Nixon's administration?
 - Was the Vietnam War overwhelmingly popular among American civilians? Why or why not?
 - What was the affect of the war on Americans? What was the affect of the war on those in Vietnam?
 - Do any of you know anyone who fought in the Vietnam War? Have they told you about their experiences?
 - Where do you get most of your information about the Vietnam War? School? Video games? Movies? TV?
 - Have you seen any films about the Vietnam War? How is the war depicted?

Vietnam War Illustrated Timeline

9. Once students have received a basic overview of the conflict, to review and further familiarize students with the events, tell students they are going to be illustrating certain key moments of this historical period, either individually, in partners, or in small groups (teacher's discretion). (There are 29 timeline strips attached that should be cut apart; teachers should ensure each is illustrated. One strip can be assigned per individual, or if teachers prefer for students to work in partners or small groups, multiple strips can be assigned for each partner/group to illustrate.) Tell students that they are responsible for reading their strip, researching additional information regarding the event(s) described (optional), then illustrating their event on the art paper provided. Final illustrations should include:
- The date of the event, prominently featured
 - A brief but clear description of the event
 - An appropriate and colorful illustration; illustrations can be literal or abstract, as long as it is clear what the abstract image is symbolizing.

Encourage students to be creative while also being historically accurate and respectful to the time period. Teachers should also let students know what type of art is acceptable. Since certain aspects of the Vietnam were very violent, it is recommended teachers encourage students to refrain from creating particularly gruesome artwork, and rather lean towards symbolism.

Finally, let students know that upon completion, their work will be hung in chronological order with the work of their classmates, creating a large, illustrated timeline of Vietnam. Allow students to ask questions and give them approximately 15-20 minutes to work on their assignment. (

10. Once students have finished, assist the class in handing their timeline around the room in chronological order. Provide each student with a double-sided copy of the attached "Illustrated Timeline Review."

Teachers can either have students circulate throughout the room and take notes as they review the art work, or place students into small groups and circulate the artwork throughout each group, allowing students to remain seated while taking their notes. (Teachers should just ensure the timeline circulates in order.)

11. After students have reviewed the illustrated timeline and taken notes on the major events, culminate with a discussion:
 - What were some major turning points of the Vietnam conflict?
 - Based upon what you've learned, what do you think was the most difficult aspect of the Vietnam War? (encourage students to consider multiple aspects as they respond to this question (i.e. the fear of being drafted, losing loved ones in combat, difficult presidential decisions, the passionate feelings of those who disagreed with and protested the war, returning home as a soldier but being protested rather than honored, etc.)
 - Do you think there is anyway the Vietnam War have turned out differently (i.e. less lives lost, less controversy, shorter term of involvement, etc.)? If so, how?
 - Think back to our warm-up. While that was a chance for us to get up and have a bit of fun, in actuality, what aspects of Vietnam (such as landmines) would have been incredibly stressful or frightening?
 - To bring the lesson full circle, share some additional information regarding landmines and the Vietnam conflict with students. Let them know that while "the Vietnam war ended over 30 years ago, for many Vietnamese, the realities of the war still linger. In the years since the fall of Saigon, over 40,000 Vietnamese have been killed or injured by landmines and unexploded bombs left behind from that conflict. In fact, every 22 minutes, someone around the world is killed or maimed by a landmine. One-third of the world's countries are littered with landmines and the U.S. State Department estimates that 60 to 75 million landmines remain unexploded in the ground worldwide. Some expert's estimate that between 12-18% of bombs dropped during the Vietnam War didn't explode on impact. Unexploded ordnance and buried landmines pose an ongoing and daily threat to the people of Vietnam, particularly in the Demilitarized Zone, the "DMZ," which once separated North and South Vietnam. These munitions continue to inflict injury and death on the farmers and innocent children of small villages. Removing such landmines is expensive and dangerous, but there are humanitarian agencies and private organizations increasing awareness of the problem and raising funds to help victims and to de-mine the fields and rice paddies." (Source: <http://www.pbs.org/vietnampassage/perspectives/perspectives.landmines.html>)
 - Why do you think some political commentators compare the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to Vietnam? Can you see any parallels?
12. Optional: As a homework assignment, have students read the attached article from CNN, "Afghanistan haunted by ghost of Vietnam." Instruct students to fill out the chart at the bottom of the article as they read, noting the similarities between Vietnam and Afghanistan and the differences between the two. Tell students the information they chart can be from the reading, but also from prior knowledge or other sources. Teachers who assign the reading should reserve time the following class period to discuss the article with students.

Additional Activities

- Teach Carolina K-12's lesson, "Remembering Vietnam: The Vietnam War Memorial," available in the Database of K-12 Resources at <http://k12database.unc.edu/files/2012/05/RememberingVietnam8.pdf>

TEACHER REFERENCE DOCUMENT:

A Short Summary of the Vietnam War

Imperialism and Colonialism

The Vietnam War has roots in Vietnam's centuries of domination by imperial and colonial powers—first China, which ruled ancient Vietnam, and then France, which took control of Vietnam in the late 1800s and established **French Indochina**. In the early 1900s, nationalist movements emerged in Vietnam, demanding more self-governance and less French influence. The most prominent of these was led by Communist leader **Ho Chi Minh**, who founded a militant nationalist organization called the **Viet Minh**.



The First Indochina War



Ho Chi Minh

During World War II, when France was occupied by Nazi Germany, it lost its foothold in Vietnam, and Japan took control of the country. The Viet Minh resisted these Japanese oppressors and extended its power base throughout Vietnam. When Japan surrendered at the end of World War II in 1945, Ho Chi Minh's forces took the capital of **Hanoi** and declared Vietnam to be an independent country, the **Democratic Republic of Vietnam**.

France refused to recognize Ho's declaration and returned to Vietnam, driving Ho's Communist forces into northern Vietnam. Ho appealed for aid from the United States, but because the United States was embroiled in the escalating Cold War with the Communist USSR, it distrusted Ho's Communist leanings and aided the French instead. Fighting between Ho's forces and the French continued in this First Indochina War until 1954, when a humiliating defeat at **Dien Bien Phu** prompted France to seek a peace settlement.

Divided Vietnam

The **Geneva Accords** of 1954 declared a cease-fire and divided Vietnam officially into **North Vietnam** (under Ho and his Communist forces) and **South Vietnam** (under a French-backed emperor). The dividing line was set at the 17th parallel and was surrounded by a demilitarized zone, or DMZ. The Geneva Accords stipulated that the divide was temporary and that Vietnam was to be reunified under free elections to be held in 1956.



The Cold War and the Domino Theory

At this point, the United States' Cold War foreign policy began to play a major part in Vietnam. U.S. policy at the time was dominated by the **domino theory**, which believed that the "fall" of North Vietnam to Communism might trigger all of Southeast Asia to fall, setting off a sort of Communist chain reaction. Within a year of the Geneva Accords, the United States therefore began to offer support to the anti-Communist politician **Ngo Dinh Diem**. With U.S. assistance, Diem took control of the South Vietnamese government in 1955 and declared the Republic of Vietnam. Due to the popularity of Ho Chi Minh throughout Vietnam, Diem promptly canceled the elections that had been scheduled for 1956.

The Diem Regime

Diem's regime proved corrupt, oppressive, and extremely unpopular. He was so unpopular that some Buddhist monks protested his regime using **self-immolation** – setting oneself on fire. Nonetheless, the United States continued to prop Diem up, fearful of the increasing Communist resistance activity in South Vietnam. This resistance against Diem's regime was organized by the Ho Chi Minh-backed **National Liberation Front**, which became more commonly known as the **Viet Cong**.

In 1962, U.S. president John F. Kennedy sent American “military advisors” to Vietnam to help train the South Vietnamese army, the ARVN, but quickly realized that the Diem regime was unsalvageable. Therefore, in 1963, the United States backed a coup that overthrew Diem and installed a new leader. The new U.S.-backed leaders proved just as corrupt and ineffective.

Johnson and U.S. Escalation

Kennedy’s successor, **Lyndon B. Johnson**, pledged to honor Kennedy’s commitments but hoped to keep U.S. involvement in Vietnam to a minimum. He kept Kennedy’s Secretary of Defense, **Robert McNamara**, but replaced the previous American military commander with **William C. Westmoreland** – a U.S. general who advocated aggressive strategies against Viet Cong and NVA using large numbers of U.S. forces. After North Vietnamese forces allegedly attacked U.S. Navy ships during the **Gulf of Tonkin Incident** in 1964, Johnson was given carte blanche in the form of the **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution**. This resolution allowed Johnson “to take all necessary measure to repel any armed attack against the forces of United States and to prevent further aggression;” this greatly expanded his presidential power. With the free hand recently provided by Congress, Johnson ordered the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy to begin an intense series of air strikes called **Operation Rolling Thunder**. He hoped that the bombing campaign would demonstrate to the South Vietnamese the U.S. commitment to their cause and its resolve to halt the spread of Communism. Ironically, the air raids seemed only to increase the number of Viet Cong and NVA (North Vietnamese Army) attacks. Johnson’s “Americanization” of the war led to a presence of nearly 400,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam by the end of 1966.



Vietnam takes its toll on President Johnson

Quagmire and Attrition

In 1965, Westmoreland began to implement a **search-and-destroy** strategy that sent U.S. troops out into the field to find and kill Viet Cong members. Westmoreland was confident that American technology would succeed in slowly wearing down the Viet Cong through a war of **attrition**—a strategy of extended combat meant to inflict so many casualties on the enemy that it could no longer continue. U.S. leaders agreed, believing that North Vietnam’s economy could not sustain a prolonged war effort.

In light of this new strategy of fighting a war of attrition, U.S. commanders were instructed to begin keeping body counts of enemy soldiers killed. Although body counts were indeed tallied, they were often exaggerated and proved wildly inaccurate, as the bodies of Viet Cong soldiers often were difficult to distinguish from the bodies of friendly South Vietnamese soldiers.

However, the Viet Cong’s guerrilla tactics frustrated and demoralized U.S. troops, while its dispersed, largely rural presence left American bomber planes with few targets. The United States therefore used unconventional weapons such as **napalm** – a highly flammable jellied substance -- and the herbicide defoliant **Agent Orange** but still managed to make little headway.

The Ho Chi Minh Trail

Meanwhile, U.S. forces continued to try to cut off Viet Cong supply lines through air power. These efforts expended a great deal of time and resources, but the North Vietnamese government proved extremely savvy in its ability to keep the Viet Cong supplied. Rather than attempt to send materials across the heavily guarded DMZ (the demilitarized zone surrounding the border between North and South Vietnam at the 17th parallel), they sent supplies via the **Ho Chi Minh Trail**, which ran from North Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia into South Vietnam ([see map above](#)). Troops and supplies streamed into South Vietnam via the trail and despite intense U.S. bombing throughout 1965, the trail never closed once, not even temporarily.



The “Credibility Gap”

Despite the numerous setbacks, Johnson and other U.S. officials, citing increased troop numbers and redefined objectives, again claimed to be making headway in the war. Many government officials reported that the North Vietnamese were declining in strength and were on the brink of

defeat. Photos and video footage of dead American soldiers in newspapers and on evening news programs, however, indicated otherwise. Moreover, U.S. spending in support of the war had reached record levels, costing the government an estimated \$3 billion a month. As a result, many people in the United States began to speak of a “**credibility gap**” between what Johnson and the U.S. government was telling the American people and what actually was transpiring on the ground.



Kent State Shootings

The Tet Offensive

In 1968, the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong launched a massive campaign called the **Tet Offensive**, attacking nearly thirty U.S. targets and dozens of other cities in South Vietnam at once. Although the United States

pushed back the offensive and won a tactical victory, American media coverage characterized the conflict as a defeat, and U.S. public support for the war plummeted. Morale among U.S. troops also hit an all-time low, manifesting itself tragically in the 1968 **My Lai Massacre**, in which frustrated U.S. soldiers killed hundreds of unarmed Vietnamese civilians in a small village.



The Antiwar Movement

Meanwhile, the antiwar movement within the United States gained momentum as student protesters, countercultural hippies, and even many mainstream Americans denounced the war. Protests against the war and the **selective service system** -- military draft -- grew increasingly violent, resulting in police brutality outside the **Democratic National Convention** in 1968 and the deaths of four students at **Kent State University** in 1970 when Ohio National Guardsmen fired on a crowd. Despite the protests, Johnson’s successor elected in 1968, President Richard M. Nixon, declared that a “silent majority” of Americans still supported the war.

Vietnamization and U.S. Withdrawal

Nonetheless, Nixon promoted a policy of **Vietnamization** of the war, promising to withdraw U.S. troops gradually and hand over management of the war effort to the South Vietnamese. Although Nixon made good on his promise, he also illegally expanded the geographic scope of the war by authorizing the bombing of Viet Cong sites in the neutral nations of **Cambodia** and **Laos**, all without the knowledge or consent of the U.S. Congress. The revelation of these illegal actions, along with the publication of the secret **Pentagon Papers** in US newspapers in 1971, caused an enormous scandal in the United States and forced Nixon to push for a peace settlement. These papers revealed that the U.S. Army, as well as presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson, had authorized a number of covert actions that increased U.S. involvement in Vietnam unbeknownst to the American public. The government tried to block the publication of these papers under the guise of “national security”, but the Supreme Court ruled in **New York Times v. US** that the government must prove an immediate threat to national security to censor the papers.



“General Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing a Viet Cong prisoner in Saigon” Famous Tet Offensive Photo

Congress’s Response

Outraged by the unauthorized invasion of Cambodia and by the double scandal from the My Lai Massacre and the Pentagon Papers, many in Congress took steps to exert more control over the war and to appease the equally angry public. The Senate voted to repeal the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution to reduce the military’s unchecked spending power (although the House of Representatives did not follow suit). Congress also reduced the number of years drafted soldiers needed to serve in the army. Finally, the **Twenty-Sixth Amendment** was ratified in 1971 to lower the U.S. voting age from twenty-one to eighteen, on the grounds that the young men serving in Vietnam should have a say in which politicians were running the war.

The War Powers Resolution

In July 1973, Congress and the American public learned the full extent of the secret U.S. military campaigns in Cambodia. Testimony in congressional hearings revealed that Nixon and the military had been secretly bombing Cambodia heavily since 1969, even though the president and Joint Chiefs of Staff had repeatedly denied the charge. When the news broke, Nixon switched tactics and began bombing Cambodia openly despite extreme public disapproval.



Nixon and Kissinger

Angry, Congress mustered enough votes to pass the November 1973 **War Powers Resolution** over Nixon's veto. The resolution restricted presidential powers during wartime by requiring the president to notify Congress upon launching any U.S. military action abroad. If Congress did not approve of the action, it would have to conclude within sixty to ninety days. In effect, this act made the president accountable to Congress for his actions abroad. Congress also ended the draft in 1973 and stipulated that the military henceforth consist solely of paid volunteers. Both the War Powers Resolution and the conversion to an all-volunteer army helped quiet antiwar

protesters.

The Cease-fire and the Fall of Saigon

After secret negotiations between U.S. emissary **Henry A. Kissinger** and North Vietnamese representative **Le Duc Tho** in 1972, Nixon engaged in diplomatic maneuvering with China and the USSR—and stepped up bombing of North Vietnam—to pressure the North Vietnamese into a settlement. The **Paris Peace Accords** were finally signed in January 1973, and the last U.S. military personnel left Vietnam in March 1973. Under the terms of the agreement, Nixon pledged to **withdraw** all remaining military personnel from Vietnam and allow the tens of thousands of NVA troops in South Vietnam to remain there, despite the fact that they controlled a quarter of South Vietnamese territory. However, Nixon promised to intervene if North Vietnam moved against the South. In exchange, North Vietnam promised that **elections** would be held to determine the fate of the entire country. Although Nixon insisted that the agreement brought “**peace with honor**,” South Vietnamese leaders complained that the terms amounted to little more than a surrender for South Vietnam.



Evacuating civilians after the fall of Saigon

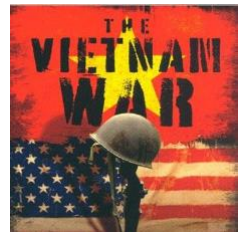
The U.S. government continued to fund the South Vietnamese army, but this funding quickly dwindled. Meanwhile, as President Nixon became embroiled in the **Watergate scandal** that led to his resignation in August 1974, North Vietnamese forces stepped up their attacks on the South and finally launched an all-out offensive in the spring of 1975. On April 30, 1975, the South Vietnamese capital of **Saigon** fell to the North Vietnamese, who reunited the country under Communist rule as the **Socialist Republic of Vietnam**, ending the Vietnam War.

Adapted and Edited by Carolina K-12

Sources:

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Name _____

Student Notes: A Short Summary of the Vietnam War

1. Why was Ho Chi Minh fighting

2. What happened at Dien Bien Phu?

3. How did the United States' foreign policy relate to an increased presence in Vietnam?

4. What group organized resistance to Diem's regime? List both names for the organization.

5. What was the Gulf of Tonkin resolution? Why was it passed? Why is it significant?

6. What was the purpose of Operation Rolling Thunder? Did it work?

7. What strategies did the United States use in Vietnam? Why did they believe they would work?

8. Why was the Ho Chi Minh Trail significant?

9. What was the Tet Offensive? How is it related to the Creditability Gap?

10. What was Vietnamization?

Student Notes: A Short Summary of the Vietnam War

Answer Key

1. Why was Ho Chi Minh fighting the French? What was the name of his organization?
Ho Chi Minh wanted to remove French control and influence from Vietnam, so the Vietnamese could rule themselves. His organization was called the Viet Minh.
2. What happened at Dien Bien Phu?
The French were defeated by Ho Chi Minh's forces and forced to leave Vietnam.
3. How did the United States' foreign policy relate to an increased presence in Vietnam?
The Domino Theory stressed that if one nation fell to communism, the surrounding nations would also fall. Ho Chi Minh was extremely popular in Vietnam after defeating the French and he probably would have won elections to unifying the country under a communist government. To prevent Vietnam falling to communism under Ho Chi Minh, the United States sent large amounts of aid and advisors. Eventually, this policy led to an increase in the amount of US troops in Vietnam.
4. What group organized resistance to Diem's regime? List both names for the organization.
The National Liberation Front consisted of supporters of Ho Chi Minh stationed in South Vietnam that carried out various resistance activities. They are more commonly known as the "Viet Cong."
5. What was the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution? Why was it passed? Why is it significant?
The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was a congressional authorization that allowed President Johnson to greatly expand the war in Vietnam. It was passed in response to the Gulf of Tonkin Incident. It is significant because it greatly expanded Presidential War Powers and allowed Johnson to escalate the war without oversight from Congress.
6. What was the purpose of Operation Rolling Thunder? Did it work?
The purpose of Operation Rolling Thunder was to bomb the N. Vietnamese into submission and to demonstrate to the South Vietnamese that the US was serious about supporting its cause. It did not work, it actually strengthened the resolve of the North and increase the number of people siding with Ho Chi Minh.
7. What strategies did the United States use in Vietnam? Why did they believe they would work?
One strategy was "Search and Destroy" – US troops would go into the countryside to find and kill Viet Cong members. Another strategy was attrition – extend combat to inflict the most amount of enemies casualties thus forcing them to surrender. They believed it would work because they felt that N. Vietnam's economy could not sustain a protracted war effort.
8. Why was the Ho Chi Minh Trail significant?
It allowed the North to resupply the Viet Cong in the South despite US efforts to stop the trail.
9. What was the Tet Offensive? How do you think it is related to the Creditability Gap?
A massive North Vietnamese surprise attack against various American and South Vietnamese targets. It was a military failure for the North Vietnamese, but it helped turned American support against the war. Many government officials issued reports that the North Vietnamese were on the brink of defeat, but the Tet Offensive proved they were not.
10. What was Vietnamization?
President Nixon's plan to withdraw U.S. troops gradually and hand over management of the war effort to the South Vietnamese.

Time Line of the Vietnam War

By David Walbert, Learn NC

Teacher Note: Strips should be cut apart prior to class

1858–1884

Vietnam becomes a French colony, called Indochina.

1930

The Indochinese Communist Party is formed. Ho Chi Minh is a founder.

September 1940

Japan invades Vietnam.

May 1941

Ho Chi Minh establishes the Viet Minh (the League for the Independence of Vietnam).

September 2, 1945

Japan surrenders to Allied forces. Ho Chi Minh declares Vietnam an independent nation, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. But victorious France reassumes colonial authority.

1946

The First Indochina War begins, as the Viet Minh begin fighting against French colonial rule. Over the course of the war, they grow from small guerilla bands into a well-organized and equipped army.

1950

China begins providing the Viet Minh with military advisors and weapons. In response, the United States pledges \$15 million in military aid to France.

1954

The Viet Minh defeat the French army in the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, forcing the surrender of most of the occupying troops. On July 21, France signs the Geneva Accord, a cease-fire that leads to the peaceful withdrawal of French troops from Southeast Asia. Vietnam is temporarily divided between North and South at the 17th parallel (17 degrees north latitude). The Viet Minh are to withdraw north of the line, while troops supporting France are to withdraw to the south. Elections are to be held in 1956 to reunify the country.

1955

On October 26, South Vietnam declares itself the Republic of Vietnam, with its capital at Saigon and Ngo Dinh Diem elected president in rigged elections. Diem argues that South Vietnam was not a party to the Geneva Accords, and cancels the 1956 elections. The North remains under the control of Ho's Communists, with its government at Hanoi.

1956

The U.S. military begins training South Vietnamese forces.

1957

Communist guerillas begin an insurgency in South Vietnam, assassinating more than 400 South Vietnamese officials. Within a year, Communist forces have settled along the Mekong Delta.

1960

The Hanoi government forms the National Liberation Front (NLF) in South Vietnam. Diem calls the group the Vietcong.

1963

Diem, a Catholic, has been intolerant of other religions and has tried to silence protests by Buddhist monks. In response, monks protest by setting themselves on fire in public places.

In November, with the [tacit](#) approval of the U.S., members of the South Vietnamese military overthrow Diem and execute him.

1964

General Nguyen Khanh takes power in South Vietnam in another coup.

On August 2 three North Vietnamese boats allegedly fire torpedoes at the U.S.S. Maddox, a destroyer located in the international waters of the Tonkin Gulf. A second attack was alleged to have taken place on August 4, but government documents later showed that no second incident took place. On August 7, Congress passes the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, authorizing President Lyndon Johnson to “take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.”

1965

The U.S. begins sustained bombing of North Vietnam, called Operation Rolling Thunder. The bombing will continue for three years.

In March, the first U.S. combat troops arrive in Vietnam. By year’s end, more than 200,000 U.S. troops are stationed there.

1966

The first protests against the war are held, including a protest by veterans of World Wars I and II in New York City.

1967

Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara calls the bombing campaign ineffective. The U.S. launches Operation Cedar Falls, a ground war effort involving 30,000 U.S. and South Vietnamese troops to destroy Vietcong operations and supply sites near Saigon. They discover a massive system of underground tunnels that had served as headquarters for the Vietcong.

1968

In January, on the Vietnamese lunar new year (Tet), the North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces launch an attack on one hundred South Vietnamese cities and towns. Within days, U.S. forces recapture most areas. The “Tet Offensive” is a military defeat for Communists, but is a political victory, as Americans begin questioning the U.S. military’s conduct of the war.

On March 16, U.S. soldiers kill hundreds of Vietnamese civilians in the town of Mai Lai.

His popularity plummeting, President Johnson announces that he will not seek re-election.

1968 (cont.)

In July, General William Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, is replaced by General Creighton Abrams.

Richard Nixon is elected President in November.

By December, U.S. troop levels in Vietnam reach 540,000.

1969

President Nixon approves "Operation Breakfast," covert bombing of Communist supply routes and base camps in Cambodia. The bombing continues for 14 months without knowledge of Congress or the American public.

Nixon's Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird, announces a policy of "Vietnamization" in which the U.S. will gradually shift the burden of the war to the South Vietnamese army.

1969 (cont.)

Ho Chi Minh dies on November 3.

On November 13, the American public learns of the Mai Lai massacre. The news further turns opinion against the war. The Army has already charged Lieutenant William Calley, who led the attack, with murder. Calley will be convicted a year later.

1970

On April 30, Nixon announces that U.S. troops will attack enemy locations in Cambodia. The news sparks protests nationwide, especially on college campuses.

In May, Ohio National Guardsmen open fire on a crowd of student protesters at Kent State University, killing four students and wounding eight others. Several of the protesters had been hurling rocks and empty tear gas canisters at the Guardsmen.

1972

The North Vietnamese cross the demilitarized zone (DMZ) at the 17th parallel to attack South Vietnam in what will be known as the Easter Offensive.

Nixon announces further troop reductions.

1973

On January 27, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Vietcong leader Le Duc Tho sign the Paris Peace Accords, an immediate cease-fire that will allow for U.S. withdrawal. Kissinger and Le are awarded the Nobel Peace Prize later in the year.

On March 29, the last U.S. troops leave Vietnam.

The U.S. Congress abolishes the draft in favor of an all volunteer Army.

1974

North Vietnam announces a renewal of the war.

1975

North Vietnam launches a massive assault on South Vietnam. President Gerald Ford announces that for the U.S., the Vietnam War is “finished.” On April 30, South Vietnam surrenders to Communist forces, and the last Americans evacuate Saigon.

1976–1980

Vietnam is unified under Communist rule as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The new government imprisons as many as a million people without trial for supporting the previous regime. Thousands of Vietnamese refugees, dubbed “boat people,” flee in crowded and rickety boats, hoping to be permitted to reach other countries.

1982

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is dedicated in Washington, D.C.

1997

The United States and Vietnam exchange ambassadors for the first time since the war, beginning a new era of cooperation between the two nations.

Name: _____

Vietnam – Illustrated Timeline Review

Event & Date	Description/Significance of the Event

Afghanistan haunted by ghost of Vietnam

By **Ed Hornick**, CNN

Washington (CNN) -- While President Obama's war council deliberates its strategy toward Afghanistan, the ghost of Vietnam is often invoked as a warning.

Afghanistan, U.S. and coalition forces have been fighting in Afghanistan for eight years, and until recently the war had been overshadowed by the one in Iraq. In March, Afghanistan will become America's longest war, surpassing the Vietnam War.

The Vietnam War, which cost 58,000 American lives, is the one most often invoked when U.S. troops are committed overseas.

Although some say Afghanistan is "Obama's Vietnam," experts say there are several major similarities and differences between the two wars.

Eric Margolis, a veteran journalist and former Army soldier who served during the Vietnam War, said the biggest problem the United States is facing now -- as in Vietnam -- is fighting the mostly poor, rural insurgents who live among Afghans.

"It makes it very difficult to drive [insurgents] out, because they can stay there forever. ... They're at home. When we attack villages where they are, we kill a lot of civilians, causing an uproar and turning the people more against us."

Steve Clemons of the nonpartisan New America Foundation said one of the factors in the Soviet-Afghan War -- which pitted the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan with the Soviet military against the Islamist Mujahideen Resistance -- was the brutal attacks inflicted on both fighters and civilians by the Soviets.

"[There] was the sense of outrage and grievance at some of the things that they had done and the triggering of a deeply felt emotional antagonism to the Soviet effort to dominate and colonize Afghanistan among the Pashtun."

He worries that if the United States fails to focus on a more humanitarian and diplomatic approach, Americans will fall into the same trap the Soviets faced, which ultimately led to them leaving the country defeated.

"I think one of the things I'm concerned about is whether or not we're triggering those same kind of emotions among the Pashtuns today. And believe me, the Pashtuns don't care whether they're [going after] Americans or going after the Soviets. If you begin to threaten their own perception of their own independence, then you turn Pashtuns into Taliban."

Peter Beinart, who recently wrote an article called "Bury the Vietnam Analogy" on TheDailyBeast.com, has said there is a real sense of national identity for Afghans that wasn't seen in South Vietnam.

"Afghanistan is a real country that Afghans generally believe in. They have an Afghan national identity. That didn't exist in South Vietnam," he said, adding that the Taliban is much less popular in Afghanistan than the Viet Cong was in South Vietnam.

In Vietnam, the Communists controlled the nationalist movement and had the nationalist legitimacy. The Taliban, meanwhile, is not as organized as the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese army were.

But there is evidence the Taliban is changing, as shown by a series of recent well-coordinated attacks on remote Afghanistan outposts.

Journalist Margolis also compared the government of Afghanistan to the government of South Vietnam.

"In both cases, the government of Saigon [South Vietnam] and Kabul [Afghanistan] are heavily influenced by minorities. We have made our enemies [among] the ethnic majority in Afghanistan who are the Pashtuns -- pretty well cut them out of power."

The recent Afghanistan elections received worldwide attention for claims of fraud by the incumbent, President Hamid Karzai, who reportedly won the election. After fierce international criticism, Karzai recently agreed to a runoff.

Another difference between the two wars comes in terms of troop numbers, Beinart said.

"I think what's clear is that the resources we put in Afghanistan have been absolutely minuscule compared to Vietnam and compared to Iraq. ... In 1968, we had over 500,000 U.S. troops in South Vietnam. We had up until a couple of years ago only about 20,000 [in Afghanistan]. ... So what's clear is, we haven't made anywhere near the kind of commitment to Afghanistan as we made to Vietnam."

In the past month, Obama's top commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, issued a report to the president and the administration, outlining the problems facing the nation and what resources will be needed. His prescription: more troops -- upwards of 40,000 by some estimates -- with the goal focusing on securing Afghan towns and cities in certain areas.

A CNN/Opinion Research Corp. poll, taken October 16-18, showed 59 percent of Americans opposed sending more troops into the country. The same poll found that 52 percent of Americans consider the war in Afghanistan has turned into another Vietnam War situation, while 46 say it's not.

Source: <http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/10/27/afghanistan.vietnam/index.html?iref=allsearch>

Similarities b/t Vietnam & Afghanistan	Differences b/t Vietnam & Afghanistan

