The Vietnam War

U.S. government's anti-Communist strategy of containment in Asia
Help the French and send some advisors-
Increase advisors, send some troops-

Escalate- we can not lose a war
Peace with Honor- we gotta get out!
Vietnam: (1954-1973)

An American Attempt to Contain Communism in Southeast Asia

Source: www.geographic.org, used with permission
Containment:

- Preventing the spread of communism
- U.S. feared the "Domino Theory"—that if one nation fell to communism, its neighbors would soon fall.
Early U.S. Involvement:

- Vietnam had been part of French Indo-China (a colony).
- Communist Party, led by Ho Chi Minh rose to power.
- French asked U.S. to assist (we financed 75% of their efforts).
- French failed in 1954 in the battle of Dien Bien Phu and fled the nation.

Ho Chi Minh
A true communist, he taught his followers the deadly arts of guerrilla warfare and terrorism.
Vietnam Divided:

- Vietnam was divided (similar to Korea) along the 17th Parallel
- North = Communist / South = Pro-West
- Ho Chi Minh was a true communist and made popular changes in the North
- South was run by a corrupt dictator who was backed by U.S. (Ngo Dinh Diem)
- Northern Army and Southern Communist guerillas (Vietcong) attacked South Vietnam.
South Vietnam Resisted:

- U.S. assisted South Vietnam by sending military advisors under JFK.
- This role expanded under LBJ after 1963 to include troops.
- American containment policy now included battle.

Napalm bombs explode on suspected Viet Cong structures south of Saigon in South Vietnam.
Increasing Involvement:

- **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution** (passed by Congress in 1964) gave LBJ right to expand the war effort.
- Involvement steadily increased through the 1960’s (**escalation**) under LBJ.
- Many Americans supported these efforts in the early 1960’s.
- Even though LBJ would have preferred to build the “Great Society”, he was bound to not allow the U.S. to actually lose its first war.
The Tet Offensive: 1968

- A strong attack by Vietcong (communist) forces
- Even though U.S. troops held, it proved the war was not nearly over
- Turned many Americans against the war effort

Helicopters airlift soldiers during a search and destroy mission by the 25th Infantry Division, northeast of Cu Chi, South Vietnam.
Our Problems Fighting this War:

• We were forced to fight a limited war— not to engage civilians or leave certain regions

• Ho Chi Minh was a very popular communist man, with popular reforms

• The Ho Chi Minh Trail supplied Vietcong by running through Laos and Cambodia (both neutral nations)

• We could not identify the enemy

• Many soldiers were not “spirited” to fight (low morale)
NIXON’S PLAN FOR VIETNAMIZATION:

- Nixon elected in 1968 (LBJ refused to run again and Bobby Kennedy was assassinated)
- Goal to return the fight to people of Vietnam (Vietnamization)
- Nixon increased bombing, invaded Cambodia...
- U.S. drew up peace accords with North Vietnam in 1973 (“Peace with honor”)
A Bitter Division at Home:

- **Hawks:** Pro War
  - Containment of Communism
  - Domino Theory
  - Must Win!!!

- **Doves:** Anti-War
  - Anti-war movement (mostly on college campuses)
  - Not our business
  - Destroying the people and society
  - Too much cost
  - 54,000 men lost
This photograph was taken during a student protest at Kent State University, in Ohio. The National Guard opened fire on a demonstration, killing four and wounding nine. This violence made the nation realize that there was a war raging in the U.S. as well as in Vietnam.

**OHIO**

TIN SOLDIERS AND NIXON'S BOMBING
WE'RE FINALLY ON OUR OWN
THIS SUMMER I HEAR THE DRUMMING
FOUR DEAD IN OHIO

GOTTA GET DOWN TO IT
SOLDIERS ARE GUNNING US DOWN
SHOULD OF BEEN DONE LONG AGO
WHAT IF YOU KNEW HER AND
FOUND HER DEAD ON THE GROUND
HOW CAN YOU RUN WHEN YOU KNOW

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A song by Neil Young
Legacies of Vietnam:

• By 1975 Vietnam had been reunited under Communist rule.
• Cambodia and Laos also fell to communism in the early 1970’s (domino theory).
• Nixon was forced to resign due to the Watergate scandal.
• American faith in government diminished.
• Opposition to war was reflected onto the treatment of veterans returning home.
The U.S. government’s anti-Communist strategy of containment in Asia led to America’s involvement in the Korean and Vietnamese Wars.
The Vietnam War demonstrated the power of American public opinion in reversing foreign policy.

Anti-Vietnam demonstrator offers a flower to a military police, Arlington, Virginia
It tested the democratic system to its limits, left scars on American society that have not yet been erased, and made many Americans deeply skeptical of future military or even peacekeeping interventions.