**My Lai**

The Cold War

From: Integrating Academic Literacy, Emily Markussen Sorsher, 2011

**History Standards:**10.9.3 Understand the importance of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, which established the pattern for America’s postwar policy of supplying economic and military aid to prevent the spread of Communism and the resulting economic and political competition in arenas such as Southeast Asia (i.e., the Korean War, Vietnam War), Cuba, and Africa.

11.9.3 Trace the origins and geopolitical consequences (foreign and domestic) of the Cold War and containment policy, including the following: …The Vietnam War…

**CCSS Standards: Reading, Grades 11-12**

1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).

9. Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

**Reading, Grades 9-10**

1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social studies.

6. Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

**Guiding Question:**

What was the My Lai Massacre? Why was it so important to the home front during the Vietnam War? What lessons can we take from My Lai and apply to the modern situation in Afghanistan?

**Overview of Lesson:**

On day 1, students should complete the journal activity, and then share their response with their partner. They may then work together to look up vocabulary. Students will then read each chunk, write their answer to the question, then share with a partner. When everyone is done, the teacher should guide a whole class discussion using the questions above. This sequence is repeated for the second article on the next day.

**Sources:**

 “The My Lai Massacre”, PBS website

“US Afghan killings suspect flown to Kuwait”, *The Star Telegram*

**The My Lai Massacre**

*Learning Objective: Students will be able to summarize the events surrounding the My Lai Massacre.*

*Task: Students will explain the importance of the My Lai massacre in America’s history.*

Student Journal: What is a massacre? What causes people to kill another group of people? Can you think of a specific example of a massacre, in history or in the news? Why did it happen?

Vocabulary for Partners to Define Using a Dictionary:

Poised –

Atrocities –

Conflict –

Entrenched –

Agitated –

Commission –

Inequities –

*Purpose for Reading: The massacre at My Lai had an impact on the Vietnam War, but it had a larger impact back home in America. The nation was divided over whether or not America should be involved in the Vietnam conflict, and this highly publicized event drew people even further apart. With modern journalism, human rights abuses can become very public, as they do during wars and occupation today.*

Text Preview: Based on the photos and headings, what do you think this article will be about? How do you know?

Reading Instructions: Read each paragraph and then answer the question with your partner. Once you have finished, read the entire piece again, and put a star next to the paragraph you believe is most important, and write one sentence at the bottom explaining why.

**The My Lai Massacre**



On March 16, 1968 the angry and frustrated men of Charlie Company, 11th Brigade, Americal Division entered the Vietnamese village of [My Lai](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/mylai/). "This is what you've been waiting for -- search and destroy -- and you've got it," said their superior officers. A short time later the killing began. When news of the atrocities surfaced, it sent shockwaves through the U.S. political establishment, the military's chain of command, and an already divided American public.

*Why is this paragraph here? What does it tell you?*

**Poised for Conflict**

My Lai lay in the South Vietnamese district of Son My, a heavily mined area where the Vietcong were deeply entrenched. Numerous members of Charlie Company had been maimed or killed in the area during the preceding weeks. The agitated troops, under the command of Lt. [William Calley](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/vietnam/whos/whos-calley.html), entered the village poised for engagement with their elusive enemy.

*This paragraph is titled “Poised for Conflict”. Why was a conflict likely to occur in My Lai?*

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| **Massacre** As the "search and destroy" mission unfolded, it soon degenerated into the massacre of over 300 apparently unarmed civilians including women, children, and the elderly. Calley ordered his men to enter the village firing, though there had been no report of opposing fire. According to eyewitness reports offered after the event, several old men were bayoneted, praying women and children were shot in the back of the head, and at least one girl was raped and then killed. For his part, Calley was said to have rounded up a group of the villagers, ordered them into a ditch, and mowed them down in a fury of machine gun fire.*Read the “Poised for Conflict” paragraph again. Why were these men so brutal to the citizens of My Lai? Why didn’t their commander stop them?***Call for Investigation**Word of the atrocities did not reach the American public until November 1969, when journalist Seymour Hersh published a story detailing his conversations with a Vietnam veteran, Ron Ridenhour. Ridenhour learned of the events at My Lai from members of Charlie Company who had been there. Before speaking with Hersh, he had appealed to Congress, the White House, and the Pentagon to investigate the matter. The military investigation resulted in Calley's being charged with murder in September 1969 -- a full two months before the Hersh story hit the streets. |

*Why do you think it took so long for something to be done about this massacre?*

**Questions About Soldiers' Conduct**

As the gruesome details of My Lai reached the American public, serious questions arose concerning the conduct of American soldiers in Vietnam. A military commission investigating the massacre found widespread failures of leadership, discipline, and morale among the Army's fighting units. As the war progressed, many "career" soldiers had either been rotated out or retired. Many more had died. In their place were scores of draftees whose fitness for leadership in the field of battle was questionable at best. Military officials blamed inequities in the draft policy for the often slim talent pool from which they were forced to choose leaders. Many maintained that if the educated middle class ("the Harvards," as they were called) had joined in the fight, a man of Lt. William Calley's emotional and intellectual stature would never have been issuing orders.

*What were the specific failures the government found? What reason did the military give for the problems in Vietnam?*

**Orders from Above?**

Calley, an unemployed college dropout, had managed to graduate from Officer's Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1967. At his trial, Calley testified that he was ordered by Captain Ernest Medina to kill everyone in the village of My Lai. Still, there was only enough photographic and recorded evidence to convict Calley, alone, of murder. He was sentenced to life in prison, but was released in 1974, following many appeals. After being issued a dishonorable discharge, Calley entered the insurance business.

*What does the article imply about Calley and other military leaders like him?*

*Article created 3/29/2005,* [*www.pbs.org*](http://www.pbs.org)

* **I selected this as the most important paragraph because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.**

**US Afghan killings suspect flown to Kuwait**

*Learning Objective: Students will be able to summarize the events surrounding the killing of civilians in the war in Afghanistan.*

*Task: Students will explain the connections between the current conflict in Afghanistan and the Vietnam War, using evidence from both articles.*

Student Journal: What do you know about the conflict in Afghanistan? What do you know about the Taliban? How is this military effort different than those you have learned about in history?

Vocabulary for Partners to Define Using a Dictionary:

* Spree –
* Preclude –
* Capital Punishment –
* Anonymity –
* Misstep –
* Headway –
* Detention –
* Court Martial –
* Jeopardy –

*Purpose for Reading: Like My Lai, the killing of 16 Afghan civilians by an American soldier has a profound impact on the political situation overseas and the perception of the war on the home front. It is important to note how the massacre is interpreted by Afghan people and their leaders, as well as how it is perceived by American leaders. The massacre creates a difficult foreign policy situation for everyone, and changes the way Americans and Afghans see a war that was intended to help the nation of Afghanistan and provide greater security from terrorism for the United States.*

Text Preview: Based on the photos and headings, what do you think this article will be about? How do you know?

Reading Instructions: Read each paragraph and then answer the question with your partner. Once you have finished, read the entire piece again, and put a star next to the paragraph you believe is most important, and write one sentence at the bottom explaining why.

Source: US Afghan killings suspect flown to Kuwait

Posted Wednesday, March 14, 2012

From *The Star Telegram*



BY HEIDI VOGT AND PAULINE JELINEK

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The American soldier accused of shooting 16 Afghan villagers in a pre-dawn killing spree was flown out of Afghanistan on Wednesday to Kuwait, even as many Afghans called for him to face justice in their country.

Afghan government officials did not immediately respond to calls for comment on the late-night announcement. The U.S. military said the transfer did not preclude the possibility of trying the case in Afghanistan, and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has said the soldier could receive capital punishment if convicted.

The soldier was held by the U.S. military in Kandahar until Wednesday evening, when he was flown out of Afghanistan to Kuwait, said a U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

*\* Why does it matter where the soldier stands trial? What will he be tried for?*

Many fear a misstep by the U.S. military in handling the case could ignite a firestorm in Afghanistan that would shatter already tense relations between the two countries. The alliance appeared near the breaking point last month when the burning of Qurans in a garbage pit at a U.S. base sparked protests and retaliatory attacks that killed more than 30 people, including six U.S. soldiers.

In recent days the two nations made headway toward an agreement governing a long-term American presence here, but the massacre in Kandahar province on Sunday has called all such negotiations into question.

Afghan lawmakers have demanded that the soldier be publicly tried in Afghanistan to show that he was being brought to justice, calling on President Hamid Karzai to suspend all talks with the U.S. until that happens.

*\* How are relations between the US and Afghanistan? What may happen because o this event? Underline the sentence that explains why people are already on edge.*

The U.S. staff sergeant, who has not been named or charged, allegedly slipped out of his small base in southern Afghanistan before dawn, crept into three houses and shot men, women and children at close range then burned some of the bodies. By sunrise, there were 16 corpses.

*\* Was this something the soldier was ordered to do? Why else might he have done it?*

The suspect was taken into custody shortly afterwards and at some point taken to Kandahar.

"We do not have appropriate detention facilities in Afghanistan," Navy Capt. John Kirby, a Pentagon spokesman, said Wednesday. He said that meant a facility for a U.S. service member "in this kind of case."

The U.S. military has detention facilities in Kuwait that have been used for other troops. Army PFC Bradley Manning was detained in Kuwait after he was taken into custody in Baghdad in 2010 for allegedly leaking government documents in the Wikileaks case.

*\* What is the problem with holding the solider prisoner in Afghanistan?*

Kirby said the transfer did not necessarily mean the trial would be held outside Afghanistan. U.S. officials had previously said it would be technically possible to hold proceedings in Afghanistan, noting other court-martial trials held here.

The decision to remove the soldier from the country may complicate the prosecution, said Michael Waddington, an American military defense lawyer who represented a ringleader of the 2010 thrill killings of three Afghan civilians by soldiers from the same Washington state base as the accused staff sergeant.

The prosecutors won't be able to use statements from Afghan witnesses unless the defense is able to cross-examine them, he said.

*\* Where do you think his trial should be held? Does it matter if he is tried under Afghan, rather than American, laws?*

Waddington said the decision to remove the suspect was likely a security call.

"His presence in the country would put himself and other service members in jeopardy," Waddington said.

But the patience of Afghan investigators has already appeared to be wearing thin regarding the shootings in Panjwai district.

The soldier was caught on U.S. surveillance video that showed him walking up to his base, laying down his weapon and raising his arms in surrender, according to an Afghan official who viewed the footage.

The official said Wednesday there were also two to three hours of video footage covering the time of the attack that Afghan investigators are trying to get from the U.S. military. He spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

U.S. authorities showed their Afghan counterparts the video of the surrender to prove that only one perpetrator was involved in the shootings, the official said.

Some Afghan officials and residents in the villages that were attacked have insisted there was more than one shooter. If the disagreement persists, it could deepen the distrust between the two countries.

*\* What would it mean if there were multiple shooters? Does the video prove there was only one?*

Panetta, in a series of meetings with troops and Afghan leaders Wednesday, said the U.S. must never lose sight of its mission in the war, despite recent violence including what appeared to be an attempted attack near the runway of a military base where he was about to land.

It wasn't clear whether it was an attempt to attack the defense chief, whose travel to southern Afghanistan was not made public before he arrived. Panetta was informed of the incident after landing.

"We will not allow individual incidents to undermine our resolve to that mission," he told about 200 Marines at Camp Leatherneck. "We will be tested we will be challenged, we'll be challenged by our enemy, we'll be challenged by ourselves, we'll be challenged by the hell of war itself. But none of that, none of that, must ever deter us from the mission that we must achieve."

According the Pentagon spokesman, an Afghan stole a vehicle at a British airfield in southern Afghanistan and drove it onto a runway, crashing into a ditch about the same time that Leon Panetta's aircraft was landing.

The pickup truck drove at high speed onto the ramp where Panetta's plane was intended to stop, Kirby said. No one in Panetta's party was injured.

*\* What does the attempted attack on Panetta’s plane tell us about the Afghan reaction?*

* **I selected this as the most important paragraph because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.**

*Final Task: Students will explain the connections between the conflict in Afghanistan and the Vietnam War, using evidence from both articles. What do these two events tell us about public perception of each war? What do they tell us about the men who fought them? What are the political consequences of these massacres? What final lesson should we take away from these readings?*