The Cold War

The Cold War was between the United States and the Soviet Union. It was between two forms of economic systems: capitalism and communism. It began at the end of World War II.

Why is it called the Cold war? It was "cold" because the two countries did not fight a traditional war. There were no battles, no soldiers, no armies, and no bombs. In the Cold War, the two countries used spies to gather information about the other country. Both the United States and the Soviet Union wanted to be the most powerful country in the world. After WWII, the United States believed the Soviet Union wanted communism to take over the world. At that time, the Soviet Union influenced many countries in Asia to become communist. For example, after WWII, China became a communist country. The United States watched governments in Asia turn communist one by one. It worried a domino effect was taking place. It worried the domino effect would bring communism to the United States. Therefore, the United States tried to stop communism from spreading in Asia. It began to send economic and military aid to non-communist countries in Asia. The United States also used spies to find out the expansion plans of the Soviet Union and China, the two largest communist countries in the world.

Three important events happened during the Cold War. The arms race was one event. The United States began a race in the world to see who could build the biggest bomb. The United States developed the first bombs: the atom bomb and the hydrogen bomb or H-bomb. Then many countries in the world began making atom bombs. Atom and H-bombs are called nuclear weapons. When countries test nuclear weapons, the explosions send poisonous radioactive waste into the atmosphere. As a result of the arms race, people in the United States began to prepare for a war that used nuclear weapons. People all over the country built bomb shelters under the ground. Alabama prepared some of the many caves it has throughout the state to be used as bomb shelters. The government stocked them with emergency supplies.

The United States also began a race to see who could be the first country to send a rocket and people to the moon. The Soviet Union embarrassed the United States in 1957 by sending the first rocket, Sputnik, into space. Then in 1961, the Soviet Union sent the first astronaut, Yuri Gagarin, into space in a space ship orbiting the Earth. President John F. Kennedy announced on May 25, 1961, that the United States would send a man to the moon by 1969. NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center at the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama, was the center of development of rocket engines that powered the space program to the moon. On July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, two American astronauts, became the first people to ever walk on the moon.

The Berlin Wall was a symbol of the Cold War. In 1961, the communist government of East Germany built a barbed wire and concrete wall in the city of Berlin to keep people from

entering or leaving the communist part of Germany. The decision to build this wall created an international crisis. The United States sent the National Guard to Germany. Many of the Guardsmen were from the Alabama National Guard, which was the third largest Guard in the United States at that time. In 1989 the Cold War came to an end when the Soviet Union began to break up into smaller, independent countries. The German citizens began tearing down the Berlin Wall at this time.

The fear of communism spreading caused the United States to become involved in two wars - the Korean War (1950-1953) and the Vietnam War (1955-1975. The details of the Korean War are outline in Lesson Five and Vietnam War in Lesson Six and Seven.