



THE WAR



A KEN BURNS FILM

DIRECTED AND PRODUCED BY KEN BURNS AND LYNN NOVICK

The Battle of the Bulge

Subjects:

U.S. History, World History

“We crossed France, went into parts of Belgium and hit the Bulge in a big snowstorm. Our vehicles became almost inoperable. And the tanks one after another were blown up and we could see dead tankers and wounded tankers running for cover all over the place. That was not a pretty sight. We bailed out of these tracks and started running through the snow to get some kind of coverage, and actually retreated back up onto a hill, dug in, and spent the night in a big snowstorm. We were wet and I thought, ‘Boy, I don’t think we can make it.’ And that night there were tracer bullets all over, lots of artillery—very, very scary. And you’d rationalize things, like, ‘nothing worse can happen but getting killed.’ But, there were things worse than being killed.”

— Burnett Miller, *THE WAR*

Introduction:

By December, 1944, it appeared the Allies were on the verge of victory in the European Theater, with troops massed in Belgium ready to invade Germany. However, on December 16, the German army launched a massive, last-ditch counter-attack on a thinly defended area in the Ardennes Forest in Belgium. One of the largest atrocities of World War II occurred early in the battle when German troops massacred approximately 125 American troops who had surrendered during the German advance.

German Panzer divisions marched through six U.S. divisions and appeared to have the upper hand, especially because U.S. air power needed to re-supply troops surrounded by German forces and bomb German positions, yet was grounded due to bad weather and heavy cloud cover. However, as the cloud cover cleared, Allied bombers pounded German positions. The Panzer tanks and armored vehicles could not be re-supplied with fuel, and by January, 1945 the counterattack was over.

In this lesson, students will analyze various online and video resources dealing with the battle, collecting information about weather conditions, the battle itself, and other conditions the soldiers endured during the period. They will use the information they collect to write “letters home” from the point of view of U.S. or German military personnel deployed in the Ardennes between December, 1944 and January, 1945.

Objectives:

As a result of completing this lesson, students will:

- Investigate the conditions and results of the Battle of the Bulge
- Understand the military situation in the European Theater in late 1944 and early 1945
- Be able to describe conditions and situations in the battle in expository form
- Be able to compare/contrast the American experience in the battle with the German experience.

Lesson Methodology:

Prior to introducing the lesson, the teacher should have the class view Episode 6 of *THE WAR*, “The Ghost Front: December 1944 to March 1945,” particularly the segment on the Battle of the Bulge and the German’s Ardennes offensive. Ensure that students have an understanding of the military situation in the fall and winter of 1944, position of U.S. forces at that time, and the conditions American and German troops experienced during the battle.

GO TO CLIP

(http://www.pbs.org/thewar/detail_5368.htm)

Next, introduce the lesson to the students, explaining that they are to assume that they are either German or U.S. soldiers during the Battle of the Bulge, and they are writing a letter to a relative at home, describing the battle as well as the conditions the soldiers endured during the period. (In order to achieve a cross-section of letters, the teacher should devise a way for some students to be German soldiers and some to be American.)

The teacher may wish to encourage the class to view other examples of letters written by U.S. servicemen during war. The American Experience: “War Letters” page (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/warletters/index.html>) has examples of letters from various conflicts that can be used.)

Distribute one “Data Collection Sheet” to each student, and explain that they will be looking for various characteristics of the battle and the experience in order to write their letters. Allow sufficient time for students to complete research and

the data collection sheets. After students have researched the battle and conditions, they can write their letters.

Resources

American Experience webpage on “The Battle of the Bulge”
(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/bulge/>)

U.S. Army webpage of Battle of the Bulge images
(<http://www.army.mil/CMH/reference/bulge/images.htm>)

U.S. Department of Defense Battle of the Bulge 60th Anniversary page
(<http://www.defenselink.mil/home/Specials/bulge/index.html>)

History Net story about General George S. Patton and the Battle of the Bulge
(<http://www.historynet.com/magazines/mhq/7558487.html?page=1&c=y>)

National Public Radio Battle of the Bulge Remembered page (includes an audio interview with journalist Walter Cronkite)
(<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4246503>)

Data Collection Sheet

Directions: As you view Episode 6 of “The War” and conduct your own research, look for information to include in your “letter home” fitting the categories below.

Weather Conditions:

How Equipment and Clothing Was Affected:

How Morale Was Affected:

How Strategy Was Affected:

Impact on Tactics and Weapons Used in the Battle:

Viewed Effect of the Battle and Conditions on the Enemy:

Other Factors Related to What You Researched That You Feel Important:

Assessment Strategies:

The teacher should grade student work based on historical accuracy, grammar, spelling and any other considerations the teacher may wish to include, such as length of the letter. The teacher may wish to design an “evaluation form” or rubric that equally assesses each category. In addition, the teacher may wish to evaluate the “Data Collection Form” the student used in order to write the letter.

Extension Activity:

The Malmedy Massacre was considered a major war crime against prisoners of war, and Germans involved were prosecuted after the war ended. However, as the film notes, Americans were also involved in instances where surrendering German soldiers were shot rather than held as prisoners of war. Using information from the film as well as student research, the class can hold a mock trial prosecuting German troops involved in the Malmedy Massacre to determine if they were guilty of war crimes.

Visit the “Search and Explore”

(http://www.pbs.org/thewar/search_home.htm) section of THE WAR web site for more information about the Battle of the Bulge.

Resources

Library of Congress World War II Battle of the Bulge Situation Maps

(<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/maps/wwii/essay1a.html>)

“HyperWar: European Theater of Operations, Battle of the Bulge resources”

(<http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/ETO/Bulge/index.html>)

35th Infantry Division Ardennes website

(<http://www.35thinfdivassoc.com/Ardennes/>)

“Bastogne: December 1944, White Christmas/Red Snow (a journal)” (<http://kclibrary.nhmccd.edu/peniche.html>)

U.S. Army online publication on the Battle of the Bulge and Bastogne

(http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/books/wwii/7-8/7-8_cont.htm)

History Net story about the end of the siege of Bastogne

(http://www.historynet.com/historical_conflicts/3031921.html)

Standards

This lesson addresses the following standards set by the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) (<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks>).

“Morale, I thought, kept up because you were with people. That as long as you were with other GIs in the snow and in the misery, if you had somebody next to you, you figured, well, if they can handle it, I can handle it. You just keep moving ahead.”

Herndon Inge, *THE WAR*, Mobile, Alabama, reflecting on his experiences in the Battle of the Bulge

U.S. History:

Benchmark 2. Understands significant military aspects of World War II (e.g., major turning points of the war; Axis and Allied military campaigns in the European and Pacific theaters; the financial, material, and human costs of the war and their economic consequences for the Allies and the Axis powers; the locations of the major theaters of war in North Africa, Europe, and the Pacific; the diverse contributions of men and women during the war)

Benchmark 5. Understands characteristics of the end of World War II (e.g., why there was a delay in creating a second front in Europe, the Soviet Union’s role in helping to defeat the Axis Powers and the reasons for the success of D-Day)

World History:

Benchmark 4. Understands the impact of World War II on civilian populations and soldiers (e.g., the roles of women and children during the war and how they differed in Allied and Axis countries, the hardships of the war on soldiers from both sides)

Benchmark 8. Understands the climax and moral implications of World War II (e.g., the moral implications of military technologies and techniques U.S.ed in the war, statistics of population displacement caU.S.ed by the war, debates surrounding the U.S.e of the atomic bomb to end the war with Japan)

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