

Section IV: World War II



Title: Battle of the Bulge—Americans Respond to a German Surprise

Grade Level: High School

Objectives: Describe strategic moments during the Battle of the Bulge. Understand how weather challenged the soldiers who fought on both sides during the battle.

National History Standards:

Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation; Era 8:3: The causes and course of World War II, the character of the war at home and abroad, and its reshaping of the U.S. role in world affairs.

Time: 45 minutes

Background:

On D day—June 6, 1944—the Allies launched a massive attack on Hitler’s “Fortress Europe,” battling their way onto the beaches of Normandy in northwest France. Allied troops and armored divisions under the overall command of U.S. general Dwight D. Eisenhower spread inland. In bitter fighting, they fought their way through fields and along country lanes, into villages and from door to door, while Allied bombing and strafing battered German defenses. In August, amphibious landings from the Mediterranean poured troops and supplies diverted from Italy into southern France. Meanwhile, Allied forces crossed the Seine River and liberated Paris. By mid-September, the Allies were in control of Belgium and stood ready to strike Germany.

On December 16, 1944, massed Allied troops were poised on the border of Germany—along a 200-mile front—when the Nazis mounted a surprise offensive in the forests of Belgium. The Allied line bulged, but it did not break. Allies quickly mobilized, pouring troops and matériel into the breach. A month of bitter fighting in winter cold and deep snow cost the Allies nearly 100,000 casualties; 20,000 Americans died. The Battle of the Bulge further depleted Germany’s disappearing fighting forces; already, its army was deploying boys, many of them younger than sixteen. As German resolve hardened, the stage was set for a bloody battle for the Nazi homeland and capital of Berlin.

“Both the enemy and the weather could kill you, and the two of them together was a pretty deadly combination.”

—Bart Hagerman, private, Seventeenth Airborne



M-4 Sherman tank covered in snow *Courtesy of National Archives*

- Materials:**
- [Online Video—European Theater during WWII](http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/Lesson11.aspx)
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/Lesson11.aspx>
 - M-4 Sherman tank covered in snow
 - Soldiers settled down in the snow
 - Pair of mittens with trigger fingers, M-1 rifle, GI helmet

Lesson:

Show the European Theater video to the class. Then have a class discussion about the strategy of fighting employed by the Allies and Axis powers in Europe. If necessary, supplement the video with a more detailed account of the battle.

Hand out the images from the above materials list; these images and objects illustrate certain aspects of the Battle of the Bulge. Have the students analyze the images with the help of guidance sheets. Then discuss with the class the timeline of the battle and the impact of the cold weather on the fighting. You might even have students hold one hand in a bucket of ice to learn how hard it is to use your fingers when they're very cold.

Next, have each student pretend to be either an American or a German soldier and write a letter home describing the battle and their feelings about it. Students should choose a particular stage in the battle—during the initial German offensive that caught the American forces by surprise or during the American counteroffensive that drove the Germans back. The letters ought to contain detail about the following:

1. a description of the success/failure of the battle at the time the letter was written;
2. a description of the weather conditions and how they affected the troop and supply movements, as well as troop morale.

Extra Resources:

- http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/books/wwii/7-8/7-8_CONT.HTM
- <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/bulge/filmmore/fr.html>
- C. B. MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*(1984)
- J. S. D. Eisenhower, *The Bitter Woods*(1969; repr. 1995)
- Stephen E. Ambrose, *Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne from Normandy to Hitler's Eagle's Nest*(2001)



American infantrymen during the Battle of the Bulge *Courtesy of National Archives*



M-1 rifle, M1 helmet, pair of mittens with trigger fingers
National Museum of American History

Bibliography

General

Daso, Dik, ed., with Howard Morrison and David Allison. *The Price of Freedom: Americans at War*. Marquand Books, 2004.

Section I: War of Independence

Brenner, Barbara. *If You Were There in 1776*. Bradbury Press, 1994.

Galvin, John R. *The Minute Men: The First Fight—Myths and Realities of the American Revolution*. AUSA Books, 1989.

Marrin, Albert. *George Washington and the Founding of a Nation*. Dutton Children's Books, 2001.

Meltzer, Milton. *The American Revolutionaries: A History in Their Own Words 1750–1800*. HarperTrophy, 1993.

Tourtellot, Arthur B. *Lexington and Concord: The Beginning of the War of the American Revolution*. W. W. Norton, 2000.

Whitelaw, Nancy. *The Shot Heard 'Round the World: The Battles of Lexington & Concord*. Morgan Reynolds, 2001.

Section II: Wars of Expansion

Bachrach, Deborah. *Custer's Last Stand: Opposing Viewpoints*. Greenhaven Press, 1990.

Christensen, Carol and Thomas. *The U.S.-Mexican War*. Bay Books, 1998.

Herb, Angela M. *Beyond the Mississippi: Early Westward Expansion of the United States*. Lodestar, 1996.

Marrin, Albert. *Tatan'ka Iyota'ke: Sitting Bull & His World*. Dutton Children's Books, 2000.

Section III: Civil War

Better, Susan Provost. *Billy Yank and Johnny Reb: Soldiering in the Civil War*. Twenty-First Century, 2000.

Chang, Ina. *A Separate Battle: Women & the Civil War*. Lodestar Books, 1991.

Everett, Gwen. *John Brown: One Man Against Slavery*. Rizzoli, 1993.

McPherson, James M. *Fields of Fury: The American Civil War*. Simon & Schuster/Atheneum, 2002.

Meltzer, Milton. *Voices from the Civil War: A Documentary History of the Great American Conflict*. HarperCollins, 1989.

Murphy, Jim. *The Boy's War. Confederates & Union Soldiers Talk about the Civil War*. Clarion Books, 1993.

Reef, Catherine. *Civil War Soldiers: African-American Soldiers*. Twenty-First Century, 1993.

Section IV: World War II

Bachle, Rosemary Eckroat. *Women's War Memoirs*. Western Heritage Books, 1999.

DeLee, Nigel. *Voices from the Battle of the Bulge*. David and Charles, 2004.

Gluck, Sherna Berger. *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change*. Twayne, 1987.

Green, Gladys and Michael. *Patton and the Battle of the Bulge*. Motorbooks International, 1999.

Josephson, Judith Pinkerton. *Growing Up in World War II 1941–1945*. Lerner Publications, 2003.

McNeese, Tim. *Battle of the Bulge*. Chelsea House, 2003.

Section V: Cold War/Vietnam

Blight, James G., and David A. Welch. *Intelligence and the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Frank Cass, 1998.

Brugioni, Dino A. *Eyeball to Eyeball: The Inside Story of the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Random House, 1991.

Edelmann, Bernard. *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*. W. W. Norton, 2002.

Palmer, Svetlana, and Sarah Wallis. *Intimate Voices from the First World War*. William Morrow, 2004.

Section VI: September 11 and Its Aftermath

Dudley, William, ed. *The Attack on America: September 11, 2001*. Greenhaven, 2002.

Frank, Mitch. *Understanding September 11th*. Viking, 2002.

Thoms, Anne, ed. *With Their Eyes: September 11th—the View from a High School at Ground Zero*. HarperCollins, 2002.

The Price of Freedom: Americans at War Teacher's Manual DVD Menu

***Americans at War*, produced by The History Channel**

An introduction to the themes of the exhibition

War of Independence

First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:

- Lydia Minturn Post, Long Island housewife, 1776
- James Collins, teenage soldier, no date
- Doonyontat, Wyandot chief, 1779
- Elijah Churchill, recipient of the first Purple Heart, 1783

Mexican War

First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:

- José María Tornel y Mendivil, Mexican secretary of war, 1837
- George Ballentine, English volunteer for the United States, 1853
- Juan Bautista Vigil y Alarid, acting governor of New Mexico, 1846
- Ulysses S. Grant, American soldier, 1885

Civil War

First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:

- Louis Myers, Third West Virginia Infantry, 1862
- William G. Christie, Minnesota soldier, 1863
- Eugenia Phillips, spy for the South in Washington D.C., 1861
- Spottswood Rice, African American Union soldier, 1864

World War I

World War I Overview, produced by The History Channel

World War II

World War II Cartoons, produced by The History Channel

**World War II Overviews in the Newsreel format,
produced by The History Channel**

- From World War I to World War II
- The North Atlantic and North African Theater
- The European Theater
- The Pacific Theater

The USO in World War II, produced by The History Channel

First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:

- George Hynes, U.S. Army, a last letter home, 1942
- Robert Morris, U.S. Coast Guard, fighting in Italy, 1943
- Robert Sherrod, journalist, the beach at Tarawa, 1943
- Ann Darr, Women Airforce Service Pilots, 1997
- Daniel Inouye, Medal of Honor recipient, 2000

Vietnam

**Excerpt from *Huey Helicopter—Air Armada*, The History Channel
documentary, 2002**

First-Person Accounts, produced by Arrowhead Film & Video:

- Hal Moore, commander of a Seventh Cavalry Regiment
battalion, 2003
- Fred Castleberry, veteran of the Twenty-fifth Infantry Division, 2002
- Clarence Sasser, recipient of the Medal of Honor, 2004,
(produced by Pyramid Studios)



Smithsonian
National Museum of American History
Behring Center

Department of Education and Public Programs
National Museum of American History
Smithsonian Institution, MRC 603
Washington D.C. 20013-7012
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory>