

Unit 10

Effects of Geography & Weather on World War II Troops

GRADES 6-12

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Combat in all theaters of action during World War II was dramatically affected by adverse geographic and climatic conditions. Infantry soldiers and marines who landed on South Pacific islands suffered from extreme heat and humidity, plagues of mosquitoes, and other venomous dangers. Successful military operations depended on the availability of healthy, well-provisioned troops. Instead, thousands of soldiers were afflicted with malaria or tropical diseases. Food spoiled and a mere scratch could lead to a life-threatening infection. In contrast, blizzard and freezing conditions in Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge were so severe that thousands of soldiers were deemed ineffective due to frostbite, trench foot, and related respiratory ailments. For many, survival depended on the ability to improvise, but not without a cost.

PROCESS

Students will read a series of excerpts from letters and oral accounts and then answer questions relating to these experiences. Students may wish to read each of the following accounts in their entirety, but specific excerpts will be suggested from the following stories of survivors:

OUTCOMES

Students will be able to empathize and have a better understanding of the effects of wartime deprivations on troops due to adverse conditions of weather and geography.

A. Lieutenant John W. Temple, 701st Ordnance Company, 5th Air Force, Philippines, 1941-1945

John Temple arrived in the Philippines in October 1941, two months before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and other Pacific locations. In December 1941 he was located south of Manila on the island of Mindanao. When word of the invasion reached his base, the troops made preparation to hold out as long as possible. All American & Filipino forces surrendered to the Japanese in April of 1942, including Temple. He became one of the "Ghost Soldiers" who was incarcerated at the POW camp at Cabanatuan, on Luzon. (Pages 75-86, II)

B. Corporal William Z. Burns, Company B, Third Chemical Mortar Battalion, Italy 1943-1944

William Burns wrote more than a hundred letters home to his wife – excerpts from his letters illustrate what field conditions were like for him during the long winter of 1942-1943 in the mountains of Italy. (Pages 85-92, I.)

C. PFC Joseph W. Duncan, Company G, 309th Regiment, 78th Infantry Division, Battle of the Bulge 1944

Joseph Duncan shares his foxhole experience during the infamous Battle of the Bulge. From the middle of December 1944 until mid-January 1945, German armies attempted to breakthrough the Siegfried line with the goal of recapturing Antwerp surrounded American forces. [Pages 203-207, II.] [add sound file]

D. Staff Sergeant Leonard Rose, 459th Bomber Group, 15th Air Force & POW Stalag Luft IV in Poland

Leonard Rose flew 29 missions from Italy over Yugoslavia, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Germany and France. On his 30th mission, his plane was shot down and he was captured by

Croatians and turned over to the Germans, who sent him to a POW camp in northern Poland. (Pages 226-230, II.) [add sound file]

Excerpts from Temple's reminiscence provided information about the deprivations many soldiers suffered in the Pacific Theater. Burn's and Duncan's accounts present information about living in isolation and under adverse conditions. Leonard Rose's account is representative of experiences of thousands of aircrew shot down over Europe and then imprisoned.

Social Studies

- POW John Temple's account may be read in its entirety or read selected excerpts (pages 78-79 and 81-85, II). For instructional purposes, focus on quality of rations and POW camp conditions. *Have students create a list of conditions typical for island jungles. What were the deprivations like? How did the men make do and cope? What happened to them physically and/or mentally?*
- William Burns fought across North Africa, recovered from the effects of malaria and yellow jaundice in Sicily, and then moved with his battalion into Italy. Read through his letters to determine his greatest problems (pages 85-92, I). *How did he cope? What helped boost his spirits? Describe what conditions in a foxhole are like – find out the size of a typical foxhole. What determined the size? Why was it necessary to be in a foxhole? Does Burns share details about his combat experiences? Why or why not?*
- Read excerpts from Joseph Duncan's oral account (pages 203-204, II.) Compare and contrast Duncan's experiences to those of Burns. *Are they similar or different? What can a soldier do to prevent frostbite? Do some additional reading about this battle. Why were these soldiers so ill prepared?* [Additional reading activity: read excerpt from Ernest Sable's account, page 186-187, II. *Compare his experience to that of Duncan.*]
- Read Leonard Rose's complete account. *Compare and contrast his POW experience with that of Temple. How were conditions similar or different? What was different about their rescues?*

Culminating Activities:

- Have students think about how men managed to survive, often alone for extended periods. *What might they have thought about? How might they pass the time? How did soldiers and airmen cope with imprisonment? What about their families? What types of aid were available to them?*
- Guide students in the creation of a comparative chart that itemizes the problems evident for soldiers in different parts of the world during wartime.
- Help students identify the wide range of tropical diseases; what are the causes, symptoms and potential outcomes? How could these diseases be treated in WWII? Have students create a "medical bag" containing possible treatment materials.
- What are the implications of severe cold and/or starvation on the effectiveness and morale of troops?

Additional Activities:

- Research and report on island hopping in the Pacific during WWII. Create maps, a timeline and, if possible, maps of individual islands. *What made it possible for Allied forces to win back*

territory from the Japanese? Additional resources are available in volume I with accounts by a B-17 navigator in the XIIIth Jungle Air Corps, Stuart Felton (pages 127-131), radio-specialist, George Deckard on the *Chevalier* off of Guadalcanal (pages 131-136), Seaman John McElroy on Saipan (pages 137-138), Carrier service unit with John Hendrickson (pages 139-141), the controversial invasion of Pelelieu with PFC Sam Peden (pages 141-144) and PFC John McSavaney (pages 144-148), and a medic on Iwo Jima, Glenn Synder (pages 148-151); in volume II read accounts of island hopping with Gadi Lawton on Guadalcanal (pages 86-94), pilot Robert Palmer, 5th Air Force in New Guinea (pages 94-97) [add sound file]; Marine Llewellyn Halderson's movements from Australia to landing at Leyte in the Philippines (pages 120-134), and Marine Ric Ranucci as a line stringer in the Marshall Islands (pages 134-138) [add sound file].

Selected Bibliography:

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