

## Unit 15

### Wartime Photo-Journalism

#### GRADES 6-12

##### HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Wartime images during the Civil War were largely dependent upon talented sketch artists such as Alfred Waud. These sketches were reproduced in newspapers and magazines such as *Harper's Weekly*. The sketches though were never as good as the images captured by the studio photographers such as Matthew Brady. His photographs brought images of the war into everyone's homes. Battlefield photography was still in its infancy, though. Lengthy photographic exposures were required for personal photographs or battlefield scenes. It was impossible to hold a smile for example for three or more minutes, and any form of motion, whether the blowing of a flag in a breeze or a movement by a soldier, would rendered the photo as a blurry image).

Prior to this time, the public had depended upon ambrotype (1854-1865) and daguerreotype photographs (1840-1860) for portraying personal images. These photographs were sensitive to light as well as fragile since they were "printed" onto the back of pieces of glass. As such they had to be conserved in a protective case. In the early 1860s this type of photograph was soon replaced with tintype photographs (1853-1880s), which were cheaper and less breakable. Cheaper paper photographs or carte-de-visites (CDV) were popular from 1859-1875. Since images could now be affixed to a paper medium and mailed home, soldiers flocked to photographic studios. As many families sadly discovered, a soldier's photograph often served as a deceased soldier's only tangible memorial. Thousands of Civil War pictures of soldiers are still available today almost a century and a half later – and they look as though they were only taken yesterday (For example, see page 21, I and the jacket cover).

Technology continued to improve. During WWI, photography not only recorded images of soldiers and their units, war material, refugees, and ruined cities, but also provided military planners with a new way to photograph the battlefield from reconnaissance aircraft (for example WWI photos in volume II). By the time of WWII, combat photography and correspondents' stories could not be overlooked. Ernie Pyle of Indiana, Robert Capra of Hollywood, and Carl Mydans (a photographer with *Life* magazine) became famous for their war coverage. Women also worked in non-combat roles as photographers and negative cutters. During the war, the public demanded good coverage and as such, male correspondents were attached to combat units. For military purposes, the Army Signal Corps used photographers to document troop activities, strategic locations, and combat action. Censorship was heavily utilized to preserve morale of the troops and the home front.

Both during WWII and in Korea, soldiers took their own personal photos usually showing life in camp or touristy types of pictures. Unofficial combat types of photos were not permitted. The Korean War was similarly documented. By the time the Vietnam War broke out, television became the most popular medium and media coverage brought the war into American homes every evening – including the latest body count of casualties. Photographs from Vietnam did much to arouse anti-war sentiment in this country in the later 1960s and early 1970s. To avoid repeating this, during the Gulf War in 1991, the media was virtually ignored and placed far away from the action. Not surprisingly, this led to intense complaints and the policy was revised with the latest Iraq War. Photographers and wartime news correspondents were once again

“imbedded” with the troops. The troops now have access to laptops and digital cameras, and images can be transmitted with great ease.

### PROCESS

The teacher provides resources relating to photography used from World War I through the Iraq War. Students should utilize the suggested website for archived photos from the different war. Students will have an opportunity to analyze wartime photographs and plan photo exhibits.

### OUTCOMES

Students will see how photographs and related media are a powerful way to tell the public about wartime experiences. Photos also have the ability of exhibiting a wide range of emotions and are truly worth “a thousand words”. Students will be able to make connections by using photos between past event and current events.

#### **A. David A. Barrows, M.D. – The Iraq War**

*Lieutenant Barrows enlisted in the Navy in order to pay for his medical school training. In 2003 he was deployed to Iraq as a surgeon with a medical company. Unlike earlier wars where any combat photography by active soldiers was discouraged or even not allowed, Barrow was a part of the digital age – his laptop computer and digital camera enabled him to record his experiences as he crossed the desert sands of Iraq and he witnessed the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime. During his six months in Iraq he took more than 3000 photographs.*

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- Teacher provides background information on the war in Iraq, using some of Barrows pictures along with images from current news. Read together Barrow’s writing about life under and after Saddam Hussein (pages 325-342, II).
- Begin a discussion on Barrows’ use of pictures to help him describe, remember and understand the war. *Can the students identify which photos on the jacket cover are also by Barrows?*
- Show images of tearing down the giant statue of Saddam and then similar images of the fallen statue of Stalin.
- Questions to discuss: *What symbolism do these statues portray? What are the parallels in the action of tearing down these two statues? How are these leaders alike? And different? What conclusions can be drawn from the regimes of these two leaders? Make a prediction for the future of Iraq based on the lessons from Stalin and the USSR.*

#### **Additional Activity:**

Direct students to articles about the Abu Ghraib prison debacle. See also the recent book by Seymour Hersh: *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib*. *How do photographs relate to this war story expose? Can students identify problems based on ready availability of cameras? Are there similar examples of how photos affect the public mood? What important issue was raised by practices at Abu Ghraib?*

## B. Captain Nick Vawter – The Vietnam War

*At the same time that William Catching was serving in Vietnam, another soldier, Captain Nick Vawter, recorded his wartime experiences on film. Vawter shared some of his personal photographs taken in the field (page 169, I).*

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- Review Vawter's two photographs from his tour of duty in Vietnam (page 169, I). Complete a photograph analysis. The National Archives suggests the following type of activity: Conceal the caption information beyond Vawter's name. Enlarge a copy of the Vawter photos and make a transparency or distribute copies to the students. Ask the students to study the photograph for two minutes. Then ask them to create a chart listing the people, objects, and actions in the photograph. Ask students to share with the class what they saw in the photograph. Direct students to answer the following questions:
- *What can you infer from the photograph?*
- *What questions does this photograph raise in your mind?*
- *Where might you be able to find answers to your questions?*
- *How might you categorize this photograph? (Try to lead students to a category/topic they would be able to research relating to the war in Vietnam, such as battle tactics, weapons, tanks, or jungle warfare.)*
- Create a caption for the photograph.

### Additional Activity:

Direct students to articles about the Mai Lai massacre in Vietnam. See also the website: <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/My-Lai-massacre>.  
*Which famous photo brought this massacre into public view? What impact did this photo have on the course of the war? Are there other examples from the Vietnam era that affected the public mood?*

### Selected Bibliography:

For books and photography relating to the Vietnam War, go to the following web sites:

- For photographs: <http://history1900s.about.com/library/photos/blyindexvietnam.htm>
- A site for teachers with photos and lessons:  
<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/vietnam-photos/>
- For a comprehensive listing of resources: *Vietnam War Film & Photography: A Selected Bibliography* at <http://servercc.oakton.edu/~wittman/film.htm>

### C. Miscellaneous Photographs – World War II

World War II is especially rich in wartime photographs. At the Still Photo Division of the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, researchers have access to millions of photo negatives and prints. If research trip can be planned to the National Archives for teachers (or even high school students over the age of 16), this is a wonderful opportunity for some hands-on work. Online research should be done first and subjects identified by record group. Black and white or color Kodak copies may be made on site for a fee.

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- Go to the National Archives online for a history of wartime photography. <http://www.archives.gov/research/ww2/photos/>
- View the WWII photographs in volume 1 (from pages 89, 100, 102, 105, 138, 140, and 147) and volume 2 (from pages 84-85, 87, 100-101, 117, 132, 136, 139, 148, 150, 158, 188, 199, 225, and 249). This is a creative writing activity, similar to that suggested by the National Archives. Divide class into small groups of four to six students. Have student group take on the role of an exhibit curators. Their task is to select from these photographs interesting images for an exhibit that will help people understand the involvement and scope of American forces in the war and the consequences of this war. Direct students to write an exhibit script that incorporates at least ten of the *Words of War* photographs. As a culminating activity, have each group of students share their exhibit and discuss why they selected what they did and how their photos relate to American involvement in the war effort.

#### **Additional Activity:**

Students may have additional photograph analysis opportunities or they may design exhibits based on their own collections. Ask students if their family has any wartime photographs (including any wars from WWI through Iraq). If students can bring in photographs be sure they are placed in large zip lock bags or envelopes and well labeled to prevent loss. Teacher should make photocopies of the originals or scan images digitally. The resulting images can be turned into transparencies for class discussions or students can create their own personal exhibition. Students should write captions for all the photographs based on family information or other reference sources.

[If any students have WWI photographs, additional information may also be found at the National Archives by going to:  
[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/picturing\\_the\\_century/galleries/greatwar.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/picturing_the_century/galleries/greatwar.html)]

### E. Miscellaneous Photographs – Korean War

The Korean War, often considered the forgotten war, also provides a rich experience for war photography. At the Still Photo Division of the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, researchers have access to millions of photo negatives and prints. If research trip can be planned to the National Archives for teachers (or even high school students over the age of 16), this is a wonderful opportunity for some hands-on work. Online research should be done first and subjects identified by record group. Black and white or color Kodak copies may be made on site for a fee.

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- Use the photographs included in Dr. Bruce Meyer's account of his experiences in a MASH unit (pages 259 and 263, II) and Sgt. Rexrode's personal photographs (pages 156, 161 & 163, I). Complete a photo analysis of these photos. The National Archives suggests the following activity: Teacher should enlarge a copy of the MASH photos from the National Archives, which were used to illustrate Meyer's activities and Rexrode's own personal photos. Conceal any caption information beyond their names.
- Make a transparency or distribute copies to the students. Ask the students to study the photographs for two minutes. Then ask them to create a chart listing the people, objects, and actions in the photograph. Ask students to share with the class what they saw in the photograph. Direct students to answer the following questions:
  - *What can you infer from the photograph?*
  - *What questions does this photograph raise in your mind?*
  - *Where might you be able to find answers to your questions?*
  - *How might you categorize this photograph?* (Try to lead students to a category/topic they would be able to research relating to the war such as battle tactics, weapons, medical care, or mountain warfare.)
- Create a caption for the photograph.

**Culminating Activities:**

- Have students select one or two of the most powerful photos from either Words of War volumes or on-line sources, print them out and create a classroom display. Have the students write a short reflective sentence or two as a caption to the photo. *Why do these photos "speak" to them? What inner emotions does this photo affect? Why?*
- Create a propaganda-style poster based on a photograph. Go to the following website to study the role of propaganda and photographs:  
<http://www.teacheroz.com/WWIIpropaganda.htm> *How do photographs (such as Rosie the Riveter) serve to motivate the public cause?*

**Selected Bibliography:**

Atkinson, Rick. *In the Company of Soldiers: A Chronicle of Combat*. (Owl Book, 2005).

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Scales, Gen. Robert H. *Certain Victory: The US Army in the Gulf War*. (Office of Chief of Staff, US Army, Washington, D.C., 1993).

Tucker, Spencer C. *Encyclopedia of the Korean War: A Political, Social, and Military History*. (Checkmark Books, 2002.)