

**WORLD WAR II
(1939-1945): BATTLE OF
THE BULGE: PATTON'S
FINEST HOUR**



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Description

Through an analysis of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the events surrounding the Battle of the Bulge, why the German High Command decided to engage in a counterattack in the Ardennes Forest, how the German advance was eventually halted and then defeated, how the battle helped cement George Patton and the US Third Army's reputation, and how the battle ultimately proved to be a turning point on the western front of the Second World War.

Subjects

European History, World History, US History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

180 minutes

Tour Links

- Bastogne Historical Center, Belgium
- Patton Monument
- Mardasson American War Memorial
- Bastogne War Museum

Essential Questions

- What was the Battle of the Bulge?
- What was the German strategy at the Battle of the Bulge? Was the strategy sound? Was it effective?
- How did Allied commanders respond to the German offensive in the Battle of the Bulge?
- What role did General George Patton play in winning the Battle of the Bulge?

Academic Summary

Lieutenant General George S. Patton, Third US Army Commander Excerpts from a Speech before the Normandy Invasion, May 1944

No bastard ever won a war by dying for his country. You won it by making the other poor dumb bastard die for his country.

You are not all going to die. Only two percent of you right here today would be killed in a major battle. Every man is scared in his first action. If he says he's not, he's a goddamn liar. But the real hero is the man who fights even though he's scared. Some men will get over their fright in a minute under fire, some take an hour, and for some it takes days. But the real man never lets his fear of death overpower his honor, his sense of duty to his country, and his innate manhood.

My men don't dig foxholes. Foxholes only slow up an offensive. Keep moving. We'll win this war, but we'll win it only by fighting and showing the Germans that we've got more guts than they have or ever will have. We're not just going to shoot the bastards, we're going to rip out their living goddamned guts and use them to grease the treads of our tanks.

Some of you men are wondering whether or not you'll chicken out under fire. Don't worry about it. I can assure you that you'll all do your duty. War is a bloody business, a killing business. The Nazis are the enemy. Wade into them, spill their blood or they will spill yours. Shoot them in the guts. Rip open their belly. When shells are hitting all around you and you wipe the dirt from your face and you realize that it's not dirt, it's the blood and gut of what was once your best friend, you'll know what to do.

Message Sent Across Enemy Lines from the German Commander at Bastogne to

Division Commander General Tony McAuliffe, 101st Airborne Division

To the USA Commander of the encircled town of Bastogne.

The fortune of war is changing. This time the U.S.A. forces in and near Bastogne have been encircled by strong German armored units. More German armored units have crossed the river Our near Ortheuville, have taken Marche and reached St. Hubert by passing through Hompre-Sibret-Tillet. Libramont is in German hands.

There is only one possibility to save the encircled U.S.A. troops from total annihilation: that is the honorable surrender of the encircled town. In order to think it over a term of two hours will be granted beginning with the presentation of this note.

If this proposal should be rejected one German Artillery Corps and six heavy A. A. Battalions are ready to annihilate the U.S.A. troops in and near Bastogne.

The order for firing will be given immediately after this two hours' term.

All the serious civilian losses caused by this artillery fire would not correspond with the well known American humanity.

The German Commander.

**General Tony McAuliffe, 101st Airborne Division at Bastogne
Reply to the Message Printed Above**

To the German Commander.

NUTS!

The American Commander.

Prayer for the Third US Army

**Authorized by Lieutenant General George S. Patton, Commander
Third Army Headquarters, Nancy, France, Dec 1944**

Almighty and most merciful Father, we humbly beseech Thee, of Thy great goodness, to restrain these immoderate rains with which we have had to contend. Grant us fair weather for Battle. Graciously hearken to us as soldiers who call upon Thee that, armed with Thy power, we may advance from victory to victory, and crush the oppression and wickedness of our enemies and establish Thy justice among men and nations.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill

Answer to a Reporter when asked about the Battle of the Bulge

It was, without a doubt, the greatest American battle of the Second World War and it will, I believe, always be considered as a great American victory.

The Normandy invasion had been a smashing, albeit bloody success, and after five long years of war in Europe, it appeared as though the end was in sight. After struggling against a valiant and determined force opposing them, Allied troops had finally broken through German positions in Northwestern France in early August 1944. Paris was liberated later in the month, and by mid-fall the German Wehrmacht seemed to be in full retreat. The road to Berlin and the end of the war lay in front of the Allies, seemingly open for the taking. Then, suddenly, everything changed.

On 16 Dec 1944, the Germans made one last ditch effort to counterattack against Allied forces in the west. The campaign, launched in winter through the densely forested Ardennes region in Belgium and France, caught the Allied Supreme Commanders off guard. The German High Command strategy was simple. Hitler believed that a sharp counterattack through the Ardennes towards the port of Antwerp would split the Allied forces in two. Perhaps he could even force a settlement on the western front, allowing the Wehrmacht to turn east and confront the Red Army. Heavily overcast weather and the element of surprise helped the German offensive achieve near complete surprise, and in less than a week a sizeable salient had formed along the front. The offensive stalled, however, when the American 101st Airborne division refused to surrender the small Belgian town of Bastogne.

The Germans surrounded Bastogne by 21 Dec, but the American soldiers, outnumbered 5-1 and severely lacking supplies, refused to surrender. They were able to hold out long enough until elements of General George S. Patton's Third Army finally broke the siege on 26 Dec. By that point, the Allies had also started a counteroffensive. Heavy German losses and a lack of supplies forced the Germans to eventually withdraw towards the Rhine. Fighting went on for weeks, but in the end the Germans suffered heavy losses in both men and material, losses they could ill afford. The German army would never again undertake a major offensive or counterattack, and

the Third Reich would fall before summer.

The offensive, known as the “Battle of the Bulge” because of what the advance looked like on Allied maps, cost the Allies dearly as well. Official reports from the US Army listed over 100,000 US soldiers as casualties, including over 19,000 dead (more than any other engagement in the war). By early February 1945, however, the Allied armies were back on the offensive against a much-weakened German force.

The Battle of the Bulge cemented General Patton’s place in US military history. Known as a tough colorful commander who had once slapped a soldier and at time had run afoul of both his superiors and political leaders, Patton’s leadership at the head of the Third Army proved crucial during the battle. “Old Blood and Guts” managed to get more out of his troops than many thought possible. He even had a special prayer issued by the Third Army chaplain to help motivate the troops as they raced towards Bastogne. As Patton himself later wrote, the relief operation was “the most brilliant operation we have thus far performed, and it is in my opinion the outstanding achievement of the war. This is my biggest battle.” History would prove him right.

Through an analysis of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the events surrounding the Battle of the Bulge, why the German High Command decided to engage in a counterattack in the Ardennes Forest, how the German advance was eventually halted and then defeated, how the battle helped cement George Patton and the US Third Army’s reputation, and how the battle ultimately proved to be a turning point on the western front of the Second World War.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the events surrounding the Battle of the Bulge.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain why German commanders decided to counterattack in the Ardennes Forest and what objectives they hoped to achieve.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how the German advance was eventually halted and then defeated.
4. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how the Battle of the Bulge helped cement George Patton and the US Third Army’s reputation.
5. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how the Battle of the Bulge ultimately proved to be a turning point on the western front of the Second World War.

Procedure

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: Who is the greatest or most famous American general? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Battle of the Bulge 1944 (20 min)
- Video – Battle of the Bulge (20 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on the Battle of the Bulge, taking notes as appropriate. (20 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles and sources for homework.
- Suggestion: AP / Advanced students should focus on primary sources.
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: Discussion on the Battle of the Bulge (20 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay: Explain in detail the events surrounding the Battle of the Bulge, why the German High Command decided to engage in a counterattack in the Ardennes Forest, how the German advance was eventually halted and then defeated, how the battle helped cement George Patton and the US Third Army's reputation, and how the battle ultimately proved to be a turning point on the western front of the Second World War.

Extension

On tour: Bastogne War Museum

While on tour, students can visit the Bastogne War Museum, where they can see for themselves a memorial to the Battle of the Bulge (known as the Battle of the Ardennes in Europe). The Museum contains artifacts, photographs and primary sources from the Battle of the Bulge. See the links section below for the museum's website. There is also a separate museum dedicated to the 101st Airborne in downtown Bastogne.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- <http://www.loc.gov/collections/world-war-ii-maps-military-situation-maps-from-1944-to-1945/articles-and-essays/the-battle-of-the-bulge/>
World War II Situation Maps: Battle of the Bulge (primary sources) – from the Library of Congress. Highly recommended for all classes as background material.
- www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/photo-gallery/bulge/
Photo Gallery: Battle of the Bulge (primary sources) – from PBS
- http://ww2db.com/battle_spec.php?battle_id=42
The Battle of the Bulge (website) – from the World War II database website, this essay gives a good overview of the battle and has excellent maps and photographs. Highly recommended for all classes.
- <http://life.time.com/history/battle-of-the-bulge-rare-photos-from-hitlers-last-gamble-1944-1945/#1>
Battle of the Bulge: Rare and Classic Photos from Hitler's Last Gamble (website) – from Life Magazine
- www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/7-8/7-8_CONT.HTM
The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge (full text book) – by Hugh M. Cole, this book, first published by the US Army in 1965 and now full text online, is considered to be the foremost authority on the battle. At approximately 700 pages, it is obviously not for all students, but is highly recommended for anyone looking to gain deeper insight into the battle.
- www.eur.army.mil/pdf/botb-staff-ride.pdf
The Battle of the Bulge: Battle-book (primary and secondary sources) – from the US Army European Command, this battle-book contains primary and secondary sources on all of the major players in the battle. Highly recommended as a starting place for all classes.
- www.bastognewarmuseum.be/home.html
Bastogne War Museum (website)
- www.99thinfantrydivision.com/ardennes.php
Battle of the Bulge (website) – from the 99th Infantry Division
- <http://nobility.org/2012/12/13/patton-prayer-before-battle/>
Patton's Battle of the Bulge Prayer (website)
- http://faculty.ccri.edu/panaccione/In-classpresentations/Present.fall05/Presentation_-_Cornelius.ppt
Battle of the Bulge (PowerPoint) – from Carol A. Panaccione, Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures at the Community College of Rhode Island
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and History classes. From Shilpa Duvor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1WF8AEGnoM#t=13
World War II Veteran Stories – Everett G. "Red" Andrews, 377th Parachute Field

Artillery Battalion, 101st Airborne division (video) - this video, from a Battle of the Bulge survivor, was filmed in Dec 2013, and is highly recommended for all students, especially AP / Advanced.

- www.youtube.com/watch?v=oltQIT6Hfyk
Patton's War: Battle of the Bulge (video) - this 43-minute video from the History Channel is probably too long for most in-class showings, but it is well worth it. Highly recommended for all students, even if done out-of-class.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=6tbFboIDJs8
Battle of the Bulge (video) – from the acclaimed PBS series American Experience

Background Information

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Bulge
Battle of the Bulge – Wikipedia article
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Bastogne
Siege of Bastogne – Wikipedia article
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_S._Patton
George S. Patton – Wikipedia article
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_McAuliffe
Anthony McAuliffe – Wikipedia article

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/winston-churchill-speeches-during-the-blitz
World War II (1939-1945) – Churchill's Speeches
- www.passports.com/lesson_plan/england/second-world-war-st-paul-stands
World War II (1939-1945) – St. Paul's Stands against the Blitz
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/world-war-ii-fall-of-france-1940
World War II (1939-1945) – Fall of France 1940
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/poland/nazi-invasion-of-1939
World War II (1939-1945) – German Invasion of Poland 01 Sep 1939
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/miracle-at-dunkirk-1940
World War II (1939-1945) – Miracle at Dunkirk 1940
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/world-war-ii-operation-barbarossa
World War II (1939-1945) – Operation Barbarossa: German Invasion of Russia
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/russia/world-war-ii-stalingrad
World War II (1939-1945) – Stalingrad: Turning Point of the War
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/world-war-ii-dday-invasion-1944
World War II (1939-1945) – Operation Overlord: D-Day Invasion of Normandy
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/world-war-ii-liberation-of-paris-1944
World War II (1939-1945) – Liberation of Paris 1944

Key Terms

- Ardennes Forest
- Bastogne
- Battle of the Bulge
- Flanking Maneuver
- George Patton
- Strategy
- 3rd Army
- 101st Airborne

