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HVL LESSON TITLE:

TARAWA IN PICTURES

DEVELOPED BY: ERIN COGGINS

TARAWA IN PICTURES: TO CENSOR OR NOT TO CENSOR

GUIDING QUESTION:

Why did President Roosevelt change his policy of censoring the media? How did changing the censoring policy affect the coverage of the Battle of Tarawa?

OVERVIEW:

Students will analyze photographs from the Battle of Tarawa, detailing the emotions the images evoke and then answer a writing prompt regarding FDR's policy to lift the censor ban on the media in early 1943.



SUBJECT(S):
Social Studies



WWII VETERAN(S):
John Kuhn



DURATION:
60 min.

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“And rather than attacking on the beach, they tried to come in from the lagoon side because they thought they would get the element of surprise. But they misjudged the tides and a lot of them got hung up on coral reef and the Japanese were just kind of pounding them.”

HVL Co-founder Chris Batte

OVERVIEW:

Students will analyze photographs from the Battle of Tarawa, detailing the emotions the images evoke and then answer a writing prompt regarding FDR's policy to lift the censor ban on the media in early 1943.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

The Battle of Tarawa, also referred to as the D-Day of the Pacific War, was the first battle of WWII to have been allowed to be photographed for the media. Up until this point, those on the homefront were kept from seeing the horrific reality of the war.

OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to

- To identify and interpret different types of primary and secondary sources.
- To Analyze historical sources and interpretations (e.g. credibility, perspective, bias, and authenticity; verifiable or unverifiable; fact or interpretation).

STANDARDS:

CCSS. 7-11-12.

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

AL: 9. Describe the significance of major battles and the consequences of WWII campaigns (island hopping and amphibious landings), including locating on a map the major battles of WWII.

AL:10. Describe the impact and consequences that WWII had on Americans.

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MATERIALS & DOCUMENTS

[John Kuhn Video](#)

Doc A: Tarawa in the Media Handout

Doc B: Photo Analysis Graphic Organizer

[Frank Filan](#)

Doc C: Vocabulary of Emotions Handout

[Photo One](#)

[Photo Two](#)

[Photo Three](#)

[Photo Four](#)

PROCEDURES

ACTIVITY 01

- Show students the John Kuhn Video.
- After the video, ask students to jot down some visual images that they think Mr. Kuhn might have seen during the invasion of Tarawa.
- Explain to students that the Battle of Tarawa was actually the first battle that the American public had access to in photographs and film. Prior battles were under FDR's Censorship policy.

ACTIVITY 02

- Lead students through the Tarawa in the Media Handout. As a class, answer the questions following the text.
- Distribute the Photo Analysis Graphic Organizer. Teacher will project the famous photo of the aftermath of the Battle of Tarawa. Inform students that the photo, taken by Frank Filan, won the 1944 Pulitzer Prize for Photography. Using the Frank Filan photograph, the teacher will model and lead the students

through the Photo Analysis Graphic Organizer. Ask students how they think the photograph impacted the American public's view on the war in the Pacific?

- Instruct students (this may be done in groups) to use the Photo Analysis Graphic Organizer just modeled to analyze five more photos from the Battle of Tarawa.
- After students finish analyzing the additional five photos, distribute the Vocabulary of Emotions Handout. Instruct students to circle the words that best fit their reactions to the five photographs.
- Inform students that they will be taking on the persona of an average American who reads newspapers and magazines during 1943. Instruct students to write a Letter to the Editor answering the following prompt: How do your emotions generated from the photographs translate to supporting or not supporting FDR's policy to lift the censor ban on the media in 1943?

NOTE

As student groups are analyzing photos, the teacher should be walking around the room to answer questions or to listen to student discussions.



METHODS FOR EXTENSION

Have students read the Smithsonian Institute's article "The Reporter Who Helped Persuade FDR to Tell the Truth About War". Ask students to write 6-10 interview questions they would ask the reporter if they had the opportunity to interview him for a news article.

TARAWA IN THE MEDIA

Excerpt: “An Enduring Legacy” by Colonel Joseph H. Alexander, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.)
December 2008, Naval History Magazine, Volume 22, Number 6

<https://www.usni.org/magazines/naval-history-magazine/2008/december/enduring-legacy>

Front-page Headlines

Many outstanding correspondents had covered the war from the start, including Robert Sherrod of Time magazine in the Pacific theater. During the conflict’s first 23 months, however, President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration tightly censored news reports from the front lines. Photographs of dead Americans were expressly forbidden until two months before Tarawa, when the President relented, likely in order to inspire public support of sagging war bond drives. Life magazine’s issue of 20 September 1943 featured a photograph of three dead soldiers, killed on a beach near Buna, New Guinea, with the editorial comment, “these are our boys, born of our women, reared in our schools, bred to our horizons.” The stark photograph elicited a storm of letters to the editor. One New York woman charged Life with “morbid sensationalism.”¹

People were still buzzing about the groundbreaking photograph when hundreds of even more graphic photographs of Tarawa began flooding the newspapers. Under pressure by newspaper editors and publishers for greater front-line access and fewer restrictions on their reporters, President Roosevelt had agreed to remove most of the barriers. Tarawa became the first battle waged under this so-called “open-door” policy and was covered by every element of the media.

Graphic reports of the fighting became front-page headlines in American newspapers. “Grim Tarawa Defense a Surprise, Eyewitness of Battle Reveals,” reported the New York Times, adding an imaginary tagline, “Marines Went in Chuckling, to Find Swift Death Instead of Easy Conquest.” Many asked if tiny Tarawa—barely a pinhead dot in the middle of nowhere on peoples’ Pacific atlases—had been worth the 3,400 U.S. Marine casualties.²

A Legion of Correspondents

Scores of accredited reporters, photographers, and artists had descended on the 2d Marine Division’s headquarters in Wellington, New Zealand. They sailed with the convoy to the Gilberts and landed with the Marines on Betio. Several became casualties; two died. Combat artist Gil Bundy was the only survivor in a Higgins boat filled with troops that suffered a direct hit from a Japanese howitzer. Before being rescued, Bundy spent a horrifying night buried under the bodies of his shipmates as the smoking hulk—his living coffin—drifted aimlessly in the lagoon.

DESCRIBING A VETERAN

GRAPHIC ORGANIZER



Some members of the press corps were Marines, like Staff Sergeant Norman Hatch, a rifleman turned motion-picture photographer. Hatch and his team recorded outstanding footage of the ship-to-shore assault and the point-blank fighting ashore, including a remarkable up-close sequence of armed Japanese dashing from a sand-covered bunker at the climax of the assault on day three. Hatch shipped the reels back to the States, where another team edited the raw footage into a 26-minute documentary entitled *With the Marines at Tarawa*. The closing, full-color scene of dead Marines floating in the lagoon was so powerful that President Roosevelt hesitated several days before releasing it. The film was sensational, and it won the 1944 Academy Award for best short-subject documentary. War bond sales soared; Marine recruiting dropped 35 percent.

The lurid stateside headlines aside, the reporting from the beachhead was on the dead level. Most war correspondents, like Sherrod, boarded Higgins boats in the fourth assault wave. When their boats ran afoul of the reef, they waded ashore under fire with the Marines. The traumatic passage unnerved the veteran Sherrod. "I was scared, as I had never been scared before," he said. "Those who were not hit would always remember how the machine-gun bullets hissed into the water, inches to the right, inches to the left." His terse observations of the battle from a sand dune near Colonel David Shoup's bunker on Red Two became a bestselling book, *Tarawa: A Story of a Battle*, in 1944.³

Associated Press photographer Frankie Filan ruined both his cameras while struggling to assist a wounded Marine in the fire-swept lagoon. "There I was," he said, "a photographer in the middle of a battle without a camera." Filan continued to rescue wounded men from the turbid waters, earning a Navy commendation for his heroism. Later he borrowed a camera from a Coast Guard photographer and took a riveting, wide-angle photo of the ungodly death and devastation on Betio, a shot that would win a 1944 Pulitzer Prize.⁴

Artist Kerr Eby, at age 53 the oldest man on either side at Betio, had sketched Marines in French battlefields in World War I. On Betio, his charcoal renderings captured the desperation of the waterborne assault and the vicious fighting beyond the seawall. Asked by young Marines to compare the Great War battles with Tarawa, Eby admitted that Tarawa was by far the worst, calling the assault "a time of utmost savagery."⁵

Questions:

Why did President Roosevelt change his strict policy on censoring the news?

How did the "open-door" policy impact the news coverage of the Battle of Tarawa?

What caused President Roosevelt to hesitate on the release of "With the Marines at Tarawa"?

What types of dangers did correspondents endure while covering the Battle of Tarawa?

What did you learn about the Battle of Tarawa from this article?

TARAWA IN PICTURES

VOCABULARY OF EMOTIONS HANDOUT



Vocabulary of Emotions

	Happiness	Caring	Depression	Indifference	Fear	Confusion	Hurt	Anger	Loneliness	Remorse	
STRONG	Delighted Ecstatic Exuberant Blissed Overjoyed Triumphant Vibrant Zigzag	Admiring Devoted Loving Tender Influential Pragmatic Wholesome Zenith	Barren Isolate Isolated Despondent Empty Gloomy Gloved Hopeless	Blinded Stricken Crippled Demoralized Helpless Powerless Useless Wretched Zero	Alarmed Appalled Distressed Frightened Horrified Panic Shocked Terrified Worried	Beleaguered Chaotic Flustered Rattled Reeling Sawed Spectacular Terror-stricken Threatened	Abashed Aching Crumpled Desolated Engaged Forlorn Guilt-ridden Riveted Ruined	Blame Enraged Fuming Furious Irate Incensed Outraged Seething Vengeful	Abandoned Cut Off Exhausted Forsaken Isolated Ostracized Outcast Rejected Stranded	Abashed Depressed Guilt Isolated Mortified Scarred Sinned Wretched Worried	
MEDIUM	Aglow Cheerful Elated Happy Joyful Merry Up	Admiring Attached Fond Happy Kind Loving Sympathetic	Able Elate Discouraged Distressed Downcast Faded Fretful Frustrated Worried	Defeated Dopey Dreary Dumb Faded Faded Faded Faded	Aleak Defensive Frenzied Nervous Scared Shaky Spiness Threatened Throated	Amazed Bewildered Fuzzed Distracted Frustrated Wishy Wishy Frustrated Frustrated	Amused Belated Distressed Enraged Frustrated Ruffled Torn Torn Torn	Aggravated Disappointed Fuming Irritable Threatened Tired Tired Tired Tired	Alienated Alone Cherished Dejected Despondent Frustrated Lonely Oppressed	Apologetic Ashamed Blatant Guilt Humiliated Innocent Innocent Innocent	
LIGHT	Content Cool Fine Glad Glad Pleased Satisfied Sunny	Appreciative Attractive Friendly Like Respectful Thoughtful Tolerant Considerate	Bad Down Frustrated Low Nasty Nasty Nasty Nasty	Bad Bad Bad Bad Bad Bad Bad Bad	Anxious Cautious Cautious Cautious Cautious Cautious Cautious Cautious	Blatant Cautious Cautious Cautious Cautious Cautious Cautious Cautious	Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant	Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant	Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant	Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant	Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant Blatant