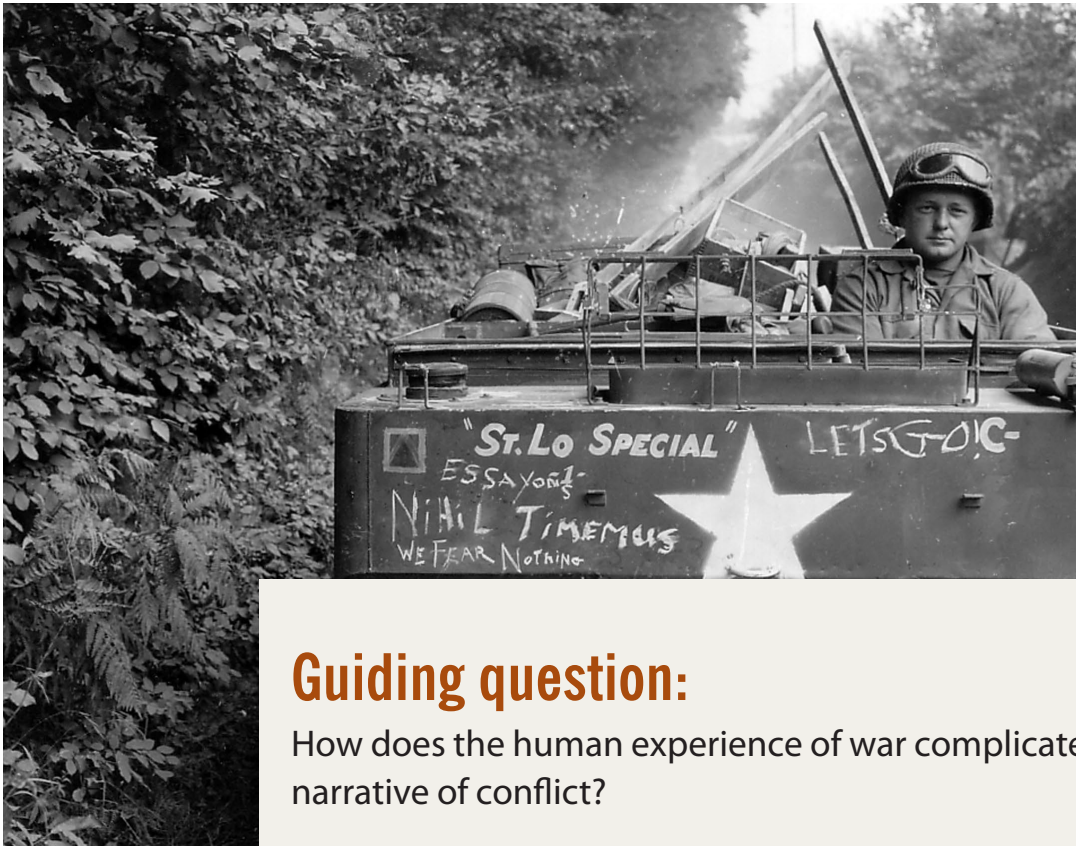




UNDERSTANDING
SACRIFICE

Activity: Writing Across Normandy: Operation Cobra and the Media



Guiding question:

How does the human experience of war complicate the narrative of conflict?

DEVELOPED BY JEANNINE MEIS

Grade Level(s): 9-12

Subject(s): Social Studies, English/Language Arts

Cemetery Connection: Brittany American Cemetery

Fallen Hero Connection: First Lieutenant William Howard Shelfer



NHD
NATIONAL
HISTORY DAY

Overview

Using interactive technology from the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), correspondence from soldiers, news articles, and primary and secondary source analysis, students will recognize how the narration of military events through the media only shallowly represented the experiences of the common soldier. In addition, they will understand the importance of maintaining morale on the home front.

Historical Context

The success of Operation Overlord and the massive D-Day invasion often eclipses the dialogue of other essential turning points in World War II. However, capturing the Normandy beaches was just one of many steps to reaching Allied victory on the European front. Operation Cobra is an often-neglected component of the campaign in history. However, the operation stands as the turning point that pushed the Nazis on their long retreat to Berlin. This lesson addresses the interpretation of events in Operation Cobra through national media, embedded journalists, secondary historical texts, eyewitness accounts, and the experience of the common soldier. Students will examine a variety of these sources in order to analyze their shortcomings, identify how each document tells a different story of the same event, and ultimately creates a complex understanding of the events that transpired.

Objectives

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

- Describe the reasons and objectives that prompted the Allies to launch Operation Cobra;
- Analyze a historical event from multiple perspectives using evidence from primary sources; and
- Connect media descriptions of the war to the desire to maintain home front morale.

“D-Day is commonly touted as the defining ‘macro-moment’ or turning point of the European Allied campaign in World War II. The under-taught Operation Cobra is an excellent moment to connect the overlooked personal sacrifice of soldiers to the lengthy push to liberate France.”

—Jeannine Meis

Meis teaches at Leon High School in Tallahassee, Florida.

Standards Connections

Connections to Common Core

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.6 Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.7 Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9 Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

Connections to C3 Framework

D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.

D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.

D2.His.9.9-12. Analyze the relationship between historical sources and the secondary interpretations made from them.

Documents Used ★ indicates an ABMC source

Primary Sources

E. C. Daniel, "Americans Drive Ahead West of St. Lo After Record Barrages," July 26, 1944 (excerpt)
The New York Times

Ernie Pyle, "An Inhuman Tenseness," July 1944
Ernie's War: The Best of Ernie Pyle's World War II Dispatches

Letter, William Howard Shelfer to Charles Boatman, Sr., June 27, 1943
Courtesy of Ruth Shelfer

Photograph, U.S. Maritime Commission, *Bird's-eye view of landing craft, barrage balloons, and allied troops landing in Normandy, France on D-Day, June 6, 1944*

Library of Congress (94505434)

<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3c11201/>

Secondary Sources

★ Eulogy video, William Howard Shelfer
ABMC Education

★ *World War II: A Visual History*

American Battle Monuments Commission

https://www.abmc.gov/sites/default/files/interactive/interactive_files/WW2/index.html

Materials

- Operation Cobra and the Battle to Liberate France Handout
- Operation Cobra Source Packet
- Operation Cobra Source Analysis
- Rulers or string to measure scale on a map
- Computer and projector

Lesson Preparation

- Set up classroom technology, if necessary.
- Test all online resources before class.
- Make one copy of each of the following for each student:
 - Operation Cobra and the Battle to Liberate France Handout
 - Operation Cobra Source Analysis Sheet
 - Operation Cobra Source Packet
- Make one copy of the Operation Cobra Source Analysis Answer Key for teacher use.
- Project the photograph, *Bird's-eye view of landing craft, barrage balloons, and allied troops landing in Normandy, France on D-Day* in front of the room.
- Divide students into groups of three to four students each.

Procedure

Activity One (60 minutes)

- Project the photograph, [Bird's-eye view of landing craft, barrage balloons, and allied troops landing in Normandy, France on D-Day](#) in front of the room. Ask the students:
 - *What historical event is captured in this image?* Offer additional clues to help students identify the 1944 Normandy landings.
 - *What challenges do you think Allied leaders faced when preparing for such a massive invasion?* Push students to understand that secrecy, timing, location, materiel and proper training would have been essential.
 - *What challenges do you think Allied leaders faced when preparing for the days following such a massive invasion?* Push students to understand that materiel such as transportation, food and water, gasoline, understanding of geography or cartography, and local informants would have been essential.
 - *How do you think German forces responded to this invasion?* Push students to understand that the shock of being invaded on such a large scale while still feeling compelled to protect other vulnerable coastal/invasion ports created the dichotomy of the Nazi response. Remind students that the indoctrination of the Nazi party created fierce fighters who were willing to die for their country. Other German soldiers had little choice, as they were conscripted into the military.
 - *What challenges do you think the soldiers faced as they began their difficult journey through France?* Push students to understand that many soldiers had little experience, they were in a foreign country, lacked access to their loved ones, and were under constant pressure from enemy attacks.
- Project the [World War II: A Visual History](#) interactive timeline. Click “enter,” “1944,” and then “Normandy Campaign.” Read the summary and watch the 1:05 video to provide context on the invasion. Ask students to discuss with a neighbor, *Why do you think some historians tend to focus on the strategy of military campaigns at the expense of the human experience?*
- Share responses with the class.

Activity Two: Source Analysis (30 minutes)

- Divide students into groups of three to four students each.
- Distribute a copy of the Operation Cobra and the Battle to Liberate France Handout to each student. Allow students to read independently, or read aloud as a class.
- Provide each group with a copy of the Operation Cobra Source Packet.
- Provide each student with a copy of the Operation Cobra Source Analysis Sheet.
- Ask students to read and discuss the sources provided and complete the analysis tasks.
- Show students the eulogy video for William Howard Shelfer, the author of the letters when complete.

Assessment

- Lead a discussion to assess student learning. Questions can include:
 - *How does the historical narrative of the Operation Cobra campaign differ from the actual human experience? What is missing from each? What struck you the most?*
 - *Why do you think some historians tend to focus on the strategy of military campaigns at the expense of the human experience?*
 - *Has exploring different perspectives changed your understanding of the conflict? Why or why not?*

Methods for Extension:

- Students wishing to learn more about Operation Cobra (or any aspect of the soldier's experience in World War II) can read more from Ernie Pyle's articles, particularly the book, *Ernie's War: The Best of Ernie Pyle's World War II Dispatches*.
- Students who have an interest in V-Mail program or V-Mail communications of other soldiers can visit the [Smithsonian National Postal Museum](#).
- Teachers can enhance students' interest in the role of journalism in World War II by exploring these related lesson plans on [ABMCEducation.org](#):
 - [History and Journalism: Examining the Events of World War II Through a Journalistic Lens](#)
 - ["Place Your Faith in Radio"](#)
 - [Words of War](#)

Adaptations:

- Teachers can adapt the project to younger learners by eliminating the *New York Times* article and adding a short video about Operation Cobra.
- Teachers can assign the final writing assignment as a small group product in order to provide greater support for struggling students.
- Students can skip the final writing component and engage in a Socratic Seminar or group discussion about the role of media in the war and its impact on morale.

Operation Cobra and the Battle to Liberate France

Normandy Beach Head

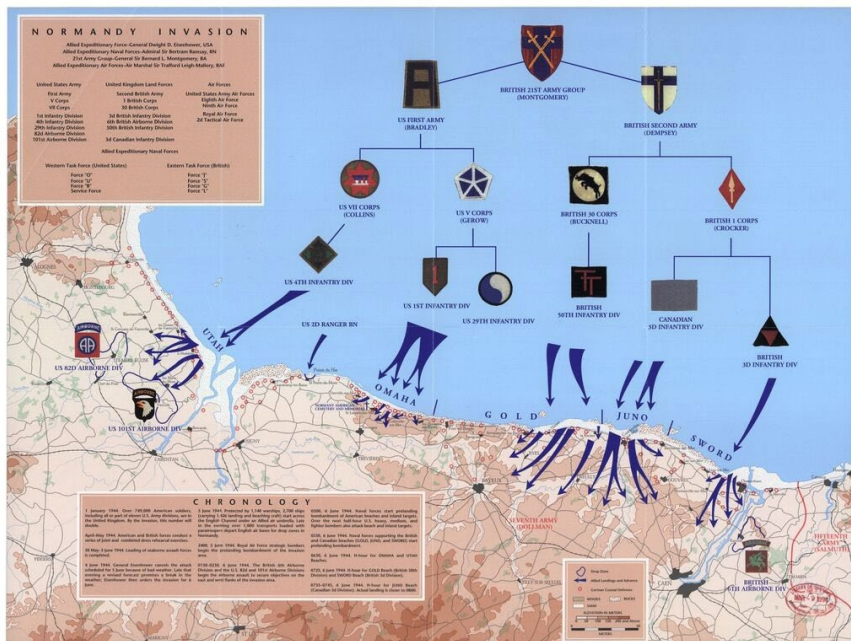
On June 6, 1944, Allied forces launched the largest amphibious assault in the history of mankind, Operation Overlord. This ambitious plan to break through German General Erwin Rommel's dreaded "Atlantic Wall" would require almost 7,000 vessels and 200,000 men to land on the beaches of Normandy, France. After one day of heavy fighting and nearly 5,000 Allied casualties, the beachhead of Normandy was secured, and American, British, and Canadian forces could begin the long push to liberate Europe from Nazi forces. The D-Day invasion was a success.

Supply Lines

Despite the initial success of Operation Overlord, Allied forces had to supply more than just manpower to accomplish their mission. Supporting materiel, ranging from food and water to armored vehicles and ammunition, had to be rapidly unloaded onto the beaches and organized and redistributed to troops who were advancing further into enemy territory. Without a deeper push into Normandy, supplies were clogging the beaches and creating chaos as soldiers desperately tried to unload ships with limited space.

Operation Goodwood

Under the direction of General Bernard Montgomery, British forces sought to take the valuable port city of Caen. This would allow Allied forces a deep-water harbor to unload material, speed up the dissemination of supplies, and hold the largest city close to the Seine River in northern France. The mission of Operation Goodwood was to take the city and secure the port and roads to the south while tying down German forces so American troops could navigate out of the bocage, ancient hedgerow "fences" between fields. British troops met surprising fierce German resistance and were unable to complete the entire mission. They were able to capture the city of Caen, but not before German forces destroyed the harbor infrastructure.



Normandy Invasion, Library of Congress (94681943)



D-Day Landings and pivotal battle cities in northwestern France, 2019. Wikimedia Commons, edited by author.

Slow Going: Bocage

A significant challenge to Allied forces was the Norman bocage, an ancient method of protecting and dividing farmland in the area using trees and shrubs. These thick and intimidating hedgerows were often difficult for vehicles to surmount and easily masked entrenched enemies. The American sector of Normandy was covered with bocage and this made progress dangerous and slow. Even a few well-hidden German snipers or guns could wreak substantial damage to Allied forces.

Operation Cobra

After the initial success of the D-Day invasion, Allied forces were met with stiff resistance. Seizing the pivotal city of Caen had proved difficult, and Operation Goodwood - the British plan to push south and isolate the German forces from reinforcements - was only partially successful. Seven weeks after D-Day, Allied forces were still trapped in Normandy.

Operation Cobra was designed to break the stalemate in Normandy by providing the Allies with the momentum to overcome the determined, but poorly organized, German resistance in Northern France. The push would begin in the American sector near Saint-Lô, while the British tied up the German panzers (tanks) as a smoke screen. The goal: liberate Brittany, capture the port, and break out of northern France.

Leadership

On the ground in France, American Generals Omar Bradley and George Patton, and British General Bernard Montgomery coordinated Allied troops. Although they often differed in their approaches to warfare, they agreed on the Operation Cobra plan after the failure of Operation Goodwood.



An aerial view of the Norman bocage, c. 1944. Archives Normandie.



British General Bernard Montgomery (right) with American Generals George Patton (left) and Omar Bradley (center), 1944. Imperial War Museum (B 6551).

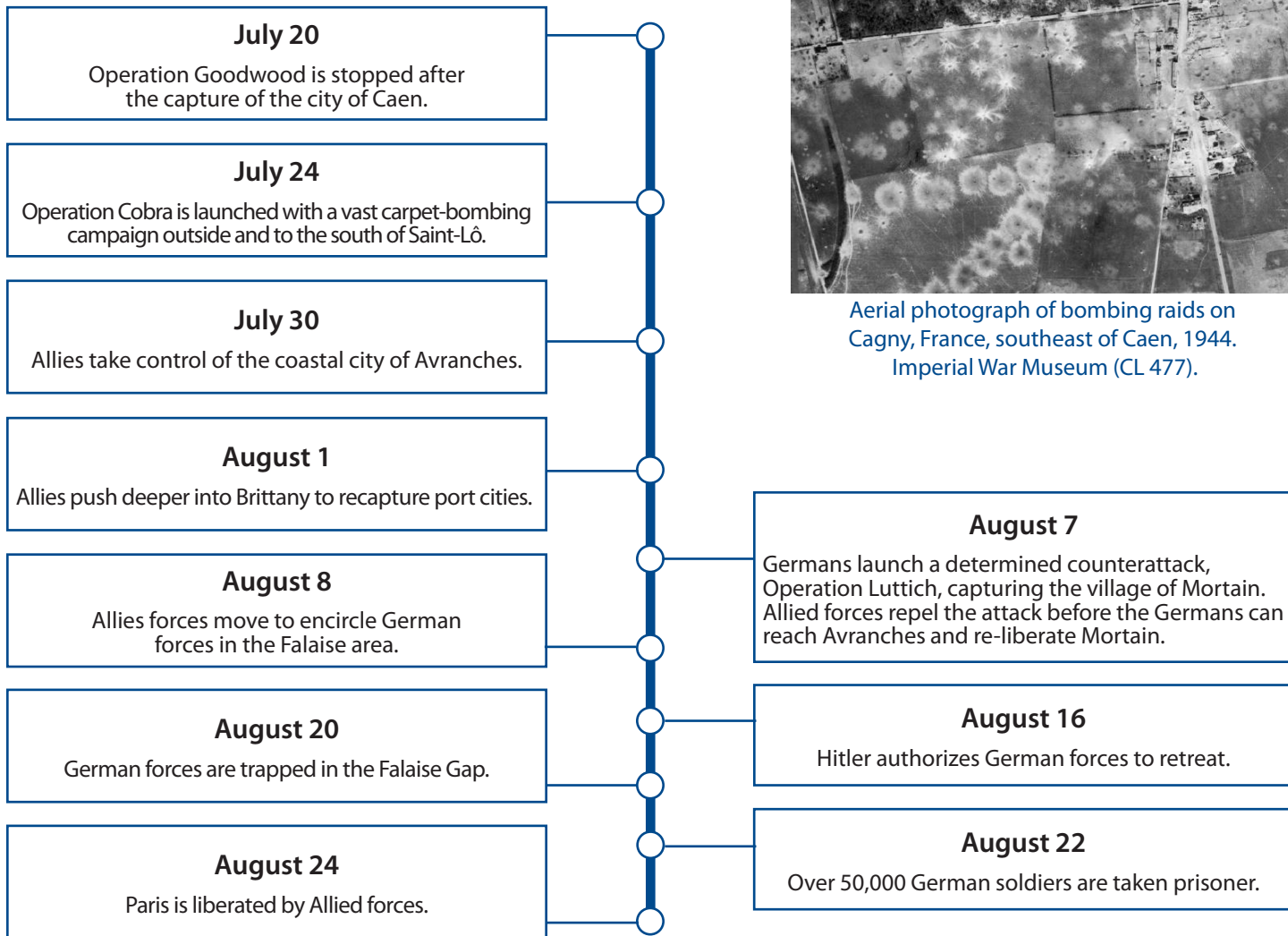
Carpet Bombing

To weaken the German lines and make a Nazi retreat difficult, close to 3,000 bombers targeted roads and railways in the Saint-Lô sector of Normandy. The speed of these attacks and a lack of adequate Allied communication resulted in close to 750 military deaths from friendly fire.



Aerial photograph of bombing raids on Cagny, France, southeast of Caen, 1944. Imperial War Museum (CL 477).

Timeline of Operation Cobra (1944)



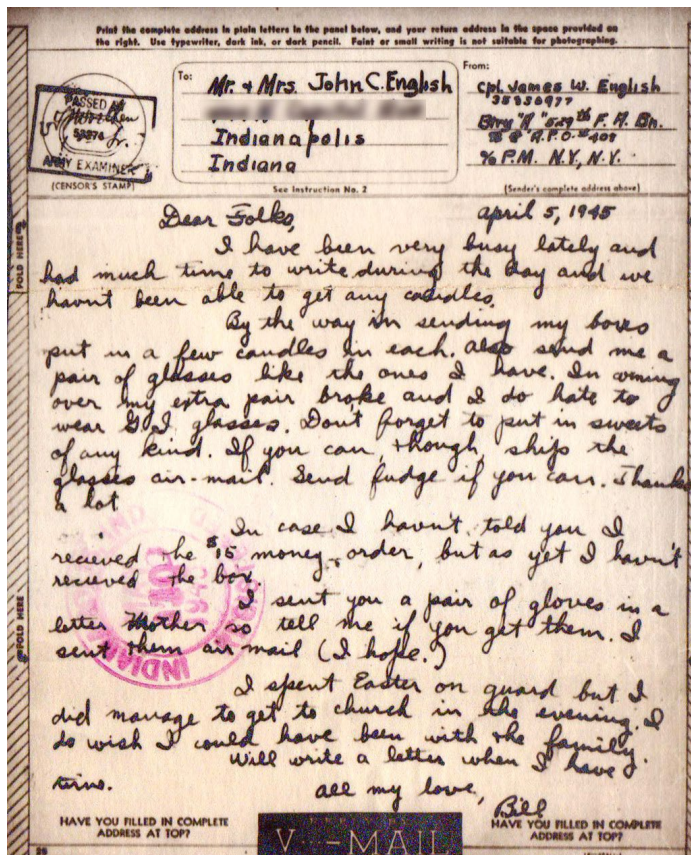
Sharing the War: Communicating

The lion's share of the combat in any war is the responsibility of the common infantry soldier. Many of these men were drafted into service by their governments, while others volunteered to end Axis tyranny. Letter writing was one of the few ways to communicate with loved ones at home, and American soldiers exchanged "V-Mail" communications that were censored and reliably delivered through microfiche.

Newspapers received stories from war correspondents, whose job was to keep the public informed while also protecting national morale. These stories varied from summaries of troop movements to special interest articles on life on the fronts. Some of the most popular war correspondents of World War II included Walter Cronkite, Daniel DeLuca, and Ernie Pyle.

The Infantry Presses On: First Lieutenant William Howard Shelfer

First Lieutenant William "Howard" Shelfer, a member of the 9th Infantry Division, 60th Infantry Regiment, Company B, participated in Operation Cobra. His service on the front lines started on November 11, 1942, when his division participated in the liberation of North Africa in Operation Torch. His division also traveled to Sicily in 1943 during Operation Husky before being sent to England in 1944 to prepare for D-Day. The 9th Infantry Division was an essential part of Operation Cobra and the liberation of France.



V-mail letter sent to Mr. and Mrs. John C. English in Indianapolis, Indiana, 1945. Wikimedia Commons.

Operation Cobra Source Packet: Source A

Map of selected battle sites from Operation Overlord and Operation Cobra



Operation Cobra Source Packet: Source B

E. C. Daniel, "Americans Drive Ahead West of St. Lô After Record Barrages," July 26, 1944

The New York Times

GAIN UP TO 1 1/2 MILES

Americans Drive Ahead West of St. Lô After Record Barrages

6,000 TONS OF AIR BOMBS

Canadians Take Verrières on the Eastern Sector of Front in Concurrent Blow

By E. C. DANIEL

By Cable to *New York Times*

SUPREME HEADQUARTERS, Allied Expeditionary Force, Wednesday, July 26 - After a stunning shrapnel attack yesterday by the greatest battle force of heavy bombers ever employed in a single assault, American troops in the western sector of the stiffly defended Normandy battle line are hammering southward on a wide front between St. Lô and Périers in a big offensive.

A front-line dispatch arriving here early this morning said the attack was made across the St. Lô-Périers road and advanced one and a quarter to one and a half miles in its first stages. [Lieut. Gen. Omar N. Bradley sent his American First Army into battle on a front stretching all the way from St. Lô westward to the sea and centering on a five-mile sector between the Vire and Taute Rivers, said an Associated Press dispatch.]

Follows Attack in East

After a lull of three days, enforced by the soggiess of the battlefield, the weather finally broke clear and bright in the Allies' favor yesterday, and the coordinated American air and ground assault started before noon. It followed by about six hours the beginning of the British-Canadian uphill climb against grimly entrenched German defenses guarding the road leading south from Caen to Falaise in the eastern sector of the battle front. Except for the assurance that the Americans had broken into the German defenses, no official word had been received early today of the progress of the American attack. [...]

... The Germans had seen signs of the approaching storm on the St. Lô sector, and the weight of aircraft thrown into the fray yesterday could be justified only by serious intentions. In less than three hours the American planes dropped about 6,000 tons of bombs, which was followed by the heaviest artillery barrage the Americans had ever laid down in Normandy.

Eisenhower Impressed

The intensity of the air attack made Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower whistle when it was described to him during a visit to field commanders yesterday. Ten square miles of German defensive positions were saturated with fragmentation and 100-pound bombs by a force of more than 1,500 American Fortresses and -Liberators from Britain, escorted by 500 fighters and augmented by 500 medium and light bombers and up to 500 fighter-bombers-a total of 3,000 aircraft.

E. C. Daniel, "Americans Drive Ahead West of St. Lô After Record Barrages," July 26, 1944 (con't) *The New York Times*

For five miles behind the German front the ground shuddered as successive waves of sixty to seventy heavy bombers unloaded their freight. Smoke rose two miles high over the target area. While the planes employed in this attack were greater in number than any air fleet ever used directly in advance of a ground attack the weight of the bombs they carried was less than that delivered by the Royal Air Force's heavy night attack-bombers before the British breakthrough into Caen. The American heavies normally carry a lighter load than the British, and the bombs they were using yesterday were of a bulky type and not block-busters with a single big punch in a compact package. The bombs were designed to daze and kill personnel and wreck equipment and strong points.

Attack West of St. Lô

The Allied communique of last night said only that General Bradley's attack was made "west of St. Lô." A German communiqué said that the attack started northwest of St. Lô and southwest of Carentan and that it began Monday, not Tuesday.

Capt. Ludwig Sertorius, German military commentator, asserted the drive was directed across St. Lô-Périers road toward Marigny, strategic road junction seven miles west of St. Lô. Sertorius also stated that the attack was launched Monday, and an Allied dispatch from the battle-front last night suggested that at least a "handful" of Allied aircraft bombed in that area Monday. The haze was so thick, the dispatch said, that some bombardiers misfired into the American front lines, causing casualties.

Yesterday morning, however, when the bomb runs started at 10 o'clock, the Norman skies were clear, and American heavies flew sometimes as low as 10,000 feet- far below their normal level-to pinpoint the targets. There was no Luftwaffe opposition, and only six bombers and three fighters were lost to flak.

Americans thrusting out between positions two miles north of Périers and a few hundred yards south of St. Lô entered some of the most difficult fighting ground in Normandy-a section of the "bocages" [groves] country. The terrain is pimply with little hills and ridges, which afford the Germans excellent sites for artillery, mortar batteries and strong points. The whole area is cut into innumerable small fields, each surrounded by a hedgerow, which Allied troops have learned from hard experience can give effective shelter and disguise to German tanks, anti-tank guns and infantry. These hedgerows are not ornamental borders but thickets of shrubs and trees, often reinforced by ditches and dirt walls sometimes five feet high. A German war correspondent's dispatch yesterday described how Nazi troops cowered under protection of these walls and ditches during artillery or aerial bombardment and then emerged to meet advancing Allied tanks and infantry.

Operation Cobra Source Packet: Source C

Ernie Pyle, "An Inhuman Tenseness," August 9-10, 1944 (excerpt)

Ernie's War: The Best of Ernie Pyle's World War II Dispatches

Ernie Pyle was a popular war-correspondent who was embedded with military personnel for most of World War II. His writing often appeared in newspapers associated with the Scripps-Howard newspaper syndicate.

It is possible to become so enthralled by some of the spectacles of war that you are momentarily captivated away from your own danger.

That's what's happened to our little group of soldiers as we stood in a French farmyard, watching the mighty bombing of the German lines just before a breakthrough.

But that benign state didn't last long. As we watched, there crept into our consciousness a realization that windrows of exploding bombs were easing back toward us, flight by flight, instead of gradually forward, as the plan called for.

Then we were horrified by the suspicion that those machines, high in the sky and completely detached from us, were aiming their bombs at the smoke line on the ground - and a gentle breeze was drifting the smoke line back over us!

An indescribable kind of panic comes over you at such times. We stood tensed in muscle and frozen in intellect, watching each flight approach and pass over us, feeling trapped and completely helpless.

And then all of an instant the universe became filled with a gigantic rattling as of huge, dry seeds in a mammoth dry gourd. I doubt that any of us had ever heard that sound before, but instinct told us what it was. It was bombs by the hundred, hurtling down through the air above us.

Many times I've heard bombs with whistle or swish or rustle, but never before had I heard bombs rattle. I still don't know the explanation of it. But it is an awful sound.

We dived. Some got in a dugout. Others made foxholes and ditches and some got behind a garden wall - although which side would be "behind" was anybody's guess.

It was too late for the dugout. The nearest place was a wagon-shed which formed one end of the stone house. The rattle was right down upon us. I remember hitting the ground flat, all spread out like the cartoons of people flattened by steam rollers, and then squirming like an eel to get under one of the heavy wagons in the shed.

An officer whom I didn't know was wriggling beside me. We stopped at the same time, simultaneously feeling it was hopeless to move farther. The bombs were already crashing around us.

We lay with our heads slightly up -- like two snakes -- staring at each other. I know it was in both our minds and in our eyes, asking each other what to do. Neither of us knew. We said nothing.

Ernie Pyle, “An Inhuman Tenseness,” August 9-10, 1944 (excerpt)

Ernie's War: The Best of Ernie Pyle's World War II Dispatches

We just lay sprawled, gaping at each other in a futile appeal, our faces about a foot apart, until it was over.

There is no description of the sound and fury of those bombs except to say it was chaos, and waiting for darkness. The feeling of the blast was sensational. The air struck you in hundreds of continuing flutters. Your ears drummed and rang. You could feel quick little waves of concussions on your chest and in your eyes.

At last the sound it dies down and we looked at each other in disbelief. Gradually we left the fox holes and sprawling places, and came out to see what this guy had in store for us. As far as we could see, other waves were approaching from behind...

How many waves of heavy bombers we put over I have no idea. I had counted well beyond four hundred planes when my personal distraction obliterated any capacity or desire to count.

I only know that four hundred was just the beginning. There were supposed to be eighteen hundred planes that day, and I believe it was announced later that there were more than three thousand.

It seemed incredible to me that any German could come out of that bombardment with his sanity. When it was over it even I was grateful in a chastened way I have never experienced before, for just being alive.

Operation Cobra Source Packet: Source D

Letter, William Howard Shelfer to Charles Boatman, Sr., June 27, 1943

Courtesy of Ruth Shelfer

July 11, 1944

Dear Dad,

Once again I have my back against the sea. The last time I did not do so good, but maybe my luck will be better this time. It has been cold for the past three days and of course I am traveling light—one blanket and a raincoat. You would think that this time of year it would be hot, but it is a far cry from it. The days are very long, about 21 hours from light to dark.

I have had a ringside seat in what is called the greatest show on earth. I would gladly exchange it for a lesser one. I am very tired of big shows. Yesterday and the day before it rained ice water and I cursed whatever God there may be for sending me out in it. I sure do hate cold weather. The weather gives us fellas in the infantry a Hell of a beating. The enemy isn't enough, we have to fight the weather, too. When this war is over, I swear that I shall never be cold again. I do not know why I am writing at all for it is hard to find anything pleasant to say in my present surroundings. My blood really must be thin because I stay cold all the time and other people don't seem to mind it so much. I think that is one reason I hate Yankees so much. It is not good to hate people, but Dad, my heart is full of it. You may not be able to understand that, but you have never slept in ice water. I shall write as often as possible, but don't expect much. Tell Mamie that the slide rule is a great source of amusement, and that I carry it in my pocket. I look to the east and wonder what is in store for me. I will see Berlin yet and may not be long doing it. Tell the kids hello and give my love to all.

Howard

July 24, 1944

Dear Dad,

It is now ebb tide in my life. Never before have I felt so low. I am sure that I can not last much longer. I have had my share of this thing and am not through yet. We have paid a heavy price. I do not know what the papers say, but as in Africa and Sicily, the 9th Division has done much of the hard work over here. I know that I should not write like this, but there is nothing else to say. It is too late for me to come home now. I know that I am a wretch and I am not sure I ever want to come home. Please give my love to all and do not feel bad because I do not write more often. I am so sick of war that sometimes I feel that I am losing my mind. It has been very hard, but the damn thing cannot last forever - not for me, it can't. All of my friends are gone now. I am a stranger in my own battalion. I shall try to do better in my next letter. Tell the girls that I will bring them all a present soon and to save me some pears.

Notwithstanding,

Howard

Operation Cobra Source Analysis

Source A

Using the narrative of Operation Cobra, use two colors to draw the routes and label the dates of the U.S. and German soldiers on the map.

Using the map, estimate how many miles a day soldiers traveled between the following cities.

a. Caen to Saint-Lô: _____ b. Saint-Lô to Avranches: _____

c. Avranches to Mortain: _____ d. Avranches to Falaise: _____

Using the timeline and the map, estimate the distance Allied soldiers traveled from July 20 to August 7, 1944: _____

The average pace for marching soldiers is two miles per hour. What factors might interfere with the rate of travel from city to city?

Source B

What event is being described in this article?

What is the author's purpose in writing about the event in this manner?

Why do you think that the bombing of the Allied front line receives such little attention in the article?

What impression does it leave with the reader?

Operation Cobra Source Analysis

Source C

What event is Ernie Pyle writing about?

How does this account differ from the *New York Times* article of the same event?

What is the author's purpose in writing about the event in this manner?

How might that explain why details of this account are missing from the *New York Times* article?

Why do you think Pyle's article was written so many days after the event?

Source D

What battles/events recently transpired that would have affected the tone of the letters Lieutenant Shelfer sent home?

What is missing from the Lieutenant's letters? Why do you think it/they are missing?

How does the content and tone of Shelfer's letters either reinforce or conflict with the reporting published in the *New York Times* or written by Ernie Pyle?

Operation Cobra Source Analysis Answer Key

Source A

Using the narrative of Operation Cobra, use two colors to draw the routes and label the dates of the U.S. and German soldiers on the map.

Using the map, estimate how many miles a day soldiers traveled between the following cities.

- a. Caen to Saint-Lô: **50 km / 30 mi** b. Saint-Lô to Avranches: **40km / 25 mi**
c. Avranches to Mortain: **25km / 15 mi** d. Avranches to Falaise: **90 km / 50 mi**

Using the timeline and the map, estimate the distance Allied soldiers traveled from July 20 to August 7, 1944: **200 km / 125 miles**

The average pace for marching soldiers is two miles per hour. What factors might interfere with the rate of travel from city to city?

Being under fire, exhaustion, geography (hills, bocage, open farmland, ordinance craters), lack of food, lack of sleep, lack of trucks / trains, etc.

Source B

What event is being described in this article?

Opening day of battle for Operation Cobra and the carpet bombing of the German lines.

What is the author's purpose in writing about the event in this manner?

To inform American audiences that U.S. soldiers continue to overcome obstacles and reinforce that German forces are retreating. This will raise morale because people will believe that the war is coming to a close.

Why do you think that the bombing of the Allied front line receives such little attention in the article?

There may not have been much detail released by the time the article was published, but it would also cause families to worry about loved ones and question the military strategies of the generals in charge of operations.

What impression does it leave with the reader?

The war is making great strides in France and the Germans are scared of Allied forces.

Operation Cobra Source Analysis Answer Key

Source C

What event is Ernie Pyle writing about?

Being on the front lines of Operation Cobra when the soldiers were shelled by their own planes.

How does this account differ from the *New York Times* article of the same event?

This account has more detailed information about the experience of the soldier actually fighting in the war. Operation Cobra does not sound as positive or straight forward as the New York Times article makes it out to be.

What is the author's purpose in writing about the event in this manner?

To expose the reader to the perils and trials of soldiers who are fighting across Europe. This may save soldiers from having to directly tell their loved ones about the traumatic experiences of war.

How might that explain why details of this account are missing from the *New York Times* article?

If the *New York Times* article shared more detail about the soldier's experience, it would complicate the reporting of the operation details and open up military leadership for criticism. This could weaken morale at home. In addition, the reporter may not have been a direct witness to the action.

Why do you think Pyle's article was written so many days after the event?

Besides just the bombing itself, the first few days after the opening of Operation Cobra were fast-paced and likely chaotic. Pyle may not have had a spare minute to write if his unit was taking fire from German soldiers and/or crossing long distances.

Source D

What battles/events recently transpired that would have affected the tone of the letters Lieutenant Shelfer sent home?

Lieutenant Shelfer has already participated in fighting in Africa, Sicily and in France. The very next day will be the start of Operation Cobra. As an officer, he knows that another battle is on the way.

What is missing from the Lieutenant's letters? Why do you think it/they are missing?

He does not share any details of his fighting or his experiences in war. He likely does so to spare his family the worry for his safety. It is also something that is probably very difficult to share with someone who has not been in combat.

How does the content and tone of Shelfer's letters either reinforce or conflict with the reporting published in the *New York Times* or written by Ernie Pyle?

Lieutenant Shelfer's letters are much more pessimistic about war itself and his outlook of coming home. It is clear that he does not romanticize the conflict and is struggling to find information he is willing to share.

Newspaper Article

Using the documents provided, write a newspaper article that creates a more complete account of Operation Cobra on the first day of battle, July 25, 1944.

Headline:
