



A Picture's Worth 1,000 Words

“Reading” Photographs as a Primary Source

A Lesson Plan from
the Education Department of the
The National World War II Museum

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“Reading” Photographs as a Primary Source

Photographs can be a very useful primary source of information when analyzing historical events. They provide concrete, visual evidence that allow students to conceptualize events of the past when viewed with a critical eye. The following sets of photographs related to the D-Day invasion of Normandy give students an opportunity to examine and analyze the complexities of that operation's planning and engagement.

OBJECTIVE: Students will analyze the complexity of the D-Day operation by learning to “read” primary source photographs from the time period.

BENCHMARKS: This lesson conforms to the National History Standards.

- **Formulate historical questions from encounters with historical documents, eyewitness accounts, letters, diaries, artifacts, photos, historical sites, art, architecture, and other records from the past.**
- **Obtain historical date from a variety of sources, including: library and museum collections, historic sites, historical photos, journals, diaries, eyewitness accounts, newspapers, and the like; documentary films, oral testimony from living witnesses, censuses, tax records, city directories, statistical compilations, and economic indicators.**

ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

- **How can photographs provide information about history?**

TIME REQUIRED:

1 class period

DIRECTIONS:

1. Introduce this activity as a “photograph-reading” exercise.
2. Divide the class into five groups and assign each group one set of photographs—A through E (5 photos in each set). Have each group choose a recorder and a presenter.
3. Give students 5-10 minutes to view and discuss their photos within each group.
4. Copy and pass out one worksheet for each group to complete.
5. The presenters will then exhibit each group's results while showing their photographs to the class. *Make sure the photos in each group are presented in order.* Presentations should include group title, a brief description of each photograph, and the group's interpretation of how their photographs fit into the chronology of D-Day.

7. After all five presentations, the teacher will lead a review discussion on how these photographs fit into the D-Day chronology and how photographs can be used as primary sources when analyzing historical events.

ASSESSMENT: Components for assessment include the group worksheet and the presentation.

ENRICHMENT: Have students write descriptive paragraphs about any current event by “reading” photographs from newspapers and magazines.

“Reading” D-Day Photographs

Group Members: _____

Directions: Photographs are important primary sources of historical information. They help us visualize events as they occurred, offering the careful viewer important clues for interpreting the past. Use your set of D-Day photographs to gain a better understanding about the events that unfolded during the Allied invasion of Normandy.

1. Give a title that represents the content or theme of your set of photographs.

2. Present details from each photograph explaining how it fits into your set and relates to your title.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

E. _____

3. Is there anything in your photographs that you do not understand, that you do not recognize, or that raises questions that would require further research?

4. How do you think your set of photographs fit into the timeline of D-Day?

5. What are the plusses (+) and minuses (-) of using photographs like these to analyze historical events?



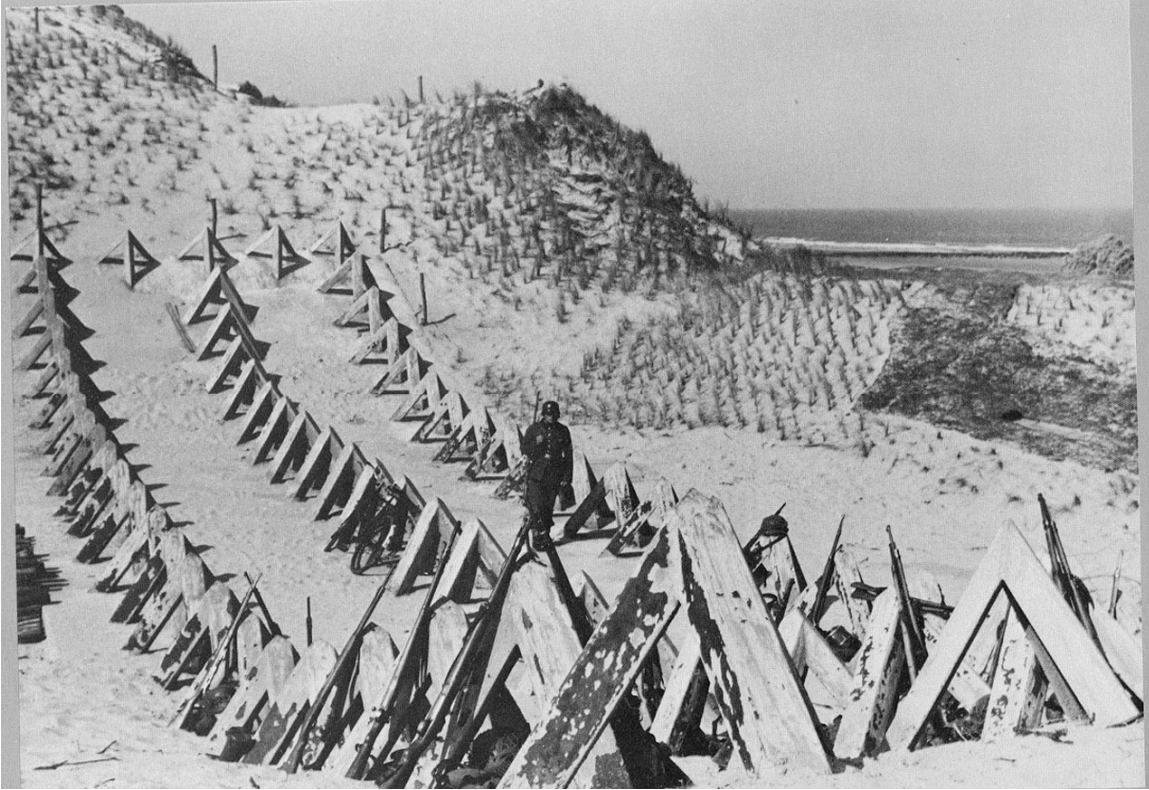
A-1) A large coastal gun in a concrete bunker. *Ullslein Bilderdienst, Berlin*



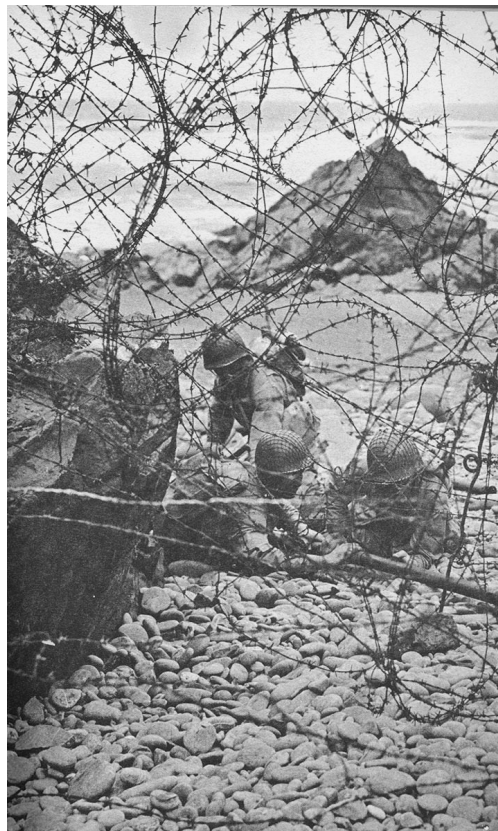
A-2) A German gun emplacement on the Atlantic Wall. *Bundesarchiv, Koblenz*



A-3) Ramps, hedgehogs, mine-tipped poles, and tetrahedrons on a Normandy beach. *US Air Force*



A-4) Anti-tank obstacles. *Budesarchiv, Koblenz*

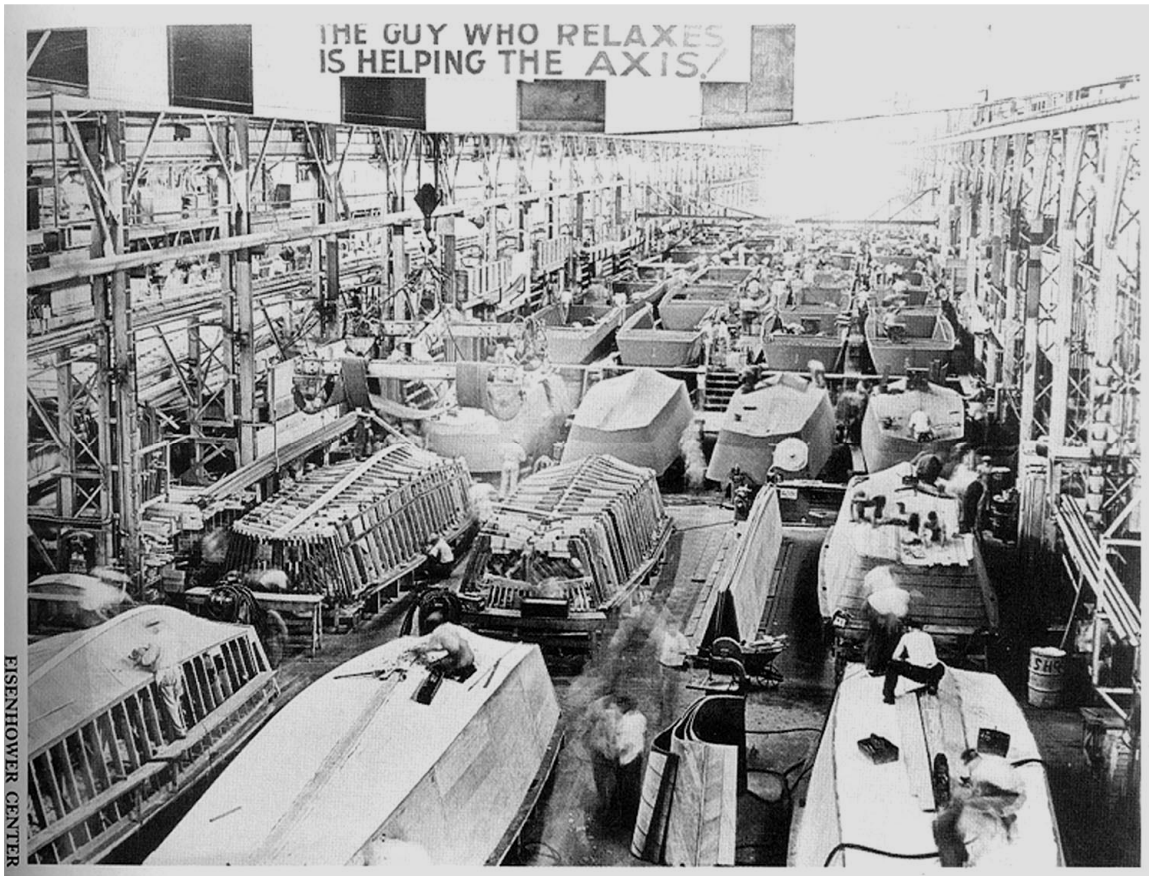


A-5) Barbed wire on a Normandy beach. *US Army*



B-1) LCVP's, PT boats, and LCSs on Bayou St. John awaiting shipment.

Graham Haddock



B-2) A Higgins Industries factory producing LCVs. *Eisenhower Center*

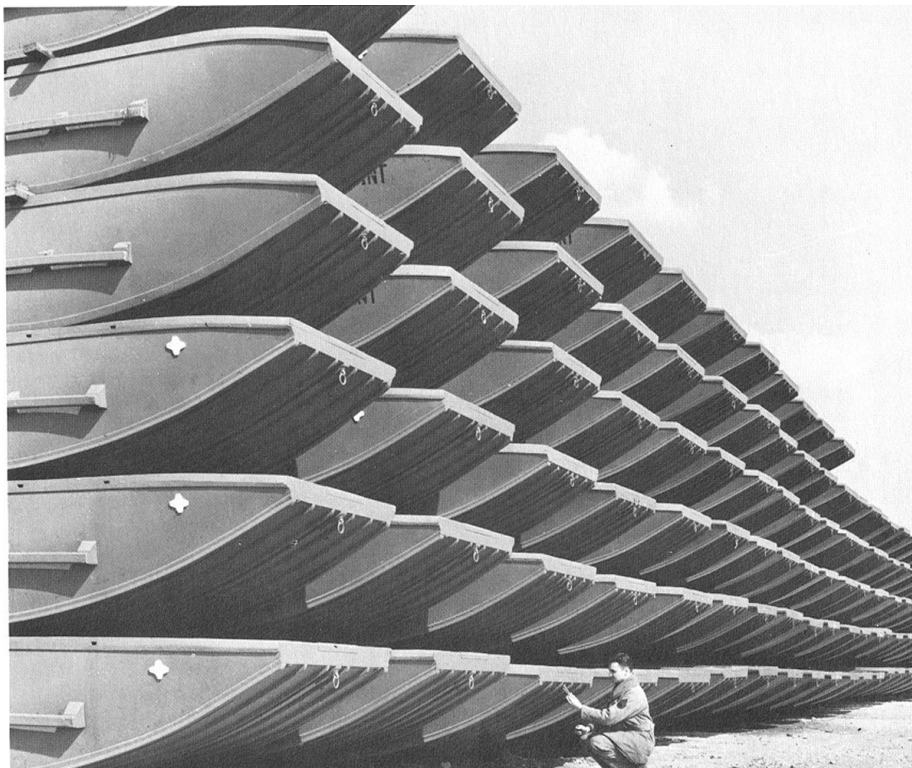


B-3) American fighter planes and bombers awaiting preflight servicing. *Imperial War Museum, London*



B-4) Everything the Army needed was stockpiled.

Imperial War Museum, London



B-5) Pontoons for temporary bridges to span France's rivers.

Imperial War Museum, London



C-1) Pre-invasion bombing of Pointe-du-Hoc. *US Air Force*



C-2) Paratroopers of the US 101st Airborne Division. *US Air Force*



C-3) US gliders and paratroopers. *US Army Signal Corps*



C-4) Glider landing field in Normandy. *US Army Signal Corps*



C-5) Wrecked 30-man Horsa glider in Normandy field. *US Army Signal Corps*



D-1) Allied soldiers on troop transports in the English Channel. US Navy



D-2) US troops loading onto an LCVP (Higgins boat). US Navy



D-3) US soldiers head toward the beach in an LCP. *US Army Signal Corps*



D-4) US soldiers waded to shore through Nazi gun and mortar fire. *US Coast Guard*



D-5) The end of the day on Omaha Beach. *US Army Signal Corps*



E-1) Robert Capa, photographer for Life magazine, went ashore at Omaha Beach with Company E, 16th Regiment, 1st Infantry Division



E-2) Survivors from a destroyed Higgins Boat at Omaha Beach. *US Army Signal Corps*



E-3) US medics tend to the wounded on Utah Beach. *US Army Signal Corps*



E-4) Wounded men from the 1st Division on Omaha Beach.

US Army Signal Corps



E-5) Wounded soldiers on an LCT being taken to hospital ships. *US Coast Guard*



Photograph changes

- 1. Remove white house**
- 2. Remove two tanks on road**
- 3. Remove on helmet on front soldier**
- 4. Remove large ship on top left hand corner of photo**
- 5. Remove line of soldiers**
- 6. Remove Higgins Boat**
- 7. Remove 1 pole**
- 8. Remove one backpack**
- 9. Remove jeep with man behind it**



Photograph Changes

1. Remove landing platform
2. Remove 1 pack
3. Remove 1 helmet
4. Take man at front away
5. Take cliffs away
6. Remove 1 rifle
7. Remove
8. Remove 1 net off helmet
9. Remove



Photograph Changes

- 1. Remove cars**
- 2. Remove Inner lining of Higgins Boats**
- 3. Remove the house on the left hand side**
- 4. Remove boat on bottom right hand side**
- 5. Remove last piece of railroad track**
- 6. Remove 7 boats**
- 7. Remove middle boat**
- 8. Remove pole**
- 9. Remove first two cars on railroad**



Photograph Changes

- 1. Remove cigarette**
- 2. Remove cable at end, left hand side**
- 3. Remove pack**
- 4. Remove goggles from helmet**
- 5. Remove chin strap**
- 6. Remove knife**
- 7. Remove rifle**
- 8. Remove helmet**
- 9. Remove Floor Lining**



Photograph Changes

- 1. Remove steps**
- 2. Remove man**
- 3. Remove brick**

- 4. Remove rivets**
- 5. Remove three cans**
- 6. Remove door**
- 7. Remove circular rock**
- 8. Remove x's on cans**
- 9. Remove camouflage on gun**