



Leyte, October 20, 1944: "I Have Returned"

VIDEO YouTube Short, 56 s (AHA-01). Link: <https://youtube.com/shorts/1uR568f9Ryo>

TIME 15-20 minutes (watch twice, discuss, exit ticket)

GRADES Grades 8-12 and AP US History; grades 5-7 teacher-led

STANDARDS C3 D2.His.10-11; TX, CA, FL WWII strands (p. 2)

SUMMARY

In March 1942, ordered out of the Philippines, General Douglas MacArthur promised: "I shall return." He reached Australia that month; Japanese forces held the islands from 1942.

About two and a half years later, on October 20, 1944, after four hours of naval gunfire, American troops landed on Leyte in the central Philippines. That afternoon MacArthur came ashore, and from the beach he broadcast his message: "People of the Philippines: I have returned."

Days later, October 23-26, Japan's navy struck back. The Battle of Leyte Gulf, among the largest naval battles ever fought, cost Japan most of its remaining warships.

Every shot in the Short is US Navy film made at Leyte on October 20, 1944. The voice in the quote is MacArthur's own: a recording of the speech he made on September 29, 1944, in Brisbane, Australia, as a backup in case the live broadcast failed. No recording of the beach delivery is known to survive. The narration is an AI voice.

KEY TERMS

Leyte: An island in the central Philippines. The first major US landing to retake the Philippines came here on October 20, 1944.

Naval gunfire: Shelling from warships offshore to weaken defenses before troops land. At Leyte it lasted about four hours.

Office of War Information (OWI): The US government's wartime news and broadcast agency. MacArthur recorded his backup speech in an OWI studio in Brisbane.

Amphibious landing: An attack in which troops go from ships to shore, often in landing craft, onto a defended beach.

Battle of Leyte Gulf: The sea battle of October 23-26, 1944, in which Japan's navy tried to destroy the Allied landing forces off Leyte.

Primary source: Evidence made at the time by people who took part, such as this film and this audio recording.

SOURCE SPOTLIGHT: TWO PRIMARY SOURCES

Source 1: the film

Who made it?

US Navy cameramen (Naval Photographic Center)

When and where?

October 20, 1944, at Leyte

For whom?

The Navy's official film record (Naval Photographic Center)

Why?

Most likely to document the operation for the Navy and the government

What it can't tell us

Shows only what Navy cameras chose to film. No Filipino or Japanese viewpoint. No footage of the Leyte Gulf battle itself.

Source 2: the audio

Who made it?

Gen. Douglas MacArthur, recorded in an OWI studio

When and where?

September 29, 1944, in Brisbane, Australia, three weeks before the landing

For whom?

The people of the Philippines, by radio

Why?

A backup in case the live beach broadcast failed

What it can't tell us

These are his real words in his real voice, but recorded before the event. It is not the live beach delivery and can't tell us how that moment sounded.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **Recall** What promise did MacArthur make in 1942, and about how long did it take to keep it?

Look for: "I shall return." From March 1942 to October 20, 1944: about two and a half years (2 years, 7 months).

2. **Cause and effect** Why do you think Japan's navy struck back within days of the Leyte landing? What did the battle cost Japan?

Look for: Japan tried to destroy the Allied landing forces off Leyte before the Philippines were lost. The Battle of Leyte Gulf cost Japan most of its remaining warships.

3. **Sourcing** The quote you hear was recorded on September 29, 1944, three weeks before the landing. Does that make it more useful, less useful, or useful in a different way? Why?

Look for: Strong answers say it is authentic (his own voice and words) and shows the landing's message was planned ahead, but it is not evidence of the beach moment itself. Look for students who name what it can and cannot prove.

4. **Perspective (argument)** All of the film was shot by the US Navy. Whose experience of October 20, 1944, is missing? What other kinds of sources would you look for?

Look for: Filipino civilians and guerrillas (living under Japanese occupation since 1942) and Japanese soldiers. Possible sources: Filipino oral histories and newspapers, Japanese records and memoirs, other Allied accounts. Credit any reasoned, specific choice.

Exit ticket. In one sentence: what is one thing the film can prove about October 20, 1944, and one thing it can't?

STANDARDS TAG

- C3 Framework D2.His.10 (limitations of evidence) and D2.His.11 (maker, date, place, audience, purpose)
- Texas TEKS 113.41(c) (7), WWII in the Pacific; California HSS 11.7.2; Florida SS.912.A.6.1
- Codes from the AHA Education Branch Plan; re-check each code against the state site before publishing.

Before class. If your school uses YouTube Restricted Mode, war-history videos may be hidden even with no graphic images. A Google Classroom teacher can approve the video, or the whole channel, for students. Watch it once yourself first.

SOURCES

- US Army Center of Military History, CMH Pub 72-27, Leyte (The U.S. Army Campaigns of World War II): archive.org/details/Leyte
- Naval History and Heritage Command, "The Battle of Leyte Gulf": history.navy.mil (browse by topic, WWII, 1944)
- NHHC via DVIDS, "NHHC releases new book on Battle of Leyte Gulf": dvidshub.net/news/431876
- HISTORY, "General MacArthur leaves Corregidor" (March 11, 1942): history.com/this-day-in-history
- FDR Library / National Archives blog, "I Have Returned! General MacArthur and FDR" (Oct 20, 2015): fdr.blogs.archives.gov
- MacArthur Memorial podcast, "Audio: MacArthur's I HAVE RETURNED Speech" (Oct 20, 2023), on the Sept 29, 1944 Brisbane recording: macarthurmorialpodcast.buzzsprout.com
- Audio: Vincent Voice Library, Michigan State University, Voice 4334, "World War II speech, 'I Have Returned'" (No Copyright): d.lib.msu.edu/vvl/2727
- Film: National Archives 428-NPC-5804 (NAID 77672) and 428-NPC-5802 (NAID 77670), US Navy, Oct 20, 1944: catalog.archives.gov