

# Edexcel GCSE

## **History A** (The Making of the Modern World) Unit 3: Modern World Source Enquiry Option 3B: War and the transformation of British society, c1931–51

Tuesday 12 June 2012 – Afternoon

**Sources Booklet**

Paper Reference

**5HA03/3B**

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## The Dunkirk evacuation

### Background information

By late May 1940 huge numbers of retreating British and French troops found themselves trapped on the beaches around Dunkirk. From 27 May to 4 June the evacuation of these troops was carried out. Some historians believe that Dunkirk was a great victory for Britain. Others suggest that it was a defeat.

**Source A:** From the memoirs of a British Army General, published in 1960. He is writing about the Dunkirk evacuation in 1940.

If you ask anybody what they remember most clearly about Dunkirk, they will all mention their feeling of shame. Shame as we went back through those frightened, silent crowds of Belgians. We were now handing them over to yet another German occupation, like that of the First World War. I felt very ashamed. We had arrived so confidently and now, like whipped dogs, we were retreating to Britain with our tails between our legs. Morale among the returning troops was very low.

**Source B:** From a broadcast to the British people by a BBC news reporter, 31 May 1940.

All night and all day men of the undefeated British Expeditionary Force have been coming home. As the men came off the ships, many looked tired and exhausted but everyone looked cheerful with some even smiling. From interviews with the men it is clear that they have come back in glory. Their morale is as high as ever and they are anxious to go back again 'to have a real crack at Jerry\*'. All the bombs in Germany will not crush their spirit.

\*Jerry = the Germans

**Source C:** From a report in the *Daily Mail* newspaper, published on 1 June 1940.

A British soldier told me that he spent two days with thousands of others among the sand dunes with little food and no shelter from the German dive-bombers. Yet men still joked, played cards and even started a football game to keep up their morale.

A sailor on a rescue boat on the way back to England told me that the previous ship he was on had sunk off the Belgian coast. As soon as he and his comrades got back to England they had volunteered to return to France at once.

**Source D:** A photograph published in a British newspaper, 2 June 1940.



British troops returning from Dunkirk full of cheery 'Dunkirk spirit'.

One soldier has come back with a captured German rifle.

**Source E:** From an interview given in 2000 by a British soldier who took part in the Dunkirk evacuation. The interview was for the BBC news website to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the evacuation.

We were just so demoralised and humiliated. I had no proper army training before I was sent to France. I could not believe how well-equipped and organised the Germans were. They were prepared for war and we weren't. The beaches at Dunkirk were full of troops. We couldn't move, we just had to dig in and wait. We had no idea what was happening. There was no food and we thought we were going to starve. We felt so down-hearted because we left behind most of our equipment and many of our troops.

**Source F is on page 4.**

**Source F:** From a history of the Second World War, published in 2007.

Over 330,000 British and French troops were successfully evacuated from the beaches of Dunkirk. Churchill created the idea of the 'Dunkirk spirit'. He cleverly turned a military defeat into a propaganda victory by persuading the British people that the evacuation was a great success. In private, Churchill called Dunkirk 'the greatest military defeat for many centuries'. Britain had clearly abandoned its ally, France, and left behind 475 tanks and over 1,000 artillery guns. Although many men behaved with perfect discipline, there were stories of officers deserting their men in order to be evacuated first.

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