

## INVASION: TASK INSTRUCTIONS

**The key question:** How worried was Britain about invasion 1940-41?

### Your task

In this investigation your task is to study the sources in this box. Decide how worried you think the British government was at the time for each source. You can use a colour code to indicate the extent of the threat (the US government uses this scale today).

Use the table to record your views.

### How worried was Britain about invasion 1940-41?

This drawing suggests Britain was confident that Hitler would never be able to invade. But was this just a brave front?

This image is a piece of propaganda produced by the British government in the summer of 1940. The basic message is that Hitler is "all talk" and that Britain will easily drive him back if he tries to invade. A caption would have been added later.

The question for us in this investigation is whether the British government really was this confident. Look at the other documents here and decide for yourself.

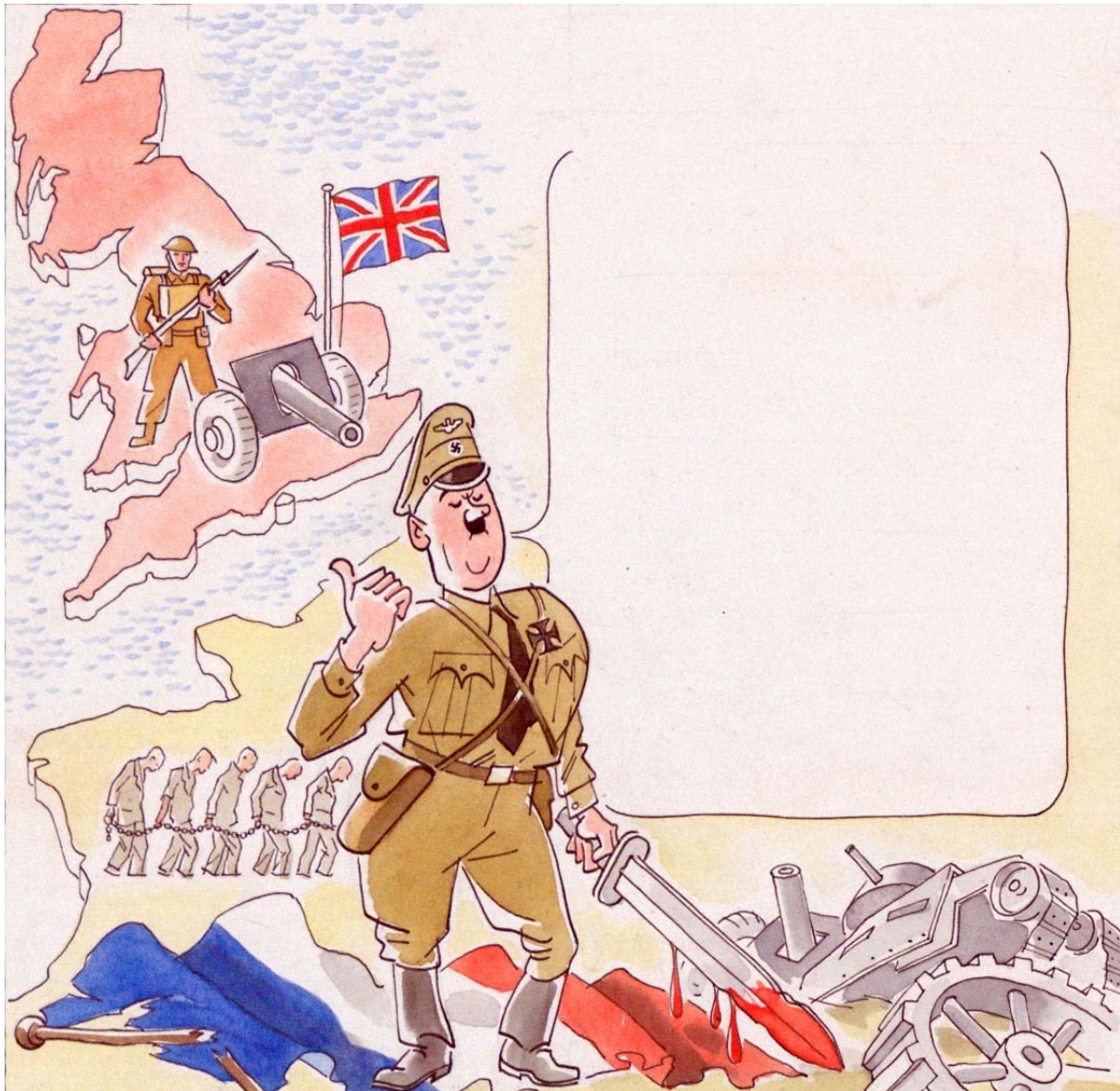
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WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: INVASION

A drawing produced by the British Ministry of Information in the early stages of the war

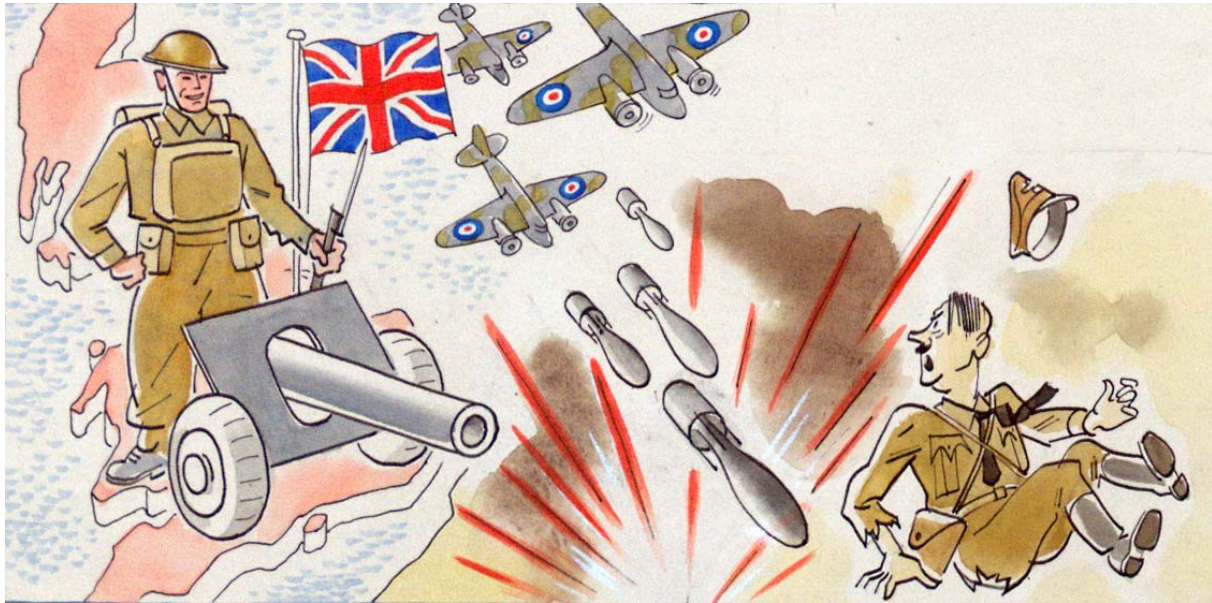
Catalogue ref: INF 3/1436

Source a





**Source b**



**What is this source?**

An artist working for the British Ministry of Information during the war produced this drawing. It might have been used for pamphlets, magazines or posters.

The Ministry of Information published thousands of pieces of propaganda during the war. It made films, radio programmes and cartoons.

**What's the background to this source?**

The image was created some time after France fell to the Nazis in June 1940. At this time Britain was the only democratic country still opposing Nazi Germany.

The German advances in 1939 and 1940 were devastating. In the early stages of the war Hitler overran Poland, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium and France. It would not have been surprising if the British people had felt that invasion was a danger.

## WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: INVASION

**It's worth knowing that..**

This particular example was probably designed as a poster. The artist has left a space for a caption to be inserted.

Not all of the drawings produced were used. Some were not quite right. Sometimes drawings were thought to be too upsetting.

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**How was this image supposed to work?**

1. How does the cartoon get the message across that Britain is safe from invasion? You might find it helpful to look at:
  - Hitler's overconfidence
  - How the British soldier is shown in the two parts of the image
  - The weapons held by the British
  - How Hitler is shown in the second image.
2. You have been asked to suggest a caption for Hitler in the first part of the image. The aim is to show he is overconfident and also to motivate the British people by showing Hitler they will not give up. Write the caption.
3. What does the cartoon suggest about Nazi rule and methods? How realistic are these messages?

## WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: INVASION

## Casualties suffered by the British Expeditionary Force May-June 1940

Catalogue ref: WO 222/1532

*Left Camp  
May 10  
May 10  
Bapt. Hall  
Mr. Shiple.*

**A. M. D. 2. SECRET**

**B.E.F. FRANCE**

29

**Casualties from 10th May to end of Evacuation.**

	OFFICERS				OTHER RANKS				TOTAL	
	Killed	Wounded	Missing	Total	Killed	Wounded	Missing	Total	Officers	Other Ranks
R.A.C.	28	51	124	203	157	367	1263	1787	203	1787
R.A.	39	75	217	331	469	2016	4516	7001	331	7001
R.E.	19	63	115	197	247	1242	3545	5034	197	5034
R. Sigs.	2	10	42	54	58	363	920	1341	54	1341
Foot Guards	23	28	29	80	220	619	1035	1874	80	1874
Infantry	197	468	962	1627	2250	8540	25456	36246	1627	36246
C.M.P.	1	2	1	4	27	153	76	256	4	256
R.A.S.C.	7	32	113	152	323	2114	2199	4636	152	4636
R.A.M.C.	9	39	101	149	58	94	1267	1419	149	1419
R.A.O.C.	1	10	24	35	37	207	218	462	35	462
R.A.P.C.	-	-	-	-	-	-	28	28	-	28
A.E.C.	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3	-	3
A.M.P.C.	-	8	36	44	27	291	5603	5921	44	5921
G.H.Q., H.Q. & L.of C.	7	23	66	96	-	-	-	-	96	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>809</b>	<b>1830</b>	<b>2972</b>	<b>3873</b>	<b>16006</b>	<b>46129</b>	<b>66008</b>	<b>2972</b>	<b>66008</b>

### What is this source?

This source is part of a record for the British War Office in June 1940.

The War Office controlled Britain's armed forces. Today it is known as the Ministry of Defence.

What's the background to this source?

Britain and France declared war on Germany in September 1939. The war went very well at first for the Germans. By May 1940 they had conquered Poland, Denmark, Norway, Holland and Belgium and were invading France. Britain sent troops called the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) to help the French. By the end of May the British and French were in full retreat. The British evacuated their forces from the port of Dunkirk in late May and early June.

The various initials at the side of the table are the different army units involved in the fighting in May-June 1940. They include the Royal Artillery (RA), Regiment of Signals (R Sigs), Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) and various others.

**WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: INVASION****It's worth knowing that...**

The fighting in France in 1940 was very fierce indeed. When the BEF had to leave France they had to leave most of their equipment behind.

Casualty rates for BEF soldiers in this campaign were about 16.6%. In the First World War they were about 17%. This gives some idea of how serious the fighting was.

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**What level of alert should Britain be on?**

1. Which units suffered the heaviest casualties? Is it clear why?
2. What do these casualties tell you about the intensity of the fighting?
3. Does this suggest the Germans were a serious threat?
4. What level of alert would you put Britain on as a result of studying this source?

Record your answer in your table - you can always change your mind as you study other sources.



WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: INVASION

Extract from a report on Operation Dynamo, dated 3rd May 1941,  
concerning the evacuation of British and French troops from  
Dunkirk in May-June 1940

Catalogue ref: WO 106/1618

SECRET

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WAR OFFICE NOTE ON DUNKIRK EVACUATION

Up to 30th May, 1940, the arrangement was that British troops were to be taken off in British ships and French troops in French ships. Notwithstanding this arrangement up to noon 31st May 14,811 French troops in addition to 149,642 British had arrived in this country in British ships. The number taken off in French ships is not known but the Admiralty had the impression that the French Navy made very little effort and that no effective steps had been taken to collect French coastal shipping.

On the night 30/31 May Lord Gort received orders that equal numbers of French and British troops were to be taken off in British ships. It was decided that the final night of evacuation was to be 1/2 June. Evacuation by daylight was no longer possible as the only channel was covered by enemy guns and his air action was incessant. On the morning 1st June alone we lost six ships by enemy bombing.

Notwithstanding the former decision the evacuation was continued up to and including the night 5/4 June. Major General Alexander and the last of the British troops left Dunkirk in the early morning of 3rd June. This withdrawal was made in full agreement with Admiral Abrial who said he had sufficient French troops to hold the perimeter and asked only for British naval and air assistance during night 5/4 June. At considerable risk to shipping taking part this assistance was given.

During the period after the decision to take off equal numbers of French and British troops the numbers brought off in British ships were

British	74,943
French	97,735.

The total numbers including wounded during the whole period of evacuation were

British	224,565
French	112,545.

The two main reasons for the disparity in total numbers are

- Failure of French Navy to make an effort to assist in evacuation.
- Failure of French High Command to issue any orders as to evacuation.
- French Commanders insistence that his troops were too tired to continue withdrawal to the coast, had resulted in their failure to reach Dunkirk while evacuation was still possible.

The War Office.  
3rd May, 1941.

SHIPPING ADVICE AND DELIVERY NOTE

**WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: INVASION****What is this source?**

Britain and France declared war on Germany in 1939. The war went well for Germany at first. By May 1940 German troops had conquered Denmark, Norway, Holland and Belgium. They were already invading France. British, French and Belgian forces resisted fiercely but by late May they were trapped in a pocket of North West France. The British government decided to evacuate its troops from the port of Dunkirk between May 26th and June 4th 1940. This was known as Operation Dynamo.

British forces returned to France further south but these troops were soon pulled out as well. France surrendered on June 21st 1940. A large number of Free French forces under General de Gaulle refused to accept this and remained in England until the D-Day invasions of 1944.

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**It's worth knowing that...**

Historians have always found it difficult to decide whether Dunkirk was a triumph or a disaster. It was superbly organised by the Royal Navy. Nearly 300 000 British and over 100 000 French troops were evacuated. The RAF outfought the Luftwaffe over the beaches at Dunkirk.

On the other hand it was a bitter defeat. British forces lost most of their equipment. They also effectively abandoned the French. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said it was a 'miracle of deliverance' but he also pointed out that 'wars are not won by evacuations'.

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**What level of alert should Britain be on?**

1. According to the report, did the French and British cooperate effectively?
2. Did the British army, navy and air force work together?
3. What dangers did the allies face?
4. Do you think the evacuation was well organised according to this source?
5. Why has it been difficult for historians to decide whether Dunkirk was a success or failure?
6. What level of alert would you put Britain on as a result of studying this evidence?

Record your answer in your table.



WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: INVASION

**Extract from a report about the German occupation of Jersey,  
June 29th 1940**

Catalogue ref: FO 371/24392

Motor Launch "SUZANNE".

Arrived Dartmouth 28.8.40., 1100 hrs, having left ROZEL, Jersey at 2400 hrs.  
26.8.40. Owner unknown, but might be a Mr. POOL. Tonnage: 3 tons appx.

Crew:-

**212**

LETOURNEUR, Henri Paul. French. Born 25.10.13 at MANTES LA VILLE  
(Seine et Oise).

COURVAL, Andre Paul Honore Desire. French. Born 22.11.12 at  
Carteret.

MILET, Clement. French. Born 3.9.19 at Carteret.

**WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: INVASION**

The following information was given by the above three men:-

They escaped from CARTHERET to Jersey on 29th June 1940 in a fishing boat. The Germans began to occupy Jersey the following day, and they thereupon started to plan their escape to England. They discovered that the "SUZANNE", lying at Rozel, was relatively poorly guarded by the Germans and they decided to make their escape in her. Parts of the magneto had been removed and there were only 4 gallons of petrol aboard. With the assistance of Mr. RICHARDSON, Advocate, of St. Helier, they obtained the necessary parts for the magneto and about 30 gallons of petrol. They escaped undetected by the Germans. They were at sea about 35 hours, having had a great deal of engine-trouble.

They brought with them a map of Jersey, upon which they had marked with ammunition dumps, gun emplacements, W/T posts, barracks, and the German G.H.Q. They also brought a number of letters from people in Jersey, who helped them to escape, addressed to relatives in this country.

They gave the following information about conditions on the island:-

1. There are about 1000 German troops in Jersey.
2. Parachute troops, recognisable by their badges, very prominent.
3. Morale of German soldiers not very high. They are unenthusiastic and listless.
4. The day following the aerial battles in which 140 German planes were destroyed, 6 German pilot officers committed suicide rather than take the air.
5. Civilians as a whole well treated by the Germans, who are trying hard to make friends with them -- with little success.
6. Two-thirds of all foodstuffs requisitioned and sent to France.
7. Aerodrome of St. Pierre extensively used by German bombers, fighters and troop carriers. The planes are parked in wheat fields surrounding the aerodrome and the wheat is used for camouflaging them. Planes to and from France never rise more than about 100 ft. above the water.
8. Very few restrictions on activities of civilians; they may listen to the B.B.C. news in English or French. There is a curfew at 2300 hrs.
9. A group of ex-service men on the island is planning to blow up the aerodrome.
10. The Golf course at Gronville Bay is being used as a landing ground for fighter craft.

over/

**What is this source?**

This source is an extract from a Foreign Office report based on information obtained from some French men who escaped to England in late June 1940.

These men escaped from France to join French forces based in England. People in Jersey helped them to escape.

**What's the background to this source?**

In May 1940 German forces drove British armies out of France. France surrendered on June 21st 1940. This left the Channel Islands in a very vulnerable position. Britain initially planned to defend the islands but then changed the decision. Islanders were given a choice of occupation or

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/>

## WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: INVASION

evacuation. The Channel Islands were invaded on June 30th 1940 and remained in German hands until May 9th 1945. It was the only part of the United Kingdom to fall into German hands.

The German forces allowed the existing government of the islands to continue, but with very limited powers. A large military build up took place on the islands in case Britain should try to take them back. Slave labour from Eastern Europe was used to build huge fortifications. In the event, the D-Day landings of 1944 bypassed the islands and left the German forces there isolated.

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### It's worth knowing that...

The Channel Islands suffered all of the same restrictions and hardships that other occupied territories endured. Anti-semitic propaganda and measures were introduced. Censorship and curfews were enforced. Any kind of resistance was severely punished.

In 1942 all those not born on the islands, and also men who had served as officers in World War I, were deported to camps in Germany. There has been some controversy over the island government's policy of passive co-operation, and some aspects of the occupation are still sensitive issues today.

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### What level of alert should Britain be on?

1. Would you say the men were likely to give the British reliable information?
2. What useful information did the three men provide?
3. What aspects of the German occupation of Jersey would either worry or comfort the British?
4. What level of alert would you put Britain on as a result of studying this evidence?

Record your answer in your table.



## WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: INVASION

### Details of Operation Sealion, the planned German invasion of Britain, September 1940

Catalogue ref: CAB 101/347

Source a

#### (1) General Aim.

"The Supreme Commander has ordered the services to make preparations for a forced landing in England. The aim of this attack

is to eliminate the Mother Country as a base for continuing the war against Germany, and, if it should be necessary, to carry out a complete occupation.

"The order to execute this operation depends on the political situation. Preparations are to be made in such a way that the operation can be carried out from 15th September.

"While continuing with its occupation duties in France and maintaining the security of the other fronts, the Army's task will be to land strong forces in Southern England, defeat the English army, and seize the capital. Other areas of England will be occupied as opportunity permits".

**WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: INVASION**

**Source b**

**[ii] General Plan.**

"(a) The Luftwaffe will destroy the English Air Force and the armament production which supports it, and it will achieve air superiority. The Navy will provide mine-free passages and, supported by the Luftwaffe, will bar the flanks of the crossing-sectors.

"(b) The Army's landing forces will first win local bridgeheads with the specially equipped forward echelons of the [nine] 1st-wave divisions. Immediately afterwards, they will widen these bridgeheads into a connected landing zone, the possession of which will cover the disembarkation of the following troops and ensure early uniform control on the English shore. As soon as sufficient forces are available, an offensive will be launched towards the First Operational Objective, i.e. Thames Estuary - heights south of London - Portsmouth. As the British will make counter attacks against the German troops who have landed first, and as they will resist with every means further German gains in terrain, bitter fighting is to be expected. Command and organisation of troops must be equal to the decisive significance of these initial actions.

**What is this source?**

This source is a summary of the plans of the German armed forces to invade Britain across the English Channel in the early autumn of 1940.

These instructions were taken from German documents that were discovered after the war.

## WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: INVASION

### What's the background to this source?

In May 1940 German forces drove British armies out of France. France surrendered on June 21st 1940. Soon afterwards German forces took over the Channel Islands. Hitler and his generals had clear plans to invade Britain in 1940.

The problem for the Germans was the Royal Navy. British ships would have destroyed their invasion ships. As a result they needed to control the air. As a result the first stage of the invasion was an attack on the Royal Air Force, which became known as the Battle of Britain.

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### It's worth knowing that...

Operation Sealion was a massive operation. British intelligence estimated that the Germans would use around 35 divisions (up to 600 000 men) to invade Britain. There were detailed plans to invade on the south coast in Sussex and possibly in Dorset as well.

Although the invasion did not happen in 1940 the invasion craft and many of the soldiers remained in France until well into 1941. It was not until Hitler invaded the USSR that the idea of an invasion was completely abandoned. Most of the troops in France were then transferred to fight the USSR.

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### What level of alert should Britain be on?

1. What was the main purpose of the German plan?
2. When was the invasion due to take place?
3. What were the Luftwaffe and the German navy supposed to do?
4. What were the main stages of the invasion plan?
5. What level of alert would you put Britain on as a result of studying this evidence?

Record your answer in your table.



**WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: INVASION**

**Information to be broadcast by the BBC if German forces landed in London**

Catalogue ref: INF 1/882

S E C R E T.

INSTRUCTIONS TO BE GIVEN TO THE PUBLIC THROUGH THE

B.B.C. ON "ACTION STATIONS".

This is a message for everyone who lives or works in London or may find himself therein in the near future. By London is meant the Metropolitan Police District or the City of London.

If invasion comes, London itself might be attacked, perhaps quite suddenly, by air-borne troops landing on open spaces in or near London. If this should happen it might be necessary for a short time to stop all vehicles over a wide area in order that the Military Command, after getting some idea of how the attack was likely to develop, might have the roads clear to deal with it. The signal for this traffic stop will be the sirens, which will sound their steady note for five minutes, instead of for one minute as they do for the "All Clear". On this signal all vehicles must stop, except civil defence and public utility vehicles on vitally urgent service. These must be ready to obey whatever orders the police give.

If you hear this signal when you are driving a vehicle you must drive up on to the pavement, or, if there is no pavement, to the edge of the road, and wait until the police tell you what to do. Stay with your car, or as near as you can with safety. Do not immobilize it unless told to do so.

Buses and trams will stop as soon as they get to the nearest collecting point, where they will await orders. Trains will go on running.

Pedestrians and cyclists need not stop, but should go on to their destinations. Passengers by train who have reached their stations, and passengers by bus whose buses have stopped should also go on to their destinations. If they cannot do this, they should ask permission to wait in a house or other building nearby - and in any case they should not wait in crowds at stations or bus stops.

If you are at home or at work, stay there; obey the "Stand firm" orders.

The traffic stop is not likely to last long. As soon as the Military Command have sized up the situation and decided what area they want to keep cleared, traffic will be released everywhere else. The signal will be cancelled by instructions given over the wireless and by the police in person or through loudspeakers.

## WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: INVASION

### What is this source?

This is information to be broadcast over the radio by the BBC in case of invasion. The Ministry of Information had also printed leaflets giving advice on how to cope in such a situation.

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### What's the background to this source?

In May 1940 German forces drove British armies out of France. France surrendered on June 21st 1940. Nazi leader Adolf Hitler expected Britain to ask for peace terms soon after this but to his surprise British Prime Minister Winston Churchill refused. As a result, Hitler ordered his commanders to prepare for an invasion of Britain. The threat of invasion hung over Britain for some time.

Historians are divided about whether a German invasion could ever have succeeded. In the end, it never happened but this source gives some indication that the British government seriously considered that there might be an invasion.

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### It's worth knowing that...

One of the biggest concerns of the government, especially of Prime Minister Winston Churchill, was the threat of paratroopers. These were used for the first time by German forces in 1939 and 1940. In many areas they proved to be extremely effective, especially in the invasion of France in 1940. The document reflects these concerns.

Churchill was so struck by the use of paratroopers in 1940 that he immediately ordered the British Armed Forces to train some. The first training camp was at Ringway Airfield in Cheshire. Today this is Manchester International Airport.

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### What level of alert should Britain be on?

1. List the main concerns of the government in case of invasion.
2. What was the role of the BBC?
3. How concerned the government was about invasion?
4. How well organised was the government?
5. What level of alert would you put Britain on as a result of studying this evidence?

Record your answer in your table.



**WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: INVASION**

**British government plans relating to a possible invasion, March 1941**

Catalogue ref: INF 1/887

Dear Norman Brook,

With reference to your letter of the 14th February to Colonel Hollis on plans for getting the public keyed up to a proper state of preparedness, I have held up the answer to your letter until the Chiefs of Staff have considered a report by the Vice Chiefs on the scale and likelihood of invasion.

2. The Chiefs of Staff consider that the Germans could not mount a full scale invasion without giving a number of indications of their final preparations. Starting from the position at the present moment, they think we shall obtain these indications during a period of about two or three weeks prior to the earliest date at which the expeditions could be launched. It must be emphasised, however, that the fact that all preparations have been made does not necessarily signify that invasion will be launched immediately, or even that it will be launched at all. It might be kept mounted for a considerable period, during which it could start at any time and at a few hours notice. We cannot be sure of getting information of the start of the expeditions.

3. The Chiefs of Staff are anxious that a voluntary flow of evacuation from the coastal areas should begin from about the 1st April, as weather conditions after this are favourable for invasion. They recommend that the public should have been made "invasion conscious" by this date and that they should also be made to realise that the danger period for invasion may well last throughout the summer months.



**WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: INVASION**

OFFICES OF THE WAR CABINET.  
Great George Street, S.W.1.  
5th March, 1941.

COPY  
SECRET

4. Invasion, when and if it comes, may be launched suddenly, once the final preparations have been made. The public must therefore clearly understand that no last minute evacuation will be possible. The motto from 1st April should be "Go now or stay put".

Yours sincerely,  
(Sgd) A.N. NICHOLL

Norman Brook, Esq.,  
Ministry of Home Security,  
Whitehall, S.W.1.

**What is this source?**

This source is a letter from one senior official to another inside the British government in March 1941.

The letter is very useful as it is a response by the War Office to a letter from a different department. Norman Brook originally asked for estimates as to how much warning Britain would have if Germany did invade.

**What's the background to this source?**

In May 1940 German forces drove British armies out of France. France surrendered on June 21st 1940. Nazi leader Adolf Hitler expected Britain to ask for peace terms soon after this but to his surprise British Prime Minister Winston Churchill refused. As a result, Hitler ordered his commanders to prepare for an invasion of Britain. The threat of invasion hung over Britain for some time.

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## WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: INVASION

Historians are divided about whether a German invasion could ever have succeeded. In the end, it never happened but this source gives some indication that the British government seriously considered that there might be an invasion, even as late as March 1941.

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**It's worth knowing that...**

Even if German forces had landed, the government had made detailed plans for resistance. The government liked to create a popular image of the British muddling through, but in reality the war effort was highly organised.

Despite this, the threat of invasion was strong in people's minds. It never really went away until Hitler invaded the USSR in June 1941 and the invasion forces moved to the East.

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**What level of alert should Britain be on?**

1. In terms of warning people about invasion:
2. What was the good news in terms of German preparations?
3. What was the bad news?
4. What did the chiefs-of-staff want people in the invasion areas to do and when?
5. What level of alert would you put Britain on as a result of studying this evidence?

Record your answer in your table.

## WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: INVASION

**German troops in Paris, British Pathe, January 1st 1940**

Catalogue ref: BP010140197710

[ITN/Source](#)

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**What is this source?**

This source is an extract from a newsreel shown to British audiences in 1940.

The newsreel shows German troops moving into Paris, the capital of France. There are shots of tanks and motorbikes moving through the streets. German soldiers are shown climbing up the Eiffel tower.

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**What's the background to this source?**

Britain and France declared war on Germany in 1939. The war went well for Germany at first. By May 1940 German troops had conquered Denmark, Norway, Holland and Belgium. British forces pulled out of France in June 1940. France surrendered on June 21st 1940.

A large number of Free French forces under General de Gaulle refused to accept this and remained in England until the D-Day invasions of 1944.

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**It's worth knowing that...**

There was a long history of bitter rivalry between France and Germany and seeing German troops parading through Paris would have devastated the French.

It would also have been very worrying for the British public to see images like this. However, the British government generally felt it was sensible to let the public see images like this since people knew France had fallen. There was no point censoring a clip like this.

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## WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: INVASION

**What level of alert should Britain be on?**

1. What famous landmarks in Paris can you see in the clip?
2. What clues do we get from this clip about German weapons and tactics?
3. Why would these scenes concern the British government planning Britain's defence?
4. What level of alert would you put Britain on as a result of studying this evidence?

Record your answer in your table you can always change your mind as you study other sources.

## WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: INVASION

### Threat level table

Study the sources and decide how worried you think the British government was at the time of each source. Record your views in the table below. You can use a colour code to indicate the extent of the threat (the US government uses this scale today).



Source	Brief summary	Suggests threat level was ...	Comments
1	Cartoon image - Hitler is confident he will invade but British soldier blows him away	Low	Could be propaganda to reassure British public - they did not know full story.
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			