

Do you agree with his interpretation of Dunkirk? Kate Nicholls

Source A is a painting that was used as a form of propaganda to boost morale in Britain. It was painted in June 1940; at this time the war in Europe was in full swing this means that it is a primary source. The painting shows Dunkirk being evacuated by soldiers, leaving the beach in small boats in order to reach the larger ships that could not get close enough to the beach due to the shallow water; they also made platforms by sinking cars and other large objects to reach as far out as they could manage which is also shown in the source. In this way the source is accurate to the actual situation. In the background there are huge clouds of black smoke as well as aircraft defending the retreating soldiers from overhead. This is also accurate as the soldiers were ordered to destroy anything that might be of use to the German military. This meant everything from burning cars and fuel to shooting horses and wrecking tanks (there would have been a lot of black smoke). The source implies that the British evacuation at Dunkirk was a miraculous rescue. The contemporary painting is by Charles Cundall; a government war artist who was paid to show the successes of Britain in his propaganda paintings. Because this source was painted by Cundall, it means that it is biased and although it is useful as a representation of what happened at Dunkirk, it exaggerates and leaves out important and bad things that happened at Dunkirk.

The way that the source is painted can also show that it was a disaster, as it shows troops with nowhere to go but back to Britain and that many people were dying as shown by the explosions and the few sinking boats in the background. However, he shows that so many soldiers made it out alive and there was very little German interference, it is presumed that this is because Hitler still hoped for an Anglo-German alliance and Cundall captured this in his painting.

At Dunkirk it is estimated that approximately ¼ of French and British soldiers could not be rescued and had to surrender. The source does not show this and the aspects that represent the actual event are hugely exaggerated. For instance; the ships are far too close to the shore, approximately 400,000 soldiers had to be evacuated but even this figure is slightly exaggerated in the painting and the enormous clouds of smoke simply would not have gotten that big. It is exaggerated because the British government saw the evacuation as a huge success and asked Cundall to paint this propaganda piece to emphasize the great accomplishment, therefore the painting could be perceived as biased.

In conclusion, I think that the source is fairly accurate as the content is correct but also biased due to its source and purpose and is unreliable due to over exaggeration. For this reason I agree with Cundall's interpretation of Dunkirk as it is a useful, primary source but should not be considered fact as there are many limitations to this piece.