“Dunkirk Was a Great Deliverance and a Great Disaster”

Operation Dynamo took place between 26 May and 4 June 1940. By this point Hitler and the Nazis had invaded Poland and Britain and France had finally got involved with the war. The Nazis had new equipment and tactics which took the French and British troops by surprise. As well as this The British Expeditionary Force (BEF) had been sent to France but found it difficult to work and communicate with the French and Belgian troops. And if this didn’t already look like a disaster in the making; they were also taken by surprise when the German troops invaded via Belgium instead of through the Maginot Line as they expected. The Maginot line was France’s biggest defense against German attack and consisted of a network of forts along the border between France and Germany.

Germany Knew about the Maginot line and so avoided it. They decided on bypassing it through the Ardennes region of Belgium to make their advance into France. The French never considered it possible that the Nazi tanks could break through the dense forest there with their tanks.

The New German techniques quickly pushed British and French troops back to the coast and compressed them until the only way out was through the shallow port of Dunkirk.

The Dunkirk evacuation or Operation Dynamo has been proven as both a great deliverance and disaster for many reasons.

To Britain, it was a disaster because of the huge loss in equipment, fuel and transport vests but in soldiers. However, it was also a great deliverance due to the amount of soldiers they managed to save and the amazing efforts of the British people.

And yet to France it was a complete disaster when they were caught out with very little defence.

The sources show facts and propaganda that display both the deliverances and disasters of Dunkirk in different lights.

Source A reinforces the idea that the British evacuation at Dunkirk was a great deliverance. The contemporary painting by Charles Cundall; a government war artist who was paid to show the successes of Britain in his propaganda paintings; shows a cloud of black smoke rising from the beach and many thousands of soldiers getting into boats and being rescued safely, sailing into a clear sky with their guns and all getting there quickly without problem. It shows the resourcefulness of the troops, using sunken vehicles to make platforms to walk across to the large ships. 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; such as the abandonment of the large machinery, although he does show the black smoke created by burning everything that could have been of use to the Germans and he had shown that the rescue ships were far further inland than they would have been in reality.

The speech by Anthony Eden, Minister of War, (Source D) also shows that it was a great deliverance. Eden was honest with the public about the “great losses in equipment” but he portrayed the soldiers as “a body of seasoned veterans”, the speech is most likely to be slightly biased as it was designed to