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Dunkirk

As Hitler's forces advanced rapidly through Western Europe after the end of the so-called 'Phoney War', they pushed Allied troops ever closer towards the coast. The British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.), alongside allied troops from France, faced the threat of encirclement and destruction at Dunkirk – a coastal town in northern France, 10 kilometres from the Belgian border. This was very early in World War Two and only weeks after the Wehrmacht had turned its attention to the countries of Western Europe. Consequently, the British government had to act quickly to avoid a debilitating, not to mention humiliating, defeat. This they did with Operation Dynamo – the plan to evacuate Allied troops from the beaches of Dunkirk, and return them to Britain. Almost 340,000 troops were successfully evacuated during the months of May and June 1940, yet there is still much debate about whether this evacuation represented a defeat so early in the war, or a triumph – allowing Britain to 'fight another day'.

Patrick's arguments that Dunkirk was a success	Elliott's arguments that Dunkirk was a disaster
The German military did, in fact, win at Dunkirk but ultimately, the Allies won the war: <i>'Wars are not won by single battles alone'</i> . Britain was not decisively beaten at Dunkirk, which meant that future victories were possible.	At the first major battle between the Wehrmacht and the Allies, the clear military victor is the German Army.
By letting the British Army escape from Dunkirk, Hitler's chance to invade Britain was gone forever. The Luftwaffe could never defeat the RAF over British skies. Moreover, the German Navy could never challenge the might of the British Navy.	Even Winston Churchill declared: <i>"We must be careful not to assign to this deliverance the attributes of victory. Wars are not won by evacuation"</i> .
Despite Dunkirk being a defeat in terms of the losses suffered by the Allies, these were mainly losses of machinery (which could be replaced) and <i>not</i> soldiers (which could not be replaced quite so easily). These soldiers would live to fight another day – and this they did. The rump of the British professional army was salvaged, around which new formations could be developed in the future.	The Allies suffered terrible losses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dunkirk was largely levelled by the Luftwaffe and German onslaught • The RAF lost 177 planes • Luftwaffe destroyed 243 vessels, including 6 destroyers • The BEF lost 50,000 vehicles (tanks, artillery etc.) • France was lost • 1/10th of the soldiers were left behind on the beach • 30,000 French soldiers left behind
The 'Dunkirk Spirit' was mobilised to wonderful effect, galvanising the British population against the onslaught of the Nazis.	The symbolic 'victory' of Dunkirk and the 'Dunkirk Spirit' were merely attempts to put a positive spin on an awful catastrophe.

Don't forget to check out Dr Elliott L. Watson's free website: www.thecourseworkclub.com and follow him at @thelibrarian6 on Twitter.

Don't forget to check out Patrick O'Shaughnessy's free website: www.historyhappy.com and follow him at @historyhappy on Twitter.