

The context: the battle of Britain took place in the summer of 1940. It was believed that Hitler would invade England. To do it, Hitler had to get rid of the RAF. Therefore, the air battle was seen as a decisive one on both sides. A German victory might have left Hitler the winner of WW2. On the contrary, the British victory was Nazi Germany's first defeat. As Hitler was defeated for the very first time, the myth of German invincibility was shattered.

The threat of a German invasion

about the air battle

Advice : do not hesitate to quote the documents. Here, to insist on the keyword "invasion".

The Germans pilots shot down over England were lost, killed or caught.

① Churchill's broadcast speech on 11 September 1940¹.

Whenever the weather is favourable, waves of German bombers, protected by fighters, often three or four hundred at a time, surge over this Island, especially the promontory of Kent, in the hope of attacking military and other objectives by daylight. However, they are met by our fighter squadrons and nearly always broken up, and their losses average three to one in machines and six to one in pilots. This effort of the Germans to secure daylight mastery of the air over England is of course the crux of the whole war. So far it has failed conspicuously. [...]

Kent in in Southeastern England, close to the Strait of Dover, where the English Channel is narrowest.

Churchill insists that the Germans were not winning.

On the other hand, for him to try to invade this country without having secured mastery in the air would be a very hazardous undertaking. Nevertheless, all his preparations for invasion on a great scale are steadily going forward. [...]

Churchill, in that case, insists on invasion. Even though it could scare the people, it could also boost their resolve to fight harder.

We cannot tell when they will try to come; we cannot be sure that in fact they will try at all; but no-one should blind himself to the fact that a heavy full-scale invasion of this Island is being prepared with all the usual German thoroughness and method, and that it may be launched now [...]

Churchill refers to English history: the English

Therefore we must regard the next week or so as a very important period in our history. It ranks with the days when the Spanish Armada was approaching the Channel, and Drake was finishing his game of bowls; or when Nelson stood between us and Napoleon's Grand Army at Boulogne. We have read all about this in the history books; but what is happening now is on a far greater scale and of far more consequence to the life and future of the world and its civilisation than those brave old days.

had repeatedly defeated invaders like the Spanish Armada in 1588 or Napoleon in 1805. English history was glorious.

② A letter written by Maria Blewitt, a WAAF, to her mother on 11 September 1940.

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/how-winston-churchill-helped-maria-blewitt-keep-calm-and-carry-on-during-the-battle-of-britain>

Likewise, Maria shows humour (she is confident that invasion will not happen).

RAF Duxford, Wednesday

Darling Ma,

I got your letter this afternoon. My news is about the same as yours. Nil. I have just been listening to Winston, brilliant, inspiring, but a tiddly bit frightening. He seems quite sure invasion will come within the next week or so. If not, I shall be home on 17th for 48 hours or so. I shall arrive about 11:30 and have to leave on 6 a.m on the morning of 19th. So, unless invasion begins, expect me then. Our bag² the other day was 22, yesterday 19 and today 10 down, 10 badly damaged and 7 more probably down. Nice work.

Must end now. Sorry not more.

Best love,

Maria

Calling Churchill "Winston", she reveals his popularity. She insists on the British victories.

➤ Using the documents and your knowledge, present the context and discuss the influence of Churchill's speeches in the outcome of the Battle of Britain.

¹11 September 1940 was a bleak day for the RAF, which lost more aircraft than the Luftwaffe.

²Bag: here in the sense of killing an animal, a tally. It refers to the German planes shot down.