

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

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Source a

i) 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".

Source b

(i) 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.

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.

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.