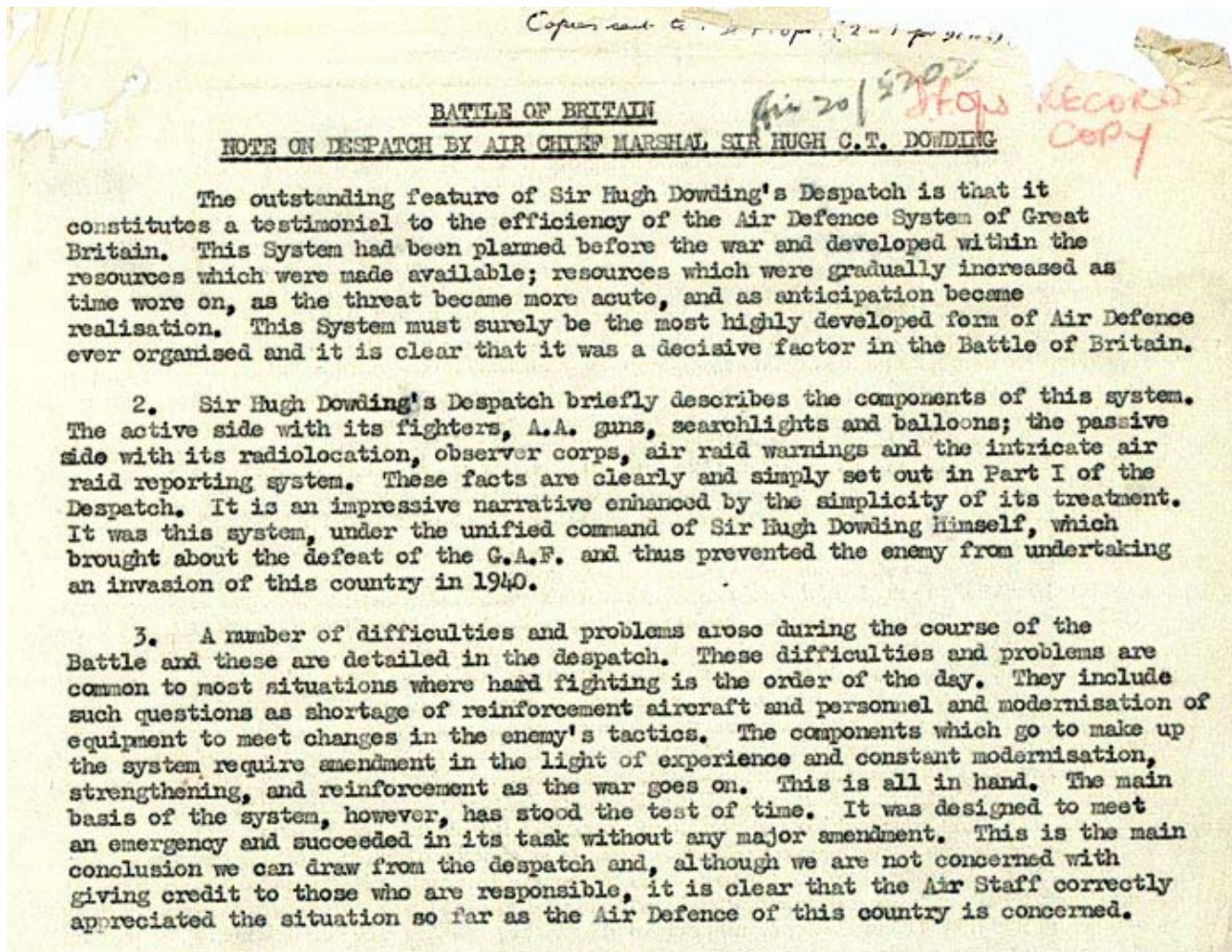


WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: BATTLE OF BRITAIN

An Air Ministry note summarising Sir Hugh Dowding's report on the Battle of Britain, October 1941

Catalogue ref: AIR 20/5202



What is this source?

This Air Ministry note refers to the official report written by Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, who was in charge of Britain's air defences in the Battle of Britain.

Sir Hugh Dowding was the man with the vision that gave Britain its air defence system. He worked very hard to persuade British governments in the 1930s to prepare for air attack.

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What's the background to this source?

By the summer of 1940 Britain and its empire stood alone against Hitler's Germany. The Germans had serious plans to invade Britain. Their problem was crossing the English Channel against the Royal Navy. They thought that they might achieve this if they controlled the air and could attack Royal Navy ships. As a result, the first stage of the German invasion plan, Operation Sealion, was to try and destroy the Royal Air Force.

The first stage of the campaign was to try and destroy airfields and aircraft factories. This proved unsuccessful and so bombing raids then switched to important towns and cities. There is no definite beginning or end to the Battle of Britain but it is generally agreed that it ran from July to September 1940.

It's worth knowing that...

Dowding was a very farsighted individual and a good planner. He understood the importance of good communications as well as good defensive weapons. This meant that the RAF's fighters were in the air waiting for German bombers when they arrived, rather than taking off once a raid had started.

Dowding brought in many innovations, such as bullet-proof windscreens for fighter planes. He was a firm believer in technology such as radar as well.

What conclusions can you draw from this source?

1. This document is very favourable to Dowding. Does the content support other evidence you have seen in this investigation?
2. What were the main elements of Britain's air defence system?
3. Did the air defence system perform well?
4. Look at the plan for your TV documentary.
 - o Do you think you will give some time in the documentary to Dowding and the British system of air defence?
 - o How much of the 30 minutes do you think you will give?

Use this storyboard framework to plan your documentary.