



Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International
Advanced Level in History (WHI03)
Paper 3: Thematic Study with Source
Evaluation
Option 1B: The British Experience of
Warfare, 1803–1945

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There was a small entry for this series for WHI03 1B. Most candidates were able to finish the paper, and the knowledge applied was generally focused on the demands of the questions. WHI03 1B is divided into two sections. Section A comprises a compulsory source-based question and assesses source analysis and evaluation skills (AO2). Section B consists of two essay questions of which the student is expected to answer one of them. The essay questions will assess the knowledge and understanding of the period in breadth (AO1). Questions, in section B, will be set so that they connect two or more of the key topics in the specification and will target a range of concepts which might include cause, consequence, significance, similarity/difference and change/continuity.

The time available for the paper enabled candidates to plan their work and many took advantage of this as evidenced by the plans included. This helped to keep the candidates focused more clearly on the task in hand. Most plans were of a reasonable length and detail so as to outline the overall argument but occasionally they became so lengthy that they constricted the time available to actually write the response. Whilst it would be advisable for candidates to spend a short while getting their thoughts in order before writing their answers this should not be too long. This would be relevant to both sections of the paper.

In general, it was section A that seemed to present the greater challenge to the candidates as they had to consider two primary sources and their use to the historian in investigating an historical issue. There was some evidence that greater familiarity with this type of question was resulting in less very weak, generalised and ill focused answers. Candidates appear to be generally well prepared; however, some difficulties were still encountered in moving beyond surface comprehension of the sources and evaluation which was little more than either stereotypical judgements or, at best, questionable assumptions drawn from the sources. This was particularly the case when dealing with the provenance of the sources where unsupported references to the bias in a source continue but with little reward. It is pleasing to see that comments made in previous Examiner Reports regarding AO2 skills are being taken into account and candidates are becoming more able to draw inferences from the sources and interrogate the evidence with support from relevant contextual knowledge. The question requires candidates to use the sources 'together' and it is good to see that many candidates are aware of this requirement. It can be achieved using a variety of different approaches. However, there are still some candidates who deal with the sources separately making it much more difficult to access the highest levels.

In section B centres do need to be aware that questions can address the same time periods from the specification and that there is no requirement to always cover all key topics in an individual paper. Section B responses generally scored higher marks as there was much greater development and engagement with the stated issues in the questions and better awareness of the conceptual focus. Many responses showed very good knowledge of the periods studied and were able to develop arguments which crossed and linked the key topics being considered.

However, there were still some answers which only dealt with one of the time periods being asked about, making it difficult for these to score highly. Although some essays remained predominantly narrative, they were in a minority. The generic mark scheme clearly indicates the four bullet-points which are the focus for awarding marks and centres should note how these descriptors progress through the levels. Candidates do need to be aware of key dates, as identified in the specification, and ensure that they draw their evidence in responses from the appropriate time period.

Comments on Individual questions.

Question 1.

For question 1 stronger responses showed a clear understanding of both sources, used them together and were able to draw out and support inferences from them which centred on the difficulties faced in attempting to solve the problems related to the health and welfare of troops in the Crimean War. Both sources were full of possibilities to draw inferences and to link these to the utility to the historian in the context of the enquiry, e.g. both referenced the influence of Florence Nightingale and reference a substantial range of difficulties. The best answers produced thoughtful observations concerning the provenance of the sources to help judge how far the historian could make use of them to consider the enquiry. Good contextual knowledge was deployed to discuss the strengths of the evidence and some consideration was given to interpreting the material in the context of the values and concerns of the society from which it was derived, e.g. the understanding that Halls' letter to his superior might have impacted its tone and content, whilst Nightingale's 'confidential' letter may have led to the candid conveyance seen in source 1. The very best answers interrogated the evidence and made clear supported judgements which weighed up the strengths or limitations of the material in relation to the enquiry under consideration.

Weaker responses appeared in a number of different forms. There were those where paraphrasing of the sources dominated and very few, if any, inferences relevant to the stated issue were made. In these types of responses contextual knowledge was often limited and, if evident, used to simply expand, confirm or challenge matters of detail in the sources. On occasions the answers drifted away from the focus on the difficulties faced in attempting to solve the problems relating to the health and welfare of the troop in the Crimean War, which was detrimental to the overall mark. Moreover, many responses focused too much attention on what the sources left out and used this as the basis for their evaluation. Unless candidates can show that omissions are deliberate, this line of argument carries little value. Source material cannot be expected to include everything, so observing that the source doesn't mention a specific point, unless being used for an example of deliberate omission is unlikely to be valid criteria for judgement. Candidates are asked to evaluate what is there rather than what is not. Furthermore, in some responses there was considerable knowledge displayed and focused on the specified enquiry but with limited references to the sources. As this question is targeting AO2 (analysis and evaluation of source material) these kinds of responses cannot score highly.

Question 2

This was the most popular essay question in section B. The question considered whether the key features of the British experience of war, in the years 1803-15 and in the years 1899-1902, were essentially similar. Similarities in areas such as political and military leadership, funding and the global deployment of troops were utilised well. These were countered by differences such as the larger size of forces in 1899 as well as the Second Boer War being more widely reported and opposed. Details were secure with the very best answers offering a wide-range in the evidence they assembled. Most responses acknowledged a wide range of features with the best answers being sustained in their argument, weighing up points in order to reach overall judgements. Weaker responses tended towards either narrative or generalisation. If analysis was present, the support offered tended to be limited in both range and depth. Weaker responses also found it harder to discuss the conceptual focus of similarity/difference. Sometimes responses became a narrative of events across both time periods. These responses struggled to make supported judgements relevant to the question. Occasional responses only engaged with one side of the argument or indeed one time period, and so limited severely their ability to score highly.

Question 3

This question was the least popular in section B. It asked candidates whether technological developments had a significant effect on warfare on the Western Front (1914-18) but had little effect on the type of warfare used against Nazi Germany (1939-45). Strong answers focused on technological developments and were able to offer alternatives as well as successfully discussing both time frames. There was more of a focus agreeing with the impact technological developments brought to both conflicts with a good range of evidence provided. Candidates were clearly knowledgeable on technology in World War One incorporating developments in machine guns, tanks, radio and air power into their answers. In addition, there was a wealth of information applied on codebreaking, radar and aircraft advancements used in World War Two offered. The very best answers were balanced and wide-ranging in the evidence they assembled, focused on the conceptual demands of the question and sustained in their argument. Weaker responses tended towards either narrative or generalisation. If analysis was present, the support offered tended to be limited in both range and depth. Weaker responses also found it more difficult to bring in relevant supporting examples from both time periods and this made it harder to make supported judgements related to the question.

