

Forsvarsstudier 8/1991

Narvik 1940

Five-Nation War in the High North

Karl Rommetveit (ed.)

Contents

FOREWORD

K. Rommetveit 5

INTRODUCTION

O. Riste 9

PART I: THE ROAD TO NORTH NORWAY

Ch. 1.

Aspects of Neutrality:

The Norwegian Experience 15

M. Skodvin

Ch. 2.

France: The Quest for "External

Theatres of Operations" 24

F. Kersaudy

Ch. 3.

Germany and North Norway:

Strategy and Ideology 36

M. Salewski

Ch. 4.

Polish Destiny:

From Westerplatte to Narvik 45

T. Panecki

Ch. 5.

British Plans and Operations 63

T.K. Derry

PART II: THE BATTLE FOR NARVIK

| | |
|--|------------|
| Ch. 6. From Mountain Warfare in Winter Conditions to the Allied Recapture of Narvik | 85 |
| K. Rommetveit | |
| Ch. 7. The Fateful Decisions: Intelligence, Command and Technical Failure | 114 |
| J. Rohwer | |
| Ch. 8. French Participation in the Battle for Narvik | 139 |
| P. Masson | |
| Ch. 9. Polish Forces in the High North ... | 146 |
| M. Borkowski | |
| Ch. 10. The Narvik Campaign 1940: A Summary | 166 |
| O.Kr. Grimnes | |
| Contributors | 172 |
| Maps | 64, 84 |

Editor's Foreword

The cold war is now said to be over. Confrontation has been replaced by cooperation. In another perspective: the dramatic and revolutionary events we have been witnessing in Europe are in a way elements in the closing of an era largely formed by the Second World War. But ethnical strife, re-emerging nationalism and unsolved geographical problems remind us that some problems will simply not go away. The challenges that e.g. Moldavia, the Baltic states, Karelia, the Kuriles, the Balkans and the Soviet Union and a unified Germany represent, mark in a way the rebirth of history, not the end of history.

The Second World War was perceived as a moral and ideological conflict. In its announced war aims, each side committed itself to crusades: Germany and its allies against communism; Japan against colonialism; Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union (after June 1941) against fascism and militarism. In early April 1940, however, the war was still not a world war and still not a total one.

In early April 1940 the War was still two separate Wars: Germany versus the Western Allies in Europe; and Japan waging war against China in East Asia. The Soviet Union was *de facto* a neutral ally of Germany, and the United States on the sideline, but secretly trying to find ways to help the United Kingdom.

In September 1939 Poland had been attacked and occupied by Germany and the Soviet Union, and Finland had to make peace in March 1940 after the Soviet attack on November 30 1939. The war at sea and in the air continued. The victorious Wehrmacht was deploying against France, and the next offensive in Europe was only a question of time ... To the

surprise of most people, the next attack came not in the west, but in the north, against the small neutral countries, Denmark and Norway ...

A considerable amount of research exists on the campaign in Norway, and the Narvik campaign in particular. But as noted by Olav Riste in his introduction, much of that research had naturally centred on national perspectives. Moreover, earlier classified material has been declassified, e.g. intelligence material, and has been used by several participants in a fruitful way. In April and May 1940 for example, German radio intelligence was more successful in deciphering the British naval ciphers than British intelligence was with the German ciphers at that time. The result was that, as noted in Jürgen Rohwer's contribution, 30 to 50 per cent of the intercepted signals were available after short delays.

Some of the essays also speak volumes on the role played "not only by skill and planning and courage, but by sheer good luck," to borrow a phrase from Michael Howard. One could add chance as well. A case in point was the German torpedo failures. The battleship *Warspite* was attacked three times by German submarines. Three cruisers, many destroyers, and transport vessels were also attacked. The result: one transport vessel sunk. "What might have happened", asks Jürgen Rohwer, "if all the torpedoes had worked as expected?"

For practical purposes and as a help to the readers, this collection has been divided into two parts. Part I, *The Road to North Norway*, deals with the events and deliberations that led to the German attack, codenamed *Operation Weserübung*, and the Allied responses.

Part II, called *The Battle for Narvik*, focuses more on the actual military campaign and operations that culminated in the allied recapture of Narvik - Hitler's first setback on land in the war. Bridging the two parts is the essay by T. Kingston Derry, who is the only British contributor. Otherwise each of

the five nations that fought in the campaign is represented by two or more historians.

It must certainly be called rather unique in the history of Norway that such a small country, and Narvik in particular, figured for months among the high priority concerns of several great powers. But in what lies the importance of *Operation Weserübung* in military history today? Several answers may be suggested. First, there is the fact of the use of airdropped troops for the first time despite the fact that this was a vital surprise element in the planned offensive in the West. Another example is the high risk and severe losses which the German navy was prepared to accept in an operation that was "against every rule of naval warfare". Pessimistic admirals talked about more than 50 per cent naval losses. *Operation Weserübung* also stands out as the war's first joint operation of army, navy and air force planned and commanded by the OKW under Hitler's immediate influence. Despite its success, however, it was to remain only an episode in the history of the Wehrmacht. The German armed services soon reverted to operating in separate compartments.

Another aspect worth noting is that the two amphibious landings during the Narvik battle fostered increasing Allied interest in combined operations in terms of amphibious assaults on Axis-held territory in Europe, culminating in Normandy in June 1944.

A particularly difficult problem that these essays could only touch upon was the impact of the Soviet Union on the prelude and perhaps also on the outcome of the Narvik campaign. Its attack on Finland on 30 November 1939 set in motion the chain of events that strongly increased the interest of Germany and the Western Allies in the Nordic countries. It is doubtful whether Germany could have attacked Narvik unless German tankers were ready in a Soviet harbour in the Kola peninsula in advance. Only one of the tankers, the *Jan Willem*, reached Narvik on 8 April. In addition, the perceived danger from the

Soviet Union during the battle prevented the Norwegian authorities from transferring fresh units from East Finnmark to the battle zone. If a front line battalion of infantry had been transferred, this could have made quite a difference to the Allied campaign.

As it was, the Norwegian campaign ended in a clear German victory. In the long term, however, the strategic disadvantages clearly outweighed the advantages: the great losses of the German navy, and their probable impact on the subsequent cancellation of the invasion of the United Kingdom, were an immediate consequence. But even more important was the over-extension caused by the need to commit over 300,000 troops to the defence of Norway against an Allied invasion that never came. Thus Germany's victory in June 1940 carried the seeds of its final downfall five years later.

The essays collected in this volume are the result of an international seminar of historians held in Narvik 26-28 May 1990, organised by the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies. The theme, location, and timing of the seminar were not accidental. Fifty years earlier, on the very days the seminar was in session, Narvik was recaptured by Allied and Norwegian troops, soon to be lost again to the Germans for the second time.

The editor would like to record his gratitude to the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, and in particular its administrative officer Colonel Sundstrøm and its principal secretary, Vigdis Bjørklund, for the smooth arrangement of the seminar. This book has benefitted greatly from the English language expertise of Marion Burdess and Irene Kulblik and the latter's sub-editing, and Francois Rebattet has translated Philippe Masson's essay from French.

Oslo, August 1991
Karl Rommetveit

Introduction

O. Riste

As Dr Derry reminds us in his essay, the battle for Narvik has been called "the most completely researched operation of the war". Can the same be said for the political and strategic prelude to the war? And if so, what was the point of another conference on the subject?

My answer to the first question is: "Yes, maybe". My answer to the second question is rather longer. It is a fact, which we historians still struggle to get around, that historical research is still primarily conducted along national lines. This is partly for linguistic reasons, and partly for practical reasons connected with the accessibility of source material. But elements of national prejudice also play a part, especially when reviewing controversial events close to our own time. A major value of a seminar such as the one held at Narvik lies therefore in bringing together historians from all the nations involved to confront them with different national interpretations of the events, and to seek - not necessarily a complete consensus, but at least a common understanding so that remaining differences of interpretation do not coincide with national borders.

The second reason for holding such a seminar is the importance of making the results of our researches known to the public. It is a fact that many myths still persist in the minds of even the generally well-informed public - myths often cemented by the media. Anyone who followed the Norwegian mass media during the first half of 1990 will have seen how old misconceptions keep returning to the surface at each anniversary of that fateful year 1940. By making the seminar open to the press and the public we were making another and

very determined effort to share with the widest possible audience our views, interpretations, and conclusions.

What, then, is the current state of international historical research concerning what we have called "The Road to North Norway"? When asked the same question fifteen years ago, at a conference in Oslo on "The Great Powers and the Nordic Countries 1939-1940", my own answer was that while we were clearly on the way to a better multi-national understanding of the period, some national prejudices still marred our discussions.¹ The Narvik seminar, I am happy to note, was remarkable for the absence of such national blinkers.

I should like to substantiate this by concentrating my introductory remarks to some of the issues that have been hotly debated in the past - debates that still reverberate in the media during each anniversary. But I will take as my point of departure the title of the first session: "The Road to North Norway". How, and for which reasons or motives, did four foreign states become involved in a war in this distant and to them unknown part of Europe?

There can be no doubt that the longest and most difficult road to North Norway was the one which the forces of Poland in exile had to follow. It was therefore a particular privilege, at the seminar, to have Professor Panecki's survey of the political events that led to the re-constitution of a Polish Government in exile in Paris, and of the decisions of that government to carry on the struggle with forces that had escaped from the home territory as well as forces formed from Poles living abroad. The participation of Polish forces in the effort to evict the German invader from Norway was remarkably uncontroversial among the Polish authorities in exile. The reason, according to Professor Panecki, was simple: Poland's *raison d'état*, and the strategic concepts that followed, demanded the continuation of the war until the final victory over Nazi Germany and the conclusion of a just peace.

Many of the historical controversies of the past have centred on the motives for the German invasion of Norway. For long - indeed for too long - there were historians who tended to portray the German invasion as a defensive move to forestall an impending invasion by the Western powers. It was a particularly refreshing experience during the seminar to hear the distinguished German historian Professor Salewski lay to its final rest the simplistic idea of a "race for Norway" which continued until the Germans on 9 April "got there first". With his unrivalled expertise as a naval historian, Professor Salewski has given us a clear understanding of how the German Naval Command saw the occupation of Norway as necessary in terms of the role they wished to play in Hitler's war - Norway here meaning South Norway up to and including Trondheim. North Norway, according to Salewski, only entered the picture after the outbreak of the Winter War in Finland, as a consequence of Allied plans to land in Narvik and secure the Swedish ore fields. Hence the necessity of occupying the whole of Norway. From then on, as he says in his paper, "the necessity of invading the whole of Norway was stronger than all operational and logistical risks".

On the side of the Western Allies, the already fairly well established picture of confused planning, based on unrealistic assumptions, has been further strengthened by the contributions of Dr Kersaudy and Dr Derry. Although historians are not in the business of apportioning guilt or innocence among the actors, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the French provided most of the driving force behind the schemes for the opening of a front in Scandinavia. As we have seen, those schemes were without exception of "remarkable unreality": they disregarded not only the obstacle of Scandinavian neutrality, but also the operational hazards of the difficult terrain and communications as well as the lack of properly trained forces. Still, those schemes were pursued. And the reason, according to Dr Kersaudy, was that both Daladier and Reynaud "were subjected to the same political and strategic imperatives: It was impossible to continue doing nothing, but

there must be no operations on the frontiers of France". In that perspective the British, increasingly sensitive to the same political imperative, and constrained in the end to accept the French strategic imperative, agreed to mine-laying in Norway as the softest option. This had been Winston Churchill's preferred alternative all along. And it did have the distinct advantage of being practical. Mine-laying also had the added advantage in British eyes of fitting into Britain's preference for war by economic blockade instead of by armed struggle. But its effect on the ore traffic would probably have been negligible.

The hesitations, throughout this wrangle, of the two most powerful figures in the British War Cabinet - Chamberlain and Halifax - cannot but strengthen doubts whether an Allied intervention on land in Norway would have occurred after 8 April without a prior German attack. In fact most students of British decision-making in those days would put it more strongly, remembering what the Secretary of State for War said at the War Cabinet meeting which approved the so-called "Plan R.4" on 5 April: "If the Germans were going to react at all, they would probably do so very shortly after we laid our minefield. We should therefore probably soon know whether the forces to be held in readiness in the United Kingdom could be dispersed."²

One clear and important conclusion from the seminar was the crucial failure of intelligence to comprehend that an invasion of Norway was about to take place. Since both strategic and tactical surprise were essential preconditions for a successful German assault, a correct assessment of what was afoot might have changed the course of history. So why did intelligence fail? There are both long and short answers to that question. The long answer was eloquently presented to the seminar by Dr Derry. I shall have to limit myself to the short one: what it basically comes down to is what one British historian has called "strategic prejudice".³ On the British side, the prejudice consisted of a firm conviction that British naval power made

a large-scale German invasion of Norway impossible. Hit-and-run attacks, or even a temporary seizure of one or two points on the coast of South Norway, were the limits of German capabilities in the area. The British would therefore in any case have what is now called "escalation control". Accordingly, the German naval movements during 5-8 April were interpreted in the light of what the British Admiralty expected might happen, which coincided with what the German Naval Command hoped the British would believe: namely that it was a prelude to a break-out into the Atlantic.

On the Norwegian side this failure of intelligence was of course particularly crucial. For it is at least possible to imagine that better prepared Norwegian defences might have led to failure for the German assault. Even such a realistic judge as Norway's Commander in Chief during the campaign, General Ruge, wrote in June 1940 as follows:

"If we had been reasonably prepared, our starting position during the first days would have been quite different from what it was. The Germans would have been stopped or thrown back into the sea. We would have gained time; the allies would have gained time; and they would have had a Norwegian army to work with instead of the small bands of freedom fighters which was all I could offer them."

So what failed on the Norwegian side? That the Germans should achieve tactical surprise against the Norwegians is no wonder: no one should expect the rudimentary Norwegian apparatus for the collection and analysis of intelligence to comprehend what the flawed but still vastly superior British "secret services" did not understand. As far as strategic surprise was concerned, Norway's perception of the threat was similar to that of the British in its firm belief in the British naval deterrent against a German invasion. But it contained a peculiar twist in the Norwegian fear that serious British infringements of our neutrality might trigger off German

reprisals, with further escalation up the vicious circle towards full Norwegian involvement in the war.

In the more long-term perspective, so clearly brought out by Professor Skodvin, Norway's road to war raises a whole spectrum of internal political disputes connected with Norway's failure to rearm in time, and our inability to make our neutrality credible to or respected by the European great powers. But some of those issues may seem of more remote interest to an international audience. Some of the issues are also disputes that are bound to go on almost regardless of what we as historians have to say about them. Still, the proceedings of the Narvik seminar 1990 should help to bring the debate a major step forward.

Notes

1. See *Scandinavian Journal of History*, Vol. 2, 1977, No. 1-2, for the proceedings of that conference.
2. Public Record Office, London. Cab 65/12, W.M. (40) 82nd Conclusions, Minute 6.
3. Patrick Salmon, *Scandinavia in British Strategy September 1939-April 1945* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, July 1979) p. 263.
4. Translated from O. Riste (ed.), *Otto Ruge: Felittoget* (Oslo 1989) pp. 204-5.

Part I

The Road to North Norway

Chapter 1

Aspects of Neutrality: The Norwegian Experience

M. Skodvin

I propose to discuss a few aspects of *neutrality*, as a general concept and as a practical guideline in Norwegian policy, in the period immediately preceding the German invasion. This must necessarily include a few more general remarks on policies and trends of thought, such as the awareness of possible danger and threat, some basic concepts of strategic thinking in Norway at the time: in short, a brief Norwegian approach to some of the themes that have been prominent in research and in general comment abroad.

But first of all, allow me a reflection of a more general nature on the history of very small nations and how they relate to what is usually called "world history", in Norwegian *verdenshistorie*.

The history of Norway is of course primarily international history in its regional or local version, conditioned by the distinctive characteristics and qualities of country and society, particularly its peculiarities. This is a truism, as long as we are dealing with the history of civilisation in general, such as influences and impulses in religion, art, literature and so forth, or with long-term trends in economic, political and, to a lesser extent, social history.

When it comes to the history of war and warfare, however, Norwegians have in general been fortunate in remaining anonymous, sideline-sitters, watching European wars not even

from the grandstand, but from a small hilltop farther off, the "free hill", *gratishaugen*, that nature almost automatically provides for every Norwegian skijumping hill. When people, in this country, talked about "world war", most of us did not really include Norway in the world where such wars originated and were fought. The events that we are here to commemorate have changed all that. In a matter of months the grand strategy of four major European powers, involved in a European war, converged on Scandinavia, and Norway became their victim. Seen from abroad, this was one minor campaign amongst many, dramatic, technically interesting, and disastrous, especially in its consequences. Seen from here, it was more than chaotic. It inaugurated totally new bearings, and from some points of view, political as well as military, a thorough reevaluation of what had been considered axiomatic, an *Umwertung aller Werte*. Just for once, may we remember that we are told never to say "never"? I submit the contention that never, in the history of events, has the world around us produced such shock waves in the direction of Norway. Where, and how, did they originate? That is where we in this country need to know very much more about the world in general. How can these events be described, as seen from here? This is where, with a few outstanding exceptions, historians around the world have much to learn about Norway. Seen from abroad, the battle for Norway becomes the story of the German, or the British, or the French campaign on Norwegian territory; the land itself appears mostly as a theatre of war, one among so many others. Numerous accounts describe why specific groups wanted to go there, how they went, how they performed, and how they left: in short, Norway is seen as an object in the history of the world. Our gallant Polish allies know more about that than we do.

Here in Narvik you are on the other side of the hill. You are invited to sit here and see everything coming towards you. It should change your perspectives considerably. On a global scale, Robinson and Gallagher did the same thirty years ago, with Africa, placing themselves there to watch the new arrivals

and their consequences, instead of starting once again from London, from Paris, from Berlin, to discover what had always been there. Imagine a map where you are not misled by Mercator, or by the South-North orientation. If you look eastward from London in 1943, you do not see yourself as sitting on an island off the coast, but rather as a crew member on a fairly small boat, looking straight at a shark's jaws. If you imagine a similar *tour d'horizon*, the view from Norway in January 1940 was of aggression or plans for aggression from all sides, even from the arctic North; for you must not forget that when you looked down on Bodø on your way here, you were only about halfway to Kirkenes, near what was then the Finnish border.

On 6 January 1940 Norway received threatening notes from the Soviet Union and from Great Britain, the latter one explaining reasons for the decision to undertake belligerent operations in Norwegian territorial waters. In France, the *Deuxième Bureau* was examining plans for a landing in Petsamo, or for occupation of southern Norwegian ports, and of possible ways of getting to Oslo. Soon Kirkenes would be substituted for Petsamo, and even ports farther west in North Norway would be considered. In Germany, Hitler himself was considering the *Studie Nord*. In another couple of days he was to forward plans for the consideration of the Wehrmacht. While Western Europe was talking of *Sitzkrieg*, Phoney War, *drôle de guerre*, the war was being fought in Finland and on the oceans, in other words on all four sides of Norway, a country considerably bigger than Great Britain with Northern Ireland, but with a population of roughly three million inhabitants only, a population density of nine to a square kilometer, and, in terms of military strength, a lamb among the wolves. How could so vulnerable a nation seek to protect itself against becoming involved in the war?

Neutrality, it has been said, was an unwritten part of the Norwegian constitution. Once upon a time, neutrality had its doctrine, its rules of treatment, and it was confidently expected

to be respected as a protection for those who wanted to stay out of other peoples' wars. The concept was eroded, because the major powers did not respect it when it seemed to work against their own national interests. To what extent could it still, at the outbreak of the Second World War, be expected to offer some kind of protection?

Norwegian neutrality policy came under heavy criticism from all belligerents. I submit that exaggerated criticisms were dictated by the same type of self-interest, to serve as pretexts for intervention, and to cloak real intentions.

Which, then, were the main problems, and how were they handled by Norwegian authorities? Norwegian territorial waters are likely to provide the most representative test cases.

The sea-lanes along the coast of Norway are among the longest inland waterways for international transit. The rights of passage in wartime are codified in the Haag conventions, notably nr. XIII (1907). On a number of occasions, they were violated by Germany, and by the Allies, sometimes openly, and in other cases by deceit, subtlety and guile. The German *U 38* sank ore transports bound for Britain in Norwegian waters, December 1939. The British *Cossack* entered the Jøssingfjord to attack the German *Altmark* in February 1940. Several German ships, including the *Altmark*, tried to pose as merchant ships or as warships, according to what seemed most expedient at the moment, for instance by switching from merchant flag to the *Reichsdienstflagge*. Ships of the British navy were observed entering Norwegian territorial waters without claiming right of passage. In most of these cases, Norwegian authorities were able to proceed according to the rules, and arrive at a satisfactory solution. It may still surprise some of you to learn that on 19 March, in the House of Commons, Prime Minister Chamberlain stated, in a reply to Mr Dalton, that navy and air force had "kept a constant and continuous watch upon these waters in order to see whether in fact German warships were violating them. If we had been

able to establish a single case of the kind, we would not have hesitated ourselves to enter these territorial waters and to attack such a ship, but we have not, up to the present, been able to establish evidence that such violation has taken place, with the one exception, now some months ago, - I am leaving the *Altmark* at the moment - when three vessels were, according to our information, destroyed in territorial waters ... I can honestly say that over a very long period we have been unable to establish any violation by German warships of Norwegian neutral waters which would justify us in going into these waters and, in turn, violating that neutrality."

And now, the *cause célèbre*, the *Altmark*: this famous *Trosschiff* also violated Norwegian neutrality by giving false information when inspected, and by using her radio to communicate with German personnel in Oslo, although it should be added that the message was intercepted, and that the captain offered his excuses.

The British raid into Norwegian waters, however, had nothing to do with this. Its purpose was to liberate the British prisoners of war, since Norway had not done so. Was this a valid justification? In its note of 15 March, the Foreign Office stated: "If a belligerent warship, paying a legitimate visit of not more than 24 hours to a neutral port, has prisoners on board, this does not in itself impose any obligation upon the neutral Government." The *Altmark* did not even do that, she just passed through. The British argument ran as follows: The object of the passage was "to complete with impunity the belligerent operation which began with the capture of the British seamen". Hence, it could not be described as the "simple passage" of the Hague convention. To this, the Norwegian government very sensibly replied that "any warship belonging to a belligerent navy may have been engaged in a battle at one moment or another ... It is difficult to see how it could be admitted that it is compatible with neutrality that a warship pays visits to the ports of neutral states carrying on board prisoners of war, and at the same time consider it

inconsistent with the neutrality that the warship passes through the neutral territorial waters in order to return home ..."

Finally, the crucial question: should the Norwegian escort have opened fire on the *Cossack*? The Norwegian view was, and had been for a long time, that a neutral power is under no obligation to use power against an overwhelmingly superior force. This was emphasised by the Norwegian delegation to the Hague more than 90 years ago, and included in the standing instructions of the Norwegian navy. The Norwegian government was gratified to receive, immediately, the full support of an outstanding American authority on international law, Professor Philip C. Jessup: "Our sympathies for the Allied cause against the Nazis should not blind us to the just rights of a small neutral ... Especially since the famous dispute between England and the United States over the Alabama claims it has been agreed that the neutral's duty is relative and not absolute." In the language of the Hague convention the neutral has a duty to "use the means at its disposal to prevent violations of its neutrality. If the United States with its great navy failed to prevent a hostile act in its territorial waters it might be chargeable with a failure to observe its neutral duties, whereas a similar failure on the part of Nicaragua or Norway might involve no liability". In a layman's language, and more colloquially, the very strong Norwegian protests did not have to be signed with blood spent for no sensible military purpose at all.

It is one of the ironies of history that the *Altmark* incident provided excellent propaganda material for the German invasion. In Germany it was interpreted as final proof that Allied escalation preceding the launching of the Scandinavian expedition had reached a point where German countermeasures could only be interpreted as mere self-defence, and also as a clear sign of Norwegian subservience. In Great Britain and even more in France, the opposite interpretation prevailed: Norwegians were so afraid of Germany that they let the Germans have a free run of their sea-lanes. In other words,

and in plain language: both sides had violated Norwegian neutrality, and both blamed Norway. The facts are that on the German side preparations for an invasion had already reached a stage where further justification was welcome, and the *Leitmotiv* of having to forestall the British dominated in the megaphones of German propaganda. The facts on the British side are that the incident almost led to the cancellation of the Scandinavian expedition, because Norwegian and Swedish acquiescence, a permanent precondition, seemed more remote than ever before. The French government, less sensitive on this count, spoke for an immediate descent on the Norwegian coast. Considered from the present, what does all this prove? It shows that established principles, ratified by all parties involved, were twisted to suit the self-interest of the offenders.

What do we conclude from this, that Norwegian policymakers lived in a dream world, and had not discovered or been introduced to the facts of life in international politics? It has indeed been suggested, and we must ask the historian's usual question: "Is it consistent with the facts?"

The strong man of Norwegian foreign policy was the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Professor Halvdan Koht, himself a historian. He is a much abused and frequently misquoted man. For instance, he never said that if we behave strictly according to the rules we are safe, or anything similar. What he said, was: "If we are to be guided by international law to the letter, in every particular, we are invulnerable to criticism" - he did *not* say to aggression - and he added: "at least, nobody could be justified in complaining about us", and further: "this does not imply any particular confidence that pure law and justice would be respected" ("*tru på at den 'reine retten' ville bli respektert*"). One of his early works was a biography of Bismarck. He was thoroughly conversant with European *Realpolitik*. In fact, I am not convinced that his opinion on that issue should be considered inferior to that of someone like Halifax. He was keenly aware of the dangers that threatened Norway from the West, and he repeatedly warned, in *Storting*

sessions behind closed doors, of similar danger from Germany. These records have been available for many years (since 1981).

Koht, and the Nygaardsvold cabinet, had no naive confidence in a neutrality umbrella. Their main problem was political, in fact a problem of *Realpolitik*. It was obvious that in a worst-case scenario, Norway could never play the role of a second Finland: even the Wehrmacht (350,000 men strong in Norway, more than the French army in peacetime) could not guarantee an efficient defence of the coastline as early as 1941. One of the implicit guarantees of Norwegian defence depended on the balance of power in Europe. The reasoning behind this guarantee was that in wartime, no major power could afford to let its adversary take possession of Norway. Norwegian forces must be able to hold until assistance arrived. In 1940, this held true. In South Norway, however, the assistance proved to be a case of too little and too late. In North Norway, there was time. The battle for North Norway was lost, not in Narvik, but in Flanders. The underlying dilemma, however, was a political one. In case of Allied landings, could Norway accept assistance from Hitler's Germany? It was thought (or decided) not. Was German propaganda justified then in accusing Norway of having abandoned impartial neutrality, and taken the Allied side?

It was axiomatic to the Nygaardsvold cabinet, at an early stage, that if every possibility was lost, if Norway was being dragged into the war, there was no choice. Hitler could not be Norway's ally. It was equally agreed that the Allies - in practice the British - must never be allowed to take this for granted. In this, Norway was successful. One fundamental question is ever present in the hundreds and hundreds of documents now available in the PRO: what will Norway do? By persuasion, by pressure, by innuendo and by open challenges, the British tried to engender at least a fragile hope for some kind of accommodating attitude, without success. To Germany, this problem did not exist. Within the German

leadership, political solutions were never contemplated. Minister Bräuer's repeated suggestions from Oslo, that Germany should rely on Norwegian neutrality and support it by political means, were discarded. The idea of a strategic assault had been adopted as soon as serious planning began. In Hitler's mind there was no alternative.

Was Norwegian neutrality policy based on illusions? Koht's concept was recently described as hopelessly behind its times, "a policy for the nineteen-twenties". It may well be so, in the sense that, in the age of Locarno, at the time when Briand and Stresemann came to Oslo to share the Nobel peace prize, one might hope that it should henceforth be possible for peaceful states to stay out of war, unless they were the victims of direct aggression. By the same criterion, one has to look far beyond the twenties for a similar model of major power strategy - for instance to the slogan of "my country, right or wrong". The differences between them are differences of degree, and they are considerable. The persuasion and pressure recipe of the UK is rather remote from the French war cry of *attaque brusque*, and the diplomatic approaches of the Allies are a far cry from the singleminded German concentration on a strategic assault without alternatives. Nevertheless the lesson of the neutrality period must be that there is no efficient policy capable of keeping a small country out of war, if both belligerent parties decide to descend upon it, leaving no alternative but complete submission; when the local D-day arrives, one has to face the music, as Norway had to do.

Time has already put all of this far behind us. To younger generations it is to a rapidly increasing degree academic. We are not here to revive old quarrels, but to put them on file. This particular campaign and its origins is history, the pen has succeeded the sword. The vision of a less warlike future no longer strains our capacity of belief, as it used to. In this context, a policy of, say 1928, may well turn out to be a workable policy for the nineteen-nineties.

Chapter 2

France: The Quest for "External Theatres of Operations"

F. Kersaudy

In France, during the autumn of 1939, one preoccupation seemed to dominate all others in the debates between the high political and military authorities: that of avoiding a frontal attack against the Siegfried Line. Indeed, Généralissimo Gamelin and Général Georges, two illustrious veterans of the First World War aged 68 and 65 respectively, both refused to initiate offensive operations against German territory. This was of course primarily because they had no material means of doing so; but it was also because they wished to spare their country the disastrous losses of the previous war - and themselves the risk of being blamed in the event of defeat.

However, since for obvious political reasons it was impossible to do nothing at all, the Généralissimo and his staff resorted to a strategy that had worked wonders during the previous war; it had the added advantage of presenting few risks, while requiring only a small expenditure in human and material resources: the blockade of Germany, for which Britain, with its control of the sea, would assume the main responsibility. Of course, within the framework of that blockade, it might become necessary to undertake some military operations in the so-called "External Theatres of Operations". In fact, that was exactly where Norway entered the picture; in London, back in September 1939, Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, was already contemplating a mining operation in Norwegian territorial waters, in order to interrupt Germany's iron ore supplies. Churchill could not bring his Cabinet

colleagues to endorse this plan: on the other hand, it was greatly favoured by the French navy. But, at the Supreme Headquarters of the French armed forces in Vincennes, a somewhat more ambitious - and more meridional - strategy was being contemplated at the time.

The French experts who had examined the German economy had reached precisely the same conclusions as their British colleagues: Scandinavian iron ore was vital to the German economy. Yet they had also discovered two other elements just as important for the German war effort: transportation, especially through the Danube waterway, and oil coming from Rumania and the Caucasus. Now at Général Gamelin's headquarters, the strategists of 1939 - who were in most cases the same as those of 1918 - recalled the brilliant operations that had been conducted during the First World War in the Mediterranean, the Balkans and the Middle East. At the time, they had led by a chain reaction to the capitulation of Germany. The old dream of a decisive operation in the East was therefore extremely lively in the minds of the French planners during the autumn of 1939; they were contemplating the possibility of interrupting Germany's fluvial communications on the Danube, and sending an expeditionary force to Thrace, to Salonica or Istanbul in order to cut Germany's Rumanian oil supplies by opening a second front in the Balkans. (1) It was with these plans in mind that the French supreme Command had sent Général Weygand, aged 72, to assume command of all French forces in the Near East. (2) As for German supplies of Russian oil, the possibility of a naval offensive in the Black Sea, as well as that of bombing and even land operations in the Caucasus, were also being contemplated. (3)

Unfortunately for the French, such ambitious undertakings could only be carried out with British participation - and the British were more than reluctant. At the September session of the Supreme Council, when Prime Minister Daladier acquainted his British counterpart Chamberlain with the plans

that were being devised by the French staffs, Undersecretary of State Cadogan noted that Chamberlain gently threw great buckets of water on all these schemes. (4) As a result, the French were forced, willy-nilly, to fall back on a Scandinavian theatre that was far less familiar to them. As Général de Villelume was later to put it: "The only way to get out of the impasse in which we were stuck was to deprive Germany of its iron ore supplies. That was the crucial issue". (5)

For Daladier, the issue was only crucial in so far as the country's morale was sinking fast, and the members of parliament were growing increasingly restive. His government was already being accused of showing insufficient energy in the prosecution of the war. An operation in Norwegian territorial waters of the kind advocated by Churchill would be ideally suited to shore up his government, while drawing warlike operations safely away from the French front, and saddling the British ally with responsibility for the undertaking. But Norway remained obstinately neutral and, in London at the beginning of October, Churchill himself had failed in his attempt to persuade the British Cabinet to override that neutrality.

The Soviet attack on Finland at the beginning of December was to supply the necessary excuse. On 18 December, the General Secretary of the League of Nations sent all member countries a telegram urging them to supply all possible material and humanitarian aid to Finland. On the very next day, Daladier placed before the Supreme Council a plan for the assistance of Finland. It included the dispatch of a Franco-British expeditionary force that would land at Narvik and then cross Norwegian and Swedish territory in order to reach Finland, thus implementing the League of Nations resolution. On their way to Finland, the troops would admittedly encounter the iron ore mines of Swedish Lappland - a fortunate coincidence, in so far as the Allies had long been seeking a way of interrupting the iron ore traffic bound for Germany. Daladier had indeed been much impressed by Fritz Thyssen's

memorandum, insisting on the crucial importance of that iron ore for Germany. "Now of course", Admiral Auphan later wrote, "it's a bit cynical to say so, but no one really hoped to stop the Soviet army and save Finland. The idea was to use the pretext of such an operation to lay our hands on the Swedish iron ore, and thus deny it to Germany." (6)

But regardless of the pretext, both Norwegians and Swedes simply remained unwilling to let anyone cross their territory, as they reminded the British in several unambiguous diplomatic notes. Thereupon, both Daladier and Admiral Darlan found much attraction in a scheme originating from Finland, that provided for a landing to be carried out directly in Finland, at Petsamo. In spite of the rather forbidding nature of the terrain, of the immense difficulties involved in carrying out a landing at this latitude, of the serious drawbacks of a direct confrontation with the USSR, and ... of the considerable distance separating the north of Finland from the iron ore mines of Swedish Lapland, the French General Staff immediately set to work devising plans for a landing at Petsamo. But that was not all; the French military officials, still hypnotised by the mirage of the orient, were also preparing plans for operations in the Balkans, Turkey and the Caucasus! For another two months, all these plans, involving the north as well as the south of the globe, were to be developed simultaneously, with truly astonishing disregard for the strategic and political realities of the moment.

On 13 January 1940, Admiral Darlan received from Prime Minister Daladier an order to prepare plans for a naval action against Petsamo, Murmansk, Narvik and North Norway, to which was added on 16 January the Swedish port of Luleaa. In other words, Sweden, Norway, Finland and the USSR ... yet three days later, Darlan was also instructed by the Prime Minister to "prepare a preliminary plan for a possible intervention aiming at the destruction of the Russian oil fields", specifically by means of "a direct intervention in the Caucasus". (7) Daladier and Darlan were by no means the only

French officials who had succumbed to the attraction of operations in outlying theatres; Général Weygand, who insisted on "crushing the USSR in Finland" (8), was also willing, provided he received some reinforcements and 200 airplanes, to "storm the Caucasus" and "cut into Russia like a hot knife through butter". (9) Généralissimo Gamelin was also in favour of the Scandinavian expedition, but he also advocated "operations of war in the Balkans and the Caucasus". (10)

All the above may explain why Captain Stehlin, reporting to the General Staff of the French air force at the beginning of February 1940, was told by the Air Chief of Staff, Général Bergeret: "Only by striking at the Soviet Union will we be able to deprive Hitler's Germany of the resources it requires, while at the same time drawing war away from our borders. In Syria and Lebanon, Général Weygand has assumed command of the armed forces that will head for Baku in order to snuff out the production of oil. From there, they will make for the north, and join up with the armies marching from Scandinavia and Finland towards Moscow." (10)

This rather haphazard strategic planning was to be pursued for the whole of February and the better part of March, following - admittedly from a distance - the evolution of the Finno-Soviet conflict. When the latter ended in mid-March, it also brought to an end all plans for a landing in Finland - and Mr Daladier's government as well ... But his successor Paul Reynaud remained beset by the very same political and strategic imperatives: no operations near the French borders, yet at the same time the utter impossibility of doing nothing at all, since that would doom the new government just as it had doomed the previous one. Since the same causes invariably led to the same effects, Paul Reynaud was soon infected by the virus of operations in distant places: the Swedish ore mines, of course, but also the oil wells of the Caucasus, maritime traffic in the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, the Danube ... Palavers, studies and plans of all these possibilities were therefore pursued without interruption, and by the afternoon of

8 April 1940 Paul Reynaud's War Cabinet was still examining ... the military and economic consequences of opening an Eastern Front!

British moderation

It goes without saying that all such plans involving northern Europe or the Orient could be implemented only with British participation. Yet ever since September 1939, as we know, the British had refused to take them seriously, inasmuch as they all implied the very serious risk of a military confrontation with the USSR. This London absolutely refused to contemplate, as Neville Chamberlain discreetly but firmly hinted to his French counterpart during the Supreme Council sessions of 19 December 1939 and 5 February 1940: a landing at Petsamo was ruled out, and exotic Oriental operations were likewise entirely out of the question. But during the session of 5 February Chamberlain did express a willingness to contemplate the possibility of an operation involving the Swedish ore mines, since the French insisted. Daladier naturally took this up with alacrity, so that a common Franco-British plan was at last put in hand; according to that plan, the British were to supply two divisions and two reinforced brigades, and the French a brigade of mountain troops, a regiment of the Foreign Legion and a Polish brigade, for an operation to be launched in the third week of March. French military officials, while pursuing their plans for exotic Eastern forays, seriously set to work implementing the Scandinavian scheme - which the Finno-Soviet armistice abruptly brought to an end on 13 March 1940.

After that, endless talks were resumed between the British and French allies, with the new Premier Paul Reynaud in turn bringing strong pressure to bear on Chamberlain in favour of an offensive operation in any strategic theatre: Norway, Sweden, the Balkans, the Black Sea, the Causasus; against the neutrals, Germany, the Soviet Union, Italy, which one did not

matter provided parliament and public opinion were satisfied that war was being prosecuted vigorously enough ... "The idea", wrote Jacques Mordal, "was simply to do something - even if it was something stupid". (11)

All this was to end in compromise at the Supreme Council session of 28 March. There, Chamberlain once again rejected any idea of an Eastern operation against the Soviets, and carefully refrained from comments on all other operational plans involving the Balkans. However, since it was clearly impossible to do nothing at all, he ended up agreeing to the seemingly most harmless operation: Churchill's plan for mining Norwegian territorial waters in order to stop the ore traffic to Germany. In exchange, the French would agree to launch magnetic mines designed to hamper German navigation in the Rhine (provided the French War Committee concurred). "Mr Chamberlain and the British", wrote Admiral Auphan, "were willing to run far greater risks than ourselves as far as Norway was concerned, provided we agreed to run greater risks concerning the Rhine Front. (...) These two operations were entirely unrelated, and linking them made no sense. Yet that is exactly what was done at the Supreme Council." (12)

As a result of this strange piece of bargaining, it was therefore agreed to set the Norwegian operation in motion between April 4 and 5. But it will be noted that at no time did either Reynaud or Chamberlain mention the possibility of a German reaction, and the necessity of countering it. But in fact, even this soon became irrelevant since, the French War Committee having rejected the scheme for mining the Rhine, the British decided to retaliate by postponing the Norwegian operation. Churchill eventually persuaded them to relent, as a result of which the latter operation was finally scheduled to take place on 8 April.

Preparations

The rather messy developments described above would naturally lead one to expect a certain confusion in the detailed preparations for the expedition. This was indeed the case: on 4 January 1940, Général Gamelin had ordered the constitution of a mixed brigade made up of mountain battalions, that was to operate in Finland under Général Béthouart; it was to land at Petsamo. At the beginning of February a new order arrived: the landing was to take place at Narvik instead. On 16 March, after the Finno-Soviet armistice, the whole expeditionary corps was dissolved, the mountain brigade was sent back to its base in the Jura, all its equipment returned to the quartermaster's stores, and the whole transport fleet disbanded after vehement protests from the Admiralty. But on 28 March, while the politicians had not even considered the possibility of a German reaction to their mining operation in Norwegian waters, the military on both sides of the Channel abruptly took steps to meet just such an eventuality. The French, without even awaiting orders from the government or the Ministry of War, retrieved the February plans, strove to adapt them to the new conditions, and set out to collect at top speed the troops and ships that had been dispersed a fortnight before. On 5 April the mountain brigade, still in the Jura, received orders to prepare for embarkation. Again without awaiting orders from the Ministry of War, Admiral Darlan requisitioned three cargo ships and a passenger liner, the *Ville d'Alger*. That same day, Général Béthouart received his first precise orders in almost a month: "Général Audet instructed me to prepare a forward detachment, just as on 11 March. This could naturally foreshadow a new departure. I asked the quartermasters at Lyon to give me back the equipment, but they refused". The next day, the French secret services having at last discovered the preparations being made in German ports, Général Béthouart received more pressing orders: "We were alerted", he wrote, "I ordered all soldiers to return to base, I again asked the quartermasters to give me back my equipment, to

which they answered: 'Yes, but not tomorrow, since doing this on a Sunday would be too conspicuous'." (13)

Hurdles

In view of all the above, it may seem fortunate that the British had been entrusted with overall responsibility for the expedition and, if need be, were to land their troops first on Norwegian soil. This at least partially explains the rather disconcerting nonchalance shown by Généralissimo Gamelin in this whole affair. But in addition, the French troops about to embark for Norway suffered at the outset from four crippling handicaps. For one thing, there was a conspicuous lack of understanding between their civilian and military chiefs: Paul Reynaud and his Minister of War Daladier had long ceased to be on speaking terms, and the latter carefully refrained from sharing with Reynaud the military information to which he was privy. As for Reynaud, he would have liked to replace Généralissimo Gamelin, whom he deemed incompetent, yet the latter was supported by Daladier, who was threatening to resign if Gamelin were forced to leave; now for compelling reasons of parliamentary arithmetic, Reynaud's government could not do without the support of Daladier's party ... Daladier in turn remonstrated severely with Gamelin, particularly over the fact that troops earmarked for Norway had been issued with only one artillery group. (14) From his headquarters in Vincennes, Gamelin rejected all blame, and in turn accused Daladier of "interfering in the conduct of operations", whereas the government "had no right to be acquainted with the measures contemplated for the expedition, or the forces to be earmarked for it" - no doubt a somewhat restrictive conception of a government's role in wartime ... Besides, Gamelin, while jealously guarding his prerogatives, also appeared to take a somewhat restricted view of his responsibilities in the Scandinavian affair, if Général de Villelume is to be believed. The latter noted that Gamelin "was not interested in the matter. The French contingent was set up

without any central direction. The Third Section at Headquarters having tried to take a hand in it, the Staff at Vincennes hauled it on the carpet". (16) To all this must be added that the Foreign Ministry was bitterly complaining that the military were leaving it in the dark, and that the Admiralty was indignant at receiving no orders from Paris concerning the preparation of troop transports for Norway. Admiral Darlan had personally assumed responsibility for collecting ships in the ports, but he was in turn "increasingly mad at the Généralissimo". (17)

The second handicap was doubtless the fascination that the largely mythical "Eastern Front", located somewhere between the Balkans and the Caucasus, continued to exert on all French military officials, very much including Général Gamelin. In fact, it explains to a large extent their lack of enthusiasm for the Scandinavian expedition. As a result, every single piece of equipment, every means of transportation, each artillery piece had to be literally wrestled from a highly reluctant General-Staff that had earmarked them for more sunny climes - with unexpected consequences at times; thus the six anti-aircraft guns obtained with great pains for the Scandinavian Expedition only came with instructions in Rumanian: they had been earmarked for the Balkans ... (18)

The lack of information concerning the objective constituted the third great handicap. The British had abstained from sharing their own information - of which they had precious little anyway - and the French Foreign Ministry itself apparently refused to share with the military whatever it had gathered. As a result, the military were compelled to base their operational plans on the crumbs of information they could collect from tourist guides. (19) Thus the French troops bound for Narvik had only the most elementary information about that port - which was to prove useless anyway, since the British immediately diverted them to Namsos instead. On the other hand, the artillery group that followed had been issued

maps of Berlin and its suburbs (20) - which was perhaps slightly premature.

To top it all, the embarkation for Norway was to proceed in the most chaotic conditions; equipment was loaded aboard ships as it arrived - i.e. in the greatest disorder - as a result of which precious pieces of equipment and armament were to go astray on loading or during the trip. As for the departure from Brest, it was marked by the most frightening scenes of haste and confusion.

Only during the second half of April, once the troops had landed in Norway, would the consequences of all this become apparent. But by then it was too late, for the French forces - like the British forces in fact - had been gathered, equipped and embarked for a peacetime landing in a neutral country. Yet after 9 April, they were to carry out opposed landings in a country that was almost entirely occupied by the enemy.

Notes

1. P. de Villelume, *Journal d'une défaite*, pp. 99, 103, 113, 115, 119, 121, etc.
2. E. Bonnefous, *Histoire politique de la 3e République*, Paris, PUF, 1967, p. 137.
3. P. de Villelume, *Journal*, *op.cit.*, p. 129.
4. D. Dilks, *The diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, Cassel, London, 1971, p. 218.
5. Commission d'Enquête parlementaire, T.IX, p. 2754.
6. P. Auphan, *La marine française dans la deuxième guerre mondiale*, France Empire, Paris, 1967, p. 78.
7. *Weissbuch* no 6, doc. no 19, 19/1/40.
8. M. Gamelin, *Servir*, T.III, Paris, Plon, 1947, p. 199.
9. H. de Kerillis, *De Gaulle dictateur*, Beauchemin, Montreal, 1945, p. 364.
10. P. Stehlin, *Témoignage pour l'histoire*, Laffont, Paris, 1964, p. 215.
11. J. Mordal, *La Campagne de Norvège*, Self, Paris, 1948, p. 67.
12. P. Auphan, "A propos de l'expédition de Norvège", in: *Écrits*

- de Paris* (no 47, Sept. 48), pp. 43-44.
13. A. Béthouart, *Cinq années d'espérance*, Plon, Paris, 1968, p. 21.
 14. P. de Villelume, *Journal, op.cit.*, p. 214.
 15. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
 16. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
 17. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
 18. R. Loiseau, "La D.C.A. à Narvik", in *Almanach du Combattant*, 1978-1979, p. 56.
 19. P. de Villelume, *Journal, op.cit.*, p. 223.
 20. R. Loiseau, "La D.C.A. à Narvik", *op.cit.*, p. 57.

Chapter 3

Germany and North Norway: Strategy and Ideology

M. Salewski

The German attack on Norway of 9 April 1940 was a typical national-socialist political crime, but it was the result of correct strategic thinking as well. Until the Moscow Peace between Russia and Finland of March 1940, you can speak in truth of that famous "race" between the German and British admiralities, which Churchill as well as Walter Hubatsch (in Germany) and others have described in their early books on the Norwegian campaign. But after 12 March it has obviously been the initiative of Admiral Erich Raeder himself pressing very strongly on Hitler to initiate the assault. Raeder first of all was worried that the lasting danger imposed by the British on Norway would trouble and destroy the whole German naval strategy. This strategy was based on the idea of cutting off the British lines of communications in the Atlantic Ocean. This idea, however, could never have been realised with nearly the whole German fleet concentrated in the southern North Sea as a real "fleet in being", only expecting a British action against Norway, not knowing at all whether and when it would ever come. Raeder believed that it would be better to launch a preemptive strike against Norway than to fall back to a position of "wait and see". This is, in a very compressed form, the real reason of *Weserübung* and anyone who has to think in strategic terms will accept the fact that the *Seekriegsleitung* was just thinking according to strategic needs.

In spring 1939, this pure and proper strategic thinking led the professionals in the German Admiralty to the result that the occupation of Norway would be a brilliant idea, but neverthe-

less nothing less than wishful thinking at the same time. All strategic and logistic studies had led to the result that Norway really would be a good base for German submarines, as well as for destroyers and cruisers, but that the German fleet was far too small and too weak to accomplish a successful naval assault on Norway. In any case it seemed to be better to deal with a strictly neutral Norway. Only thus did there seem to be a realistic chance of obtaining sufficient amounts of iron ore from Sweden via Narvik. If Norway remained neutral, the inner Norwegian shores could then be used by German shipping.

Naturally the brains trust in the *Seekriegsleitung* knew all about "worst-case-thinking". The worst case would be generated by a British assault on Norway. It was very easy to imagine the consequences of British naval bases in Norway: the whole German navy would then be cut off from the high seas. This would have been even worse than in the First World War, when the German fleet had been barred in the German Bight, and when there had not been the slightest chance of breaking through the northern barrier, as the passage via the English Channel had of course been bottled up by British forces.

The German naval records reflect these dilemmas on nearly every page concerning the northern war. Many of the most skilful German naval officers were convinced that it was only a question of some weeks or months until Great Britain would try to realise the geographic advantages of Norway, and indeed we know now that the British Admiralty thought exactly in this direction. It would have been very strange if it had not, and that makes it simple for historians to understand the German and British sea strategy as far as Scandinavia is concerned.

Nevertheless Hitler and the OKW knew very well that the Norwegian neutrality, from the political point of view, was as important as the neutrality of Belgium had been before the

First World War. Everybody remembered very well the political reactions of Great Britain in the first three days of August 1914. It was therefore not certain whether Britain would violate Norwegian or Danish neutrality in order to improve her strategic bases in the North Sea. That was exactly the reason why the Germans too were scrupulous. Only a precise analysis of the pros and cons could have answered the question whether it was better to respect Norwegian neutrality even if it were continuously endangered by the Western Allies or to risk a preventive action against any possible Allied military action in Norway or Norwegian waters.

Certainly we have to ask ourselves what this perception of British strategy really meant. Without any doubt there were first of all the simple professional operational and strategic aspects. But if we remember the Hitlerian policy after the campaign against Poland and if we are willing to take into account the reasons for the "Phoney War" in the west, it seems less than pure speculation to say that Hitler was always hoping to postpone the great war with Britain. Hitler knew as well as any of his advisers that a German assault on Scandinavia would provoke exactly the same consequences as those provoked in 1914 by violating Belgian neutrality. An assault on Norway would have been the point of no return: Hitler was not yet willing to go so far.

But Raeder was! During the formation of the German fleet, between 1935 and 1938 Raeder too hoped that the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 18 June, 1935 would lead to a final alliance between the two "Germanic" countries. Hitler himself had firmly pointed out that he did not wish any war with Italy, Japan or, most of all, with Great Britain. This directive was bluntly accepted by the German naval High Command because everybody knew very well that in the event of another Anglo-German war, things would be no better than in 1914-1918.

German historians do not quite agree on the exact *terminus ad quem* when Hitler and Raeder were convinced that the conflict with England was unavoidable - but earlier or later, who can tell? I imagine that it would have been late autumn of 1937. Up to then no specific strategic planning against Britain took place. In the various war games Britain always played the role of a benevolent neutral. Certainly there had been officers, like Albrecht, who did not believe in this scenario, but the official line of strategy was maintained up to 1938. The political crisis of May 1938 provoked a climax: Raeder was sure now that England would be on the other side; the whole *Z-Plan* was nothing other than the reflection of this new political and strategic conviction.

But it is of great historical interest that this famous plan was no answer at all to the actual British threat. It could have been realised only over a period of about ten years. In the meantime the German navy would be weaker than it ought to be if all resources were focused on the British problem. It was exactly this point which led to the famous Dönitz memorandum of August 1939 being the last word of a long debate in the inner circles of the U-boat Commodores staff. Dönitz was quite right when he pointed out that in the case of war with Britain there was no alternative but to enforce U-boat warfare by building as many U-boats as possible. Raeder was reluctant and Hitler too agreed with the hypertrophies of the "Z-Plan" which could only be realised in a decade. In short: political and strategic options as well as shipbuilding facilities differed enormously. The question is: why?

I think we have to clarify attitudes at different times. In my opinion there is no doubt that neither Hitler nor Raeder wanted to avoid the great war with Britain in the end, partly as a simple result of Nazi ideology and partly traditional naval revisionism: revenge for Scapa Flow! This great war in the Atlantic was anticipated for the years 1945-1950. In the meantime, however, it seemed better not to disturb Anglo-German relations by building submarines and discussing

geopolitical questions such as "Norway" or "Denmark". Gemzell has shown that an awareness of such questions really existed, and he emphatically pointed out that *Weserübung* was anticipated as early as in World War I, or at least in the late twenties, when the ideas of Alfred Wegener were infecting German sea strategy. All this is undoubtedly correct, but nevertheless irrelevant to the main problem: why did Raeder insist on *Weserübung* when he knew that the risks were almost too high - from both the political and strategic point of view?

There are two main reasons. Firstly, Britain went to war with Germany, and Raeder, with a rather good knowledge of British history, was convinced that Britain would never again agree to an "Amiens". On the first day of war with Britain Dönitz told his U-boat commanders that the war would last seven years, and he remembered the policy of Pitt versus Napoleon. Raeder and Dönitz did not agree with Hitler's interpretation of British war-willingness; they were sure that after 3 September nothing but a clear victory or a clear defeat would bring Britain out of the war.

The consequences were obvious! If Britain would fight regardless, it did not matter whether Germany violated the neutrality of any other state in Europe. From the very beginning of war the SKL therefore put into effect the rather vague plans for Norway. You will find the steps to *Weserübung* in the war diaries of the *Seekriegsleitung*; it is not necessary to repeat the well-known facts. Without paying regard to any International Law, *Weserübung* was planned by the German military. International law and problems of neutrality were set aside; it was the decision of the *Führer*.

I believe that it was indeed Hitler, who at first was reluctant because of International Law and the consequences of violating it. Certainly he did not make it a matter of conscience, but he always hoped that England at least would give in and "come", as it was put in the decades before World War I. Therefore he was relieved when he learnt from Schreiber and other sources

that the Allied Forces planned an action to help Finland via Norway. In this case a German campaign against Norway was nothing but a justified reaction; it did not disturb the political hopes concerning Britain. We can see how Hitler, the OKW and Raeder played their parts together in preparing *Weserübung*.

To repeat: *Weserübung* planning since October 1939 was based on the assumption that Britain herself would take the first step. Therefore it seemed unnecessary to weigh the pros and cons: Germany would be under heavy pressure and it would be impossible not to react to an Allied action on the northern stage.

Everything changed when it became clear that the Allied help for Finland might never take place after the Moscow Peace. It does not matter whether the admiralty planned to invade Norway or not after this date - there are some obscure points in the official history after all, and I hope that they will become clear during this conference - the essential fact is, that Raeder and Hitler did not know anything about Allied plans concerning Scandinavia. There was no information at all about this in Germany: I do not know why; it may be that this was another triumph of the British secret service.

The consequences are obvious: Raeder now changed his mind and finally convinced Hitler on 26 March that *Weserübung* had to be executed in the near future, that is to say, exactly before the bright northern midsummer nights would stop all tactical planning. Mid-April was the last opportunity, and Raeder successfully used it.

But *Weserübung* proved not to be a simple realisation of Alfred Wegener's strategy. *Studie Nord* was firmly influenced by another basic idea which was generated by the Allied plans concerning support for Finland. Wegener had stressed the idea of involving only the southern and middle parts of Norway,

but the main problem now concerning the *Seekriegsleitung* was North Norway and the Narvik region.

Previously, North Norway had not been the main problem; in fact it had not been a problem at all. Nobody could imagine that it would be feasible to invade North Norway by sea, and if, contrary to all expectations, it had become necessary, it seemed impossible that the SLOCS (Sea Lanes of Communication, Ed.'s note) between Germany and Narvik ever could be safe. Only a sort of "tip and run" operation would have been a realistic option, and that was not considered sufficiently safe. That is why earlier German naval interest was not extended further north than up to Trondheim.

The overall strategic and political situation from the outbreak of the Winter War then cancelled all these reflections. Now it was obvious that North Norway was the centre of strategic interest for the Allies, because all military and logistic support for Finland had to be based on this part of the Scandinavian peninsula. To give up the invasion of North Norway would have meant the establishing of a new Allied-German front on the northern stage, and the geographic situation made it clear that in this case all advantages would be on the British side. It was therefore evident that only a complete occupation of Norway could avoid such a situation.

It had to be avoided at all costs; the necessity of invading the whole of Norway was stronger than all operational and logistical risks. The SKL knew that *Weserübung Nord* was a very perilous operation, but knew that it had to be achieved. Therefore the whole operational planning concerning North Norway, was designated mandatory. In the SKL as well as in the OKW and in the headquarters of Hitler himself there were hopes that the Norwegians would not fight and that the invasion would be a "peaceful" one, but there were no illusions about the British reaction. It did not seem impossible that the whole British fleet, based on Scapa Flow, would come to grips with the German navy steering north; the danger of

another "Jutland" was imminent. This danger could only be avoided if the whole operation became a complete strategic surprise.

It is not my job to tell the story of the operational and tactical outcome of *Weserübung* on the northern stage. I have only to mention that the whole operation has to be seen as a political ideal, specifically that *Weserübung* belongs to the general German "grand design"; the invasion of Norway was not a strategic necessity for the aggressor but an ideological target. We know that Hitler would never have given independence back to Denmark and Norway; both countries were expected to form parts of the great "Germanic Reich". Norway was intended to become the heart of this "Empire". There is also certain evidence that Hitler dreamed, as early as the spring of 1940, of attacking the Soviet Union in order to realise the general "program", and this being accepted, it became obvious that the whole of Scandinavia together with Finland as a satellite would form the gigantic left flank of the German force which stood by to invade Russia. [What nearly happened during the Winter War: Allied support via North Norway to Finland could then have been turned into Allied support for Russia.] Considering the later PQ and QP convoy-routing in the Arctic Ocean, it is not difficult to imagine the strategic consequences of western bases in North Norway, Narvik included. Only by occupying the whole of Norway would it become possible to fight the Allied convoys in the Polar Sea with aircraft and destroyers. Norway in Allied hands would never have provoked the tragedy of PQ 17 and PQW 18.

Finally another interesting aspect has to be mentioned. It is related to the German-Russian negotiations after the well-known Hitler-Stalin Pact of 23 August 1939. It was the Russians who put very strong pressure on the German naval officials to deliver a whole arsenal of naval equipment to Russia, including, it is well known, a large cruiser. Very soon German naval officers began to think of reciprocal compensation. The idea of support bases in the Arctic was mooted

and found acceptable, the first being Archangelsk, and after that one in the Teriberka Bight, where indeed later *Basis Nord* was installed. Many years ago, I published the nearly unknown story of *Basis Nord*, and there you will find that this base was obviously only the beginning of a very ambitious strategic idea: logistically supported by *Basis Nord*, there were visions of a German northern fleet, at least a strategic base for the home fleet which naturally was directed against the British fleet. *Basis Nord* was perhaps the only real strategic alternative to *Weserübung*, but it could only have worked if the German-Russian relations had remained friendly, because only Russian logistical support, for example by permitting the use of the Arctic Canal, could ensure the continued operation of a German naval base in the Arctic Sea. This episode indicates that even the so-called strategic necessities, which led to the invasion of Norway, were only consequences of the general war plan of the Nazis. It was perhaps the shadow of Russia which darkened the northern stage.

In the end, it was all in vain. In fact, North Norway proved to be an extremely sore point in German thinking. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Norway became one of the greatest problems for Hitler. He was always afraid of a British invasion in Norway and therefore he always stressed the necessity of strengthening the Norwegian bases. Finally, at the beginning of 1943, it was this problem which led to the final clash between Hitler and Raeder, which resulted in Raeder's dismissal. The last great German battleship, the *Tirpitz*, was also destined to be lost in Norway. The almost incredible operational "luck" of 9 April, 1940, was later paid for with a lot of severe inconvenience, trouble and loss of life. Norway had become a millstone around the neck of Nazi Germany.

Chapter 4

Polish Destiny: From Westerplatte to Narvik

T. Panecki

On 1 September 1939 at 04.45 hours the German battleship *Schleswig Holstein* attacked the Polish Military Transit Depot on Westerplatte. For seven days and nights 180 soldiers successfully rebuffed attacks from the sea, land and air, delivered by superior German forces. It was only when they had run short of ammunition, provisions and medicines that the Polish defenders decided to surrender. Westerplatte was called "small Verdun" by the Germans.

Salvos from the German battleship, which had gone to Danzig on a "courtesy visit", announced to the world that the Second World War had started. At the same time German troops launched an attack along the whole 1,600 km of the Polish border. The Luftwaffe bombarded Polish villages and towns. The German aggression was to cause much suffering and disaster in Poland; the nation was faced with the danger of extermination.

When invaded, Poland opposed the aggressor by force of arms, disrupting Hitler's series of "peaceful" invasions. Poland was the first country in Europe to say "no" to the German policy of blackmail and intimidation although the struggle was doomed to defeat from the start due to disproportion of forces. The strategical position of Poland, deeply outflanked from the north and south, made it easy for the Germans to carry out *Fall Weiss*. The plan provided for employment of two thirds of German ground forces, including all their armoured and motorised divisions and all their bombers, against the Polish front. The enemy had at its disposal crushing military superi-

ority. The German army with strong industrial backup was at that time one of the most modern armies in the world. About 1,500,000 men equipped with 2,700 tanks, 2,000 planes and 6,000 guns were reserved by the Third Reich for a direct attack against Poland. The Polish army, amounting to approximately 1,000,000 soldiers not completely mobilised, lacked modern equipment and weapons, though it did not yield to the Wehrmacht in combat training. The country's inferior economic and educational situation, its almost complete lack of industry, and its only slowly developing heavy industry caused all sorts of difficulties in supplying the army with proper technology. The Polish army had under its command only 300 light and medium tanks and 500 reconnaissance whippet tanks. Artillery consisted of 4,000 guns and the air force had only 400 planes, mostly outdated, ready to fight. The navy was equipped with 4 destroyers, 5 submarines, and 6 trawlers.

Already after only a few days of war, there was no doubt that, in spite of stubborn and very often heroic resistance by the Poles, German victory was only a matter of time. Germany was fighting the war against the whole Polish people: the Germans murdered civilians, shot hostages, and made terrorist raids on unprotected cities. From the first hours of the war the capital of Poland, Warsaw, was constantly being razed from the air. Poland became the first target of German fury, the Polish nation was the first to learn and understand what a total war, directed at a whole race with reprieve for none, meant.

Entering into an unequal conflict with Germany on 1 September 1939, Poland expected her Allies, France and Great Britain, to fulfil their obligations. So, when these two powers declared war on the Third Reich, Poland responded with great enthusiasm. Fighting against a much stronger enemy, she now felt that she was no longer alone, with such strong allies. Poles were expecting an offensive in the West any day. The French army and the British air force as well as the Royal Navy raised high hopes. Polish-British military cooperation in the event of war had already begun on 30 August when the

three Polish destroyers *Blyskawica* (*Lightning*), *Burza* (*Thunderstorm*) and *Grom* (*Thunder*) left Gdynia and headed for harbour in the Scottish port of Rosyth. When hostilities broke out they were joined by the submarine *Wilk* (*Wolf*) and a little later by the *Orzel* (*Eagle*), which escaped from the port of Tallinn in Estonia where she had been interned, and after a daring escape, during which she sailed without any navigation instruments, she succeeded in baffling her German pursuers. Three other vessels the *Rys* (*Lynx*), *Sep* (*Vulture*) and *Zbik* (*Wildcat*) entered Swedish ports and were interned there.

According to the Polish-French alliance signed in 1921 and new terms approved in May 1939 during staff talks, the French army was to undertake limited offensive actions three days after mobilisation, and 15 days later a general offensive on the western front was to be launched. In view of the above agreements the Polish Commander in Chief, Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly, conducted rearguard actions while awaiting a decisive blow from his western Allies. The Allies, however, disappointed him. Indeed, on 6 September French units undertook some limited offensive actions but during the meeting of the Supreme Allied Council in Abbeville on 12 September, because Poland's position was regarded as catastrophic, it was agreed to renounce an offensive on the western front. However, Poland was not informed of this decision. At that very moment *la drôle de guerre* (the Phoney War) on the western front began.

The Polish authorities had assumed in their military calculations that the Soviet Union, with whom Poland signed a pact of non-aggression in 1932, would stay neutral. Though the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 23 August 1939 spelled obvious German-Soviet rapprochement and made Poland's position worse, Polish leaders depended on the Soviets not to interfere in a conflict with Germany.

Meanwhile important decisions, which would appear pregnant with consequence for further Polish resistance, were taken in

Moscow. On 17 September at 03.00 hours Molotov's deputy, Wladimir Patiomkin, met the Polish ambassador, Waclaw Grzybowski, and read out his government's memorandum to him. It was submitted that, since the Polish state had been overthrown and the Polish government as well as the country's capital ceased to exist, it had become necessary to take the Ukrainians and Byelorussians under the Soviet protection. In that situation the Soviet government had ordered its forces to cross the Polish-Russian border. The ambassador did not accept the memorandum stressing the fallacy of the asserted facts. Nevertheless, at 04.00 hours the first Russian divisions entered Poland.

In view of the fact that the plans for the war with Germany had not anticipated Russian intervention, Polish border troops did not know how to cope with the unforeseen events. Some of them resisted the invader; others surrendered without fighting. Nobody knew why the Red Army units had appeared on the Polish soil; some people even supposed the Soviets would come to Poland's assistance, though the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact was clearly at variance with this view. It was only after the Russian troops had advanced further that the situation became clear. The Russians were apparently moving forward according to a definite plan which, it was later found, had been based on a secret protocol enclosed with the pact of 23 August.

The information on the Russian memorandum and the Red Army's invasion of Polish territory struck a blow at the Polish government, who, fleeing the country with the diplomatic corps for fear of an attack by German forces, was then approaching the Polish-Rumanian border. Beforehand, the Polish government had made contact with the Rumanian authorities about the transit of Poles through their territory and was granted an unofficial and quick transit of the President and the Cabinet to the port of Constanca on the Black Sea. It has to be admitted that Rumania was in a very difficult situation, pressed on both sides by the Russians and Germans.

Germany was interested in Rumanian oil, while Russia coveted Bessarabia which had belonged to her in the Czar's time. Under the terms of the treaty with Poland signed in 1921 Rumania should have gone to war after 17 September when the Red Army attacked Poland, but in the event that was out of the question. Polish authorities expected only some facilitation for their speedy passage to France. On the evening of 17 September, with Russian troops advancing rapidly, the President, the Cabinet, the Commander in Chief and some Polish units found shelter in Rumania.

Despite the Russian invasion and the significant numerical superiority of the German forces, the fighting in Poland was still going on: Hel'pa, Modlin and Lvov were defending their positions; Warsaw, though brutally bombed by the Luftwaffe, was fighting fiercely; and besieged Polish forces continued to carry out their defensive action. Warsaw capitulated on 28 September and the last Polish troops ceased fighting on 5 October in the Kock area. The Polish-German campaign ended in defeat, but neither the Polish government nor the Supreme Command of the Army surrendered.

Polish losses during the 35 days of fighting with Germany amounted to 70,000 killed and 130,000 wounded. It still remains uncertain how many Polish soldiers died in battles with the Red Army units. 400,000 soldiers were taken prisoner by the Germans and over 200,000 by the Russians. Some 85,000 men were interned in Rumania, Hungary, Lithuania and Latvia.

The September campaign in Poland was the Wehrmacht's most costly victory and, as it temporarily halted German expansion, Poland's allies were given a chance to advance their defence preparation. According to Polish information Germany lost 45,000 killed and wounded in the Polish campaign and at the same time German losses on the western front amounted to 1,600 soldiers. The war effort in Poland considerably lowered the combat capability of the German army: nearly 1,000 tanks

and armoured vehicles, 300 planes and about 11,000 mechanised vehicles were destroyed.

Russian losses were estimated at 737 killed and 1,862 wounded.

On 28 September 1939, on the very day when the Polish troops ceased fighting in Warsaw, the Third Reich and the Soviet Union signed the "Treaty on Borders and Friendship", which formally sanctioned Poland's partition. Ribbentrop and Molotov put their signatures to the treaty in Moscow. A secret protocol to the treaty decided the border line of the Soviet and German interest areas to be on the rivers Bug and San. The Polish state, whose territory in 1939 was 384,000 square kilometres, with 35 million inhabitants, was divided as follows: the Third Reich occupied a territory of 188,000 square kilometres with a population of 22 million, out of which 92,000 square kilometres with 10 million Poles was annexed to the Reich. The remaining area became a German province, an artificial entity under complete German supervision, treated as a land of slaves, whose intelligentsia were persecuted right from the start for any manifestation of their own Polish culture. The Soviet Union occupied 196,000 square kilometres of Polish territory with 13 million inhabitants, 5 millions of whom were Poles. As a consequence of the NKWD controlled so-called referendum, the territory was formally annexed into the USSR in early November. Contrary to Hitler's original intention which was to consider the possibility of forming a truncated Polish state, Stalin vehemently opposed such a project finding the idea of an independent Polish state unacceptable. On 31 October, at the meeting of the Supreme Council of the USSR, Molotov repeated the Soviet stance on Poland and confirmed the fate of the annexed land, saying: "One swift attack, first by Germany, then by the Red Army, and nothing remained of the grotesque Versailles creation".

The occupied lands became the scene of German terror and extermination as well as of Stalin's repressions which resulted

in about 2 million Polish citizens being deported deep into Russian territory. But the nation's strong will to fight that emerged on 1 September could not have been crushed by all the Gestapo and NKWD atrocities. The invaders' policies not only did not stop Poland's aspirations to independence; on the contrary, they intensified them. Any attempts to collaborate with the enemy were met with ruthless public condemnation. Hitler's Germany failed to organise any Polish infrastructure that would fight with or beside the fascist bloc. Within occupied Poland there never was collaboration.

Polish society responded to terrorism and repression with sabotage, defensive activity and other forms of resistance. Organisations for civilian and military cooperation were conceived, expanded widely and became specialised. Even during the defence of Warsaw, as early as 27 September, there was founded a military organisation in the capital called the Service for Poland's Victory, whose aims were underground activities against the Germans.

The state's authorities, established in France, were the soul and mouthpiece of the Polish nation's aspirations to independence. Since the legal President of Poland, his government and the Commander in Chief were interned in Rumania, they were no longer able to perform their constitutional duties, but the war was being continued in spite of Poland's defeat. In that situation, for the sake of continuity of the state of Poland, a new political power represented by General Wladyslaw Sikorski appeared, ready for a constitutional takeover. General W. Sikorski - Prime Minister, the Chief of General Staff and the Minister of Military Affairs in the prewar period - was one of Josef Pilsudski's opponents. In September 1939 Sikorski, without being assigned to a particular service, left Poland for Rumania from whence, accompanied by the French ambassador to Poland, Leon Noël, he went to Paris and contacted the French authorities there. As a fervent advocate of the alliance with France, General Sikorski was instantly accepted in French political circles as a candidate for the position of Prime

Minister of the Polish Government in Exile. Wladyslaw Raczkiwicz, who charged General Sikorski on 30 September with the task of forming a new government, was nominated for the Presidency of the Polish Republic on 27 September. Under the Act of 7 November the President appointed General Sikorski the Commander in Chief of the Polish armed forces as well.

In December 1939 the National Council, a substitute Polish parliament in exile, was appointed. It represented the main Polish political parties and minority groups.

The existence of the Polish Government in Exile was of great importance. Firstly, their activities were a vivid testimony to the Polish presence, which denied Hitler's and Stalin's intention of obliterating Poland from a political map of Europe. Secondly, the Polish government in France symbolised a continued Polish participation in the armed effort of the anti-Hitlerite coalition. Thirdly, all the Allied and most of the neutral countries recognised the government, which was then a significant factor in determining the legal and international status of Poland. Finally, General Sikorski's government was fully supported by the people of the occupied country, for whom Sikorski's policy meant hope for prompt liberation. Paris, where the French authorities put the Hotel Regina at the government's disposal, became the government's temporary headquarters, and this was changed to Angers on 22 November.

One of the government's main worries, and especially one of Prime Minister and Commander in Chief, General W. Sikorski's was the question of regular units of the Polish army in exile, that would continue the war with Germany on the side of France and Great Britain, on the understanding that Poland would regain her independence.

Strategic concepts of the commander in chief of the Polish army in France were based on the declaration of 13 December

1939 in which the government considered its main task to be a maximum "participation of Poland and her army in the war" to free the country from "the hostile occupation, and to guarantee Poland both direct and broad access to the sea as well as borders providing lasting security". The President, Prime Minister and Commander in Chief, and also other prominent officials in exile, spoke of the participation of Poland and her army in the war in all their declarations and public statements. Thus the Polish army recreated abroad "was to be an instrument for achieving the planned political aims". Consequently great care was taken of the army and the government in France was called the Government of Unity and National Defence. In order to pursue these objectives General Sikorski held in his own hands most of the important executive, civil and military functions.

The largest part of the government's budget was spent on army expenditure.

Poland's *raison d'être*, and the Commander in Chief's strategic concepts resulting from it, required continued fighting until final victory over Germany and a just peace were won. As for the Soviet Union, the Polish Government in Exile was of the opinion that, although Poland and the USSR were not at war from the formal point of view, Stalin's brutal policy in the eastern areas of the Polish Republic made the country Poland's second enemy.

Poles were right to expect that sooner or later western powers would clash with the Third Reich. The Polish armed forces could not be absent from that decisive encounter and fighting arm in arm with the Allied Armies would be their contribution towards Germany's defeat. The Polish military leaders considered the western front to be the main theatre of military operations where most land, air and naval forces should be concentrated. Thus the Polish army was expected to return to Poland from the West. Troops formed in Syria were to approach the country as an auxiliary force from the Middle

East, through the Balkans and the Carpathian Mountains.

In order to recreate the Polish armed forces in France, Poland needed to renew her political and military alliances with the western powers. The army was to be organised in France and the forces in the Middle East countries subordinated to it, as well as those in Great Britain, where some Polish warships and the whole Polish merchant fleet had found harbour, and where it was hoped that the Polish air force would be recreated with the help of the RAF.

The Polish Government in Exile was an ally of the western countries because it functioned under international treaties signed by Poland before and after 1939. The alliance with France signed in 1921, the guarantee treaty of 1925 and the treaty of 4 September 1939 constituted the basis of its policy. The alliance with France was strengthened by the one with Great Britain concluded on 25 August 1939. The bilateral alliance with Rumania was the only one which ceased to exist, because on 6 September 1939 Rumania declared herself a neutral country.

The military agreement of 9 September 1939 appeared to be a further step to strengthen the links between Poland and France. It concerned a Polish division to be formed in France, and was signed in Paris by the French Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence, Edward Daladier, and Poland's ambassador Julius Lukasiewicz. As early as 12 September the Poles were offered by the French authorities a military camp in Coëtquidan in Brittany with whatever facilities were necessary for a new division. The camp was known to Poles since the First World War as General J. Haller had formed units of the Polish army there, then.

However, more extensive plans for Polish army organisation required new formal documents, and so, after negotiations on 4 January 1940 General W. Sikorski signed a new military agreement with Prime Minister Edward Daladier. The agree-

ment said that the Polish army would be under the orders of the government of the Polish Republic but during combat operations it would come under the French Commander in Chief's control. It stated precisely the terms of recruitment for the army from among the half million Poles living in France and clarified the question of supplies, armament, training and financing. All expenditure for the Polish units in France was to be paid by the French Ministry of Finance as a loan to Poland.

The Polish side prepared to form two corps: one, organised in France and composed of the 1st and 2nd divisions which would be ready for combat on 1 April 1940; the other, composed of three infantry divisions organised in Canada and one in France. The 2nd Corps was expected to be ready for departure on 1 August 1940. There were also plans to organise one large armoured unit in France but its combat readiness would depend on evacuating Polish soldiers of General Maczek's 10th motorised cavalry brigade interned in Hungary and on training new specialists in France.

On the same day an air agreement was signed with France. The Polish air force was to follow the French organisational structure and consist of two fighter wings, two support squadrons and some regular units.

Since the Polish-British agreement of 25 August 1939 was mainly of a political nature, on 18 November there was another agreement signed concerning the navy and defining the status of Polish warships within the British fleet.

The question of the air force formation became more complicated because General Sikorski planned to organise the Polish air force in France, but there was strong opposition to the idea among senior Polish air force officers who argued that it would be better to base it with the Royal Air Force. A compromise was found at the French-Polish-British conference held in the French air force's Staff Headquarters during which

they decided that half of the Polish air personnel evacuated to France was to be sent to the British Isles. An adequate Polish-British agreement was not signed until 11 June. That provided for two Polish bomber wings to be formed, Polish airmen to be formal volunteers under the protection of the Royal Air Force King's Regulations, officer promotions to be accepted by the Polish Commander in Chief, and Polish airmen to take both English and Polish oaths. It was agreed that temporarily the British would cover all expenditure as a loan to Poland.

At the same time Polish soldiers, who had escaped abroad after the September campaign, were being evacuated to France. This source of recruitment, compared with the Polish colony, was a most valuable one; soldiers were well trained with some front-line combat experience. Most of them, about 40,000, including 5,500 officers, a modern motorised cavalry brigade, almost complete, as well as valuable air personnel of about 900 men had been interned in Hungary. About 30,000 men together with High Command and staff officers had found shelter in Rumania. Almost one third of them were air personnel (9,276 men, including 1,491 officers). 13,800 Polish soldiers had been in Lithuania and 1,315 in Latvia. There were altogether about 85,000 men, who, after evacuation to France and Great Britain, could immediately enter into regiments, wings and batteries.

The evacuation was complicated by the fact that Polish soldiers were kept interned and in order to flee the camps they had to be provided with civilian clothes, documents and money. Polish diplomatic agencies as well as French and British embassies were involved in the process. Soldiers came to France by rail through Jugoslavia and Italy, or by sea to Marseilles, from the Middle East, Sweden and Norway. It has been estimated that by 15 June 1940 about 22,000 people were evacuated from Rumania, 21,000 from Hungary but only 500 men from the Baltic countries (because of pressure from the Russians).

Poles who had settled in different countries all over the world were a large reservoir of potential volunteers for the Polish army in France. The problem seemed simplest in France where local authorities agreed to recruitment being carried out among the Polish colony numbering almost half a million people. Altogether, 44,000 Poles from France reinforced the ranks of the Polish army. A very small Polish colony in Britain gave 900 soldiers. Unfortunately, recruitment from among an estimated 5 million Polish emigrants in the United States ended in failure. Service in the Polish army appeared to Americans of Polish origin to be no better than joining the US army.

The last and largest human reservoir was Occupied Poland, where the underground forces were already organised; the underground, however, did not seem as attractive to many young Poles as open engagement in Polish uniforms, so they chose to go to France.

Taking into account the above sources of possible recruitment it seemed reasonable to expect to organise in France an army of about 185,000 soldiers. Unfortunately the optimistic calculations did not prove a realistic gauge and consequently the Polish army in France numbered only 82,000 soldiers by 1940.

It was also found necessary to alter the existing plans as regards the Soviet attack against Finland on 30 November. The League of Nations, by excluding the Soviet Union from its ranks on 14 November, was appealing to world opinion with an urgent request for help for the invaded Finns. At that moment a project was launched to dispatch expeditionary corps of French and British contingents to the Finno-Russian front. The Polish government in France supported the initiative and embarked quickly upon preparation of the Polish Podhale (Highland) Brigade which numbered about 5,000 men and was commanded by Brigadier-General Z. Bohusz-Szyszko.

The whole expeditionary corps was intended to number 50,000 soldiers. If the corps had been sent and entered into combat with the Red Army, a completely new situation would have been created: the Western Allies, already at war with Germany, would have found themselves in open conflict with the Soviet Union too, a situation which they had been trying to avoid since September 1939.

As the hostilities with Finland ceased on 12 March 1940, the corps was not dispatched and the Polish Highland Brigade remained in France.

By May 1940 the following units of the Polish army were organised as well as the Polish Highland Brigade:

1. 1st Grenadier Division commanded by Gen. Bronislaw Duch (16,000 men strong)
2. 2nd Infantry (Riflemen) Division commanded by Gen. Bronislaw Prugar-Ketling (16,000 men strong)
3. 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade commanded by Gen. Stanislaw Maczek (about 5,000 men strong - 2,000 of them ready to fight)
4. 3rd Infantry Division commanded by Col. Tadeusz Zieleniewski (about 3,000 men strong and under organisation, without weapons and uniforms)
5. 4th Infantry Division commanded by Gen. Rudolf Dreszer (about 3,000 men strong during the initial stage of organisation).

The Polish air component in France, with the personnel from Hungary and Rumania as its core, numbered 6,863 men and officers in May 1940 and the air force consisted of 4 fighter squadrons and 5 fighter flights under Gen. Josef Zajac's command. The observation and bomber aviation had not been trained yet and was not ready for combat. Altogether, the Poles had 86 planes at their disposal.

Outside France, in Syria, there was only one Polish unit, the Independent Carpathian Riflemen Brigade commanded by Colonel Stanislaw Kopanski. By May 1940 its organisation had not been completed with the eventual military personnel of about 4,000 soldiers.

The only part of the Polish armed forces which was taking part in combat operations from its first moments in exile was the Polish navy consisting of three destroyers (the *Lightning*, *Storm* and *Thunder*) as well as two submarines (the *Eagle* and *Wolf*). Already by 6 September the Polish destroyers had taken part in their first combat patrol. Also the submarines were carrying out some patrol missions. On every Polish ship there was one British liaison officer with whom cipher and radio-telegraph operators and signalmen worked, who were operationally subject to British command but kept their Polish uniforms, ensign flags and regulations.

Such was the picture of the Polish armed forces reconstituted in France and Britain after the lost September campaign of 1939. The Polish army, subject to Polish political authorities in exile and commanded by General W. Sikorski, Commander in Chief, was reminding the world of Poland's existence and giving evidence of the fact that the Polish nation had never accepted the loss of independence and the annexation of its motherland by the Third Reich and Stalin's Russia. The Polish army was a significant force in the fight for independence. The very thought sounded resonantly in General Sikorski's address to the Polish Highland Brigade during the passing out parade on 10 April 1940: "Using your bayonets you will not only release the nation from the yokes of cruel bondage; you will not only enlarge your country's territory and secure lasting peace for it; you will also give to your countrymen a concept of a new Poland".

The first Polish unit, reconstituted abroad, to fight against Germany was the Polish Highland Brigade. It was called up on 9 February 1940 as an emergency measure on account of -

as it has already been mentioned - its planned participation in the expeditionary corps' activities on the Finnish front. The brigade was composed of battalions detached from the 1st and 2nd divisions. Its name referred to the traditional alpine regiments of the Polish prewar army, and when the brigade's future battleground is taken account of the aspect of mountain fighting ability naturally assumes importance. As for its organisational structure it reflected that of a French alpine rifleman's brigade (Chasseurs Alpins) and consisted of - apart from headquarters, command and transport units - two demi-brigades of two rifleman battalions each. Attached to the brigade there was a 13-man French liaison mission with Colonel Molle in command.

The brigade's formation area was initially the region of Plelan-le-Grand, later the Coëtquidan camp and from 20 February, Malestroit, Rochefort-en-Terre, and Ploëmel. By March the plans to use the brigade in Finland no longer had to be considered and they decided to direct the brigade to the front-line region of Grenoble.

When the Germans invaded Denmark and Norway the Allied countries again took into consideration the concept of the expeditionary corps being used in Scandinavia.

The Polish brigade was to be included. Combat training was greatly intensified with this in mind and on 14 April a movement alert was sounded, after which on 15-16 April the units of the brigade were transported (by road and rail) to the region around Brest, where soldiers boarded troopships. On 24 April the convoy with the Polish brigade on board, supported by an auxiliary cruiser the *Colombie* and some destroyers, left Brest and headed for Norway.

The brigade's inner circle were career officers of the Polish prewar army. They all (except one person) were graduates of military colleges, well experienced in staff and command work. Brigadier-General Zygmunt Bohusz-Szyszko (aged 47),

the commander of the brigade, had been commanding an infantry division in the September campaign of 1939.

A significant proportion of the group were Polish emigrants in France, 70 per cent of the privates were recruited from the same source. The average age of the soldiers was between 25 and 30 years, which seemed to be good for a unit whose assignment was to fight in such peculiar conditions.

It was a very long and difficult road that Poles had to travel from September 1939 to April 1940. The lost campaign did not crush their morale. In the course of six months they were again ready to continue the struggle against Germany; this time far from Poland, in the Norwegian fjords, Poles fought nonstop for 2,078 days until the very end of the Second World War in Europe.

Bibliography

- Y. Beauvois, *Les relations franco-polonaises pendant la "drôle de guerre"*, Paris 1989.
- F. Bédarida, *La stratégie secrète de la drôle de guerre*, Paris 1979.
- W. Bieganski, *Wojsko Polskie we Francji 1939-1940*, Warsaw 1967.
- W. Bieganski, *Zaczelo sie w Coëtquidan. Z dziejow polskich jednostek regularnych we Francji*, Warszawa 1977.
- A. Bregman, *Najlepszy sojusznik Hitlera*, London 1980.
- J. Ciałowicz, *Polsko-francuski sojusz wojskowy 1921-1939*, Warsaw 1970.
- J. Fuller, *Druga wojna swiatowa 1939-1945*, Warsaw 1959.
- M. Gamelin, *Servir* Vol. III, Paris 1947.
- J. Garlinski, *Polska w drugiej wojnie swiatowej*, London 1982.
- A. Jaskowski, *Kampania norweska*, Glasgow 1944.
- T. Jurga, *Obrona Polski 1939*, Warsaw 1990.
- K. Liszewski, *Wojna polsko-sowiecka 1939*, London 1986.
- F. Majorkiewicz, *Narwik. Dzieje Samodzielnej Brygady Strzelcow Podhalanskich*, Warsaw 1957.
- H. Michel, *La drôle de guerre*, Paris 1971.
- W. Pobog-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski 1864-1945* Vol. III Part 2, London 1986.

Polskie Siły Zbrojne w Drugiej Wojnie Światowej, Vol. I, II, London 1951-1959.

K. Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkriegs*, Bonn 1954.

Walki formacji polskich na Zachodzie 1939-1945, ed. W. Bieganski, Warsaw 1981.

Wojna obronna Polski 1939, ed. E. Kozłowski, Warsaw 1979.

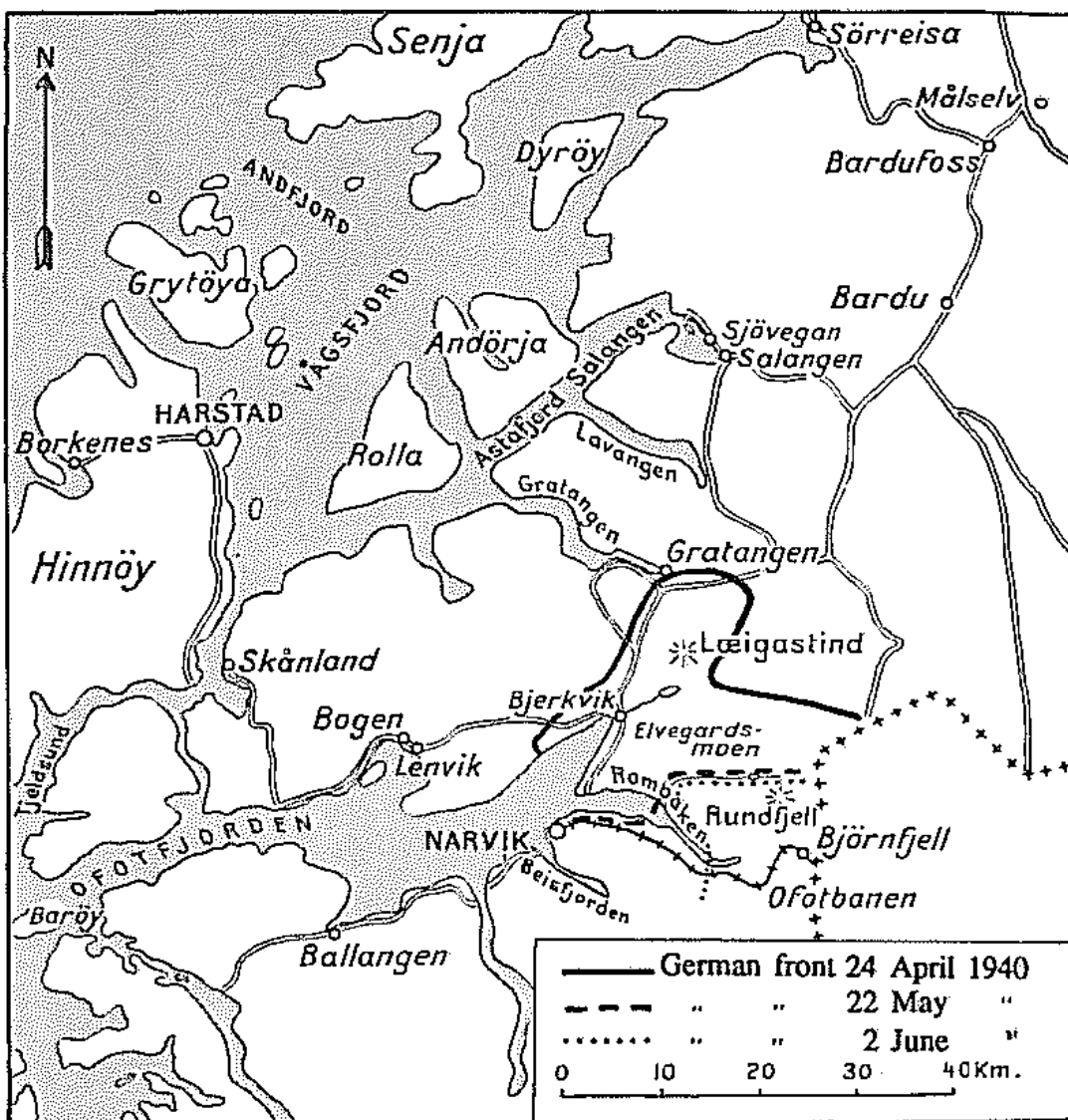
Chapter 5

British Plans and Operations

T.K. Derry

Some aspects of this tangle of long-past events call up vivid memories for one who was at the time a very amateurish editor of the news bulletins in Norwegian, which were being hurriedly improvised by the BBC. Moreover, it was only nine years after these events that I visited Narvik as an official historian of the British part in the campaign, and here as elsewhere the Norwegian authorities gave me every facility for my studies. I was privileged to survey the lower slopes of Taraldsvikfjell in the company of Major Hyldmo, who had led the Norwegian battalion in the victorious landing operation. On the Seventeenth of May I was present when the simultaneous advance by the Polish troops on the far side of the Beisfjord (then still unbridged) was commemorated by visiting Communist generals at a ceremony in the old churchyard. I stood in the window of a lonely farmhouse, while its owners described the scene when the survivors of HMS *Hardy* struggled ashore, carrying their dying captain. I saw the hulks of German destroyers, beached in the innermost recesses of the Rombaksfjord.

Yet perhaps the most important of the many impressions received was not that of the fighting itself, but that of the conditions men had fought in. All the way from Tromsø the snow lay deep in that mid-May of 1949, so that even a military driver had difficulty in negotiating the way down to Narvik from Bardufoss through the mountains where the Norwegian brigade had fought with such determination nine years before.



The Narvik Campaign

In 1958 the eminent German historian, Walther Hubatsch, assured a select audience at London University (including Field-Marshal Auchinleck) that the scholars of four nations had "made it clear from their works that the achievements of the German units employed have been remarkable, and they have been generously recognized by their former opponents". (1) Such recognition has been accorded most readily to General Dietl's long holding-operation around Narvik. The part played by Norwegian and Allied forces of all arms has likewise received more attention than the dimensions of the campaign might seem to warrant, so that by 1974 a leading American naval historian could describe it as "perhaps the most completely researched operation of the war". (2) Distinguished additions to this literature have also been made for the present jubilee. (3) Nevertheless, as a long silent and obviously outmoded practitioner of this little branch of historiography, I should like tentatively to suggest certain respects in which the struggle for Narvik is not even now to be regarded entirely as a *chose jugée*.

In the first place, "The Road to North Norway" is a topic which still lends itself to conjecture, notwithstanding the signposts for the route set up by national historians. In September 1939 Churchill was already eager to lay mines in the Leads and Daladier desirous of "successful naval action in the Baltic", (4) which would undoubtedly have had repercussions farther north; in October Grand-Admiral Raeder expressed to the Führer his hopes of "acquiring naval bases on the Norwegian coast with the help of Russian pressure", (5) while the Swedish banker Jacob Wallenberg was advising his government to tread warily in the matter of iron ore exports because Germany had "a crushing military superiority over the Western Powers". (6) Then came the Winter War, with the spectacular initial victories of the Finns suggesting to excitable Conservative minds what the commander-designate for a proposed British naval incursion into Baltic waters called "a wonderful chance - and perhaps the last - of mobilising the anti-Bolshevik forces of the world". (7) Though Chamberlain

and Churchill remained reluctant to engage in open hostilities against Soviet Russia, both civil and military leaders in France were not: Daladier even wrote personally to the aged and notoriously pro-German King Gustav V of Sweden, outlining a general plan of attack, both in the north and at Baku. (8)

Because the Finnish War came to an end before the Allied force (which was to occupy the iron mines and their railway on its way to rescue the Finns) had actually set sail, we can only conjecture the degree of resistance which would have been encountered all across Sweden and at the starting-point in Norway. (9) We may conclude from what was to happen in April that, in March too, the Germans would have coordinated their forces to good effect. As for the Russians, later events suggest that their reaction would have been very formidable, so that either the map of Europe or at least the pattern of alliances would have been transformed. Only the eventual opening of the Kremlin archives may be expected to shed light on this. The same is true of a second, more localised problem, which leads on to the present writer's appointed topic, namely "The Battle for Narvik". Did Stalin at any stage contemplate a carve-up of land in Scandinavia, such as he had achieved with Hitler in Poland? Certainly the Norwegian authorities in the North were sufficiently anxious about this possibility to retain one of their six infantry battalions and some smaller units in East Finnmark throughout the two months of the campaign, while rejecting the proposal of the Allies to post the Polish troops there as provocative. (10)

At the very outset, were there other reasons, more cogent than the weather conditions in the misty and stormy North Sea and the element of chance - both of which favoured the enemy - that help to explain the failure of the British Navy to intercept the ten heavily laden German destroyers on their long journey to Narvik?

There had certainly been plenty of warnings of impending maritime activities. On April 3rd, the day when the first supply ships set out for Narvik, the British War Cabinet was already discussing reports that a strong force had been assembled at Rostock, "with the avowed intention of taking action in Scandinavia, if necessary". (11) Troop embarkations had also been reported from other Baltic ports, and there were repeated indications of something stirring in North Sea ports as well. Then, at 8.48 a.m. on April 7th, some part of the force which had sailed only six hours earlier for Narvik and Trondheim (the heavy cruiser *Hipper* and 14 destroyers, escorted by the *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst*) was sighted from the air, and the RAF responded with two unsuccessful attacks. A second sighting disclosed only three destroyers apparently sailing south, but a third sighting at 1.25 p.m. reported what might be a battle cruiser, with two cruisers and ten destroyers, steering NNW and only 70 miles south of The Naze (Lindesnes).

Earlier that afternoon the Commander in Chief of the Home Fleet (Sir Charles Forbes) received a report, which had reached the Admiralty the previous day, of Hitler's "definite orders to send one division in ten ships moving unostentatiously at night to land at Narvik on April 8". (12) The Admiralty had, however, commented negatively: "All these reports are of doubtful value and may well be only a further move in the war of nerves". (13) Even more unfortunate than this misleading evaluation was the fact that news of the RAF's third sighting of an enemy force (referred to above) was delayed for four hours, apparently by some mishap in radio transmission.

In the belief that what impended was an attempted break-out by the enemy's capital ships into the Atlantic trade routes, the Home Fleet left Scapa Flow at 8.15 p.m. in belated pursuit and held on into the north for 24 hours, though Admiral Forbes was increasingly disposed to believe that the Germans were making for Norway. (14) Yet on the night of the 8th-

9th, after turning back south, he kept his three battleships some 80 miles away from the Norwegian coast, whilst Admiralty orders prevented him from sending his cruisers to sweep northwards from closer inshore.

Meanwhile, at 4.30 a.m. on the 8th the minefield intended to interrupt the ore traffic to Germany had been duly laid at Hovden in the Vestfjord, just north of Bodø, and this was being watched over by eight destroyers (including four partly disarmed for the minelaying) and by the battle cruiser *Renown* from farther out at sea. But the destroyer *Glowworm*, separated by accident from the *Renown*, was found and sunk at about 8 a.m. by the *Hipper* (though not before she had bravely rammed the heavy cruiser). This caused the *Renown* to turn back south for a time, and the Admiralty ordered the destroyers from the Vestfjord to follow her. The search for the enemy out at sea was further encouraged, when a flying-boat searching ahead of the Home Fleet in the early afternoon sighted the *Hipper* and accompanying destroyers, which (as luck would have it) were steering west while waiting to enter the Trondheimsfjord next day. It was nearly 7 p.m. before a fruitless search by Admiral Whitworth in the *Renown* was ended by orders "to concentrate on preventing any German force from proceeding to Narvik". (15) But the heavy weather rendered his destroyers almost unmanageable, so he steered farther into the north until the weather should moderate. Although the sequel was a running fight at early dawn against the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, in which the latter was severely damaged, by the evening of the 12th both German ships had made their way back to base after creating precisely the diversion intended.

How did it come about that the struggle for Narvik began, not with an interception, in which the odds might have been heavily in favour of the interceptors, but with a *coup* against a small neutral port, where many practical and all the psychological advantages were on the side of the invader?

The fatally slow tempo of the British response to the German naval challenge of April 7th-9th owed something to the preceding seven months of "phoney war", during which there had been so many false alarms, mainly on the western front but also concerning Scandinavia. A second factor was undoubtedly the weakness of the Intelligence organisation, making a slow recovery from peacetime economies. Until the summer of 1939 the Joint Intelligence Committee was regarded as "a peripheral body"; (16) it remained ineffective until Churchill became Prime Minister, while the Government Code and Cypher School had not yet mastered "Enigma". One variety, which the Germans used for air and some other operations in Norway, was indeed being read from April 15th until it was discontinued about a month later, but its special significance was not made clear to commanders in the field. Moreover, the circulation of Intelligence was often unaccountably slow, as when the vital information that German troops rescued from the *Rio de Janeiro* admitted that they were bound for Bergen, though known in the Admiralty early on the afternoon of April 8th, did not reach Admiral Forbes until 11.00 p.m. A want of alertness also contributed to the ease with which the Germans all through the Norwegian campaign continued to read fully 30 per cent of intercepts on the main British naval cypher.

It is arguable, however, that the biggest adverse influence was the self-assurance of the Royal Navy. Had not the British naval blockade been a - perhaps even the - determining factor in the First World War? Therefore in April 1940 the navy's primary concern was to enforce the blockade of the seaways by preventing any break-out into the Atlantic - just as the minelaying in the Vestfjord was to stop a break-in via the Leads. As for Norway, had not its west and even its north coast been a British interest since the days of Palmerston, and did not Norwegian politicians take the British navy for granted as their strongest defence? Such self-assurance encouraged the belief that, though the Germans might be confidently expected to react to our mine-laying, they certainly would not act first

on a coastline where Britannia so clearly "ruled the waves". But they did.

The naval battles fought off Narvik on April 10th and 13th made sure that at any rate one of the six groups of enemy ships which had successfully penetrated into Norwegian waters should pay the full price of their audacity. Captain Warburton-Lee's attack at dawn on the 10th developed into a drawn battle against heavy odds. Each side lost two destroyers, including the flotilla-leader with its captain, but the much smaller British warships (17) also disposed of six out of ten German merchantmen lying in the harbour and an ammunition ship encountered as they withdrew. They were then under heavy fire, so a landing (for which they had a party in readiness) was obviously impracticable. On the 13th the *Warspite* with its 15-inch guns and nine attendant destroyers completely eliminated the remaining German warships, but Admiral Whitworth decided that the 200 men he could muster were too few and too tired to land and hold even the waterfront. However, he reported later that evening and again the next morning that a larger force could now take Narvik "by direct assault without fear of meeting serious opposition on landing". (18)

Why were there no troops ready in the right place at the right time to take advantage of the re-assertion of British sea-power? The failure is all the more surprising because the mine-laying project had included "Plan R 4", under which a force had been organised to sail for Norwegian ports as soon as the expected German reaction to the mines made British help acceptable. But on the evening of April 7th, when the Home Fleet had sailed to stop a presumed break-out into the Atlantic, it was decided at the Admiralty (19) that four battalions already embarked in cruisers at Rosyth should be hurried ashore without their equipment and that two battalions embarked in transports in the Clyde should be deprived of their escorting cruiser and destroyers. The object was to make every possible ship available to the Home Fleet, whose

commander was not consulted and who found the change of plan disconcerting; equally disconcerted was the Prime Minister, when he elicited the information from an embarrassed First Lord at the War Cabinet meeting next morning.

On the day following, when the Chiefs of Staff met at 6.30 a.m. to consider the news of the German invasion of Norway, it was expected that the 1st Scots Guards, one of the two battalions in the Clyde, would "leave at once for Narvik": (20) yet the C.I.G.S., Sir Edmund Ironside, recorded in his diary at midnight, "The whole day gone and nothing but talk." (21) It was not until 1 p.m. on April 12th that the first two companies of Guardsmen sailed in a cruiser from Scapa Flow, escorting the military commander of the expedition to recover Narvik with part of his headquarters, while its naval commander set sail at about the same time in another cruiser from Rosyth. Whitworth's report of the opportunity for immediate action led the naval commander to appoint a rendezvous for both cruisers at Skjelfjord with a view to an attack at Narvik next morning, but owing to difficulties in wireless transmission no message reached the General until he had already landed his two companies to support the Norwegians on the mainland farther north. The two men met for the first time on the morning of April 15th at Harstad, to which transports also brought the rest of the expedition. Thus the effects of some initial delay were compounded by the failure of the commanders to coordinate their plans for an improvised operation on their way to the intended scene of action.

Unfortunately the sanguine tone of Admiral Whitworth's report had a further untoward effect on the Narvik expedition. If Narvik was likely at any moment to fall into our hands, was it not time to pay closer attention to the possibility of also recovering Trondheim, in which the Norwegian authorities showed more interest? It was therefore decided in London to divert three battalions (out of 5 1/2) from the Harstad convoy while it was still at sea. This modification of the objective did not lead to the recovery of Trondheim, but it inevitably had

an adverse effect on the military commander's intended dispositions.

It is generally agreed that Churchill bears the main responsibility for the mistakes and misjudgements indicated above. As First Lord, he was spending much time in the Operational Intelligence Centre of the Admiralty, and the First Sea Lord, Sir Dudley Pound, was inclined to defer to his proposals for action. In strategic questions Churchill also tended to dominate his ministerial colleagues in committee and Cabinet, since Lord Hankey alone had comparable experience in military matters from the First World War. But should not the blame be shared by the Chiefs of Staff?

Instituted in 1923 as a collective command for the armed forces, this was a trinity whose members still gave less thought to the unity of defence than to the separate interests of the three Services, which they also severally represented. Consequently, the Chiefs of Staff as a joint organisation exercised very little control over the present campaign, which was after all the first of any size since their meetings had started. It is instructive to compare the effectiveness of the stand they made against Churchill from 1942 onwards over Operation Jupiter, when he tried so persistently to find a special role for North Norway in the strategy of a world at war. (22)

In the third place, it still occasions surprise to find that, counting from the arrival of the transports at Harstad on April 15th, it took six weeks to recover Narvik from a numerically inferior and comparatively ill-supplied enemy. How far was this due to the notorious personal incompatibility between the naval and military commanders, compounded by the incompatible aims with which they had been commissioned? (23) Lord Cork's instructions from Churchill and Pound were oral and evidently highly aggressive; Mackesy's, signed by General Ironside as C.I.G.S., "required boldness", (24) but made it his first duty to establish a base from which to plan his further

operations. The 12th Earl of Cork and Orrery, alias "Ginger" Boyle, was an Admiral of the Fleet, called from retirement by Churchill to mastermind his reluctantly abandoned incursion into Baltic waters; (25) Mackesy, who was ten years younger, was a major-general of two years' standing. According to his own son, the latter "was not a conciliatory man, and he did not gladly accommodate himself to those in high places with whom he disagreed" (26) - a category covering both Cork and Churchill himself, whose intervention in Plan R 4 had produced *inter alia* this unwelcome substitute for an old friend, Admiral E.E.R. Evans "of the Broke".

When Mackesy, at their first meeting in the Admiral's cruiser off Harstad, refused point-blank to be redirected straight to Narvik, there was a complete impasse, duly reported to Churchill by private cypher. (27) At the end of a week Cork was placed in supreme command. But it was still impracticable for him to overrule the General (albeit that Churchill suggested the possibility of placing him under arrest), (28) since Mackesy was supported by the naval chief of staff, Captain Maund, as well as the senior army officers other than his own chief staff officer, the future Lt.-General Sir Arthur Dowler. In retrospect, however, even he felt that, though Mackesy should have been more of a bridge-builder, "Others might have helped to build the bridge." (29)

By April 24th agreement had been reached on trying the effect of a heavy bombardment of Narvik by the *Warspite*, with three cruisers and eight accompanying destroyers, troops being held in readiness to go ashore if the enemy showed signs of surrendering. It was aimed at military objectives only and was under Lord Cork's personal direction, but the deep snow hid its effects and after three hours the enemy still made no sign. Meanwhile the British brigade remained largely snow-bound in positions along the route from Harstad towards Narvik beside the fjord, only the advance party of Scots Guards having been moved inland to Forsbakken, where their presence was intended to help a Norwegian advance against the enemy

in Gratangen. (30) In the last days of the month, however, the South Wales Borderers were conveyed in two stages to Haakvik on the south side of the Ofotfjord, from where they advanced nearly to Ankenes in spite of a vigorous enemy counterattack. A company of Irish Guards was also brought across in reserve, but the position was eventually transferred to the newly arrived Chasseurs Alpins, who were best able to cope with the German ski patrols in the mountains along the Beisfjord.

The arrival on the scene of five French battalions, followed by four Polish, then prompted Lord Cork to renew his demand for a direct assault on Narvik, which Mackesy still vehemently opposed: even if a foothold were gained, machine-gun fire across the broken terrain would make further advance impossible. The senior military officers supported the General, so the Admiral proposed an initial landing at the village of Bjerkvik instead. Mackesy consented, but handed over the operation to French troops under *Général de Brigade* Béthouart, whose Chasseurs Alpins were finding the advance on Bjerkvik by a mountain road too difficult in loose, deep snow.

The first opposed landing of the Second World War was therefore undertaken by French Foreign Legionaries with the help of two light tanks, the British providing the ships for bombardment and the newly arrived landing craft, which put ashore the first flights of Legionaries and the tanks. The naval guns, in setting fire to houses which might harbour German machine-gunners, caused a horrifyingly high number of civilian casualties. (31) Otherwise the operation was outstandingly successful, as Lt-General Auchinleck (Mackesy's intended successor) reported, though he observed that a raid by German bombers, for which the weather was unfavourable, might well have turned it into a failure.

The Øyjord peninsula opposite Narvik was quickly overrun, and Auchinleck (who replaced Mackesy on the evening of May 13th) entrusted Béthouart with the operations for its

capture, one Norwegian battalion and a field battery being also provided by General Fleischer. Nevertheless there was a further delay of nearly a fortnight, mainly because the landing craft were needed to bring ashore A.A. guns and other heavy equipment intended for Bardufoss airfield, which had been cleared of snow by Norwegian labour under an agreement negotiated with General Fleischer after a reproachful interview. (32) Fighter aircraft were then flown in from carriers, such as had previously provided temporary and less fully effective help from their own complement.

The guns of three cruisers and five destroyers were available to support the landings, which began on a small beach at Orneset just after midnight on May 28th; but there was also effective bombardment from French and Norwegian batteries at Øyjord, almost directly opposite. Two battalions of Legionnaires and one of Norwegian troops made the attack against an enemy who manoeuvred skilfully on the heights above them. A critical moment came in the early morning, when sea fog at Bardufoss gave German bombers their chance to replace the RAF fighters and compel every warship to take evasive action, (33) so that the Germans were starting to fire down on to the beach before relief came from a single destroyer. The Polish battalions, which had attacked simultaneously against Ankenes, likewise suffered for a time from the withdrawal of naval support. The Germans counterattacked successfully on the heights behind Ankenes, so the day ended before that area was completely cleared, with the enemy incurring heavy losses as they withdrew eventually across, or round the head of, the Beisfjord. On the north side of Narvik the Germans had been able to retire along the line of the railway some hours before the Norwegian and French troops made their formal entry at 5 p.m.

The stubborn resistance encountered on May 28th suggests that the only surviving member of Dietl's staff (34) may have been justified in claiming retrospectively that an organised and well-armed defence had been in place since the second day after

their arrival. There were also the problems of the snow, which even the Chasseurs Alpins found daunting, and of the terrain: exploring the Narvik promontory after its capture, Captain Maund found that "All beaches were well covered by machine-gun posts that could not have been neutralised by fire from the sea". (35) So from the evidence available it seems that General Mackesy was most probably right in refusing to risk what might have been a very costly failure in a situation where prestige rather than any truly vital interest was at stake.

Nevertheless, there may have been some justification for General Ruge's view that Mackesy was "hesitant and timorous": (36) he was certainly handicapped towards the end by ill-health, to which the strain of endless controversy with a fiery opponent may perhaps have contributed. At least three entries in the private diary of the C.I.G.S. suggest dissatisfaction with Mackesy; (37) and Auchinleck, who had thought well of him when they met at the Staff College at Quetta, (38) now quickly found it necessary to exercise his secret power of supersession. The possibility that Mackesy never fully grasped the realities of a novel situation is suggested by the fact that he was apparently much slower than either Béthouart or Auchinleck to establish cordial relations with Fleischer, the Norwegian general whose troops bore the brunt of the fighting on the north side of Narvik. When much help might have been acquired from their expertise, General Mackesy was content to inform the War Office on April 17th: "Norwegian troops are almost entirely untrained and I have, I am afraid, not much confidence in them." (39)

Finally, some reassessment may still be needed of the part played by British troops in the Battle for Narvik. Except for the Norwegian 6th Brigade they were the first in the field, yet they had no role in the two opposed landings, except for the single battery of Royal Artillery (25-pounders) which operated under French control in the Polish advance into Ankenes. Instead, the 24th (Guards) Brigade was moved piecemeal into the south, when the evacuation of the Allied forces from

Namsos on the night of May 2nd-3rd left open the road route from Grong to Bodø (which was wrongly supposed to be impassable at that season) for a German advance. The brigade then worked in close cooperation with five Independent Companies; newly formed from Territorial volunteers with some Regular officers (including eight with Indian Army experience), each of these was intended to function as a self-supporting guerrilla unit, 290 men strong. There were also a weak Norwegian battalion and other small Norwegian units in this southern area, the defence of which was added on May 7th to Lord Cork's overall responsibilities.

On the 10th, part of an Independent Company and two Norwegian companies successfully ambushed the enemy vanguard a few miles south of Mosjøen, the first settlement of any size on the route north. But on the same day 300 Germans were landed at Hemnesberget, far in their rear, from a coastal steamer seized in Trondheim, the British navy having arrived on the scene an hour and a half too late. (40) The consequence was a serious loss of ground and the decision to move all the British troops south, so as to hold on if possible to Mo i Rana (another small port then comparable to Mosjøen) and in any case to Bodø, the loss of which would place the operations against Narvik in jeopardy.

Nevertheless, the Scots Guards and the Independent Companies, together with some Norwegian troops (providing ski detachments), suffered a series of defeats - at Stien in front of Mo; in three delaying-actions on the south side of the Saltfjell; and again on the north side, after crossing 23 miles of arctic plateau unscathed between high banks of snow. The newly arrived Irish Guards, two Independent Companies, and a Norwegian machine-gun company and ski patrols then fought a stubborn two-day engagement at Pothus (41) before making yet another withdrawal - along the Saltfjord to the Bodø peninsula, where the South Wales Borderers had now arrived to strengthen the defence. But at this juncture the campaign petered out, as the British troops were to be re-embarked

forthwith at Bodø because of the impending evacuation of North Norway by the Allies. For security reasons the change of plan was not explained to the Norwegians, who had recently sent reinforcements which were left in a very difficult position.

In a confidential section of General Auchinleck's Report on his command in North Norway, which was circulated to the War Cabinet in 1942, he criticised his British troops as seeming "distressingly young, not so much in years as in self-reliance and manliness generally. They give an impression of being callow and undeveloped." (42) His standards would be those of training in the Indian Army, where he had been Deputy Chief of the General Staff. But he himself remarked in regard to the Independent Companies, which were not organised for warfare in such thinly populated territory, that a guerrilla was more likely to succeed in his own country. (43) As for the Guardsmen trained on barrack squares, their traditional discipline did not fit them well for fighting on barren hillsides and along narrow, boulder-strewn valleys against men of a purpose-equipped mountain division, brought to Norway by Hitler's orders for the express purpose of rescuing their comrades, hard pressed at Narvik.

The withdrawal, which was probably in the long run inevitable, was turned into a continuous retreat by the dominance of the German air force. This had indeed affected every side of the Norwegian campaign, from the shock to the Home Fleet, when the A.A. armament of its much prized battleships was found to give insufficient protection against land-based bombers on the afternoon of April 9th, (44) to the havoc wrought by the same enemy weapon at every one of our bases in Norway, from Aandalsnes to Harstad. (45) The reinforcement of the holding-operation south of Bodø was disrupted twice - by an air attack on the *Chrobry*, which killed the four senior officers of the Irish Guards and ravaged the entire transport; (46) and by the wrecking of the cruiser *Effingham*, which was taking an unusual alternative course for Bodø with

the S.W.B. on board, partly to avoid the fate of the *Chrobry*. Thus the South Wales Borderers as well as the Guardsmen had to return to Harstad to refit. Meanwhile the enemy, besides receiving some of their supplies by air, could watch every Allied movement and harass troops in action or on the march. The War Diary of the Scots Guards states that, after six days of withdrawals, "The men were utterly exhausted and a certain demoralisation had set in," (48) which suggests that the menace from the air bears a greater share of responsibility than the casualty list might indicate.

Conversely, the troops engaged at Pothus took heart when the two fighters flew over from Bodø (where they had landed from a carrier) and shot down two enemy planes over the battlefield. Both of these, however, were destroyed on the ground next day, and German bombers eventually laid the whole town in ashes. Nine years later a traveller over the road route of about 215 miles, from the scene of the initial ambush south of Mosjøen to that of the re-embarkation at Bodø, found the surroundings of that port to be the only recognisably urban district on the whole journey; and the sites of individual British war graves were still to be seen in the solitude of the Arctic Circle.

* * *

Certainly, the failure of the Allied campaign in Norway was due much less to shortcomings in the men who fought there than to the glaring mistakes made by the men who sent them out to fight, the most conspicuous of whom was Winston Churchill. Indeed, in a postwar letter to his most trusted military adviser he himself admitted that "The brief and disastrous Norwegian campaign, if campaign it can be called," was one for which he "certainly bore an exceptional measure of responsibility". (49) And yet it was the resulting political crisis at Westminster which carried him in the nick of time to the premiership, as being, from an overall viewpoint, less responsible than Mr Chamberlain for the recent past and in

any case, more resolute for facing a perilous future. Is it too farfetched for me to close with the paradoxical but prophetic reply which the Norwegian Resistance leader, Gunnar Jahn, gave in 1942 to a fellow countryman who feared that the Germans might be the winning side? "Oh no, the Germans lost the war when they invaded Norway ... It had this effect, that Winston Churchill took over the leadership of Great Britain." (50)

Notes

(Place of publication London unless otherwise shown)

1. *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution* (1958), p. 342.
2. A.J. Marder: *From the Dardanelles to Oran* (1974), p. 154.
3. E.g. Jack Adams: *The Doomed Expedition* and Francois Kersaudy: *Norway 1940*.
4. PRO/CAB 99/3, quoted by F. Bédarida in *Scandinavian Journal of History*, Stockholm, Vol. 2 (1977), p. 10.
5. Führer Conference of 10 October 1939, quoted by H.D. Look, *ibid.*, p. 79.
6. G. Hägglöf: *Möte med Europa* (Stockholm 1971), p. 210.
7. Admiral of the Fleet Lord Cork to Churchill, December 5, 1939 (M. Gilbert, *Churchill*, Vol. VI 1983, pp. 101-2).
8. Cf. *Svenskt Biografiskt Lexicon*, Vol. 17, Stockholm 1967-9, p. 643.
9. Cf. M. Jakobson, *The Diplomacy of the Winter War*, Cambridge, Mass., 1961, pp. 243-5.
10. Cf. T. Sandvik: *Operasjonene til lands i Nord-Norge*, Oslo 1965, Vol. II, pp. 321-2.
11. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 207.
12. F.H. Hinsley *et al.*: *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, Vol. I (1979), p. 122.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
14. S. Roskill: *The War At Sea*, Vol. I (6th impression 1976), indicates that an invasion of Norway was envisaged in the Admiralty on the evening of April 7th as possibly impending, and by Admiral Forbes at sea on the late morning of the 8th as an attack which had already begun.
15. AT 1850/8, received 1915/8.

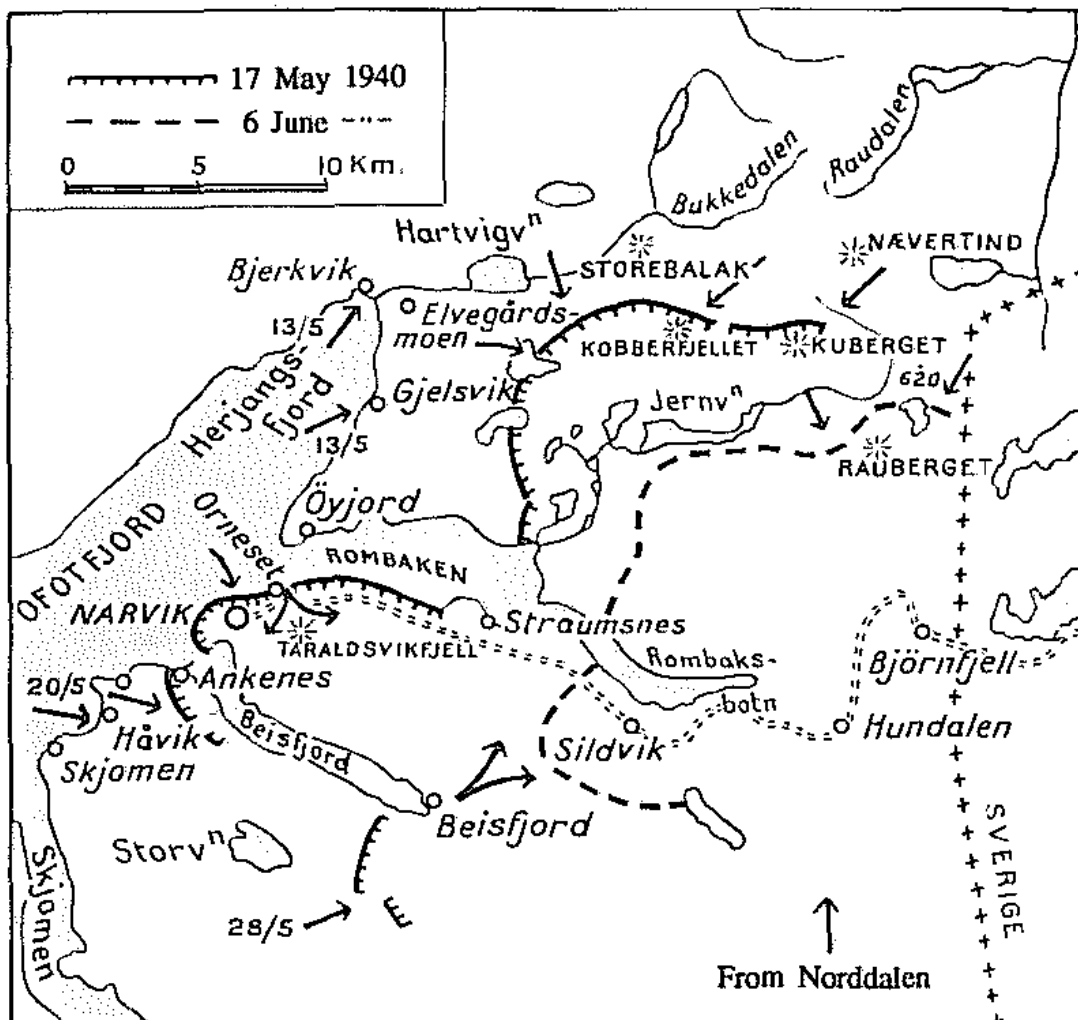
16. Hinsley, *op.cit.*, p. 37. His authoritative review of the Intelligence received before April 9th demonstrates that, although there was "no confirmation of an unambiguous kind" (p. 119), the evidence from various sources, if properly collated and objectively studied, might have pointed to an impending invasion of Norway. Instead, an Appreciation dated April 8th "claimed that the disposition of German forces did not then 'support any probability of a Scandinavian invasion'". (W.O.190/891, cited at p. 125).
17. The ten German destroyers had five 5-inch guns, the five British four of 4.7 inches (5-inch in the flotilla-leader). In tonnage the Germans were believed to be about 15 per cent heavier, but Professor Jürgen Rohwer (who himself served in destroyers) informs me that this is an underestimate of the difference.
18. Message timed 1027, 14/4/40 (Roskill: *War At Sea*, I 178).
19. General Sir Ian Jacob, who was then Military Assistant Secretary to the War Cabinet, was convinced that the order to clear the ships at Rosyth, though telephoned by Pound, came about because Churchill's mind "moved around the idea of the fleet action". (S. Roskill: *Churchill and the Admirals*, 1977, p. 99).
20. C.O.S. 40 (70th meeting) Annex, p. 4.
21. R. Macleod and D. Kelly (editors): *The Ironside Diaries* (1962), p. 250.
22. See the 18 indexed references to "Jupiter" in Gilbert, *op. cit.*, Vol. VII (1986).
23. "The General and myself left the U.K. with diametrically opposite views as to what was required." (Lord Cork's Despatch, Section I 10: *London Gazette* No. 38011, 10 July 1947).
24. See J.L. Moulton: *The Norwegian Campaign of 1940* (1966), p. 219.
25. Pressed by Churchill upon an unwilling Admiralty from 6 September 1939 to 23 January 1940 (Roskill, *Churchill and the Admirals*, pp. 93-4).
26. Article by Piers Mackesy (*Journal of the RUSI*, December 1970, p. 32).
27. The full Admiralty records disclose 21 messages from Churchill and 27 from Lord Cork (Roskill, *Churchill and the Admirals*, pp. 292-3).
28. On April 22 (*Ibid.*, p. 293).

29. P. Mackesy, *Ibid.*
30. The Guardsmen by agreement held only a *replisting*, "acting as long-stop to the Norwegians", for operations in which the latter suffered a severe though temporary setback, when a battalion strength of 648 was reduced by 40 per cent, with three company commanders among the 34 killed (Sandvik, *op. cit.*, I 246-7; D. Erskine, *The Scots Guards 1919-1945*, 1956, p. 31).
31. The loss of 17 civilian lives in Bjerkvik that morning compares with 35 lost in Narvik during the entire campaign (E.A. Steen: *Norges Sjøkrig 1940-1945*, Vol. IV 1958, p. 260). According to Béthouart (*Cinq années d'espérance*, Paris 1968, pp. 51-2) General Fleischer had assured him that the civil population had been evacuated and he found the spectacle shattering (*bouleversant*); he says nothing about a cease-fire which was ordered in consequence from a destroyer but countermanded by the Admiral (L.E.H. Maund: *Assault from the Sea*, 1949, p. 41).
32. Five of Fleischer's reproaches are listed by Moulton, *op. cit.*, p.232, as learnt from his chief of staff.
33. Two bombs fell on the deck of the A.A. cruiser *Cairo*, causing 35 casualties and an exclamation of "Oh!" from Lord Cork - the only occasion on which the Frenchman saw him indulge in such a display of emotion (Béthouart, *op. cit.*, p. 65).
34. Colonel Herrman, cited by P.Mackesy (*op. cit.* p. 30).
35. Maund, *op. cit.*, p. 52. Lord Hankey had in his possession two further notes by Maund, dated 20 October and 11 November 1940, strongly supporting Mackesy's refusal to carry out plans from London "that only a man ignorant of military affairs could possibly have supported". (S. Roskill: *Hankey Man of Secrets*, Vol. III 1974, p. 460).
36. Béthouart, *op. cit.*, pp.45-6.
37. *The Ironside Diaries*, pp. 268 (April 18), 273 (April 20), and 281 (April 25).
38. "Auchinleck had a high opinion of his intelligence, knowledge and ability" (John Connell: *Auchinleck*, 1959 p. 107).
39. Tel. to WO no. 2105/17, quoted by F. Kersaudy, *Norway 1940*, p. 126.
40. Though its advance up the coast was duly reported by the Norwegian authorities, Lord Cork had no destroyer available in time to intercept the steamer; on May 7th he had applied in vain for two additional destroyers. (Sandvik, *op. cit.*, II p. 85; Lord Cork's Despatch, Section III 5).

41. Lt-Col. H.C. Stockwell from No. 2 Independent Company had command in the field for this engagement, which won him the DSO; in 1956 he commanded the land forces at Suez - where the muddle reminded him of his experiences in Norway - and in 1960-64 he was Deputy Supreme Allied Commander in Europe.
42. Quoted by Connell, *op. cit.*, p. 149, with severe criticism of the treatment of this passage by the present writer in *The Campaign in Norway*, 1952, pp. 241-2.
43. Letter to Sir John Dill (Vice-CIGS) on May 13, 1940, quoted by Connell, *op. cit.*, p. 113.
44. Cf. Roskill, *War at Sea*, I 171, References 13 and 16. No battleship was available for the final assault on Narvik, the *Resolution* having been sent home after a bomb had penetrated three decks.
45. The harbour area at Harstad was bombed on 140 occasions (Steen, *op. cit.*, IV 48).
46. The commander of the escorting destroyer, to which 694 men were trans-shipped in 16 minutes, recounted to his father that "Any rescue would have been impossible but for the superb discipline of the men of the battalion." (D.J.L. Fitzgerald: *History of the Irish Guards in the Second World War*, Aldershot, 1949, p. 46).
47. The resulting delay prevented the Borderers from playing a full part in the campaign in the southern area, for which they were better adapted than the Guardsmen, being recruited largely from Welsh hillmen and having spent much of the previous winter training on the high Yorkshire moors. Moreover, they included a strong contingent which had been in action on the North-West frontier of India in 1937-8.
48. War Diary for May 23rd (Erskine, *op. cit.*, p. 44). On p. 41 the regimental history points out that on May 18th one of the two companies which the lieutenant-colonel told the Norwegians he lacked was still in the neighbourhood of Bodø, thus correcting the present writer (*op. cit.*, p. 186).
49. Letter to General Ismay, 26 May 1946 (Gilbert, *op. cit.*, Vol. VIII 1988, p. 237).
50. Speech on 23 May 1948 (*Churchill's Visit to Norway*, Oslo 1949, p. 42).

Part II

The Battle for Narvik



The Allied Attack on Narvik-Bjørnefjell

Chapter 6

From Mountain Warfare in Winter Conditions to the Allied Recapture of Narvik

K. Rommetveit

"Only idiots say that they learn from experience. Personally I prefer learning from other peoples' experience." (*Bismarck*)

Introduction (1)

50 years ago, nearly two generations ago, the longest and hardest fighting during the Norwegian Campaign took place in the Narvik area. As a military geographic concept the Narvik area includes the northern part of the county of Nordland and the southern part of the county of Troms, limited by the sea to the west and the Swedish-Norwegian border to the east.

In my article I will consider some aspects of the campaign in North Norway, and attempt a preliminary evaluation of the importance of the so-called human factor, including questions of command, materiel and organisation, especially German and Norwegian. This assessment can be seen more clearly if we consider it under two main themes: mountain war in winter conditions and the Allied recapture of Narvik. Narvik was taken twice by the Germans in 1940, and once by Allied and Norwegian armed forces.

Survey. Conditions before the battle

On 9 April 1940 Norway was drawn into the Second World War without prior mobilisation. A rather weak defence had been set up, in case Norway's neutrality should not be respected.

This defence was stronger in the north due to the Finno-Soviet Winter War 1939-40. In 1940 the Treaty of Friendship between Germany and the Soviet Union still existed. The partition of Poland made by the two powers was not forgotten by Norwegian civilian and military authorities. The danger from the East (the Soviet Union) led to a strengthening of the garrison company in Sør-Varanger by a security force of two infantry battalions and a field artillery battery in East Finnmark during the whole campaign. (2) This had considerable consequences for the battle of Narvik since *the lack of first-line Norwegian infantry battalions there had powerful repercussions.*

The few available battalions were in the front line the whole time, with little rest or relief under extremely hard weather conditions, in the high mountains, throughout the campaign. The result of this lack of infantry was that the fighting power of the Norwegian force was considerably reduced. The transfer of, for instance, the Varanger battalion would have increased the manpower strength of the infantry battalions by approximately 20 per cent, in real fighting power perhaps even more, taking into account the probable fighting power of this battalion as being equivalent to the Alta battalion.

Narvik was quite clearly the central operational focus for all involved in the war for reasons my colleagues have made abundantly clear. The German occupation of Trondheim and Trøndelag cut North Norway off from the rest of the country, and so the region became a separate theatre of operations where the hostilities in the first phase developed fairly independently and were unaffected by the war in South

Norway. A notable exception was Vaernes airport at Trondheim as base and harbour for German air, sea and ground operations heading north. Unfortunately Vaernes was repaired and enlarged with the assistance of several thousand Norwegian civilians. This proved to be a distinct help to the German operation at Narvik.

In 1940 there was no continuous road link north-south through North Norway, and the railway was not open for regular traffic north of Trøndelag. Therefore the sea alone linked the northernmost counties. No airfield that could be used by contemporary fighters and bombers existed. At Bardufoss, the army's main airfield was under construction, but no coastal defences existed in North Norway. A planned "fortress" at Ramsund at the estuary of the Ofotfjord had not at that time been built, a point that the German mountain troops only realised after some action; this lack together with the defective German submarine torpedoes, made the Royal Navy's dominance of the Ofotfjord possible. German-manned batteries on both sides of the Ofotfjord's mouth and intact German submarines, would have changed the situation dramatically.

Apart from the rail link to Sweden, Narvik in 1940 was effectively an island in communication terms. No bridge existed over Rombaken or Beisfjord.

Militarily, North Norway constituted the 3rd Naval District and the army's 6th Command District. The Commander of the 6th Division, Major General C G Fleischer, was appointed Supreme Commander in North Norway, and he also assumed command when the German attack started, over the naval forces.

Norwegian armed forces in the Narvik area on 8 April

The only Norwegian naval forces partly deployed for combat, were the navy's Ofoten detachment which consisted of two forty-year-old armoured ships, the *Eidsvold* and the *Norge*, two outmoded submarines and three guard vessels. The rest of the ships of the navy were spread along Norway's long coast.

The Naval District also included the 3rd Air Detachment with 3 torpedo/bombers (Heinkel 115) and 2 reconnaissance planes (MF 111).

In the Narvik area the army could field one reduced infantry battalion (Ist/13th) on Elvegaardsmoen and one reinforced rifle company of the Ist/13th, one anti-aircraft battery (40 mm) and one reduced pioneer company of local troops from Narvik.

The majority of the soldiers called up for frontier guard duty in North Norway in April 1940 had 72-84 days of basic training. No refresher training had taken place since 1922. The units therefore needed training and exercises in order to become tight-knit units usable under field conditions. It was not enough to have good and sufficient equipment; the soldiers that were to use it needed individual training, and then, combined arms training preferably including inter-service exercises. Even the first stage, i.e. learning how to handle new weapons, is a long process in an army of mobilisation. With 20,000 being retrained every year, it would take 4-5 years before all soldiers were trained to handle a new weapon. (3)

During the call-up in the winter of 1939/40 there was some time and room for manoeuvres. During this period all the line units of the 6th Division - except IInd/16th which lacked unit training - did their 3 month stint of neutrality defence. The hardening, exercise and welding together that they received here, were of great importance in the battle for Narvik.

Another factor which also greatly influenced the fighting, was the army's general lack of officers. It was especially difficult in the 6th Division, because the majority of reserve officers lived in South Norway. Generally speaking, the battalions of the 6th Division could not match the German and Allied battalions in firepower, weapons or equipment.(4) However, one must add that General Dietl's mountain troops had only a small degree of the heavy fire support they were supposed to have, owing to problems of supply and transport. Their stock of artillery and heavy mortars was severely reduced, leaving only one mountain battery and no heavy mortars. In addition, the Germans lacked naval fire support. To some extent, this situation was partly offset by German air support from Vaernes, but the Luftwaffe was hampered by the distances involved, the poor availability of airplanes, those aircrafts' range, and periodically, bad weather. The Norwegian forces lacked hand grenades, submachine-guns, effective air defence, mines, antitank defence, tanks and armoured vehicles. The Germans did not have the last three equipment categories in North Norway either. Therefore this state of affairs had only an indirect influence on events because these deficiencies accelerated the collapse in South Norway. Thus Dietl's forces got air support, reinforcements and supplies *sooner* than they otherwise would have done. However, the Norwegian forces and about 2,000 of Dietl's mountain troops were the only ones that had had training for winter and mountain warfare. The Norwegians were the only force that were fully equipped on skis and had a comparatively high mobility under winter conditions. (5) The lack of close range weapons like hand grenades and submachine-guns, made the Norwegian units best suited to fighting in open terrain with long fields of fire. Even if the Norwegian army lacked equipment, and deficiencies stretched from uniform to Colt heavy machine-gun and 81 mm mortar, on the whole it was well suited to winter war in mountain terrain, at least compared to the Allied battalions.

Haalogaland Air Detachment had 6 field planes (Fokker, model 1929) and 14 unarmed trainers (Tiger Moth). None of the

Norwegian planes was, in performance and armament, a match for the German fighter planes.

9 April in Narvik

These events have been described many times in several languages. But seen from this article's perspective, I will stress the human and psychological factors that made the German occupation of Narvik and Elvegaardsmoen possible in the first hours of the first day of attack. A key phrase in this connection is *mental preparedness*. Norway had had peace for 126 years. The transition from peace to war is always difficult. It was especially so because Norway had not mobilised in advance, and the Germans took the major cities, airfields, ports and depots during the first hours. "It was no political aim that Norway was to be prepared to fight a war alone." (6) Thus neither people nor soldiers were prepared for the ruthlessness, brutality, sufferings and strains of war. The Germans were also aided by the weather. Northwesterly gales and drifting snow at dawn made visibility poor. Dietl's 3rd Mountain Division was the only one of the 6-7 invading German divisions with combat experience (from the Polish campaign). The Germans knew what they wanted and used surprise, audacity and speed with great skill and luck.

They also used the uncertainty and confusion of the opponents when they conquered Narvik and Elvegaardsmoen.

Here a more general problem emerges: *How can one, in peacetime, prepare for the unexpected, even for what seems "impossible"?* It is particularly difficult in long periods of peace with reduced defence budgets, no obvious external threat and a seemingly unavoidable tendency towards increasing military ineffectiveness! This question is relevant for politicians and the military today as it was in the 1930s. It is of course impossible to address this complex question within the scope of this article. Now I can suggest only a few possible,

relevant factors. Geography, past experience (history), tradition, culture, the ideology and perceptions of a nation's top decision-makers, all come into play in various ways. Just as important is the *internal character* of an army or a military organisation. If we treat an army as a living, complex organism, I can use the analogy "military disease" to illustrate the idea that a number of internal factors determine the combat effectiveness of an army to a high degree.

Military history provides many examples - besides the initial phase of the German attack on Norway - of larger military forces being defeated by smaller ones, such as the collapse of the French army in 1940, the British defeats in Malaya in 1941 and of Gazala in 1942, and the Arab-Israeli Wars of 1967 and 1973. An examination suggests that certain diseases, active in the defeated armies, were of more importance than the health of the victorious ones. These diseases are characteristic of most social organisms. Yet military personnel and many military historians have paid little attention to "pathologies" such as conformity, faulty feedback, excess trust, careerism, poor selection and promotion values, and unrealistic training.

In Narvik in the morning of 9 April, the Germans were numerically superior. Very soon this changed, but still the small, isolated German force fought on and avoided defeat by a larger Allied and Norwegian force. This was possible because the above-mentioned "pathologies" were less active in the German army than in its opponent's organism, especially the Allied one.

The undecided situation in Narvik during the first hours of the German occupation of the town, could have gone either way. About 200 men of the 1st/13th managed to bluff their way through the German positions and marched eastward along the Ofoten railway. Thus, this force, under Major Omdal, blocked the important railway link to Sweden until the Norwegians were surprised and overwhelmed on 16 April.

Sea war

The sea war at Narvik finished after three days on 13 April - four days after the invasion started. After this date, there was no question about who dominated at sea.

Again we can point out a difference from conditions in the south where the Germans shipped their supplies over Kattegat and Skagerak protected by aircraft. (7) As a result of the battles at sea, Dietl's land force more than doubled. It is an open question, historically, whether the Germans could have held on so long without the 2,600 naval personnel from the sunk German destroyers. These were equipped from Elvegaardsmoen. The loss of Elvegaardsmoen was a major one: here the Germans gained a well-equipped operational base (e.g. provisions for 2-3 weeks) close to the northbound main road.

Air war

For some time the Luftwaffe was somewhat stronger than its opponent in the North. As I mentioned earlier, the Germans were severely limited in the use of air power. Among other things, the distance from the airfield to the zone of operations in conjunction with the range of the aircraft, made only *one* hour of operation in the Narvik area possible. After South Norway fell in late April - early May, the Luftwaffe's activity increased in the Narvik area of operations. In particular, offensive missions by nearly 200 bombers, increased enormously. Most German bombing missions were directed against British naval ships and the maritime traffic in general. Harstad harbour and the British naval base of Skaanland suffered 140 air attacks in 8 weeks.

The cold, objective result of this was that the Norwegian

forces that operated chiefly to the east of the main roads, had fewer air attacks than they otherwise would have had. Those that took place were bad enough, but, as often happened during the Second World War and during more recent wars, morale increased rather than the opposite, as seems to be the case when one is bombed from the air and cannot hit back effectively.

Another lesson we learn from the air war in the mountainous terrain in the Narvik region, was that initially the *psychological* effect of being bombed was more important rather than the actual. But this effect decreased later by improved Norwegian air warning, and better use of the terrain for protection, while naturally, the soldiers got more accustomed to being bombed and found that the snow had a moderating effect.

During the campaign, the German air transports to Hartvigvann and Bjørnefjell became more frequent. In the last phase of the battle about 1050 men (mountain troops and parachute troops) in addition to vital supplies, were dropped.

The British used for a long time only carrier-based aircraft because of the lack of adequate airfields in North Norway. The aircraft carriers had to cruise at a safe distance out of reach of the German aircraft, and the distance to the coast being frequently so great, these carrier-based aircraft seldom could give effective support to friendly troops. Another contributing factor was that the British had not developed modern, fast, long-range dive-bombers and torpedo-carrying aircraft that could operate from carriers.

From 26 April to 6 May no aircraft carrier operated outside North Norway. Apart from the few Norwegian airplanes, only one squadron of amphibious planes operated from the region. This fact of course affected the operations on the ground.

Bardufoss airfield was ready around 20 May and from 21 May one Gladiator fighter squadron, and from 26 May - 7 June one Hurricane squadron, operated from this base. (8)

The Norwegian army made reconnaissance and photo missions, while naval aircraft flew bombing missions to cover them. For instance: east of Laeigastind on 12-14 April when 6th Brigade attacked, the Norwegian aircraft gave tactical air support to their own ground troops. Another example showing that the campaign in South and North Norway was very different. In the south there was no air support. The arrival of the British fighters ended the German supremacy in the air and saved bases like Harstad and Tromsø from suffering the same fate as Aandalsnes, Namsos and Molde in South Norway.

Ground war

Given the above-mentioned air and naval strength relationship, the final outcome was destined to be decided, as so often before and since the Narvik campaign, on the *ground*. Whereas more Norwegians fought on more fronts in South Norway, the *Allied* land forces were in the majority from mid-May onwards around Narvik. In the period from 14 April to 9 May, 12 Allied infantry battalions and some divisional and base units reached North Norway.

In the first phase, until mid-May, the 6th Division was virtually alone in driving the Germans back in the Narvik region. Only 3 of the 12 Allied infantry battalions were involved during this time in any actual fighting with Dietl's forces. This says much about the Allied command and the limited usefulness of the Allied units, due to insufficient training and deficient materiel for such extreme weather conditions and difficult terrain.

Dietl consolidates

To achieve freedom of movement in order to have some defence in reserve against the expected Norwegian attacks from the north, and to reach his main objective, Major General Dietl deemed it necessary to establish rapidly sufficient room for defensive manoeuvres. On 10 April, therefore, a mountain troops battalion advanced northwards from Bjerkvik and reached Elvenes in Gratangen the next day.

On 13 April a reinforced company of this battalion established itself on Lappaugen after having thrown a Norwegian protective detachment back. On 16 April, as mentioned above, the railway link to Sweden was established. Again Dietl and his men showed vigour and initiative. The space and the time he thus provided for himself, was later to prove sufficient to enable Dietl and his men to be saved by events on the Continent.

The Norwegian forces and leadership

After the fall of Narvik the 6th Division, (excepting the above-mentioned force on Bjørnefjell which commanded by Omdal was broken on 16 April,) had only one infantry battalion plus a few minor support units that was immediately available to be thrown against the Germans. The Division, therefore, had to prevent Dietl's bridgehead from becoming reinforced, and at the same time secure its own mobilisation and concentration of forces. This task was ably executed. Major General Fleischer's independent and quick reaction, from the evening of 8 April to the first Norwegian attack on the night of 24 April showed good leadership qualities, resourcefulness and a will to do what the situation demanded. He achieved this without waiting for the Government's mobilisation order or his own formal appointment as Commander in Chief North Norway by the same Government.

Further, it was Fleischer's plan to prepare thoroughly in order that the baptism by fire of his green, inexperienced troops might be as favourable as possible. He knew that this was essential for their further usefulness in combat. His reasoning was correct, and he could justifiably claim, in his posthumously published work:

"The units suffered much, but they became tough and ... learnt how to take care of themselves. They became units that could be used in war."

Operations in South and North Norway clearly illustrate the difference between timely, orderly mobilisation and its converse.

Still, for some Norwegian units the first engagement with the enemy was a catastrophe. Three times Norwegian forces were surprised and overwhelmed by the Germans. The first time was in Narvik on 9 April when the Germans occupied the town without the army firing a single shot and the second the incident with Major Omdal's force on 16 April at Bjørnefjell. The third time was the Trønder battalion (1st/12th) on 25 April during the fighting in Gratangen. This battalion was also attacked early in the morning when everybody except a small close security force was sleeping. During the remainder of the campaign the 1st/12th operated as a half-battalion. Several military historians maintain that the battalion never fully recovered from the psychological shock of the attack and of its result.

In the cosy light of hindsight the question can be asked whether Fleischer should have *cancelled* the attack. Storm and blizzard had totally exhausted the units. The plan for the attack was sound, but it presupposed possible skiing conditions and observation visibility in the direction of proposed fire. Operationally speaking, the 6th Division had lost a first-line infantry battalion. The lack of Norwegian infantry became

even more acute. But there were no further surprise attacks. The Norwegians had learnt the hard way.

The Germans soon withdrew their forward positions from Lappaugen and the valley of Gratangen south of Gratangen. They found their positions too exposed against the numerically superior Norwegian forces in this area. On 23 April five Norwegian infantry battalions had converged in the area north of the German bridgehead.

After the tragedy of the Trønder battalion, the 6th Division continued its offensive regardless. At the end of April the snow had begun to melt and hampered the movement of all units enormously, especially those that used skis and sledges.

Around the end of April - early May the units of the 6th Division in the Salangen-Gratangen area were organised as a combat division that consisted of two weak brigades - 6th and 7th Brigades - plus some divisional troops directly under the division. According to a report given to the Norwegian central staff in 1947, with Colonel Østby as chairman and among others Colonel Hyldmo (Commander IInd/15th in 1940) as commission member, 7th Brigade was never a brigade in the real organisational sense. "It lacked, for instance, all facilities for service in the rear areas. No brigade command existed, only a strongly reduced, small brigade staff. It was rather a combat group".

At the same time, early May, the Germans held a defensive perimeter over Labergdalen - Gratangseidet - Gressdalen. They had here two mountain troops battalions and two naval companies. One mountain troops battalion was stationed in Narvik with one company at Ankenes. The other naval battalions were along the north and east sides of the Herjangfjord, in Narvik and along the iron ore railway.

On 29 April Fleischer started his combined operation with the French General Béthouart, commander of the five French and

four Polish battalions which had arrived. The relationship between the two gentlemen was excellent and much better than Fleischer's relationship with General Mackesy.

On 1 May the pressure against Dietl's forces was resumed. The Norwegian offensive lasted more or less until the fighting was over. In the operations, the participants were 6th and 7th Brigade, the French 27th Demi-Brigade with two mountain battalions (Chasseurs Alpins) and one 75 mm field battery. Simultaneously a British battalion was in combat with a German mountain troop company in the area Haakvik-Andenes southwest of Narvik.

Apart from the actual amphibious operations in Bjerkvik and Narvik and the French-British battalion thrust along the main road at Haakvik, the operations on the ground in the Narvik area must be characterised as mountain warfare under winter conditions.

Operations to a great extent took place above the timberline where the possibilities for shelter from the harsh weather and concealment from aerial observation were very sparse.

9 April had nine hours between sunrise and sunset. Six weeks later it was daylight day and night. In 1939-40 the winter was unusually severe. The snow along the coast was more than one meter deep and inland double that. On 9 April it was still full winter, but three weeks later the spring had begun in the lower coastal area, and gradually spread upwards to the valleys. During the final phase of the campaign, the ice in the rivers melted and formed formidable obstacles. In the high mountains the snow and nightfrost remained until the end of the campaign on 9 June 1940.

During the fighting there was often a strong wind, and periods with snow falling, and in the final stage of the campaign, many days with dense fog. (10)

Main development in the following operations

In the first phase the main axis of attack was to a great extent directly south. From mid-May onwards the direction of the thrust changed towards the southeast, towards the eastern part of the iron ore railway and the Bjørnefjell area - the Swedish border. The objective was to gain control over these areas and eliminate Dietl's forces or drive them into internment across the Swedish border. (11) Gradually the north side of the Ofotfjord, north Rombaken, became the main area of French operations, while the Polish troops had the southern sector as their fighting area.

The British 24th (Guards) Brigade was transferred to Bodø, to Mo i Rana, from 30 April to 25 May. Fleischer deeply regretted that the best British unit, 24th Brigade, was for all practical purposes inactive from 14 April to 17 May. They were waiting for the snow to disappear! 24th Brigade was pursued by accidents and tragedies as two of the three battalions experienced shipwreck resulting in heavy losses in personnel and equipment.

The operations from the Vefsn valley to Bodø fall beyond the scope of this article, but since the Allied forces in the Narvik sector were reduced due to the fighting there, it should be mentioned as influencing on the outcome at Narvik.

The British suggestion to send the Polish brigade to East Finnmark was brusquely rejected by Fleischer!

The Allied landing in Herjangsfjord/Bjerkvik

The French General Béthouart, who commanded the five French and the four Polish battalions, had quite correctly found out that it was easier to advance by sea than on snow-covered mountains. The Allies dominated the sea from 13

April onwards. An amphibious assault was planned by Béthouart and executed on the night of 13 May - after having been postponed. Fleischer pledged Norwegian cooperation on 8 May. Due to faulty timing, lack of good cooperation and strong German resistance, the German defenders managed to escape the pincer movements. The sources give different accounts of the operations of 6th and 7th Brigade in connection with the landing. (12) Only a detailed study could, if it were still possible, provide answers about what happened when and why up there in the mountains.

Munthe-Kaas, then commander IInd/16th, calls 13 May "the biggest day of fighting in the Narvik area". Five nations participated. Tanks were used for the first time in the battle for Narvik!

The result of the fighting in the mountains was that the German positions on the northern sector of the mountain plateau were outflanked and deserted on 22 May. The Norwegians lacked fresh, rested troops for effective pursuit and possible defeat of the exhausted Germans, because the Varanger battalion was still deployed in East Finnmark ... After four weeks of combat and hardship day and night, the Norwegians had reached their limit. The supply lines of 6th Brigade were stretched to the utmost.

After these successful operations, the Allies now held the necessary jumping-off ground for a direct attack on Narvik by the reconquest of the Bjerkvik-Øyjord area. 25 years after the Gallipoli landings, the Allies began the Second World War's amphibious operations at Narvik.

The pause in the 6th Brigade's operations until early June

Munthe-Kaas, Commander of IInd/16th, criticises in his book from 1968 6th Division's (Fleischer's) directive of 22 May

that led to the long break in the fighting and evacuation from the mountain of IInd/16th, minus one rifle company and one heavy machine gun platoon. (13)

The Alta battalion, IInd/16th, and Ist/16th, needed a rest, but the offensive-minded Munthe-Kaas estimates that a 48 hour pause would have been sufficient. IInd/16th was out of action for *one week!* The skis of the battalion were sent to Setermoen, a grave mistake, because the skis were later needed again when the battalion again had to operate in the snow-covered mountain plateau. Lindback-Larsen, in 1940 Major and Chief-of-staff 6th Division, mentions several times in his book of 1946 about the 6th Division that the Division's command *underestimated* the capacity and endurance of the Norwegian soldiers. On page 83 he says: "We were to learn that the troops could endure much more than we thought." On page 90: "Without any doubt the troops endured the mountain conditions better than we had expected."

Ist/16th under Commander Major Hunstad, had on 7 and 14 May shown a remarkable marching capacity in difficult terrain. This was the battalion that IInd/16th were to operate with ...

A contributing reason for Fleischer's possible miscalculation could be the fact that the direct attack on Narvik was impending, an attack that took most of the attention of Fleischer and Lindbäck-Larsen. Moreover, they both participated with Hyldmo's battalion in the landing as observers. However, 6th Division had underestimated the substantial problems that the Nygaard basin created further to the west after the ice had melted.

Not until 3 June was the group IInd/16th (IInd/16th, Mountain Artillery Battalion III, one heavy machine gun platoon from Ist/16th and a mortar section from Ist/12th) allowed to move up into the mountains. By then, 12 days had elapsed since Dietl's retreat on 22 May!

Loss of time haunted the Allied and Norwegian operations at Narvik. "The long pause in operations ... brought the Germans great advantages and the Norwegians considerable loss of time and terrain. The shifting of weight was decisive ..." According to the former Commander IInd/16th Munthe-Kaas.

The direct attack on Narvik 27-28 May

The attack had to be postponed several times because of the necessity of having the airport at Bardufoss ready to receive British fighters. From 21 May one Gladiator squadron and from 26 May one Hurricane squadron operated from Bardufoss. Could the Gladiator squadron have provided sufficient air power? Could the attack have started immediately after the squadron was operative from the Norwegian air base? The possibility was a real one; but it must be stored in the collection of tempting hypothetical questions.

The attack was prepared and led by Béthouart in cooperation with the British and the Norwegians. The attacking force consisted of two battalions of the Foreign Legion, the Narvik battalion IInd/15th and two light tanks. The French artillery battalion and the Norwegian battery were there to support the attack from positions above Øyjord. Artillery support was also supplied by the Royal Navy, which provided landing crafts as well.

Coordinated with the time of the attack over Rombaken, the Poles advanced over the mountain from the Haakvik area towards Ankenes and the bottom of the Beisfjord.

Comments on some important aspects of the Narvik operation

A prepared amphibious assault against a defended area needs detailed planning, reconnaissance, coordination and detailed orders down to each individual soldier. All this takes time. For this operation enough time was available; indeed the long waiting period produced nervous strain on the attackers. Béthouart was waiting for the British fighters to arrive or for dense, low cloud cover ...

The plan's weak point was the lack of suitable landing crafts. Only half a battalion could be transported across at a time. Surprise was therefore essential. Secrecy and camouflage of all movements were imposed.

The operational plan was simple and good. But the choice of embarkation points was unfortunate, excepting the first echelon of the bridgehead-battalion and the two tanks which embarked at Seines. Seines was hidden from German observations and the first echelon achieved initial surprise in the landing area. But the rest of the attack force embarked at Øyjord which could be clearly observed from the opposite, German side.

When the second echelon of the bridgehead-battalion were due to embark, the quay and the surrounding area came under heavy artillery fire. The Legionnaires suffered some losses: amongst others a French company commander was killed. Therefore the embarkation area had to be moved 200-300 metres west of the quay. From there the Legionnaires were ferried across without further loss of life. (16)

But precious time had been lost - perhaps 45 minutes. It was impossible for the later echelons to close this time gap. The next battalion to cross the fjord was Major Hyldmo's Narvik battalion. It crossed without casualties, but because of the above-mentioned lapse of time, the bridgehead-front had not

been pushed as far forward as planned. The French battalion commander assured Hyldmo that there was no danger and that he could simply advance. At that time, the second critical phase occurred: before Hyldmo's two forward companies had time to move on, while they were marching through the French lines, the Germans launched a strong counterattack against the left company and the central sector of the battalion's front. Suddenly the French and Norwegians had a crisis on their hands and panic broke out. (17)

Simultaneously, Allied ships were attacked by German aircraft over a period of two hours. Several ships took direct hits and suffered heavy casualties, among them the flagship *Cairo*. During the German air attacks the naval ships could not give fire support to the ground operations. It was a great disappointment for the attackers that British air support did not materialise during this critical period due to fog coming in from the sea near Bardufoss. The whole operation was in danger. But through excellent leadership, the officers managed to contain the situation and regain control. The reserve company and the mortar platoon were thrown in as reinforcements. Cooperating with the Norwegian battery on the Øyjordside of the fjord, IInd/15th made an envelopment that enabled the Hyldmo battalion to gain a foothold on the mountain plateau. Unfortunately, the tanks got stuck in the mud and therefore played no further role in the operation.

In the afternoon the IInd/15th advanced as the first battalion, courtesy of the French, into Narvik through the French battalion that waited north of the railway station.

The reconquest of Narvik - the Allied goal from the first day of the Norwegian campaign - caused 150 casualties. About 60 of these were Norwegians.

How could Norwegian soldiers with their "peaceful" attitude and short training period before 9 April, become real combat soldiers? (19)

Some points may be considered:

1. Officers, non-commissioned officers and private soldiers knew each other well and could trust each other. During the neutrality defence period and the winter exercises, the units achieved a high degree of unit cohesion. Comradeship with strong leadership was the rule. The will and ability to help and support each other was well developed. Recent research confirms that the above-mentioned factors are decisive in determining unit cohesion in battle and fighting power. (20)
2. The soldiers had learnt how to use their weapons even those which needed a great deal of practice and maintenance like the Madsen machinegun.
3. The soldiers knew how to exploit the terrain. (21)
4. The Norwegian soldiers knew why they fought. They knew that their war effort could be decisive.
5. II/IR 15 had rather simple tasks to begin with. The gradual introduction to battle led to heightened self-confidence and high morale.

What has been said here about Hyldmo's battalion, could just as well be said of the majority of the Norwegian forces in the Narvik battles.

The final battles

After the reconquest of Narvik, the Norwegian offensive in the north which began again around early June, the French advance in the West along the iron ore railway, and the taking of Beisfjord by the Poles in the southwest and their subse-

quent advance towards Sildvik, it seemed as if it was only *a question of time* before Dietl's forces had to give up the fight.

But events on the continent were to influence the outcome of the operations in North Norway in a decisive way. The decision to withdraw the Allied forces was conveyed to Admiral Cork and Orrery on the night of 25 May. Owing to security measures the evaluation order was first passed on to representatives of the Norwegian government late on June 1 - one week later.

The Chief of Defence, General Ruge, who had assumed command on 29 May, was told on 2 June. The decision was received with bitterness. The fact that the evacuation order was conveyed so late, caused the Norwegian military command to act in the light of a false sense of the vital time factor. A case in point is that of the disposition of General Fleischer's men in the mountains from 22 June onwards. The temporary lack of Norwegian pressure on the Germans, gave Dietl's hard-pressed and exhausted forces a breathing space that probably saved them. Actually, it was possible to resume the Norwegian mountain offensive earlier. Dietl told Ruge after the campaign had ended that they (the Germans) could have held out for only 24 more hours - at the most 48.

Tentative conclusions

Why did the numerically superior Norwegian-Allied force fail to defeat the German bridgehead at Narvik?

The German attacks of 9 April on Narvik and Elvegaardsmoen were, as with the simultaneous attacks in South Norway, primarily based on surprise, audacity and speed. These factors combined with the unreadiness and indecision on the part of the defenders enabled the Germans to take both objectives in North Norway without a fight.

These factors were to be decisive. "We (the Norwegians) built on peace in sheer defiance" to try to quote the Norwegian poet Nordahl Grieg.

During the following operations in the Narvik area, the German mountain troops fought with great skill under inspiring leadership, periodically supported by the Luftwaffe. In this connection it is relevant and remarkable to refer to General Jodl's OKW report about the Norwegian campaign, signed 12 June 1940. (22) It was written just after the events when the impressions and incoming reports were fresh. The decisive influence of the Luftwaffe forms a thread through the whole document. The report becomes even more interesting when we consider the author's position as an army officer who knew only too well of the disagreements and the lack of cooperation between the three services.

We know that in peacetime it is extremely difficult to evaluate and compare the military strength of different countries or blocks. Such an evaluation consists of much more than counting materiel and soldiers, ("bean counting"). When evaluating the *operative status* (stridsdyktighet) of a force, many critical, but non-quantifiable factors like leadership, organisational ability, strategy, operations, morale and unit cohesion in combat come into the sterile, quantifiable data. Further, local factors like climate and terrain enter the picture as well.

It must be remembered that the fighting men are much more than a mere physical presence on the battle ground! It is a very advanced organisation of human beings whose ability to fight is ultimately dependent on a delicate psychological, social and moral cohesion. This cohesion can be ruined in other ways than by regular annihilation or decimation. It will be wise to remember the German military, philosophical and strategic thinker Clausewitz' words that war is a "clash of opposing wills". And the will of the enemy can be influenced by other means than defeating his first line troops ...

Today we know that the German army in the winter 1939-40 went through a tough training period based on the experience from the Polish campaign. Soldiers and officers were encouraged to be critical, to take the initiative, to improvise. How could they otherwise be prepared to deal with the unexpected, or learn to exploit the opportunities in combat that often only exist for a passing moment? Something of the essence of the German philosophy was expressed by the elder Count Moltke although this advice was not always followed: "A favourable situation will never be exploited if commanders wait for orders. The highest commander and the youngest soldier must always be conscious of the fact that omission and inactivity are worse than resorting to the wrong expedient." (23)

This attitude helps us to begin to understand something of the "secret" that lay behind the German army and Wehrmacht's successes. Certainly it is more plausible than explanations just listing revolutionary tactics or superior weapons and numbers.

On the three-year course at the German Military Academy, for many years the highest German military educational institution, half the time was spent learning tactics. The second most important subject was military history. The result of this was that in the art of waging war up to a certain level, they were second to none. Unfortunately for the Allies the German Wehrmacht in the spring of 1940 was far superior to the Allied forces in combat effectiveness.

According to the late Major General A.D. Dahl, Lieutenant Colonel and battalion commander of the Alta battalion in 1940, *tactical defence* was strongly emphasised in the Norwegian army in the 1930s. He maintains that tactical defence has always been a negative undertaking. It invites "waiting, leaves the initiative to the enemy, and leads to disaster if considered the only right doctrine ... Our terrain is well suited to tactical surprise attacks ... The *offensive spirit* must be kept

alive. It has nothing to do with sabre rattling or "ein frischer and fröhlicher Krieg"; it is simply *the essence* of all war experience. But if an attack is to be executed by a rather large unit, it must be practised *in peacetime*". (24)

The Norwegian army's directives and doctrines on the conduct of the officer when in combat point in the same general direction. He was supposed to be where he can best lead and control his unit, i.e. *behind* the unit, and the bigger the unit the farther behind he must be! Even if there were many exceptions, the above-mentioned Østbye report stated: "There is no doubt that the officers ... on the whole were located too far back. This is no reproach: they were where they were supposed to be. It is the system that was wrong." (25)

Considering the emphasis on *defence* in the prewar army, the offensive operations in the Narvik area become even more impressive.

There is another sensitive question which is difficult, even impossible, to evaluate with any degree of accuracy today: how did the activities of certain civilians as saboteurs and intelligence agents for the Germans affect the war? Had the sympathy that certain officers undoubtedly had for the Germans any influence on their performance? It is quite obvious that the suspicion of security leaks on the Norwegian side affected the cooperation with the Allies in a negative way. A.D. Dahl mentions "cases" and events in his book about the Alta battalion. Two people that he suspected were one of his company commanders and the chief-of-staff of his brigade! (26)

Concerning the Norwegian-Allied numerical superiority based on the number of active combatants at Narvik, the literature is often misleading. One forgets, for instance, that the 6th Division had personnel in Nordland and East Finnmark! The 6th and 7th Brigade had only 4,800 men - not 8-10,000.

Some authors also count British forces that were based far away from the actual fighting zones. Finally, numbers vary from this distance in time on both sides. My preliminary research indicates, reservedly, an Allied superiority around mid-May of slightly less than 3-1, decreasing to 2.3-1 by the end of the month.

Still, these factors are not *sufficient* to answer our question. Additional causes can be found in the Norwegian-Allied camp. Here we can identify at least four serious deficiencies that probably played just as decisive a role as the Germans' own skill and air support. (27) Before I list these problems, I will refer to Clausewitz's words: "Everything in war is very simple, but in war the simplest thing is difficult". (28) General Ruge has, in his *Feltoget*, a personal narrative of the campaign pointed out: "... He who makes the least mistakes, wins". (29)

The first fault in North Norway in 1940 was that we lacked the necessary infrastructure to receive those components which compose balanced military help e.g. airfields.

Secondly, the organisation, agreements and mutual trust were lacking which could have provided functional use and unity of command of the Allied and Norwegian armed forces in North Norway.

In *Feltoget* General Ruge criticises himself for not assuming earlier active command over the Norwegian warfare in North Norway in order to influence the Allies to wage war more aggressively; he wished to avoid stepping on General Fleischer's toes.

Thirdly, the campaign exposed the lack of a British command structure for combined operations which included all services. Finally, the operation revealed the fact that the majority of the Allied ground units lacked adequate training and equipment for winter and mountain warfare. This fact strongly reduced their usefulness. (30)

In my opinion, the *internal factors* that decide the combat efficiency of an army, among them the *human factor*, must be accentuated much more strongly than is commonly suggested. The theory that the Allies had to confront a foe superior in arms and materiel in North Norway is simply not acceptable.

In addition, the Norwegian-Allied loss of momentum and subsequent *loss of time* played an important role in explaining the outcome. Time is always a critical factor in military operations.

Some questions that need further research

1. Why did the Varanger battalion remain in East Finnmark during the *whole* campaign? Was the Red danger, the threat from the Soviet Union perceived to be so imminent? What did really happen with the 6th and 7th Brigades from 11-14 May?
2. What happened to the innocent third party, the civilian population, during the battle for Narvik. We have some knowledge, and it is pleasant to find that more personal accounts are emerging. But we need to know more. As the saying goes: "Until the lions get their own historians, hunting stories will always glorify the hunter."
3. Why did Norway not receive the same amount of help from Sweden that Finland did during the Winter War? The Finns received large quantities of weapons and ammunition that were partly substituted by Germany. In addition, about one and a half times more Swedish troop volunteered to Finland than the number of men in the 6th Division on the Narvik front. We know that the Swedish Government were under heavy pressure from the Germans and that, to a certain degree, they gave in to the pressure.

Finland showed more will to help her neighbour, but they had to give priority to the very real threat from the Soviet Union. They had no military materiel to spare. Still, courtesy of the Finns, a Norwegian "supply line", Torneaa-Rovaniemi-Svanvik-Kirkenes, was established. Personnel, notably badly needed reserve officers from South Norway, came via this route.

But despite the fact that the Norwegians in the Narvik area advanced modestly but steadily, the battle was lost due to events on the Continent beyond their control. North Norway too lost its sovereignty. Five years of foreign rule were at hand ...

Notes

1. I am greatly indebted to Colonel Otto H. Munthe-Kaas and his *Krigen i Narvik-avsnittet 1940*, Oslo 1968. The same applies to Colonel O.U. Munthe-Kaas's many contributions, especially "Felttoget i Nord-Norge 1940. En oversikt" in *Norsk Militært Tidsskrift (NMT)*, (nr 2, 1975), pp. 59-68 and his lectures given during a Nordic military history tour in 1966. Colonel Østbye's "Innstilling fra utvalget om erfaringer fra 1940" made for the Norwegian MOD and former battalion commander, Major Hyldmo's narrative from 1963 in a collection of tactical examples called *Military History, Part II, Prepared attack*, have also been of great assistance.
2. The survey draws upon O.U. Munthe-Kaas, *NMT*, *op.cit.*, pp. 59-60.
3. T. Holm, 1940-igjen, p. 26, *Forsvarsmuseets Smaaskrift*, (nr 4, 1987).
4. O.U. Munthe-Kaas, *NMT*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
5. *Ibid*, p. 60.
6. T. Holm, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
7. Professor Ole Kr. Grimnes' Narvik 1940, pp. 12-13, a pamphlet issued by the Press Service, The Ministry of Defence; undated.
8. O.U. Munthe-Kaas, *NMT*, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
9. See Innstilling ... Brigadens oppsetning, *op. cit.* (for 1), pp. 77-80.

10. O.U. Munthe-Kaas, *NMT*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.
11. Grimnes, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.
12. See e.g. the books of T. Sandvik, *Krigen i Norge 1940, Operasjonene til lands i Nord-Norge 1940, Bind II*, pp. 111-120, Oslo, 1965, Otto H. Munthe-Kaas, 1968, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-142, J. Høgevold *Vår militære innsats hjemme og ute, 1940 45*, Forsvarets overkommando, 1984, pp. 193-198 and Lindbäck-Laarsen, *6.Divisjon*, Oslo 1946, pp. 90-95.
13. See Otto H. Munthe-Kaas, 1968, *op. cit.*, pp.
14. Lindbäck-Larsen, *6.Divisjon*, *op. cit.*, pp. 83 and 90, Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, Oslo 1946.
15. Otto H. Munthe-Kaas, 1968, *op. cit.*, p. 176.
16. Unpublished lectures in military history, Nordic study tour, 1966 by Colonel Hanekamhaug, Company Commander IInd/15th in 1940, pp. 1-9.
17. Hyldmo, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
18. O.U. Munthe-Kaas, *NMT*, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
19. The tentative answer is from Hyldmo.
20. E.g. Elmar Dinter: *Hero or Coward*, pp. 71-73, Frank Cass and Company Limited, London, 1985.
21. In a German book, *General Dietl*, Munich 1951, p. 171: "He (Dietl) soon became aware of the enemy. The Norwegians excelled in better exploitation of the terrain, better use of skis, and they were excellent marksmen. But they were not great tacticians and the chapter 'Angriff auf nahe Entfernungen' was evidently not included in their textbooks, because here they almost always became stuck in our fire, or under counterattack by our Jaegers."
22. *NMT*, (nr 4, 1980), pp. 169-172.
23. Quoted by Col. T.N. Dupuy i *A Genius for War - the German Army and General Staff* (London 1977), p. 116.
24. Særtrykk av generalmajor A.D. Dahl: Noen betraktninger omkring v. Clausewitz' "Vom Kriege", V, udatert.
25. See Innstilling, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-101.
26. A.D. Dahl: *Med Altabataljonen mot tyskerne*, pp. 103-106, Aschehoug forlag, Oslo, 1946.
27. O.U. Munthe-Kaas, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
28. *Carl von Clausewitz, On War* ch. 7, p. 119, ed. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton 1976.
29. Otto Ruge, *Felttoget*, p. 203, Oslo 1989.
30. O.U. Munthe-Kaas *NMT*, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

Chapter 7

The Fateful Decisions: Intelligence, Command and Technical Failure

J. Rohwer

The battle for Narvik - the fateful decisions *)

To avoid a repetition of well known facts and of details presented by my colleagues I shall cover the questions of how intelligence reports influenced decision-making on both sides, of how the perceptions of the leaders and commanders were formed by the information they received from different sources, and of how the command set-up and technical failures on both sides influenced the outcome of the campaign.

The way to Narvik

As Michael Salewski pointed out, one of the main aims of the German operation was to take Narvik to prevent a capture of this ore-exporting harbour, which was vitally important to the German war economy, by the Allies. (1)

To achieve this, it was necessary to use most of the available big destroyers, (10), the only fast seagoing vessels which could reach Narvik in time without losing the indispensable surprise element until the last moment. Because this type of ship was not constructed as a transport, it was only possible to load the minimum of necessary troops with their personal weapons and light equipment, while the heavy weapons and vehicles had to be sent by two apparently innocent merchant ships in advance. To cover the destroyer force to the entrance

of the Vestfjord from British heavy forces, the only two fast battleships had to go with this group. (2)

Because these two battleships and ten destroyers were so important to future naval operations, it was thought necessary to bring them back to home ports as early as possible. This was only possible if the destroyers found in Narvik the necessary fuel for the return voyage which had had to be sent in advance by two disguised merchant tankers. (3)

Early intelligence and the first decisions

In early April 1940 the German xB-Dienst, the radio intelligence unit, was more successful in deciphering the British naval ciphers than Bletchley Park was with their own German ciphers at that time. So the German *Seekriegsleitung* or SKL could inform the commanders at sea promptly and fairly accurately about the strength and dispositions of the British forces off North Norway. (4)

The British intelligence agencies in early 1940 were not working in close coordination. (5) There were many conflicting reports about German intentions towards Scandinavia in early April, but there was no central evaluation. So the decision-makers acted mainly on their own preconceptions. Even when on April 7th an aircraft reported part of the German force in the North Sea and, later on, west of the Skagerrak, the Admiralty and the Commander in Chief Home Fleet considered a German break-out into the Atlantic the most probable and dangerous possibility and acted accordingly, disregarding the available reports from diplomatic sources about German troop transports moving north in the Belts and the Kattegat. (6)

At this time Operation Wilfred, the mining of some places on the Norwegian coast in order to force German ore transports out to the open sea, was already under way, and in British

ports troops were loaded aboard cruisers to be ready to counter German moves. (7) Now these ships had to unload the troops and to sail with the main body of the Home Fleet to cover positions in case of a break-out. So they were too far west to intercept the German force running for the Lofoten area. The air reconnaissance was greatly hampered by the wind's rising to a gale and by low visibility.

Such weather conditions might have been advantageous for a getaway into the Atlantic by the German heavy ships, but the destroyers, heavily loaded with troops and equipment, had great difficulty in reaching the Vestfjord in time and they lost almost all the materials which were lashed to the decks. (8)

Also the merchant ships which had sailed from Germany on April 3rd, were delayed, and only the whale factory ship *Jan Wellem*, which was used as a tanker, reached Narvik in time, coming from the *Basis Nord* near Murmansk. (9)

Why was the entrance to the Vestfjord not blocked?

While four British mine-laying destroyers laid their minefield near the southern shore of the Vestfjord, according to plan, on the morning of April 8th, Vice Admiral Whitworth, whose battlecruiser the *Renown* was covering the operation off the Lofotens, had no clear idea about the German intentions and, when he got a garbled signal from the isolated destroyer *Glowworm*, he raced south with his only remaining destroyer. (10)

In the late forenoon of the 8th Whitworth intercepted the Admiralty signal to the minelayers and their escorting 2nd Destroyer Flotilla to join the *Renown* off the Vestfjord and so he then turned north. But after meeting the 8 destroyers, having no new information on the German ships' position, he presumed their escape into either the Arctic or the Atlantic, either way most dangerous possibilities, and decided to

position his force northwest of the Lofoten islands. (11)

The weather also played a part in Admiral Whitworth's decision not to go back immediately to the entrance of the Vestfjord as ordered by the Admiralty on the evening of the 8th, when the intelligence pointed more directly to a probable German attack on Narvik. The gale and the heavy seas forced the destroyers to heave to, and then trail at low speed behind the battlecruiser on a northwesterly course.

Whitworth could not imagine that the German ships would try to enter the narrows of the Vestfjord in such conditions at night without being able to fix their positions exactly. (12)

So the way for Commodore Bonte and his destroyers was opened only about two or three hours before they arrived at the entrance of the Vestfjord. There Vice Admiral Lütjens detached them from his two battleships for their final run in to Narvik, while he himself turned for a covering position west of the Lofotens, so innocently following Whitworth's force. (13)

Both were surprised when they sighted each other through gaps in the snow showers, Whitworth without identifying the German ships correctly and Lütjens without recognising the destroyers clearly but guessing there would be a second battlecruiser (the *Repulse*) from his intelligence reports. An indecisive action followed with some success for both sides before the slower *Renown* lost sight of the *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst* but managed to follow them for some time while the destroyers were sent on to the Vestfjord. (14)

Bonte's situation estimate and his decisions

Meanwhile, Bonte and his destroyers arrived off Narvik on time according to plan. The low visibility and insufficient communication between the Norwegian outposts and Narvik

prevented a clear warning to the two Norwegian coast defence ships *Eidsvold* and *Norge*, which only now had the warning to prepare to resist a German attack. They had just manned their battle stations, but their captains were reluctant to open fire immediately. Bonte had the order and wanted to avoid a battle but he had to sink both ships when the captain of the *Eidsvold* refused to surrender and the *Norge* finally opened fire. (15) The unfortunate loss of life from those unpremeditated actions must have weighed heavily on Bonte's mind, probably adding to his indecisiveness during the day; the mental exhaustion from the strain of responsibility in bringing General Dietl's mountain troops to Narvik in such terrible weather conditions was already troubling him. (16)

While Dietl, informed beforehand of the probability of a surrender by the Norwegian commander at Narvik (as a follower of Quisling) (17), was able to occupy all the important standpoints of the town and established defensive positions around with his 2,000 mountain troops, Bonte is not reported to have been very efficient in preparing his ships for the return voyage, although ordered by the SKL to do so as soon as possible. (18)

His problem was the fuel situation. He waited for the tanker *Kattegat*, which had been detailed to refuel him but which, unknown to him, was intercepted by the Norwegian auxiliary *Nordkapp* and had scuttled herself. (19) His only available tanker was the *Jan Wellem*, which was not very well suited as a supply vessel. She could fuel only two destroyers at a time and this took from six to eight hours. Bonte's intention seems to have been to take as many of his ships as possible, but it could have taken at least one and a half days to top them up with fuel. A getaway could only be tried, therefore, at night on the 11th if he did not wish to divide his forces. So he dispersed half his ships to outlying fjords while the others waited their turn to use the *Jan Wellem*. (20)

The British reactions and Bonte's preparations

Meanwhile the British in London and at sea off the Vestfjord had no clear information whether the Germans were already in Narvik and, if so, in what strength. A series of counter-manding signals went out from the Admiralty, the Commander in Chief Home Fleet, and Admiral Whitworth, to Captain Warburton-Lee, commander of the 2nd Destroyer Flotilla on patrol off the Vestfjord. He chose the most militant order and decided to attack the Germans at Narvik in the early morning hours of the 10th using his 5 destroyers. (21)

Bonte probably counted on timely reports of the three U-boats in the Vestfjord and Ofotfjord. But only *U 51* sighted the destroyers on the evening of the 9th, just when they were on course southwest, trying to win some time to be at sunrise off Narvik. (22) And the orders Bonte gave for the patrol destroyers in the Ofotfjord were not vehement enough to prevent the *Diether von Roeder* from leaving its post before the relieving destroyer took over. So Warburton-Lee achieved complete surprise in the very bad visibility of the morning. (23)

The outcome of the battle is well known and I will not repeat the story here. (24)

The deaths, first of Bonte and then of Warburton-Lee, had grave consequences. On the German side the SKL ordered an escape of the prepared and fuelled ships, but by the evening of the 10th Captain Bey, who had taken over command of the destroyers, had only two ships ready. Knowing from the German xB-reports of the heavy forces off the Lofoten, when he sighted two destroyers and a cruiser in the Vestfjord, he returned to Narvik. The destroyers must have been the *Eskimo* and *Punjabi*, which *U 25* had just attacked and assumed they had sunk, the first two instances of the many torpedo failures in Norway. (25)

The British preparations for a final attack

On the British side Admiral Whitworth could not get a clear picture of the German position from the reports from the three destroyers which returned damaged (and which had also, incidentally, been attacked twice by U 51 without their knowing it because the torpedoes failed). (26) When the Admiralty signalled the captain of the cruiser *Penelope* to take the available destroyers and attack Narvik again, there was some uncertainty as to whether there were one or two German cruisers, and Whitworth, probably piqued because he had again been overridden by the Admiralty, did not act at all. (27)

Only when on the 12th air reconnaissance reported the heavy German ships in the southern North Sea going southward did the Commander in Chief, Admiral Forbes, send his forces northward, to attack the German ships by carrier aircraft from the *Furious*, but without success. However, with a report of five German destroyers at Narvik, a plan was made now on the 13th to attack with 9 destroyers, supported by the battleship *Warspite* flying the flag of Admiral Whitworth. (28)

The order to form the "Force B" was intercepted and deciphered by the German xB-Dienst and so Bey was warned of the forthcoming attack, without being able to attempt a further escape. Only three of his destroyers were fully operational, two had to repair battle damage, two were damaged by grounding, one was wrecked from the battle of the 10th and two were sunk. (29)

The events of the battle on April 13th are also well known and need no re-examination here. (30) More interesting are the decisions taken during the following days on both sides.

The crisis in leadership at the German supreme command

To the German side the loss of all the ten destroyers was a great shock. General Dietl's 2,000 mountain troops had established a wide defensive ring around the north as far as Elvenes and were trying to push the Norwegian forces back away from the ore railway to the Swedish border. But they were without heavy weapons. There was no possibility of supplying them by sea and only very limited means for air supply. (31)

In the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW) a crisis erupted on the 14th when a nervous Hitler wanted to evacuate the Narvik troops to Sweden to avoid further losses which might undermine his prestige. Only by strong opposition from General Jodl were the orders redrafted, and Dietl was told that, if he could not hold Narvik, he should take up a defensive position in the mountains along the ore railway and remain there supported by airdrops of supplies. Only on the 18th when the expected strong Allied action did not take place, was the crisis in leadership overcome. (32)

British indecisiveness:
direct attack or methodical approach?

On the Allied side the reason for the inaction was a clash of opposing ideas on further operations by the Admiralty, the Home Fleet and the commanders on the spot. (33) Because the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, recalled a former First Sea Lord, Admiral of the Fleet the Earl of Cork and Orrery, to be supreme commander for the operation in the field, there arose problems of seniority, of coordination with the army, and of conflicting orders.

The army itself had problems with the assignment of troops. Major-General Mackesy, commander of the 49th Division, had only a part of his troops when he arrived at Harstad on the 14th, because the remainder was diverted to land at Namsos. (34) Lord Cork, sent out without clear orders, arrived on the 14th at the Vestfjord and proposed to Mackesy early on the 15th to attack with the available ships and to land the troops directly at Narvik in order to overwhelm the enemy by the weight of naval power. But Mackesy held to his orders to establish a base at Harstad first; he had not at that time combat-loaded his transports. In addition he still had no clear picture of the enemy situation. (35)

So it was decided first to set up camp at Harstad, and, after preparing to cross the Vaagsfjord towards Skaanland and Gratangen, to attack the German positions systematically in cooperation with the Norwegian Brigades 7 and 6 which were east of them.(36)

The German torpedo crisis

This decision might have led to heavy Allied losses if the German torpedoes had worked well. Already during the two destroyer battles the German destroyers and the U-boats had experienced many frustrating torpedo failures. Some exploded prematurely, others became surface runners, many were running much deeper than set and neither the magnetic fuses nor the impact detonators functioned reliably. (37) Most of the British destroyers in the battles of April 10th and 13th reported torpedoes running far beneath their ships. (38)

And now the U-boats ordered to the Vaagsfjord, on an xB-Dienst report of enemy concentrations there, failed in their attacks. On the 14th, *U 38* missed the cruiser *Southampton*, carrying General Mackesy, and on the 25th the same *U 38* missed the covering battleship *Valiant*, while *U 65* failed to hit the Polish transport *Batory*. Meanwhile *U 49* was sunk by

British destroyers, which captured a chart showing the German U-boat dispositions at the beginning of the Operation Hartmut. *U 47* (under Lt.Cdr. Prien) twice fired salvos of four torpedoes each against the anchored transports and cruisers, but all failed. This list could easily be expanded using other areas off Norway. (39)

Unsupported, off the northern coast of Norway the battleship *Warspite* was attacked three times; the cruisers *Effingham* (then flagship of Lord Cork), *Enterprise* and the French *Emile Bertin* were also attacked; and there were many destroyers, not least among them the Polish *Blyskawica*, which were attacked but not hit: all these failures were in spite of close range shots and good intelligence (40). What might have happened if all the torpedoes had worked as expected?

The Allied buildup and the German defences

Meanwhile General Mackesy awaited the arrival of the convoy with the 5th Demi-Brigade Chasseurs Alpains which arrived on the 19th. (41) Lord Cork sent destroyers regularly to bombard Narvik and the German positions along the ore railway. Also British troops were transferred from the northern shore of the Bogenfjord to the southern side of the Ballangenfjord in preparation for the land attack. (42)

During this time General Dietl tried to equip approximately 2,500 survivors of the destroyers with Norwegian weapons captured at Elvegaardsmoen and to strengthen his positions after driving the Norwegians off the railway and up to the Swedish border. Supplies were airdropped on a limited scale, and Do-26 flying boats were used to bring in some heavier loads and to evacuate important technicians. (43)

The heavy snowfalls made movements very difficult for both sides and the Germans found it almost impossible to bring supplies from Narvik to the northern Group Windisch because

of the British destroyers in the Rombaksfjord. (44)

Lord Cork still hoped to take Narvik by direct assault; he made one last attempt to compel the Germans to surrender by a massive naval bombardment, intending to land his British troops without opposition. On April 24th, after some delay caused by snowstorms, he came in with his flagship the *Effingham*, the battleship *Warspite*, the cruisers *Aurora* and *Enterprise*, and the destroyer *Zulu*, and engaged in a three-hour bombardment, but because no positive results were observed, the troops already embarked on the training cruiser *Vindictive* had to be disembarked again. (45)

On the 26th the German Group Windisch destroyed the Norwegian battalion I/12 and took 144 prisoners in a counter-attack near Elvenes. They were evacuated to Sweden during the next few days. (46) General Mackesy gained additional strength by the arrival on the 27th of a convoy with the French 27th Demi-Brigade Chasseurs Alpains, and of another convoy on May 5th with the French 13th Demi-Brigade Foreign Legion and a Polish Brigade "Chasseurs de Nord". (47)

The German xB-Dienst successfully identified these transports, but the Luftflotte 5 was seldom able to send attacking aircraft up to the Lofotens partly because of the weather conditions but more because the planes were needed to attack the Allied evacuation convoys from Andalsnes and Namsos in Central Norway. (48)

Notwithstanding their failure to crack the German position in Central Norway around Trondheim by this two-pronged attack, the British Government decided, during the first days of May, to take Narvik as soon as possible intending to hold North Norway as a foothold for the Norwegian Government in its own territory. (49) To coordinate the troops from Great Britain, Norway, France and Poland in the inevitable land operation, it was deemed necessary to have a more senior

commander, and Lieutenant-General Auchinleck was sent out. However, as he could arrive no earlier than May 12th, further direct attacks were postponed. (50)

German deliberations for a relief attack

On the German side during these days deliberations took place on how to help General Dietl, who on 3rd May reported his intention of holding Narvik, and asked for more air support. (51) With the area around Trondheim now secure, the 2nd Mountain Division (known at this time as Group Feurstein) began their very difficult journey from the area north of Namsos along the coastal road to Mosjøen and Mo in the hopes of eventually reaching Narvik by land. (52) On May 8th the OKW ordered Dietl to hold out if possible in Narvik but, if not, at least in the mountains on the Norwegian side of the Swedish border. (53)

The German advance along the coastal road forced the British eventually to transfer the British 24th (Guards) Brigade south to block the area around Bodø, while the exercises against Narvik had to be taken on by the French, the Norwegians and the Polish battalions. (54)

Their pressure was felt by the Germans especially on the front in the north with the Group Windisch. So discussions started whether there was a possibility of easing the situation by calling on the heavy German ships off the Lofoten Islands or, as Hitler proposed, of sending troops with the big liners *Bremen* and *Europa*, in the protection of the big ships, into the Lyngenfjord north of Tromsø to reach the important airfield Bardufoss which would first be taken by a drop of parachutists. (55) The discussions dragged on: the liners would first have had to be reconstructed accordingly, and the battleships and cruisers as well as the few available destroyers for escorting the ships would have had to be made fully operational again, and so nothing came of this idea in the end.

On May 10th the main interest of the Allied Governments was turned on the new German offensive against the Netherlands, Belgium and France. In North Norway the snow began to melt, making movement for some time even more difficult. (56)

The Allied amphibious attack into the Herjangsfjord

Lord Cork, who had already on May 3rd planned to attack across the Rombaksfjord on May 8th, again had to back down in the face of General Mackesy's doubts, and only when the French Général Béthouart supported him by offering the two battalions of the Foreign Legion for an amphibious operation, was he able to organise an assault against Bjerkvik at the end of the Herjangsfjord for the night of 12th-13th May, supported by the battleship *Resolution*, and again the cruisers *Effingham* and *Aurora* and four destroyers. (57)

This attack, which incidentally led to the capture of the former Norwegian depot at Elvegaard, made the situation of the Group Windisch, which was attacked at the eastern part of their line by the Norwegian Brigade 6, even more difficult and led to its retreat to a shorter line. (58) Local attacks by the Norwegians and the French pushed the German line back until, on May 22nd, it withdrew from the Straumen narrows of the Rombaksfjord, north of the Haugfjell, to the Swedish border. Strengthened by some groups of parachutists General Dietl could now think of evacuating most of the destroyer crews, after the Swedish Government had agreed to their transfer by Swedish railway as "survivors of sunken ships"; this evacuation really began on May 30th. (59)

The preparation for the final attack

After General Auchinleck's arrival, new planning began for the final capture of Narvik on May 13th. (60) When he took command of the land and air forces under Lord Cork's overall direction, he sent all British army forces to the south to cover the Bodø area and stand against the oncoming German attack of Group Feurstein. The troops off Narvik were put under the command of Général Béthouart, who had to lead the French and Norwegian battalions against the northern front, and the Polish troops against the southern front over the heights above Beisfjord. (61)

But the preparations for the final attack needed time, and especially the transfer of the British battalions to the south gave time and opportunity for some successes to the German Luftwaffe. Already on May 4th the Polish destroyer *Grom* had been sunk by a He-111 bomber. On May 14th a Ju 87 dive-bomber sank the Polish transport *Chrobry* on the way to Bodø and on the 17th the cruiser *Effingham* struck a rock while transporting troops to Bodø and was lost. On May 18th the battleship *Resolution* was hit by a 1,000 kilo bomb from a Ju 88. So the planned attack had to be postponed from May 21st to May 27th. (62)

The decision to take Narvik and to evacuate North Norway

Meanwhile the developments in Belgium and France and the increasing danger from the German Luftwaffe, which could not be countered by the few fighter aircraft that the carriers *Glorious* and *Ark Royal* could bring in to North Norway, led to a decision by the Allied Governments, on May 24th, to evacuate North Norway after capturing Narvik and destroying the harbour and the ore-loading installations. (63)

The German air superiority was again shown, when on May 26th the anti-aircraft cruiser *Curlew*, the intended flagship of Lord Cork for the final assault, was sunk by German Ju 88 bombers while defending the construction of a new airfield at Skaanland for the fighter planes from the carriers. By changing to the sister ship *Cairo* Lord Cork came in with the anti-aircraft ships *Coventry* and *Stork* and five destroyers to support the crossing of the Rombaksfjord by one Norwegian and two French battalions for the direct attack on Narvik, while the cruiser *Southampton* supported the Polish attacks along the Beisfjord. (64) During the afternoon of May 28th the *Cairo* was damaged by a bomb hit, but the Norwegians entered Narvik, sent in first by courtesy of Général Béthouart. (65) The Germans retreated along the ore railway to the innermost part of the Rombaksfjord beyond Sildvik, but the Allied attempt to close their escape to Sweden by ski patrols of French and Polish detachments failed. (66)

At that time, reports in the media of the "victory" were used to black out to some extent the bad news from France including imminent evacuation of Dunkirk, but the evacuation of North Norway was beginning in great secrecy. (67) First the British brigade at Bodø was taken off while a Norwegian battalion, ignorant of the whole intention, tried to cover this operation from the advance of the Group Feurstein. (68)

Now the Allied troops, as they no longer needed to continue the pressure against the much shorter defence lines of the Group Dietl, had concentrated again at Harstad. Very bad weather with snow showers and low visibility prevented the observation of these movements by the German air reconnaissance. And the exhaustion of the German troops hampered their patrols so that the Germans did not realise what was going on. (69) In the four consecutive nights from 4th/5th to 7th/8th May, 4,700, 4,900, 5,100, 5,200 and finally the last 4,600 British, French, Polish and some Norwegian soldiers were concentrated and embarked on the troop transports

assembled at Harstad and left in several convoys for Great Britain. (70)

The evacuation and Operation Juno

This operation was also successfully disguised from the German intelligence. Even when the xB-Dienst recognised heavy shipping movements, they first thought it might be reinforcements coming in. (71) This led to additional pressure on the German side for a relief operation of the two battle-ships *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst*, the heavy cruiser *Admiral Hipper* and four destroyers against the Allied concentrations at Harstad. (72)

On June 4th the Commander of the Fleet, Admiral Marschall, left with his force for the Operation Juno. The enemy situation was not very clear. While ordered to attack the concentration of transports at Harstad he, travelling north, gained the impression of an Allied evacuation already in operation. When aircraft reported ships to the south with westerly courses, Marschall changed his target in contravention of his received orders from the SKL and the Naval Group Command, causing the second crisis in the leadership of the fleet and finally his reliefment. (73)

The details of the operation, which led to the sinking of the carrier *Glorious* and some other ships, but failed to intercept the real evacuation convoys with the troops, are well known. (74)

Not so well known is the reason why the German ships could attack so freely in the Norwegian Sea. The British intelligence got no early indication of the German operation, and the air reconnaissance did not report the German force until they reached Trondheim. (75) The Home Fleet at the time was distracted by a false report from the Q-ship *Prunella* about two unidentified ships proceeding towards the Iceland-Faroes

passage, leading the Commander in Chief Home Fleet to fear a German sortie into the Atlantic, always the most dangerous possibility for his command, and he sent his fast battle cruisers into this area, away from the evacuation convoys and the German ships. Because there were no radio signals about the German ships, no countermeasures were taken in time. (76)

So the Norwegian campaign ended with intelligence failures on both sides, which prevented the Germans from achieving greater successes with their heavy ships, and hampered the possibilities for the British of bringing the dangerous German ships into battle.

Summary

Generally speaking the German commanders in Norway and at sea were supplied with more exact intelligence, mostly because of the success of the German naval xB-Dienst in cracking the British Naval Cypher No.1 with the result that about 30 to 50 per cent of the intercepted signals were available with short delays. Also, after the establishment of air bases in Norway, the German air reconnaissance could furnish much better information than the British.

On the British side there was a great amount of information available from many different sources, but the collation and evaluation of this material, and its presentation to the decision-makers and to the commanders in and off Norway was ineffectual. Even the success of Bletchley Park in reading the new "Enigma"-cypher "Yellow", introduced on April 10th for the intercommunication between the German army and air force, could not usefully be used because of the absence of an evaluation and distribution system. (77) For the same reason the capture of intelligence materials during the campaign produced relatively unimportant results until June 1940.

On April 14th the destroyers *Fearless* and *Brazen* captured from the sinking *U 49* off Harstad maps and orders for the U-boat operations, but when they arrived in London the German U-boat operations had practically come to an end because of the torpedo failures. (78)

And on April 26th British search operations against some German special service trawlers, sent out to cut cables from Norway to Great Britain, led to the sinking of the *Schiff 37* by the destroyer *Arrow* and the capture of the *Schiff 26* by the destroyer *Griffin* off the Romsdalfjord. Looting of the second ship by the boarding party prevented Bletchley Park from making use of the captured cypher materials and documents as expected. Only in May was it possible to solve the cypher settings for six days of April. (79)

So the experience of this failure was only of use for the future.

In the decision-making processes the Germans had the great advantage of having the initiative, and of having the possibility of planning beforehand and arranging the command relations for a combined operation before its outset. These arrangements generally worked well. But there were on the German side two crises, first with Hitler's nervousness from April 14th to 18th which was overcome by the strong recommendations of General Jodl, and secondly with the problems between the SKL, the Group Command West and the Fleet Commander during Operation Juno, which have just been described.

On the Allied side problems arose because there were several decision-making bodies which had to react to surprising events which no one in command had imagined. It took time and disappointments before controversial orders to army and navy commanders and problems of seniority could be overcome, and when the arrangements for joint leadership of the different services of four nations were started, it was too late. There was also the interference of the authorities in London,

especially that of the First Lord of the Admiralty, with direct orders on tactical operations, when it should have been sufficient to send all available information concerning the enemy and then let the commander on the spot make decisions according to the situation of his forces, the geographical and meteorological conditions, and his own observations about the enemy. (80)

Finally we must remind ourselves of what could have happened if the German torpedoes had functioned as one would have expected after such a long development of this weapon. The failure of the German technicians to test this weapon under realistic conditions probably saved the Allied Navies great losses which might have had grave consequences for the future operations of the war. (81)

When I look back at my own experience in preparing the two papers for the conferences at Canakkale and Narvik, it is interesting to note that there were many critical analyses about the Dardanelles campaign available when, almost exactly 25 years later, the operations around North Norway were planned. There were even people who had participated in the battle of 1915 in positions such as deciding politicians, soldiers or sailors, who now had to take new decisions. (82) But had they re-evaluated their own memories using the analyses available from all participating nations? It seems that most of the lessons were disregarded. I think we historians must not only work together regardless of borders between us, but must invite the politicians and decision-makers to join us as our Norwegian hosts did. We must be grateful for their effort.

Notes

- *) This study is based mainly on the following publications:
- *Kriegstagebuch der Seekriegsleitung (KTB/SKL) 1939-1945. Teil A*, ed. by Werner Rahn, Gerhard Schreiber and Hansjoseph Maierhöfer, Vol. 8-10, Mittler, Herford, 1989-1990.
 - Hubatsch, Walther, *Weserübung. Die deutsche Besetzung von Dänemark und Norwegen 1940*, (Studien und Dokumente zur Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges 7), Musterschmidt, Göttingen, 1960.
 - Derry, T.K., *The Campaign in Norway*, (History of the Second World War, Military Series), H.M.S.O., London, 1952.
 - Roskill, S.W., *The War at Sea.*, (History of the Second World War, Military Series), Vol. I, H.M.S.O., London, 1954.
 - Dickens, Peter, *Narvik. Battles in the Fjords*. (Sea Battles in Close Up 9), Ian Allen, London, 1974.
1. *Lagevorträge der Oberbefehlshabers der Kriegsmarine vor Hitler 1939-1945*, ed. by Gerhard Wagner, Lehmanns, München, 1972, pp. 82, 85-87, 90.
Salewski, Michael, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung 1935-1945. Vol. I: 1935-1941*, Bernhard & Graefe, Frankfurt/Main, 1970, pp. 175-212.
Butler, J.R.M., *Grand Strategy. Vol. II*, (History of the Second World War, Military Series), H.M.S.O., London, 1957, pp. 91-117, 124.
 2. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, pp. 10-12.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.
 3. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol.8, pp.22-23, 37-38, 54.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
 4. Bonatz, Heinz, *Seekrieg im Äther. Die Leistungen der Marine-Funkaufklärung 1939-1945*, Mittler, Herford, 1981, pp 85-93.
 5. Hinsley, F.H., Thomas, E.E., Ransom, C.F.G., Knight, R.C., *British Intelligence in the Second World War. Its Influence on Strategy and Operations. Vol. I*, H.M.S.O., London, 1979, pp. 139-142.
 6. Roskill, *op. cit.*, pp.160-165.
 7. Roskill, *op. cit.*, pp. 157, 164-165.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

8. Hubatsch, *op. cit.*, pp.64, 70-71.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.
9. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, pp. 54, 73-74.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 21, 29.
10. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, pp. 59-60, 63-65.
Hubatsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-158.
Roskill, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-158.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-67.
11. Roskill, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-160.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-28, 31.
12. Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-33.
13. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, pp. 47-48, 53-54, 72.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
Maier, K.A.; Rohde, Horst; Stegemann, Bernd; Umbreit, Hans,
Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Vol. 2. Die Erringung der Hegemonie auf dem Europäischen Kontinent,
Stuttgart, Deutsche Verlags Anstalt 1979. pp. 1289-234, bes.
213-214.
14. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, pp. 72-73.
Hubatsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.
Maier *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 214.
Roskill, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-167.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-36.
15. Steen, E.A., *Norges Sjøkrig 1940-1945. Vol. III: Sjøforsvarets kamper og virke på Vestlandet og i Trøndelag i 1940. Vol. IV: Sjøforsvarets kamper i virke i Nord-Norge i 1940*, Oslo, 1954-1958. Vol. III, p. 206, Vol. IV, pp. 64-73.
KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, pp. 73-74.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-39.
16. Hubatsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-105.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
17. *Kriegstagebuch der 3. Gebirgsdivision, Generalleutnant Dietl*, pp. 64-68. Quote from Hubatsch, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
18. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, pp. 76-77.
Lageberichte des Wehrmachtsführungsstabes über die Besetzung von Dänemark und Norwegen, 7. April - 14. Juni 1940. In Hubatsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 245, 248, 251-252.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.
19. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, p. 96.
Steen, *op. cit.*
20. KTB/Skl., *op. cit.*, vol. 8, p. 85.
Hubatsch, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

21. Roskill, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-173.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-47.
22. Hubatsch, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
Roskill, *op. cit.*, p. 174.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-52, 55-56.
23. Roskill, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-175.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-62.
24. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, pp. 83-84.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-96.
25. Sammlung der Torpedo-Schussmeldungen der deutschen U-Boote in der Bibliothek für Zeitgeschichte, Stuttgart.
KTB/SKL, *op. cit.* vol. 8, pp. 96, 104.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-99, 103-104.
26. Schussmeldungen, *op. cit.*
Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-99, 105.
27. Roskill, *op. cit.*, p. 175.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-106.
28. Roskill, *op. cit.*, p. 177.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-111.
29. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, pp. 96, 109, 110, 112.
Bonatz, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-95.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-116.
30. Lageberichte ... , *op. cit.*, pp. 259, 262.
31. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, pp. 119, 122-123, 135.
Hubatsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-114.
Roskill, *op. cit.*, pp. 177-178.
Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-155.
32. Dienstliches Tagebuch des Chefs des Wehrmachtführungsstabes, Generalmajor Jodl. in: Hubatsch, *op. cit.*, pp.354 ff., bes. pp. 373-377.
Generaloberst Halder, *Kriegstagebuch. Vol. I: Vom Polenfeldzug bis zum Ende der Westoffensive (14.8.1939-30.6.1940)*, ed. by H.A. Jacobsen. Stuttgart, Kohlhammer 1962. pp. 259, 261-263.
KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, pp. 123-124, 131, 142-144, 178-179.
Hubatsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-168.
Maier *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 219-220.
33. Derry, *op. cit.*, pp.71-77.
Roskill, *op.cit.*, pp. 178-181, 184, 190-191.
34. Derry, *op. cit.*, pp.84-89,145-150.
Roskill, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-182.
35. Derry, *op. cit.*, pp.148-150.

- Roskill, *op. cit.*, p. 190.
36. Derry, *op. cit.*, p.151.
 37. Rössler, Eberhard, *Die Torpedos der deutschen U-Boote. Entwicklung, Herstellung und Eigenschaften der deutschen Marine-Torpedos*, Koeler, Herford, 1984. pp. 90-96.
 38. Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 64, 69, 75, 83, 86, 122, 127, 132-133.
 39. Schussmeldungen ... , *op. cit.*
KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, pp. 104, 113-114, 148, 151, 163, 187, 202-203, 216.
 40. Schussmeldungen ... , *op. cit.*
 41. Derry, *op. cit.*, pp.153-158.
Lageberichte ... , *op. cit.*, pp. 311.
 42. Derry, *op. cit.*, p.158.
 43. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, pp. 147.
Lageberichte ... , *op. cit.*, pp. 282, 315-316.
 44. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, pp. 160, 239, 249, 272, 296, 306.
vol. 9, p. 6.
Lageberichte ... , *op. cit.*, pp. 314, 324, 326.
 45. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, pp. 259, 283.
Derry, *op. cit.*, pp.154-155.
Roskill, *op. cit.*, p. 191.
 46. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, p. 283.
Lageberichte ... , *op. cit.*, pp. 265, 288.
 47. Lageberichte ..., *op. cit.*, p. 316.
Derry, *op. cit.*, pp. 155, 157, 163, 193.
 48. Derry, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-144.
 49. Derry, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-171.
 50. Derry, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-170.
 51. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, pp. 179-180, 191-192, vol. 9, p. 90.
 52. Hubatsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-191.
 53. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, p. 87.
 54. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, p. 274.
Derry, *op. cit.*, pp.187-192.
 55. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, pp. 234-235, 254-256, vol. 9, pp. 260, 274-275, vol. 10, pp. 20, 23, 25, 55-56. 119.
Hubatsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-193.
Salewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-199.
 56. Derry, *op. cit.*, pp. 180, 196-198.
 57. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, pp. 43, 79-80, 107, 109, 110-120, 129-130.
 58. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, pp. 15, 24, 36, 45, 67, 234.
 59. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, pp. 184, 215, 310, vol. 10, p. 37.

60. Derry, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-201.
61. Derry, *op. cit.*, pp. 218-221.
62. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, p. 53, vol. 10, p. 23.
Roskill, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-192.
63. Butler, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-146.
64. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, pp. 330, 332-336.
65. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, p. 189.
Roskill, *op. cit.*, p. 193.
66. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, p. 321, vol. 10, pp. 4, 24-25.
67. Roskill, *op. cit.*, p. 193.
68. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, p. 289.
Lageberichte ... , *op. cit.*, pp. 337-338, 340-341.
Derry, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-191.
69. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 10, pp. 12, 81.
Lageberichte ... , *op. cit.*, pp. 342, 344, 346-347.
70. Roskill, *op. cit.*, pp. 193-194.
71. Bonatz, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-109.
72. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 10, pp. 38-39, 45-46.
Hubatsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 193-197.
Salewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-204.
73. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 10, pp. 59, 69, 71, 82-85, 108-110,
117.
Hubatsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 197-210.
Salewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 204-207.
Maier *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 222-225.
74. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 10, pp. 106-107.
Roskill, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-195.
75. Hinsley, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-143.
76. Roskill, *op. cit.*, p. 197.
Hinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 141.
77. Hinsley, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-138.
78. Ministry of Defence (Navy), *German Naval History, The U-Boat War in the Atlantic 1939-1945*, H.M.S.O., London, 1989,
part I, pp. 17-26.
79. KTB/SKL, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, p. 81.
Hinsley, *op. cit.*, pp. 163, 336.
80. Roskill, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-188, 201-203.
Hinsley, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-143.
81. Rössler, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-96.
Hubatsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-117.
Salewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-190.

82. Rohwer, Jürgen, "The Fight for the Turkish Narrows. Problems of Co-ordination in Coalition Warfare". Paper for the International Symposium, Dardanelles Battles: The Reasons and the Result, at Canakkale, Turkey from March 14th to 17th, 1989. (To be published).

Chapter 8

French Participation in the Battle for Narvik

P. Masson

Both the timing and the extent of the German invasion of Norway came as a great surprise for the Allied Command. On the French side, no preparations had been made. The French Prime Minister, Paul Reynaud, was astonished to find that the French force set up at Brest at the beginning of March had been disbanded, and that one had to start again from scratch. This made him consider the possible dismissal of the Commander in Chief of the French forces, Général Gamelin.

In the meantime, a new expeditionary force was being set up at Brest. It was made up of three echelons: first the 5th and then the 27th Demi-Brigade de Chasseurs Alpins under Général Audet, and Général Béthouart's 13th Demi-Brigade Foreign Legion together with the Polish brigade. In addition to these three echelons, there was the 2nd Light Division made up mainly of the 2nd Demi-Brigade de Chasseurs Alpins. In fact, this last unit had barely reached Scotland when it was called back home on 10 May to face the German onslaught in the West.

Troops and stores and equipment were carried in 10 convoys, the departures of which, from Brest, were staggered between 12 April and 5 May. Convoys were mustered from 14 April to 10 May at Greenock, on the west coast of Scotland, where the French navy kept several supply ships, such as the tankers *Mekong*, *Lot* and *Tarn*, the ammunition carrier *Margaux*, and the patrol boat *Leoville* which was used as a seaborne base.

Altogether, the French navy mustered the 1st Division of armed merchant ships under Rear-Admiral Cadart (the liners *El Djezair*, *El Mansour*, *El Kantara*, and *Ville d'Oran*), as well as 15 passenger ships and 14 cargo ships which had been commandeered. Cover was provided by French torpedo boats and destroyers.

The French expeditionary force was given the Narvik operation as an assignment by an Allied decision made on 9 April. But as early as 14 April, it was decided, on political and military grounds, to move the joint Anglo-French contingent to Central Norway. It was expected that a pincer movement starting from Namsos and Aandalsnes would drive the Germans out of Trondheim. The first French echelon, together with the 5th Demi-Brigade de Chasseurs Alpins under Général Audet were sent to Namsos which was already occupied by a few British battalions. The landings of the troops and supplies were staggered between 19 April and 27 April and proved difficult to carry out.

The very next day, however, the British Commander ordered the evacuation of Aandalsnes and Namsos despite the objections of the French. Several facts led to this decision: mounting pressure exerted by the German forces, the power of the Luftwaffe, the high exposure of ground forces, onshore supplies and ships due to the lack of air cover and AA guns, and lastly, the makeshift harbour facilities including wooden piers and no lifting gear.

Moreover, another mistake was made in having the troops and their supplies conveyed by separate convoys travelling at different speeds. The troops ran short of heavy weapons and even ammunition within several days of their landing. One ship, the *Ville d'Alger*, had to pull back because of the dreadful weather after having put on the shore only some of the troops on board. Skis were unloaded on shore but without their bindings ... To crown it all, the loading of the cargo ships at Brest had been a complete mess, ships were loaded

as the railway waggons came in, without any schedule, ignoring both where the units belonged in the overall military structure and their requirements in the field. And then most supplies were destroyed by aerial bombings in Namsos harbour on 28 April.

The troops were evacuated during the night of 2 and 3 May by Allied ships under Vice-Admiral Cunningham; the ships included the *Montcalm*, the destroyer *Bison* and the liners of the 1st Division of armed merchant ships. They managed to sail down the fjord without trouble, but once out on the high seas, air attacks sank the *Bison* and the British destroyer *Afridi*. The 5th Demi-Brigade de Chasseurs Alpains under Général de Division Audet was taken back to Scotland and was then no longer involved in the Norwegian campaign. Once back in France, it was eventually surrounded and forced to surrender at Saint Valery-en-Caux after the collapse of the Somme.

While the Allied gambit in Central Norway was a total failure, the British Command, after endless waverings, decided to revive the Narvik operation. Conditions seemed right. All the German destroyers had been sunk or gutted by the *Warspite* group. From 15 to 17 April, three British battalions managed to gain a foothold at Harstad in the Lofoten islands. The second echelon of the French expeditionary force joined them from 27 April to 30 April. The 27th Demi-Brigade landed at Skaanland and Salangen. Supplies were unloaded later at Harstad and Skaanland. The 13th Demi-Brigade Foreign Legion and the Polish brigade landed at Harstad, Skaanland and Salangen from 7 to 9 May. Supplies carried on board five cargo ships were unloaded at Harstad and Skaanland from 9 to 12 May.

Landings had to be staggered because the Anglo-French base at Harstad had many faults: moorings were inadequate, there were no facilities to carry out repairs on motor vehicles, there were not enough buildings to provide shelter for equipment

and other supplies. Since loadings at Brest had not been planned properly and there were no lists, the French alpine troops never retrieved their jackboots or their sunglasses. The lack of that part of their equipment led to many cases of frostbite and of snowblindness. All the ammunition of the 27th Demi-Brigade travelled on board a single cargo ship. Had the latter been sunk, the firing capability of the troops on land would have been reduced to six hours.

To quote an officer in the French navy, the base at Harstad was a "real bear-house". Each unit ordered that its equipment be unloaded and took it away without any checking. And he added: "We were getting conflicting orders from British and French officers, each one with his own order of priority. They went round the ships looking for their supplies and the crews of the cargo ships did not know what they had on board".

What made things even worse was that the ships were being unloaded under heavy aerial bombings, particularly after 15 May. There were not enough AA gun batteries to protect all the exposed areas. It was only from 21 May that two fighter squadrons, one of Gladiators and the other of Hurricanes, were able to operate out of Bardufoss. Many ships, such as the cruiser *Curlew* and the destroyer *Grom*, the liner *Chrobey*, and the tankers *Pembroke*, *Castle* and *Balteako* were sunk or set on fire by the Luftwaffe.

Worse was still to come, since there were also disputes among the leadership. *Général de Brigade* Béthouart, the French commander of the French troops, was an expert at mountain warfare. His earlier assignment as French military attache in Finland had given him a sound knowledge of the Scandinavian theatre of operations. In the beginning he reported to Admiral of the Fleet the Earl of Cork and Orrery, Supreme Commander of the whole expeditionary force, and to Major-General P.J. Mackesy, Commander Land Forces. The two British commanding officers had a disagreement.

Admiral the Earl of Cork and Orrery advocated a straight landing close to Narvik, so as to take advantage of the protection of the ships. Mackesy, however, was cautious and even fearful, and wanted the troops to make a circular move forward in a carefully planned fashion, up the fjord from Bogen and Ballangen at the same time, while the French and the Norwegian units moved up from Salangen.

Général Béthouart, who fully shared the views of Admiral Cork and Orrery, managed to make his own compromise proposal prevail after having done some reconnaissance work off the coast of Narvik. Without giving up the idea of a circular move forward, he advocated a landing by the 13th Demi-Brigade Foreign Legion at Bjerkvik, so as to secure the German-held Øyjord peninsula and Elvegaard camp where large Norwegian supplies were kept. This first operation was to be followed by a second landing close to Narvik itself. The operation had every chance of being successful given the Allied superior force of 25,000 troops against 3,000 German troops.

It began on 12 May. The battleship *Resolution*, the cruisers *Effingham* and *Vindictive*, and five destroyers opened fire under Général Béthouart's command against the German lines of defence. According to an eyewitness, Captain P.O. Lapie of the French Foreign Legion: "The scene was at once striking and weird, as though from a very ornate theatre show with a wealth of sets and on a film strip at the same time ... Houses were ablaze ... After an hour's steady artillery fire it was suddenly dead still, and the sea beyond the beach was swarming with little black boats full of troops bobbing up and down. It was the first battalion on its way to storm Bjerkvik."

The little town was taken after overcoming stiff enemy resistance which had to be driven out of every street and house. The civilians were sorely tried because they were not evacuated before the fighting began. A legionnaire retains the memory of "an appalling crossroads strewn with torn corpses,

with dead babies lying under their overturned cots, the wounded moaning in pools of their own blood". The landing of a second battalion led to the securing of Maby and the Elvegaard army camp. Next day, the troops that made the sea-landings were able to join up with the Polish troops that had come up the road along the shore and with the Chasseurs Alpains and the Norwegian troops that had come down from Stratangen. The success of the landing at Narvik brought about the dismissal of General Mackesy who was replaced by Lieutenant-General Auchinleck. The latter appointed Général Béthouart commander for the whole area of Narvik and all the Allied forces there.

While the British tried to check the advance of the German relief force moving up from Trondheim towards Mo and Bodø, Général Béthouart planned the final move which began on 28 May. The Demi-Brigade Foreign Legion and a Norwegian battalion landed at Orneset, east of Narvik, with the support of the ships' guns which had been brought to bear for the second time.

The fighting at Orneset was very tough for the Poles concerned. The Germans launched a counterattack with the air cover supplied by the Luftwaffe, the latter hitting the cruiser *Cairo* very badly and driving the Allied ships away. Dietl's forces, for fear of being trapped, began to give way and to fall back along the railway line towards Sweden. The Norwegians thereupon marched into Narvik.

It turned out to be a short-lived victory. As early as on 24 May, the impending disastrous outcome of the battle of France with the British Expeditionary Force trapped at Dunkirk prompted Winston Churchill's decision to evacuate Narvik. The troops that had carried out the orders in the field, at any rate the British and the French, were informed on 26 May.

The evacuation was carried out throughout five consecutive nights beginning 3 June, and involved the destruction of the

railway line, the harbour facilities and the power station. This was done without any major interference by the Luftwaffe because of low cloud. But the success of the move was marred by the loss of the aircraft carrier *Glorious* sunk by the guns of the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* despite the gallant sacrifice of its two destroyers. The RAF pilots who had supported the ground forces during the battle of Narvik all went down with the carrier.

At a particularly gloomy juncture for the Allied cause the Narvik success may seem a mere hollow one. Did it not spell the end of the Norwegian campaign and did it not happen at a time when the final outcome of the Battle of France was no longer in doubt? Narvik will nevertheless continue to have an enormous and lasting effect in France. This single victory during a tragic spring shows that French army units under a good commander and integrated into a close-knit force can win. Let us also add that the Demi-Brigade Foreign Legion was still in Britain when the truce was signed by France, and that it was the first unit of the French forces that joined Général de Gaulle and made up the initial core of the Free French Forces.

Chapter 9

Polish Forces in the High North

M. Borkowski

After the defeat of Poland by Nazi Germany, following the sudden and ruthless aggression of September 1939, not all soldiers of the defeated Polish army dispersed or were taken prisoners of war. Tens of thousands, in concentrated groups, crossed the Romanian and Hungarian frontiers in an attempt to reach France or England. In the belief that the war could only result in good, they were making their way to join the Allies and to take their part in the final crushing of Germany. In May 1940, Polish units on Allied territory numbered 82,000 officers and men, 45,000 of whom took an active part in the defence of Norway and France.

The Battle for Narvik was the first real battle fought by Polish soldiers after the September defeat, and it proved that the Poles had not laid down their arms, but rather that they had joined the Allies boldly, under the war cry so deeply rooted in the Polish national consciousness: "For your freedom and ours".

1. Participation of the Independent Podhale (Highland) Rifle Brigade in the battle for Narvik

During the night of April 8 1940, Nazi Germany made a surprise attack on Norway. German troops landed at a number of points on the Norwegian coast: Oslo, Arendal, Stavanger, Kristiansand, Bergen, Trondheim and Narvik. The Norwegian government mobilised their forces and asked the Allies for

help. In the afternoon on April 9, following an agreement between the governments of Great Britain and France, a decision was taken to send Allied troops named "North-Western Expeditionary Force" to aid the Norwegian army fighting in the region of Narvik. The corps, with the consent of the Polish government in France, incorporated the Independent Podhale Rifle Brigade.

The order to create the Independent Podhale Rifle Brigade (1) was issued on February 9, 1940. The brigade was set up promptly from battalions separated from the 1st and 2nd infantry divisions in Brittany and elsewhere in France. Initially it was intended to be transferred to the Finnish front. The composition of the brigade was diverse: some officers, mostly career ones, were greatly experienced after the fighting in Poland, but nearly 90 per cent of the privates were volunteers from Polish émigré families in France, Belgium and Holland, none of whom had had front line experience.

By the end of the formation process, the brigade was composed of staff, communications, motorised section and two demi-brigades. Each demi-brigade was composed of staff company, auxiliary weapons company and two rifle battalions. Colonel Zugmunt Bohusz-Szyszko, promoted to the rank of Brigadier General before setting off for Norway, was nominated commander of the brigade. He was an experienced officer; among other things, he had been in command of the 16th infantry division during the 1939 September campaign in Poland. An important characteristic of the brigade's organisational set-up was its inability to conduct independent operations for want of organic artillery, armoured weapons and anti-aircraft defences. At the time that the brigade was embarked, (on French transport vessels, the *Mexique*, *Chenonceaux* and *Columbie*, which occurred during the night of April 23) the numerical strength of the brigade was 4,778 officers and men. It had twenty-five 25 mm armour-piercing guns, fifteen 81 mm mortars, fifteen 60 mm mortars and 68 heavy machine guns.

After several days of lying in the roadstead off the port of Greenock, the convoy, together with the Polish brigade and detachments of the French 13th Demi-Brigade Foreign Legion, accompanied by destroyers, set off for North Norway. It crossed the Polar Circle on the night of May 3. The 13th Demi-Brigade Foreign Legion and the Polish brigade together formed the 1st Light Rifle Division under the command of a French general Marie Emile Béthouart (2). Poles constituted one-third of Allied armed forces operating in the region of Narvik and nearly 50 per cent (3) in the actual battle for Narvik, after the British troops were moved to the region of Bodø and Mosjøen.

Initially the Polish brigade was to disembark at Tromsø. However, the King, the Government and the Norwegian Parliament stayed in the town. It was feared that the presence of military troops could attract German aircraft, and so two days later the Polish brigade was disembarked at the port of Harstad on the isle of Hinnøy. The 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 1st Demi-Brigade were immediately directed to patrolling the northern part of the island while the 3rd was moved to Ballangen where it replaced the detachments of the Foreign Legion; the 4th was sent to Salangen.

After the ships departed, it took fourteen days to apportion the supplies. (This was because the troops had been loaded in France without keeping to the organisational scheme.) Nearly the whole rolling stock of the 4th battalion was lost: 21 trucks, 2 passenger cars, and 10 motorcycles. The 1st Battalion moved to the front without grenade detonators and without ammunition belts for heavy machine guns which were not found in time from among the piles of luggage. (4)

At that time the Allied Command drew up a plan to crush the enemy's right flank, i.e. the Windisch Group, and to clear the Øyjord peninsula in order to make a starting point for the attack on Narvik. *Général de Brigade* Béthouart was entrusted

with carrying out the plan. Plans were made for simultaneous attacks; by the 13th Demi-Brigade Foreign Legion from the direction of the sea, and from the north, through Grassdalen valley towards Hartvig Lake.

An auxiliary role in the Bjervik landing operation was played by the 2nd Battalion of the Podhale Brigade under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Wladyslaw Dec who attacked the enemy's right flank from the direction of Bogen. The Poles were transported by fishing boats from Harstad to Bogen on May 11 and at 9 p.m. on the following day the companies, covered by Norwegian skiers, moved eastwards working their way through heaps of melting snow. Despite the extremely difficult conditions of their advance, (the Germans had pulled down all the bridges over deep ravines and streams) the Podhale Brigade soldiers, carrying all their equipment on their backs, covered the distance of more than 25 kilometres in less than sixteen hours, and their appearance behind the defences accelerated the enemy's withdrawal. The battalion's advance through such rough country was recognised by the Allied staff as an extraordinary achievement.

A participant in the Bjerkvik operation, the then Private Wojciech Lipinski, who is present here in the delegation of Polish war veterans, recalls that exhausting combat march: "... The route that our platoon had to cover was the most difficult. We had to move along the very shores of the Ofotfjord. After many hours of working our way through the heaps of melting snow (some soldiers even crawled on their knees putting snow rackets on their hands) we were deeply exhausted and many soldiers fell asleep while marching. We owed a lot to the protection of the Norwegian skiers. At one moment, seeing our utter exhaustion they made walls out of snow to let us rest for several hours and took the watchman's duty. We joined the battalion 24 hours later." (5)

During the night of May 13 the Poles and the Legionnaires worked together to draw away the German patrols covering the

section of the road between Berkvik and Øyjord. During the evening of May 15, the 2nd Battalion was relieved of duty by the 14th Battalion Chasseurs Alpains and, according to Général Béthouart's order, set off for Bjerkvik to embark for the Ankenes peninsula.

As a result of the three-day Allied operation, the situation of Major-General Dietl's troops deteriorated considerably. The loss of the Øyjord peninsula meant Allied mastery of the Narvik garrison from the north. Only the waters of the Rombaksfjord lay between the Allies and Narvik, which was no major obstacle as the British navy had supremacy at sea.

On May 17 the Narvik operational area was divided into two regions: the region of Ankenes - from the north bordering on Ofotfjord and from the west on Aefjord; under the orders of the commander of the Independent Podhale Rifle Brigade; and the region of Bjerkvik - under the orders of the commander of the 13th Demi-Brigade Foreign Legion. On May 16 and 17 battalions of the 1st Podhale Demi-Brigade released the British and French troops on the Ankenes peninsula. This arrangement was strengthened by the arrival of the 4th reserve Battalion on May 19. Only the 3rd Battalion remained in the region of Ballangen to secure the supply bases. Detachments of the 1st Podhale Demi-Brigade defended the ridge of the Ankenes peninsula from the village of Baetberget to Hills 295, 405, 677 and 734 until May 27 inclusive. The demi-brigade occupied two battalion defence regions. The 1st Battalion was on its right flank and the 2nd on its left. The commander of the demi-brigade, Colonel Benedykt Chlusewicz, held the 4th Battalion in reserve and on May 22-24 it was transported from the region of Tjelbotn (the headquarters of the 2nd Demi-Brigade) to the Ankenes peninsula.

Initially, the German numerical strength in Ankenes was composed of two companies of mountain troops (Gebirgsjäger) and later, under the threat of Allied invasion of Narvik, it was increased to two battalions.

Général Béthouart's operational order issued on May 22 stipulated that the 1st Light Rifle Division, using part of its force, would attack the Narvik peninsula from the Øyjord peninsula. The attack was to take place at midnight on May 27 in order to make counteraction by the German Luftwaffe more difficult.

The Independent Podhale Rifle Brigade (1st, 2nd and 4th Battalions) supported by a detachment of Chasseurs Alpains, two tanks of the 342nd Company, a battery of French 75 mm guns, two English field howitzers and artillery of the British cruiser *Southampton*, was to seize control of the rest of the Ankenes peninsula at the same time stopping the attacked Germans from escaping along the shores of the Beisfjord. East of Beisfjord, the Poles were to join forces with the Foreign Legion approaching from the north, and close the ring around General Dietl's troops on the Narvik peninsula.

The 3rd Battalion of the Podhale Brigade, located in the region of Ballangen, and two Chasseurs Alpains rifle battalions made up Général Béthouart's reserve, which was to move into action in the final stage of the battle to contain any Germans that would manage to escape from Ankenes and Narvik or to drive them out to Sweden.

Having studied the division commander's order, the commander of the Podhale Brigade, General Bohusz-Szyszko, decided to launch an attack in two different directions: Colonel Benedykt Chlusewicz's forces (1st Battalion and a detachment of the 4th Battalion) were to attack east to capture the village of Beisfjord, and Colonel Wladyslaw Dec's 2nd Battalion, was to make itself independent of the demi-brigade, and launch an attack northward towards Ankenes and Nyborg. Such an operational solution was not exactly what Général Béthouart had in mind when he insisted on the necessity of seizing Beisfjord, but the occupation of that village would prevent the escape of the Germans from Ankenes and lead the Podhale Brigade round to the rear of the Narvik corps.

The right flank attack of Colonel Chlusewicz's troops was preceded by a reconnaissance carried out by the 4th Battalion which, on May 27 at 2 p.m. secretly left Mattisjorden to encircle the enemy from the south. After a twelve hour march it reached the region of Iverdalyggen hill on the following day. From here, after a prearranged light signal, it was to attack the enemy's rear positions on Hill 606. At 6 p.m., without waiting for the signal, and remarking a German withdrawal, the commander decided to launch an attack. Hill 606 was captured, but the attack did not coincide with the operation of the 1st Battalion from Chlusewicz's demi-brigade which started its attack at 00.01 hours on May 28 and after a heavy battle, captured Hill 773 at 9.30 p.m. The 1st Company supported by a heavy machine gun platoon set off for the village of Beisfjord but it reached only as far as Lakselven valley. Because the soldiers were exhausted with climbing, it proved impossible to take advantage of the success of the advance troops, and the idea of making the 2nd Reserve Company give hot pursuit to cut off Haussel's troops' escape route through the village of Beisfjord towards Kvanta pass and on to Sildvik, was abandoned. The march was resumed on the following day, and at 5 a.m. patrols of the 1st Battalion entered a Beisfjord cleared of Germans, where the rest of the battalion joined them at 3 p.m. Later they all moved towards the Kvanta pass without meeting any significant enemy forces.

Colonel Dec's troops launched an attack on May 28. The attack by the 2nd Battalion's left flank started at 00.01 hours after a 20 minute artillery barrage. The 3rd Company supported by a heavy machine gun and a mortar platoon, attacked on both sides of the highway leading to Ankenes. However, the tanks which were to support it ground to a halt the moment they entered the struggle. Despite that misfortune, the company continued to attack with great vigour and eventually reached the southwestern outskirts of Ankenes. Here, however, it encountered heavy machine gun and mortar fire and, after heavy losses, had to withdraw at about 3 a.m.

The Germans launched an immediate counterattack taking advantage of the gap which occurred between the 1st and the 3rd Company. Their capture, at about 5 a.m., of Hill 295 disorganised the command and communications systems of Colonel Dec's detachments. The danger was averted by the 3rd Company of the 4th Battalion which moved into battle from the brigade's rear echelon and took its positions on the southern and western slopes of Hill 295. Unfortunately, despite three successive attempts, the recapture of the hill proved to be impossible. The Germans left it voluntarily at midnight after the loss of Narvik, there being no point in remaining on the Ankenes peninsula longer. In the morning of May 29, the 3rd Company of the 4th Battalion entered Ankenes and took it without struggle.

Colonel Dec's 1st Company, supported by the fire of the heavy machine-gun platoon, began an attack at 02.00 hours from Hill 295 towards Haugen. Slowly but systematically, it moved forward until its left flank came under fire from the Germans who, in the meantime, had seized Hill 295. The company then lay low until the morning of May 29.

The only real success was scored by the right-wing 2nd Company, supported by fire from the 2nd Demi-Brigade's heavy machine gun and mortar platoons and a British howitzer half-battery. During the seven-hour battle they forced their way through the German defences and reached the rock crest at the village of Nyborg. From that position, they kept the Germans' main Nyborg-Fagernes escape route under machine-gun fire and, together with the 2nd Company of the 4th Battalion, inflicted heavy losses on the escaping enemy. The occupation by the two companies of the village of Beisfjord clarified the situation in the Ankenes section and improved the position of the Foreign Legion, because the German resistance on Hill 457 subsided and this accelerated the German defeat on the Narvik peninsula and the eventual seizure of Narvik. (6)

Seizing control of the Nyborg and Lyngenes region on the southern side of Beisfjord and of the southern side of Lakselven valley finally deprived Dietl's group of support on the Ankenes peninsula.

Driving the Germans away from the Ankenes peninsula was an unquestionable combat success on the part of the Polish brigade, but it was also a source of joy and pride for all the soldiers. For most of them, participation in the Battle for Narvik was their "baptism of fire", and they had demonstrated their endurance and determination to fight and given numerous proofs of their personal courage. Many of them did not live until the end of the battle: Polish army losses in the Battle for Narvik amounted to 97 killed, 189 wounded, 7 taken prisoner and 21 missing. The German losses along the Polish section of the front are estimated at 190 officers and men, including 60 POWs.

Driving the Germans away from the Ankenes peninsula did not mean an end to the combat activity of Polish troops. On May 30, the staff of the Polish Podhale Brigade received another order to remain in combat readiness for the attack on Hundalen via Sildvik. The entire 1st Demi-Brigade, for this purpose concentrated at Beisfjord, was to take part in the attack. However, the 2nd Battalion was too exhausted and, for the time being, the men were incapable of fighting. The 3rd Battalion, transported to Salangen, received the order to cover the region of the airfield at Bardufoss.

In the meantime the 1st Battalion, knowing nothing about the evacuation due to error in the command system, managed (with the help of the 13th Demi-Brigade Foreign Legion) to move the line of its own defence further east. When the 1st Battalion joined detachments of the 13th Demi-Brigade Foreign Legion along the Klubnes line and on Hills 675 and 660, a new order came ordering them to cover the evacuation of the whole brigade. All bases in the region of Narvik and the Øyjord peninsula were covered until June 8.

The evacuation was carried out smoothly and in secrecy, but the brigade's heavy equipment and rolling stock was mostly destroyed. Fishing boats were used as a means of transporting the soldiers to the British destroyers which later set off for Tromsø where the soldiers boarded transport vessels. The brigade set off for Scotland on June 9. Partial reloading took place at Greenock and on June 13 the brigade left for Brest in France.

The operation of the Independent Podhale Rifle Brigade - despite its final success in fulfilling the tasks set by the commanders of the 1st Light Rifle Division - has been criticised by military historians. They draw particular attention to command errors; characteristic was the breaking of the principle of concentrating on the main object of attack. The tendency to troop dispersal was noticeable in Général Béthouart's operational plan, in General Bohusz-Szyszko's orders and also in the operation of individual units. From the operational point of view, the Ankenes direction was of secondary importance and it should only have received protection.

A decisive solution, not only for the fighting on the Ankenes peninsula but also for the whole Narvik operation, could only be brought about by the Beisfjord-Sildvik operation, i.e. attack on the rear positions of Haussels' section where the main attack would be concentrated.

The failure of the attack carried out by Colonel Dec's troops was due to shallow, linear grouping and a poor choice in the direction of the strength of the action. Colonel Dec launched three companies in one line along the five kilometre long front, distributing among them all the battalion's howitzers, without leaving reserves and without focusing on the seizure of the enemy's main defence point. General Bohusz-Szyszko accepted this tactical solution which eventually led to the crisis after the defeat of the 3rd Company.

In turn, Colonel Chlusewicz's group, because of excessive caution and lack of practice in mountain operations, advanced too slowly (3-4 km a day); the reconnaissance of the enemy's rear was also a failure. The commander of the brigade had a groundless fear of a German attack from the direction of Ankenes on Chlusewicz's rear positions and this also slowed down the already not too swift speed of attack. (8)

Independently of the aforementioned criticisms it should be stressed that the lack of adequate progress in operations on the Ankenes peninsula, and the considerable losses suffered there, had their sources primarily in the brigade's inadequate supply of armoured and artillery equipment, lack of air support and in the lack of combat experience of the majority of soldiers and their inability to carry out operations in the mountainous and climatic conditions of North Norway. Apart from that, the plan and the course of the Battle for Narvik were undoubtedly under pressure from the decision to evacuate the Allied Expeditionary Corps from Norway which had already been taken on May 24, 1940 but whose implementation (owing to the firm position of Général Béthouart) was postponed until the seizure of Narvik. An unusual situation arose in which the commander had his attack order in one pocket and his evacuation order in another. The actual capture of Narvik became just a matter of military honour though, in fact, it served to achieve an orderly departure.

It should be emphasised that the operation of the Independent Podhale Rifle Brigade and the combat worthiness and moral values of its soldiers on the Narvik battlefield won high recognition from Allied command. "I am using this opportunity", says a special message of May 26 addressed to the commander of the brigade by Colonel Finne, representative of the Norwegian army in the Allied command, "to tell you, Mr. General, that of what I have seen and heard, the troops fighting under your command are among the best and the most disciplined it has ever been my pleasure to see. I know that

General Ruge's and General Fleischer's opinion is the same."
(9)

In addressing the troops which took part in the battle, Général Béthouart specifically congratulated the French and the Polish soldiers "... who in extremely strenuous conditions showed the enemy and the whole world the combat readiness of the Allied infantry and artillery". (10)

2. Participation of Polish warships and merchant ships in the Norwegian campaign

Expecting the German attack on Norway, the Allied Command, in early April, prepared in the Scapa Flow base a special multipurpose team, separate from the Home Fleet, especially for operations in this region. It was composed of mostly Polish warships and merchant vessels which, after the loss of Polish ports in September 1939 went under the command of the British Admiralty. The team of destroyers which was to cover the landing operations included, among other warships, Polish destroyers: the *Blyskawica*, *Grom* and *Burza* whilst the transport fleet included Polish motor ships: the *Chrobry*, *Batory* and *Sobieski*. These were large, modern passenger ships which could accommodate more than 1,000 men at a time. Apart from that, two Polish submarines: the *Orzel* and *Wilk*, as well as a number of smaller boats also served under the British Admiralty Command.

The operation of the Polish navy in the Norwegian campaign was begun by the *Orzel* submarine (Commander: Captain Jan Grudzinski) which on April 8, that is on the eve of the German aggression on Norway, sank the German vessel the *Rio de Janeiro* which was carrying several hundred German troops towards the southern Norwegian coast. Those who were picked up after the wreck said that they were heading towards the port of Bergen. This information could have eliminated the

possibility of a surprise attack, but it was completely disregarded by the Norwegian command.

The division of Polish destroyers went into action for the first time during the evening of April 7 as part of the main force of the Home Fleet under Admiral Forbes' command. The group was looking for German warships in a region many miles off the Norwegian coast while the numerous groups of German warships at sea at that time were much closer to the coast. Because of this, the attempt to counteract the Nazi landing operation in Norway was abortive. At midday on April 9 Admiral Forbes directed the main forces of the Home Fleet to the north to lead them out of range of the German planes which were using several airfields already captured in South Norway. The Polish destroyers did not join the big ships in their voyage to the north because, together with the British destroyer *Tartar*, they received the order to escort the convoy of ships from the Norwegian coast to the British ports. The Polish warships and the *Tartar* reached the convoy safely; it was composed of 31 vessels fleeing from Norway and, incidentally, transporting gold from the Norwegian bank. The whole convoy reached the British ports without loss. On April 12 the Polish vessels docked at Rosyth whence, after refueling, they moved on to Scapa Flow.

It was there that they were given a new task connected with the decision of the Supreme Military Allied Command to disembark French and British troops in central and northern Norway. Ships with landing troops including Polish military transport vessels the *Batory* and *Chrobry* started to leave Scapa Flow and Rosyth on April 11. The transport vessels had an escort of their own and their safety was further guaranteed by numerous protective and patrol units. One of the patrol units was composed of the ORP *Blyskawica* and the *Grom* and the British destroyer HMS *Tartar*. On April 14 and 15 the team carried out a patrol operation off the Norwegian coast. On April 17, it was despatched to the aid of the heavy cruiser *Suffolk* which had been damaged by a German aircraft, and

under the protection of the destroyers, the cruiser was safely escorted to Scapa Flow.

Meanwhile the transport vessels *Chrobry* and *Batory* formed part of teams engaged in transporting the first groups of Allied landing troops. The *Batory* (Captain Edward Pacewicz) and two British transport vessels under the protection of the liner *Valiant* and nine destroyers brought the landing troops to Harstad and the *Chrobry* (Captain Zygmunt Deyczakowski) - to Namsos.

The unit of Polish destroyers under the command of Commodore Stanisław Hryniewiecki was sent to the northern coast of Norway on April 19. In the evening of April 21 only the ORP *Blyskawica* (Commodore Stanisław Nahorski) and the ORP *Grom* (Commodore Aleksander Hulewicz) reached the waters of Vestfjord. The ORP *Burza* (Commodore Wojciech Francki) had to return to port as she was damaged during a storm. The *Grom* and *Blyskawica* spent their first week patrolling the waters of Vestfjord and many other small fjords along the coast of Norway. At that time they accounted for one-fifth of the overall strength of the Allied navy in North Norway because, in addition to them, there were only ten destroyers in the area. By the end of April, fresh Allied warships started to arrive in the region of Narvik, mainly cruisers and destroyers, the ORP *Burza*, among them. At that time, the commander of the Allied troops in Norway, Admiral of the Fleet, William Henry Boyle Lord Cork and Orrery, using the warships' artillery fire, was trying to force the German garrison at Narvik to surrender. On April 28 the ORP *Grom* was sent to Rombaksfjord and the ORP *Blyskawica* penetrated fjords south of Narvik. The Polish warships were to destroy enemy positions, roads and railway lines as well as other objects of military importance. Both destroyers coped with the task rather effectively, pressing the enemy hard with 120 mm artillery gun fire day and night.

The tasks of the British warships were similar. But Admiral Lord Cork expected more than just shelling of the German positions. Although, because of the deep waters in the fjords, the ships could come close to the rocky coast, and managed to destroy a number of enemy positions, they, however, did not manage to force the Germans to surrender.

The German army's offensive in central Norway was accompanied by increased activity of the Luftwaffe in the region of Narvik. The Allied ships often had to fight with the planes defending not only themselves but also the Allied troops. All the three Polish destroyers took part in the fighting.

The ORP *Blyskawica* which was patrolling the fjords in the vicinity of Narvik was shelling the German positions. In the evening of May 2 she entered Rombaksfjord where she was attacked and damaged.

On May 3, the *Blyskawica* was replaced in Rombaksfjord by the ORP *Grom* which kept shelling the German positions day and night destroying three guns of a exposed battery and several other objects. On the following day the *Grom* was attacked by the Luftwaffe. The bombs dropped by one of the three high-flying aircraft hit the midship. The ship broke in two and sank in less than three minutes.

The German soldiers opened fire on the shipwrecks with machine-guns. British cruisers and destroyers rushed to the scene. The rescue operation lasted 40 minutes. 17 officers including the captain and 137 noncommissioned officers and seamen, 26 of them wounded, were rescued. Fifty-nine crew members were killed.

The ORP *Blyskawica* returned to her position in Rombaksfjord on May 5. During the day the ship was attacked several times with aerial bombs and in the evening she shelled a German 88 mm AA battery and managed to silence it. Hit by 11 shells, the Polish warship escaped practically undamaged. On the

following day the Luftwaffe attacked the *Blyskawica* from morning till dusk. Commodore Nahorski directed his ship to the larger fjord - Herjangsfjord - where, using the engine and the rudder it was easier to avoid the bombs. The ship was not hit. The *Blyskawica* artillery men downed one enemy plane and damaged two others.

From May 1, the ORP *Burza* stayed in Harstad taking part in rejection of aerial attacks on the base. On May 2 the ship patrolled the fjords west of Harstad and on the following day it transported a detachment of French Chasseurs Alpains riflemen and towed several landing craft from Skaanland to Gratangen. From May 4 it operated near Skaanland where her captain acted as commander of a naval region. The ship's main task was the antiaircraft defence of personnel and materiel unloaded in Skaanland. The Luftwaffe attacked the ships with particular ferocity: for example, on May 5, eleven bomb airraids were made but, owing to the strong antiaircraft defence, no major losses were inflicted. On May 7, the ORP *Burza* covered the landing of Polish Podhale riflemen. This unexpected meeting in combat conditions had an especially friendly character.

On that day in the evening the ORP *Burza*, with the commander of the 1st Light Rifle Division, Général Béthouart and officers of his staff on board, went out on a reconnaissance mission in the region of Bjerkvik. After the return and unloading of the staff at Skaanland the ship went to Harstad where it met the ORP *Blyskawica*.

Then a decision was taken to send Polish warships to British ports. (11)

The Polish destroyers left the Norwegian waters but the white and red flag remained there until the end of the hostilities. On May 11, the military transport vessel *Chrobry*, arrived at Harstad bringing reinforcements of Allied troops and a new commander of the Allied army in North Norway, Lieutenant-

General Claude Auchinleck and his staff.

On May 14, the *Chrobry* with 1,200 British soldiers on board left Harstad and assisted by the British destroyer *Wolverine* and the gun boat *Stork* set off for Bodø. Close to its objective the unit was attacked by German aircraft.

The attack was concentrated on the *Chrobry* the biggest and the least armed vessel in the group. Despite the anti-aircraft gun fire the Polish ship was hit by several bombs. The fire spread so quickly that there was no hope of saving the vessel. Abandoning ship was a smooth operation. The HMS *Wolverine* which approached the sinking vessel from the stern picked up 695 shipwrecked, and the *Stork*, several hundred others. However, many soldiers went down with the ship, and 12 members of the *Chrobry* crew died.

The sinking of the *Chrobry* was a considerable loss for the Polish navy. The Allied forces in North Norway also suffered in its wake because after the loss of equipment and materiel, the rescued soldiers and seamen were transported back to Harstad and on to Britain.

The second attempt to reinforce the Allied troops in the region of Bodø was undertaken as late as May 17 when reinforcements from Great Britain arrived in Harstad brought in there, by, among others, the Polish military transport vessels: the *Batory* and *Sobieski*. Both ships took part in the evacuation of the entire Allied Expeditionary Corps from Norway early in June 1940.

The last two patrols of the ORP *Orzel* submarine are to a certain extent connected with the operation in Norwegian waters. The first was carried out from April 28 to May 17, 1940 in the North Sea. The second started on the evening of May 23 and the ship was never seen again. No explanation of the ship's disappearance has ever been discovered. Sixty seamen and six officers perished on board the ship.

The disappearance of the *Orzel*, the sinking of the ORP *Grom* and the bombardment of the *Chrobry* were considerable Polish losses in the Norwegian campaign. These losses could not be cushioned by the sinking by the ORP *Orzel* of the German transport vessel *Rio de Janeiro* and another unidentified ship as well as the shooting down of two German planes by the *Blyskawica*.

These losses were the price of the typical effective daily activity of Polish warships and vessels during the Norwegian campaign - they are impossible to express in numerical terms.

* * *

The capture of Narvik was one of the brighter spots against a background of continued Allied failures in the years 1939-1940. "Our soldiers", wrote Général Béthouart in one of his despatches, "wrote in Narvik a history whose name is as hard as iron, as bright as glory and as mysterious as the Great North; Narvik was to shine with joy and trust in the dark days of May 1940 and to leave priceless memories in the hearts of the 10,000 boys who survived it." (12)

The Poles contributed a great deal to the Allied victory. On July 17 1940, in Scotland after the reading of the roll of the dead, the Prime Minister of the Polish Government in Exile and Commander in Chief of the Polish Army, General Wladyslaw Sikorski decorated the banner of the Independent Podhale Rifle Brigade and many of its soldiers with the highest Polish combat decoration - the Virtuti Military Order. On December 9, the Commander in Chief of the Norwegian armed forces, Major-General Fleischer, on behalf of King Haakon VII bestowed on all Podhale Brigade soldiers the privilege to wear a cord in Norwegian national colours with a golden lion on the left arm. After the war, the people of

Narvik erected a monument to Polish seamen at Ofotfjord. Polish war veterans, participants in the Battle for Narvik, were honoured by King Haakon with medals and diplomas bearing the inscription: "Norway warmly thanks you for all that you have given her in the struggle for Freedom".

Notes

1. The name of the brigade comes from the tradition of the Podhale regiments in the prewar Polish army. Reminiscent of the tradition were long, green cloaks provided by the French commissariat.
2. The 1st Light Rifle Division together with the 24th (Guards) Brigade and support units made up the North Western Expeditionary Force; the name was adopted on May 12 after the forces previously operating in the region of Trondheim. By the same token, the combat force of the corps equalled that of 12 battalions: three - of British Guards, three of Chasseurs Alpains riflemen, two - of the Foreign Legion, and, four - of Podhale riflemen. On May 12 General Claude Auchinleck took over command of the Allied army in North Norway from General Mackesy. At the same time, he also assumed control of the local air force.
3. Cf. Witold Bieganski, *Narvik*, Warsaw 1979, p. 15.
4. Janusz Odziemkowski, *Narvik 1940*, Warsaw 1988, p. 95.
5. Delivered orally to the author on Feb. 21, 1990.
6. Cf. Felicjan Majorkiewicz, *Narvik*, Warsaw 1957, p. 123. Alex Buchner, *Narvik - die Kämpfe der Gruppe Dietl im Frühjahr 1940*, Heidelberg 1958, p. 139.
7. Polish and German losses are quoted from "Polski czyn zbrojny w II wojnie światowej" (Polish Armed Effort in World War II), vol. II, *Walki formacji polskich na Zachodzie 1939 - 1945* (*Struggles of Polish Formations in the West 1939 - 1945*, Warsaw 1981, p. 112.
8. Cf. F. Majorkiewicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-131; W. Bieganski, *op. cit.*, p. 31; J. Odziemkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 178.
9. Quotation from F. Majorkiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 154.
10. *Ibid.*
11. In all probability, the decision came in effect of intervention

of the Polish Navy Detachment in the Admiralty or of the Division Commander, Commodore Hryniewiecki with Admiral Lord Cork and Orrery. It could have been evoked by the anxiety about the fate of Polish ships caused by the loss of the ORP *Grom* and the intensification of the activity of the German Luftwaffe in the region of Narvik. It could also be the physical and psychical exhaustion of sailors who have had no rest for a long period of time and who were depressed by the fate of the ORP *Grom*. (Polish Armed Effort in World War II), *op. cit.*, p. 97

12. Quotation from F. Majorkiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

Chapter 10

The Narvik Campaign 1940: A Summary

O.Kr. Grimnes

The battle for Narvik was decisively shaped by conditions prevailing from the very outset of the operations. The Germans conquered a town which was situated so far to the north that they were perforce isolated there. This isolation became a permanent feature of the campaign even if the Germans received some reinforcements from the air and some specialists and a certain amount of civilian goods in transit through Sweden. Furthermore they were given the opportunity to evacuate some wounded men by Swedish railways. In addition, the German invasion force was fairly small, a prerequisite of the invasion project being that the troops must be transported on board warships which could only carry a limited number of men. An isolated and small German force was thus a characteristic throughout the campaign. It had only light weapons at its disposal as the heavy equipment did not arrive according to plan.

On the other hand, German preparations for the attack on Narvik had been thorough. The landings were carried out as planned. The troops were well trained and highly motivated. Through surprise the Germans not only established their bridgehead but were also able to consolidate it before the Norwegians and the Allies were able to counterattack by land on any significant scale. This at the same time provides an explanation of why it took so long to drive back the almost completely isolated, small-sized, and lightly armed German force. It was given the time to dig in.

The Allies and the Norwegians were determined to throw out the enemy, but they had been taken by surprise: confusion reigned, and they were hampered by lack of preparations even though Norwegian troops were better prepared in North Norway than in the south, there having been extensive call-ups for the neutrality defence force in North Norway during the Winter War. What further distinguished the Narvik campaign from operations in South Norway was that in the north the Norwegians and the Allies had more time to mount a counterattack, and gradually were able to do so with superior forces because the Allies, unlike in South Norway, controlled all sea lines.

Topography and natural conditions always play a part in military operations but at Narvik they made for a particularly complex situation, the war frequently being more of a combat with geography and meteorology than with the enemy. A great number of fjords cut into the mainland and made it difficult to carry out coherent operations. At one moment the troops had to be transported by boat, the next they were marching on foot in rugged terrain. There were so many bare mountains and such a lack of roads that mountain warfare above the timber line became typical of the campaign. Winter receded only slowly, cold and snow, later spring thaw and slush bearing heavily on the campaign.

This was a campaign where war at sea, in the air, and on land all played their part, but in proportions different from what was prevalent during the operations in South Norway. Sea warfare was important and there were battles at sea of a kind that never took place in South Norway. On the other hand, the war at sea was largely decided within a matter of days. It was clear after the battles in the Ofotfjord on 10 and 13 April that the British controlled the sea, having inflicted on the German navy a defeat from which it was never wholly to recover during the remainder of the war. This British victory meant that the German troops never received any help from the sea, that they were shelled continually by the British navy, and that

the Allied attacks readily assumed the form of landings from the sea. It also meant that the Allies by and large could transfer their troops by boat when they so wished. It was mostly farther south, in the Helgeland campaign, and during the evacuation after the operations at Narvik had come to an end that the British suffered casualties at sea.

In the air the parties were more of a match than in South Norway where the Germans were always superior. At Narvik the latter had for a long time only a slight advantage because German planes had to operate from distant airfields in South Norway. However, the British established hegemony in the air at the end of May when British fighter planes could finally operate from a freshly completed airfield north of Narvik and not from aircraft carriers which had to stay far off the coast for fear of German bombers. This hegemony was to become an important factor in the Allied reconquest of Narvik.

Land warfare was decisive in the sense that the chief objective, control of Narvik, could ultimately be obtained only by operations on land. Here the main pattern of development was as follows: a well established and consolidated German bridgehead was gradually brought on the defensive, its forces being forced to relinquish its very core, the town of Narvik, but finally when they were at the point of surrender, the whole campaign was called off because the Allies had to withdraw due to disasters on other fronts. The gradualness of this development and the fact that the Norwegians and Allies were forced to rely on superior force to reconquer Narvik are conspicuous facts about the campaign. To explain them the historian is thrown back on those basic conditions prevailing from the very outset of the campaign which have been mentioned.

Two aspects of the campaign are particularly characteristic: mountain warfare and landing operations. The former has already been touched upon. Much of the war was fought in open and roadless mountainous terrain. As for landing

operations the German forces arrived at Narvik by means of a landing operation and two of the most important Allied operations were landing enterprises, the first when Bjerkvik was taken 12-13 May, and the second when Narvik was reconquered on 28 May. Landing operations required the cooperation of navy and army, and at the reconquest of Narvik the air force was involved too. These operations were a distinct feature of the Narvik campaign both in the sense that they had no parallel in South Norway on the Allied side and that landing operations had not yet become a regular occurrence in war generally.

The relationship between the long-drawn-out and stubborn mountain warfare on one hand and the swift landing operations on the other is interesting but can also turn into a controversial subject. Here we find the well known difference between the two Allied commanders, Lord Cork who wanted to wager the whole campaign on a dashing landing operation, and Mackesy who wished to proceed slowly and systematically, advancing towards Narvik step by step on either side of the Ofotfjord. The upshot was a mixture of both, advancement on land and two landing operations. But which was more effective to the final outcome, the warfare on land or the swift landing operations? And who were most important for the landing operations, the navy which made the crossing at sea possible, or the army which put into the field the men who actually vanquished the enemy? Such questions are relevant not only to the different branches of service, but also to different nations because there was an international division of labour during the operations. The Norwegians would dearly like to consider the mountain warfare their particular domain although Polish and French forces participated in them to some extent. The French made up the majority of the landing forces though Norwegian units participated in the reconquest of Narvik. The British exercised control of the sea which was necessary for the landing operations.

The Narvik campaign was a European multinational undertaking in which altogether five nations participated. In a sense there was a multinational campaign in South Norway, too, but at Narvik there were Poles who did not take part in events further south, and at Narvik the relative strength of the various anti-German forces were more evenly balanced than in South Norway where the Norwegians constituted the bulk of resistance against the Germans. At the same time, multinationality was distributed in such a way that there was only one nation, the Germans, on one side. This made for homogeneity and clarity on this side, strengthened by the uniform German chain of command. There was no doubt as to who was the Commander in Chief; it was General Dietl, and as the German navy was of little importance after 13 April there were few problems of coordination between army and navy. Coordination between air force and ground forces was also smooth on the German side.

Relations between the Allies were much more complicated, and the Narvik campaign provides an illustrating example of the difficulties encountered when several nations are to conduct a campaign jointly. The differences were aggravated by the fact that the Allies had to improvise so much from the outset and that opposing views of land warfare and landing operations were coloured by interstate controversy.

In consequence, the Allied and Norwegian campaign as a whole is marked by little integration. This applies particularly to the Norwegian side of the campaign. The Norwegian warfare in the mountains started before the Allies were able to mount their operations on land and generally was conducted without much linkup with Allied operations. The British use of their forces provides another example, in this case of troops that were at hand but for a long time hardly participated in any operations. The British ground forces were the first to arrive of all the Allied ground forces but were engaged in combat on a larger scale only from around the middle of May

when they were dispatched southwards to participate in the Helgeland operations.

There are campaigns that end in victory for one side, defeat for the other. There are campaigns which end inconclusively and there are campaigns which end in disintegration and chaos. The distinguishing mark of the Narvik campaign is that it has no clear loser, but several winners, each in his own way. The Allies did not lose but withdrew at a time when they were advancing victoriously and the Norwegians were triumphant just as the campaign was called off. The Germans did not lose either though they were on the point of surrendering when the campaign ended and they were the ones who could move into Narvik as the ultimate conquerors of the town. There is something agreeable about a war that has no losers, only victors ...

Contributors

MACIEJ BORKOVSKI, lieutenant colonel, has held various posts in the Polish Armed Forces. He holds a M.A. degree from the Military-Political Academy and a Ph.D. from the Military Historical Institute in Warsaw. Lt. Colonel Borkowski has published numerous articles and co-authored others. At present he supervises the Department of Contemporary Military World History at the Military Historical Institute.

THOMAS KINGSTON DERRY has worked in the BBC, 1940-41; in political intelligence (P.I.D., Foreign Office, and P.W.E., SHAEF), 1941-5; and in the Cabinet Office Historical Section (part-time), 1948-52. Among his more relevant publications are *The campaign in Norway* (1952), *A Short History of Norway* (1957), *A History of Modern Norway* (1973), and *A History of Scandinavia* (1979).

OLE KRISTIAN GRIMNES is professor of history at the University of Oslo. He is the author of numerous books and articles on Norway and the Second World War, covering such topics as *The Leadership of the Resistance* (1977), *Norway during the occupation* (1983), *The Assault* (1984) and *The Road to War* (1987).

FRANCOIS KERSAUDY, historian, writer, and linguist, teaches at the Sorbonne. His doctoral thesis at the Institute of the History of Contemporary International Relations dealt with *Norway and the Great Powers 1938-1945*, after which he published *Stratégies et Norvège 1940*; *La Guerre du Fer*; and, in 1990, *Norway 1940*. He is also the author of *De Gaulle et Churchill*, which was published both in France and in the United Kingdom.

PHILIPPE MASSON, docteur ès lettres, is since 1965 Director of the Service Historique de la Marine in Paris, and teaches history at the École de Guerre Navale. He has published several books on French naval history. His two most recent books are *De la Mer et de sa Strategie*, and *Une Guerre Totale 1939-1945*.

TADEUSZ PANECKI is a professor of contemporary history at the Institute of Military History in Warsaw, and Secretary General of the Polish Commission of Military History. His books have dealt with Poles in the Belgian Resistance; Polish émigrés in the military plans of the Polish Government in exile; and Resistance in Western Europe 1940-1945.

OLAV RISTE is director of the Institute for Defence Studies at Norway's National Defence College, and adjunct professor of history at the University of Bergen. He is the author of i.a. *The Neutral Ally: Norway's Relations with Belligerent Powers in the First World War* (1965) as well as a two-volume study of the Norwegian Government in exile during the Second World War, beside numerous articles on the history of Norwegian foreign and security policy.

JÜRGEN ROHWER recently retired as Director of the Library of Contemporary History, Stuttgart. He was also editor of *Marine-Rundschau* from 1958 to 1986. He is the author of eleven books and a large number of articles on naval warfare, with special emphasis on submarine warfare in the Second World War.

KARL ROMMETVEIT, born in 1950, graduated from the Naval Academy as a reserve officer in the coastal artillery in 1970. He holds a cand.philol. degree from the University of Oslo with history as his principal subject. Rommetveit has been a lecturer at the Military Academy in Kristiansand, Krigsskolen Gimlemoen, since 1985.

MICHAEL SALEWSKI is Professor of history at the University of Kiel, Germany, and a specialist on the history of the German navy. Among the many books and articles he has authored on the subject is the massive three-volume study *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung 1935-1945* (1970-1975).

MAGNE SKODVIN is emeritus professor at the University of Oslo. He has also been President of the Norwegian Academy of Sciences and Letters and President of the International Committee for the History of the Second World War. He has published several books on Norwegian wartime and postwar history, and was chief editor of the eight-volume series *Norge i krig* (1984-87).

Forsvarsstudier - tidligere utkommet

O. Riste (red.): FORSVARSSTUDIER - Defence Studies. Årbok for Forsvarshistorisk forskningscenter - Forsvarets høyskole 1981. (Tanum-Norli 1982):

- O. Riste: The Genesis of North Atlantic Defence Cooperation: Norway's 'Atlantic Policy' 1940-1945.
O. Riste: Svalbard-krisen 1944-1945.
O. Riste: Functional Ties - A Semi-Alliance? Military Cooperation in North-West Europe 1944-1947.
K.E. Eriksen: Storbritannia og basepolitikken i Norden 1945-1947.
R. Tamnes: Den norske holdningen til atomfrie soner i Sentral-Europa 1957-1965.
O. Riste: Politics in the Armed Forces: A Contemporary Problem in Historical Perspective.
D.C. Pugh: The Armed Forces and Alta: Some Tentative Reflections on Civil-Military Relations.

R. Tamnes (red.): FORSVARSSTUDIER - Defence Studies. Årbok for Forsvarshistorisk forskningscenter - Forsvarets høyskole 1982. (Tanum-Norli 1983):

- R. Tamnes: Den norske holdningen til en nordisk atomvåpenfri sone 1958-1983.
O. Riste: Ein idé og ein myte. Roosevelts frihamnstanke for Nord-Norge.
R. Tamnes: NATOs og Norges reaksjon på Tsjekkoslovakia-krisen 1968.
O. Wicken: Ny teknologi og høye priser.
O. Riste: The Foreign Policy-Making Process in Norway: A Historical Perspective.

R. Tamnes (red.): FORSVARSSTUDIER - Defence Studies III. Årbok for Forsvarshistorisk forskningscenter - Forsvarets høyskole 1983/1984 (Tanum-Norli 1984):

- N. Borchgrevink: Norsk forsvar gjennom britiske briller.
O. Riste: Frå integritetstraktat til atomvåpen: Det stormaktsgaranterte Norge 1905-1983.
T.V. Skaret: Kirkens engasjement i atomdebatten 1960-1982.
R. Godø: Forsvarets ledelsesordning etter 1945.
D.C. Pugh: Guns in the cupboard. The Home Guard, Milorg and the Politics of Reconstruction 1945-46.
O. Wicken: Vekst og våpen. Norsk militærproduksjon som industripolitisk virkemiddel i 1960-årene.

FORSVARSSTUDIER

8/1991

Narvik 1940

Five-Nation War in the High North

Karl Rommetveit (ed.)

**INSTITUTT FOR
FORSVARSSTUDIER**

IFS

*Narvik 1940:
Five-Nation War in the High North*

In the late spring of 1940 the forces of five nations for the first time - and hopefully the last - fought for the control of Northern Norway. In this study, also for the first time, historians from those five countries join forces to review and analyse that campaign and its background. In spite of the Narvik Campaign having been termed "the most completely researched campaign" of the Second World War¹, this multinational approach yields a wealth of new insights. Of particular interest is the focus on failures of command, of intelligence, and of equipment and training for winter warfare.

*Karl Rommervelt teaches
military history and
strategy at the Gimlemoen
Military Academy, Kristiansand.*

