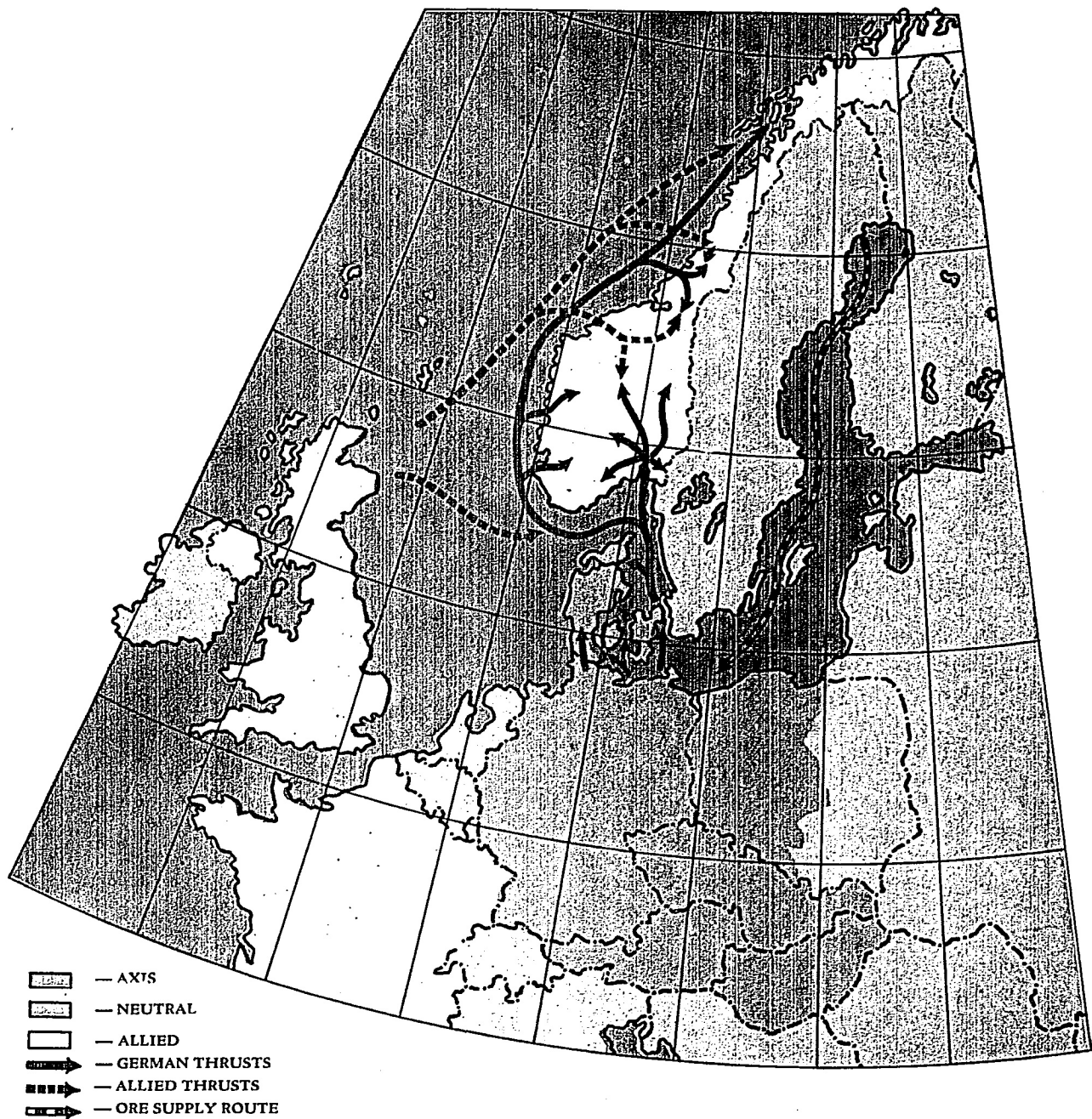


# The Norway Failure

## Part I: The Narvik Operation

By Maj Carl W. Hoffman  
Photos from British Information Services



## Britain's unbalanced fleet, over-supervision by the Admiralty, contradictory instructions between the attack and landing force commanders, failure to exploit an advantage gained, and lack of an adequate landing force led to defeat in Norway

☛ IN THE SPRING AND SUMMER OF 1940, THE ALLIES and particularly Great Britain, suffered a disheartening disaster on the icy coasts of Norway. Britain's was the greatest navy in the world at the time, yet she was unable to wage successfully a naval campaign. For naval campaign it was. And failure it was.

At the outset, it should be made perfectly clear that the stimulation of an Anglo-American controversy on the subject of sea power is not the purpose of this article. For indeed, much of the short-sightedness exhibited by a large number of British political and military leaders between the two great wars was common to many Americans also. We *still* occasionally hear many of the arguments revived with all the vigor and fervor of a new discovery.

Early in World War II, the strategic importance of the Scandinavian Peninsula was apparent to both the British and the Germans. Germany needed Sweden's iron ore desperately; Hitler's war industry would virtually wither without it. The Swedish iron ore fields were located at Gaellivare—near the north-center of Sweden. In the summer months, Germany drew the ore from the port of Lulea, at the head of the Gulf of Bothnia, and in the winter, when the gulf was frozen, from Narvik on the west coast of Norway. (See map.)

☛ AT FIRST GLANCE it would seem a simple matter for Britain to stop these movements, in view of her strong fleet as compared to Germany's. The situation was greatly complicated, however, by the Norwegian corridor. This corridor was formed by an almost continuous fringe of islands which parallels the entire west coastline of Norway. Between these islands and the coast was neutral water, through which German traffic could nonchalantly communicate with the outer seas. This situation caused Mr Winston S. Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, to write on 29 September 1939: "At the end of November the Gulf of Bothnia normally freezes, so that Swedish iron ore can be sent to Germany only through Oxelosund in the Baltic, or from Narvik at the north of Norway. Oxelosund can export only about one-fifth of the weight of ore Germany requires from Sweden. In winter normally the main trade is from Narvik, whence ships can pass down the west coast of Norway, and make the whole voyage to Germany without leaving territorial waters until inside the Skagerrak. It must be understood that an adequate supply of Swedish iron ore is vital to Germany, and the interception or prevention of these Narvik

supplies during the winter months . . . will greatly reduce her power of resistance."

In order to stop the German movements through the corridor and to force German ore-carrying ships onto the high seas, the First Lord proposed that a series of small minefields be laid at two or three suitable points along the coast. From September 1939 to April 1940, this recommendation was officially repeated on six occasions—unofficially on many more. Although all interested parties agreed that it was a necessary move, respect for Norway's neutrality proved the deterrent.

Almost simultaneous with Churchill's recommendation that certain areas in the Norwegian corridor be mined, Adm Raeder, Chief of the German Naval Staff, submitted a proposal to Adolf Hitler headed "Gaining of Bases in Norway." He stressed the disadvantages to Germany should the British occupy Norway: ". . . the control of the approaches to the Baltic, the outflanking of our naval operations and of our air attacks on Britain, the end of our pressure on Sweden." The Admiral pointed out the advantages that would accrue to Germany in an occupation of Norway: ". . . outlet to the North Atlantic, no possibility of a British mine barrier . . ." Hitler mulled over the idea for two short months, and then, on 14 December 1939, ordered his Supreme Command to prepare plans for an operation against Norway.

Russia, meanwhile, operating in the spirit of her pact with Germany, made demands on Finland—many of which the latter conceded. Nevertheless, on the last day of November 1939, Soviet armies marched across the Finnish frontier. A wave of sympathy for the Finns immediately swept Great Britain, France, and the United States, but it possessed no strength of action. A combined Anglo-French Expeditionary Force was hastily assembled and held in readiness awaiting permission from Norway and Sweden to let troops and supplies pass through their countries to Finland's aid.

Britain's willingness to aid Finland was occasioned by a sincere sympathy for the latter's sad plight. In addition, a means was presented of achieving a major strategic objective. If Narvik were used as an Allied base to aid the Finns, Germany could hardly use it to secure vital-ly needed iron ore shipments, and her use of the Norwegian corridor could be prevented conveniently. Fear-

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## British Viewpoint

To get a British viewpoint, the GAZETTE asked LtCol H. A. Digby-Bell, RM, to comment on *The Norway Failure*. LtCol Digby-Bell's remarks, in part, follow:

"... We cannot learn too much from the many lessons of the last war—bitter as some of them are. In this campaign in Norway, so well covered by Major Hoffman in his article, I feel, however, that special mention should be made of the *political* necessity for allied support of the Norwegian people.

"In this emergency we needed to retain the moral support of Norway's people to bring over to our side her not inconsiderable tanker and merchant fleet. We needed to try and prevent the export of iron ores to Germany and we wanted to aid the Norwegian Royal House with which we had such close family ties.

"These factors, combined with a strong feeling of

leadership in a disintegrating Western Europe probably made our War Cabinet realise that some military gesture must be made to prove to Norway and the world that we would not leave a friendly country heartlessly to her fate.

"The majority of landings and battles in this campaign were fought at a time when we were on the retreat in Belgium and France. The attempted solution of every problem in the Narvik area was fraught with the realisation that before very long we should need every man, gun, and ship to defend our native shores. This picture of ultimate withdrawal hung like the sword of Damocles over the commanders' heads and it is one of the many psychological factors that are so often neglected by official historians."

Some of LtCol Digby-Bell's further remarks are included as footnotes to the article. They are identified by the initials HAD-B.

ful of becoming involved in the war, however, Norway and Sweden refused to cooperate in the enterprise. In the middle of March 1940, the badly managed Russian campaign ended. Finland was defeated.

While Britain worried about the possibility of further Russian moves against the Scandinavian countries, Hitler's plans were crystallizing.

✻ CHURCHILL'S LONG-DEBATED PLAN for the mining of Norwegian waters finally came to fruition early on the morning of 8 April 1940. The minefield was laid by four destroyers off the entrance of West Fiord, the channel to the port of Narvik. The Norwegian government, still eager to remain neutral, feverishly drafted protests. It would soon have more to worry about.

The day following the mining operations, Denmark was invaded by the Germans. In a lightning move—contested only briefly by the King of Denmark's guard—the Nazis overran the country. News of the invasion did not reach Norway until she herself was struck.

Germany's invasion of Norway by sea and air transport was a daring move—especially since the greatly superior British Fleet was within striking distance. Hitler's forces descended at Oslo, Kristiansand, Stavanger, and to the north at Bergen, Trondheim, and Narvik. The latter was their most cunning move. For a week, supposedly empty German ore ships had plied the neutral channels of the Norwegian corridor loaded with military supplies and ammunition. Like so many Trojan horses they enjoyed their sanctified privacy until joined by ten destroyers, each carrying 200 soldiers direct from Germany.<sup>1</sup>

Two Norwegian warships gallantly contested the invader's approach, but both were quickly sunk and the capture of Narvik was speedy and economical.

History is replete with examples of the devastating effectiveness of surprise attacks. Surely, the German successes in Norway may to a large measure be credited to this important principle. Within 48 hours, all of the main ports were in German hands. And the invasion had been characterized by economy of force—nowhere did the initial landings use more than 2,000 troops. Three divisions were used in the assault phase and four more later reinforced through Oslo and Trondheim—a total of seven divisions. Important in the invasion had been 800 operational aircraft and 250-300 transport planes.

The German landings in Norway provided a golden opportunity for the British to strike counterblows. Two days after the invasion, Mr Churchill declared in the House of Commons: "We [are] greatly advantaged by what [has] occurred provided we act with the necessary vigor to profit from the strategical blunder which our mortal enemy has made." Admiral of the Fleet Lord Keyes wrote nearly three years later: "... a wonderful opportunity was open to us, if it had been pursued with ... daring and enterprise."

On the morning of the German invasion of Norway, Prime Minister Chamberlain summoned the War Cabinet to discuss the critical turn of events. At the meeting it was agreed that Adm Forbes, Commander-in-

<sup>1</sup>British Naval Intelligence knew of the attempt to smuggle troops but, as Norway was a neutral country, it was impossible to get permission to take positive action until it was too late.—HAD-B

Chief of the Home Fleet (then cruising in Norwegian waters), should be instructed to take all possible steps to clear Bergen and Trondheim of enemy forces, and that the Chiefs of Staff should immediately start planning for the recapture of both those places and Narvik. Military expeditions, however, would not be undertaken until the naval situation was clarified.

That afternoon (9 April) French leaders flew to London and a Supreme War Council meeting was held. It was determined that strong forces should be sent to Norway to seize selected ports. A French Alpine division would embark in two or three days; the British would provide 11 battalions—two would embark that very night, five more within three days, and the remaining four within 14 days.

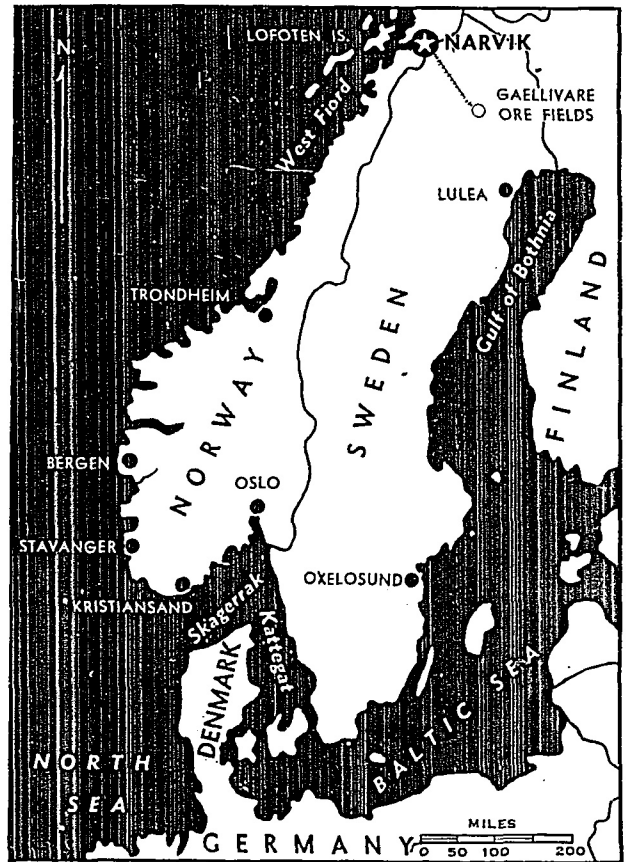
Meanwhile, the British and German Fleets had not been idle; a number of minor engagements had been fought in, or near to, Norwegian waters which had been costly to both participants. On the 8th, the day before the German invasion, the British destroyer *Glowworm* was sunk after ramming and crippling the German cruiser *Hipper*. On the 9th, the British battle-cruiser *Renown* got important hits on the German battle cruiser *Gneisenau*, but was unable to make a kill as the latter escaped under the smoke screen of a sister ship. And on the same day, Adm Forbes notified the Admiralty that he intended to send a force of cruisers and destroyers into the port of Bergen to destroy German shipping. After first concurring in the plan, the Admiralty later cancelled it on the grounds that the risk was too great.

Caution or risk—take your choice; while Adolf was making his gambles pay off, the British were immobilized with caution. Lord Nelson had said many years before: "Something must be left to chance. Our only consideration should be, is the honor and benefit to our country and its Allies worth the risk? If so, in God's name, let us get to work."

Mr Churchill with his characteristic willingness to admit his mistakes, later wrote: "Looking back on this affair, I consider that the Admiralty kept too close control upon the Commander-in-Chief, and after learning his original intentions to force a passage into Bergen, should have confined ourselves to sending him information."

While Adm Forbes was floating in a sea of cold water (on his plans as well as his ships), the Germans took the opportunity to launch strong air attacks against the Fleet. In these attacks, one destroyer was sunk, two cruisers were damaged, and the flagship *Rodney* was hit but not impaired.

His first plan over-ruled, Adm Forbes proposed that Bergen be raided by naval aircraft on April 10th. This the Admiralty approved, and in addition, arranged attacks by RAF bombers on the night of the 9th and by land-based naval aircraft on the morning of the 10th. These attacks were reasonably successful; the German

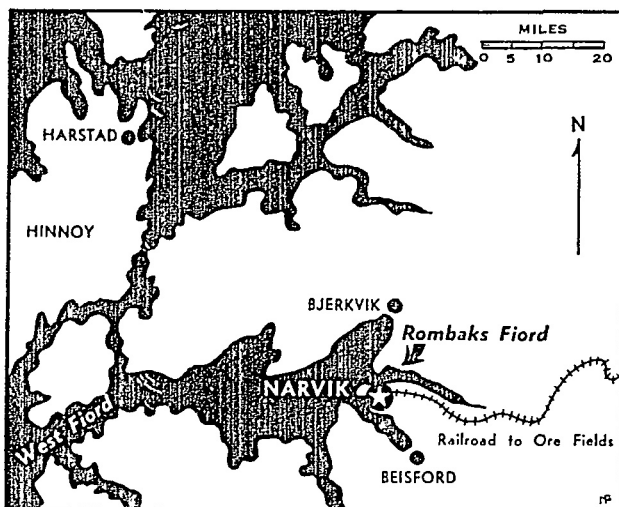


cruiser *Koenigsberg* was sunk. Similar attacks on Trondheim next day achieved no hits.

British submarines, meanwhile, were active in the waters near Norway. In addition to at least nine transports and supply ships which were sunk during the first week of the campaign, the subs sank a German cruiser and got a torpedo hit on a pocket battleship. But the losses were not reserved for the Germans alone; three of His Majesty's submarines were sunk in the month of April and other severe shipping losses were felt.

While plans to attack Bergen were being proposed, cancelled, revised, and executed, Adm Forbes ordered Capt Warburton-Lee, officer in command of destroyers, to proceed to Narvik and prevent a German seizure of that important port. The Admiralty informed Capt Warburton-Lee by radio that one German ship had already entered the port and debarked troops, but to "proceed to Narvik and sink or capture enemy ship. It is at your discretion to land forces, if you think you can capture Narvik from number of enemy present."

As he moved into West Fiord with his five destroyers, Capt Warburton-Lee was informed by Norwegian pilots that a German force of six ships larger than his own and a U-boat were already in the harbor. Warburton-Lee merely passed this information to higher echelons and signified his intention to attack at dawn. This message was heard by Adm Whitworth, aboard the



NARVIK AREA

battle cruiser *Renown* who gave some thought to sending ships from his own squadron to bolster Warburton-Lee's meager quintet. He determined, however, that there was not sufficient time to execute the reinforcement and that a delay was undesirable. Even had Whitworth announced his plan, it would not have been permitted by the Admiralty. In this connection, the First Lord of the Admiralty writes: ". . . we . . . were not prepared to *risk* [author's italics] the *Renown*—one of our only two battle cruisers—in such an enterprise."<sup>2</sup>

And so, stout of heart on a blustery April 10th, Capt Warburton-Lee's five destroyers steamed up the fiord and into the harbor of Narvik. Things went well at first. Of five German destroyers in the harbor, two were sunk and the other three so effectively blanketed with fire that they offered no resistance. In addition, a total of eight German merchantmen were either sunk or destroyed. But then, just when it appeared that Warburton-Lee's bold stroke was to remain unchallenged, five German men-of-war hove into view and opened fire. In short order, the heavier guns of the Germans established fire superiority and of Lee's five destroyers, one was beached, one sunk and two damaged. Capt Warburton-Lee, aboard the *Hardy* was killed and his ship beached. The three destroyers that were still afloat steamed for the open sea. They made good their escape, and as chance would have it, encountered a large, unprotected enemy ammunition ship which was vengefully demolished.

On the 11th of April, as he spoke before the House of Commons, Mr Churchill was still convinced that the German moves were foolhardy: "Everyone must recognize

<sup>2</sup>*Risk*. In the words of Herodotus, Book VII: "I pray thee, fear not all things alike, nor count up every risk. For if in each matter that comes before us thou wilt look to all possible chances, never wilt thou achieve anything. Far better is it to have a stout heart always, and suffer one's share of evils, than to be ever fearing what may happen, and never incur a mischance."

the extraordinary and reckless gambling which has flung the whole German Fleet out upon the savage seas of war, as if it were a mere counter to be cast away for a particular operation. . .

☛ FOLLOWING A DIVE BOMBING attack on enemy shipping in Narvik harbor on the 12th, Adm Whitworth, aboard the battleship *Warspite*, with an escort of nine destroyers and an umbrella of naval aircraft from the carrier *Furious*, moved into West Fiord at noon on the 13th. This time it wasn't a case of sending a boy to do a man's job—the forces were adequate. The results were gratifying. Eight German destroyers and one submarine were sunk, as against no ship losses for the British. German troops, who had only arrived in Narvik a few days before, were driven into the hills.

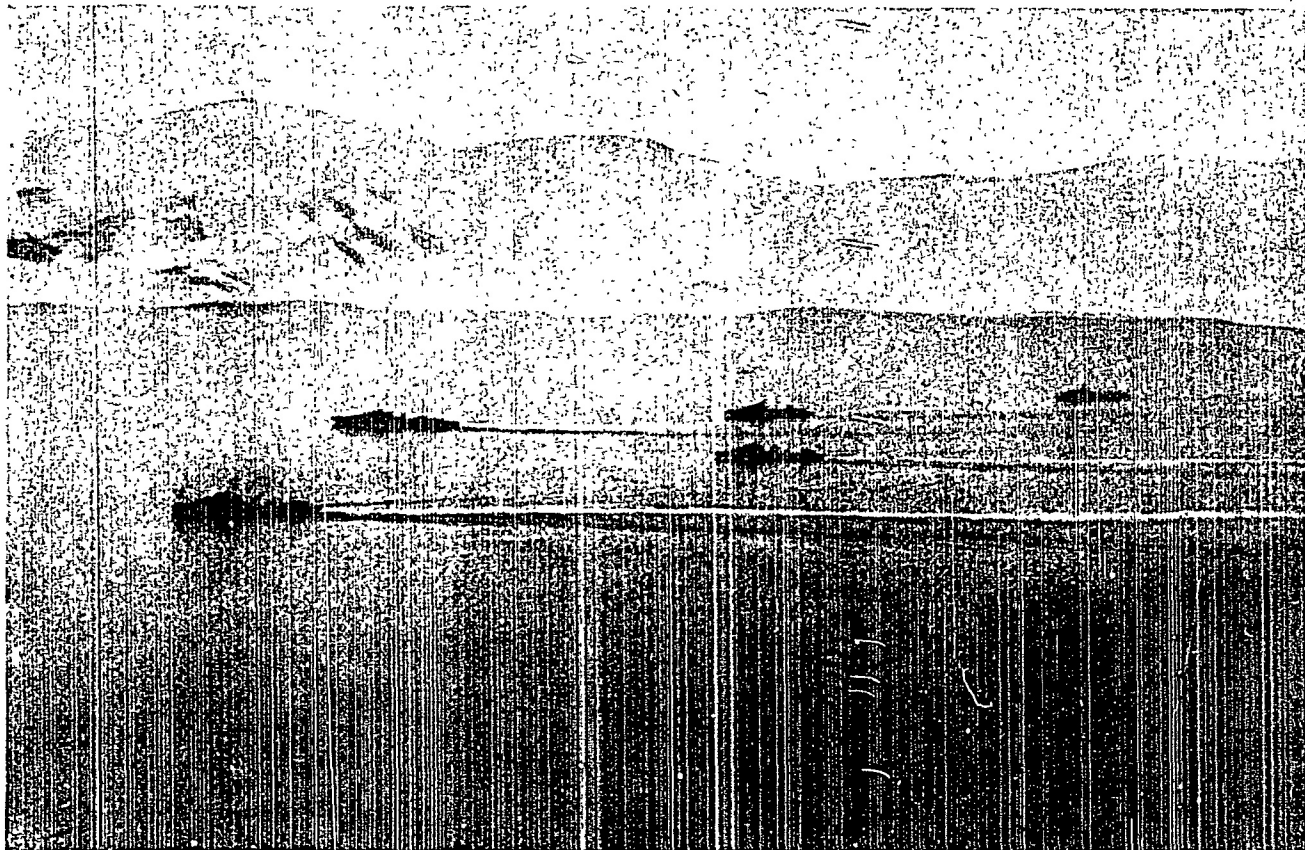
After toying with the idea of sending a provisional landing party of sailors and marines ashore to seize the town, Adm Whitworth decided against it since it would be necessary to retain the *Warspite* in the waters off Narvik in order to provide support for such a landing. This, he felt, involved too much risk from German air and submarine attack. (The Admiralty's caution appears contagious.)<sup>3</sup>

Late in the afternoon, a number of German aircraft appeared on the scene and confirmed his anxieties. The next morning, therefore, he withdrew. Two destroyers were left off the port to observe and report any new developments. Whitworth then communicated his recommendation to the Admiralty: ". . . the enemy forces in Narvik were thoroughly frightened as a result of today's action. I recommend that the town be occupied without delay by the main landing force."

☛ WHILE THESE NAVAL ACTIONS were occurring, plans for an expedition against selected ports in Norway were ripening. A seizure of Narvik clearly seemed within the capabilities of the Allies, whereas an operation against southern Norway was not within the means available. Narvik could be supported and maintained from the sea at a strength superior to anything which the Germans could move by land through 500 miles of mountain country. Trondheim, 372 miles to the south, had an important airdrome which could provide a base for British aircraft, as well as affording an excellent delaying position to contest a German advance to the north.<sup>4</sup> These operations would not only improve the Norwegian morale (to realize that they were not in the war alone), but would serve a useful purpose to the entire Allied war effort. The British Cabinet whole-heartedly ap-

<sup>3</sup>The Narvik fjords were too narrow to allow evasive manoeuvres under-way and we could not get the range to open AA fire because of the high mountains.—HAD-B

<sup>4</sup>The Trondheim operation—beginning after the Narvik operation and ending before it—is the subject of a separate article titled *The Norway Failure, Part II*.



British destroyers steam up Ofot Fiord towards Narvik during the second battle of Narvik. Eight German destroyers and one submarine were sunk as against no ship losses for the British forces.

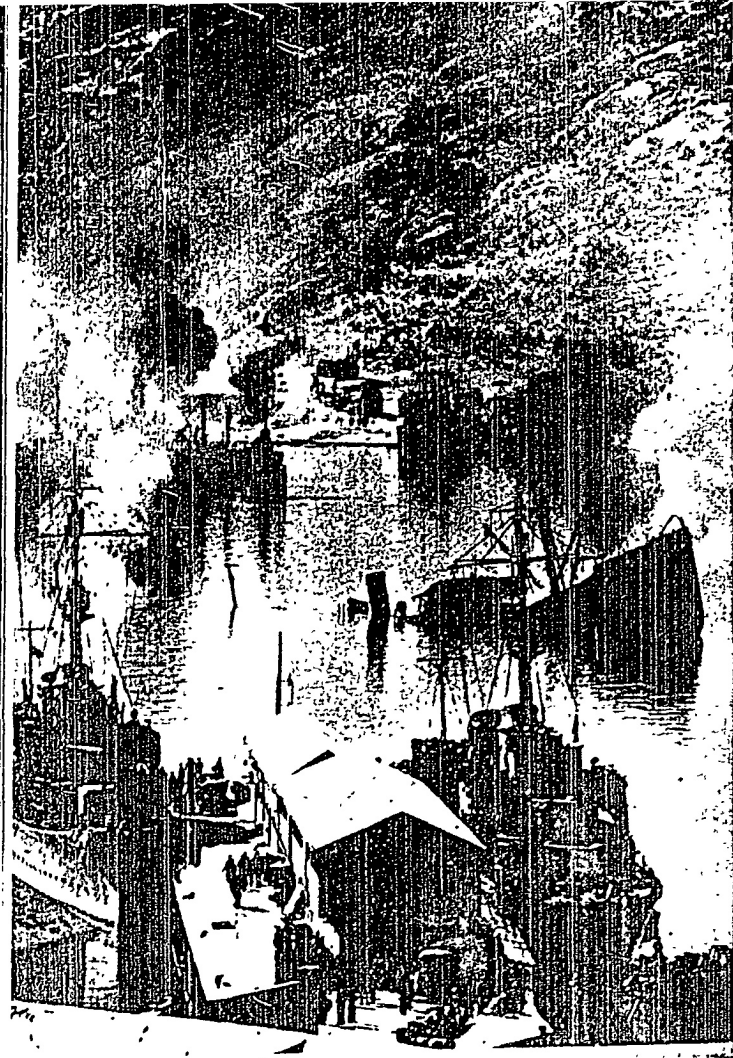
proved and the wheels were set in motion. Narvik would be first.

Here in the planning stages, a crucial and regrettable error was made: the Navy and the Army, though actuated by the same purpose, gave separate instructions to their senior commanders. And even more serious, the instructions, once given, were not exchanged nor discussed between the two services. Thus Admiral of the Fleet Lord Cork and Orrery, senior Naval commander, was not acquainted with the Military Staff's instructions to MajGen Mackesy, the senior Army commander. The General, similarly, was not familiar with the Admiralty's instructions to Lord Cork.

That Narvik was to be seized, there was no question; the principal difference appears to have been in the manner in which it was to be done. To the Navy and Lord Cork, the best scheme was to hit hard—gambling if necessary—quickly exploiting any favorable opportunity that presented itself. In Lord Cork's own words: "My impression on leaving London was quite clear that it was desired by His Majesty's Government to turn the enemy out of Narvik at the *earliest possible moment*, [author's italics] and that I was to act with all promptitude in order to obtain this result."

Gen Mackesy's instructions from the Army gave no indication of a need for *promptitude*: ". . . Your initial task will be to establish your force at Harstad, [a small port on the island of Hinnoy, 120 miles from Narvik] insure the cooperation of Norwegian forces that may be there, and obtain the information necessary to enable you to plan your further operations. It is not intended that you should land in the face of opposition. . . . The decision whether to land or not will be taken by the senior naval commander in consultation with you."

Prior instructions to Gen Mackesy had emphasized that bombardment of a "populated area in the hope of hitting a legitimate target . . . but which cannot be precisely located and identified" should be scrupulously avoided. This limitation on bombardment was later to prove an obstacle to Lord Cork's plans. The stress and mood of the two orders differed appreciably, though both were animated by the same purpose. Since Gallipoli many British military men had been hag-ridden by the notion that a combined operation (amphibious operation) against a defended beach must necessarily be destined to costly failure. This ingrained idea was perhaps responsible for that part of Mackesy's instructions which said: "It is not intended that you should land in the



Narvik Bay after the historic attack by British men-of-war during the early days of World War II.

face of opposition. .” The General read his orders carefully.

On April 12, aboard separate ships, the Admiral and General departed from Britain, the latter in company with a brigade (24th Guards) of British soldiers. (It was then planned that three battalions of Chasseurs Alpins, plus other French troops, follow in a week or two.) The two commanders were to meet at Harstad—this much of the planning was familiar to both.

Two days out of port, Lord Cork received a message from Adm Whitworth, who had just withdrawn from Narvik waters after his successful attack. The message said in part: “I am convinced that Narvik can be taken by direct assault now without fear of meeting serious opposition on landing. I consider that the main landing force need only be small. . .”

A quick stroke of this nature was to Lord Cork’s liking—he immediately sent a message to the British cruiser *Southampton* to meet the *Aurora* (Cork’s flagship) in the Lofoten Islands, where a provisional landing force would be organized and put ashore at Narvik as soon

as possible. The Admiralty, however, put the kibosh on the scheme, saying that any move against Narvik should be made together with Gen Mackesy’s force. A golden opportunity was thus lost—the Admiralty would rue that decision.

☛ HIS BOLD PLAN THWARTED, Lord Cork made for Harstad to join Gen Mackesy. The latter established his command post in a hotel in the city and let it be known that no amount of urging or argument would convince him that a direct attack against Narvik was feasible. The General was worried about German machine guns in Narvik and did not feel that naval bombardment would materially change the situation—nor did he feel (consistent with his instructions) that the city should be bombarded. Plus all that, his transports were not combat loaded.

Deadlock. Frustration. Snow. And in Narvik, the Germans cleaned their machine guns.

By the 17th of April, the Defense Committee of the War Cabinet was sufficiently disappointed with the lack of progress at Narvik to send a message to Lord Cork and Gen Mackesy (obviously aimed at the latter) saying in part:

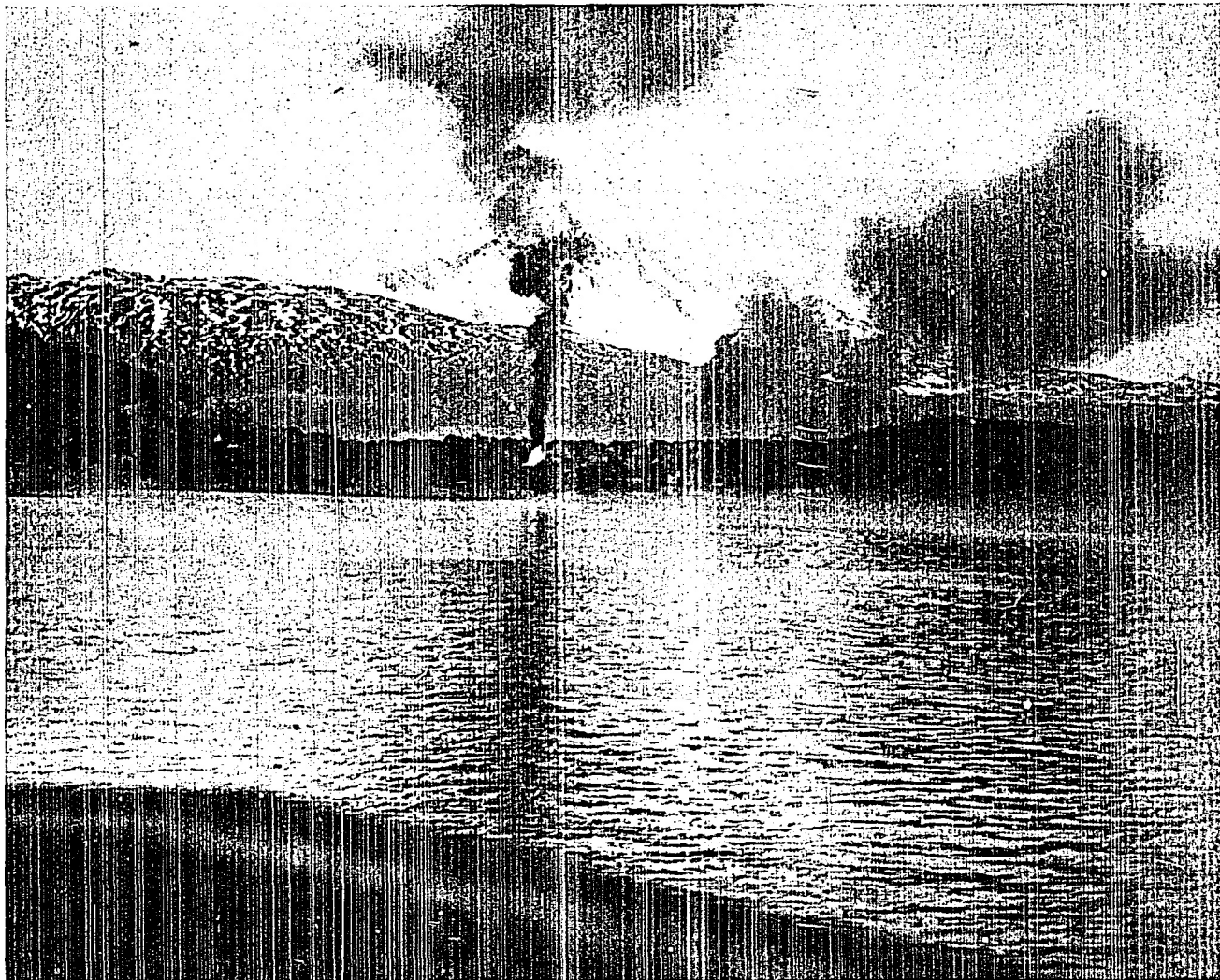
“Full consideration should . . . be given by you to an assault upon Narvik covered by the [battleship] *Warspite* and the destroyers, which might also operate at Rombaks Fiord. The capture of the port and town would be an important success. We should like to receive from you the reasons why this is not possible, and your estimate of the degree of resistance to be expected on the waterfront. Matter most urgent.”

☛ DOUBTLESSLY, the Committee expected some action following this message—they got none. If the general was fearful of having “blood on his hands,” the message should have relieved him; the Committee had, in effect, shouldered the responsibility for a costly defeat and virtually absolved him of all blame should the decision prove wrong. But the General was unmoved; the snow would melt eventually, and he could then implement his preferred (to the exclusion of all others) plan of landing on an undefended beach and advancing on Narvik by land.

Here was a force of over 4,000 British troops, well supported by naval vessels (although there was a regrettable absence of naval aircraft) against a German force of about 2,000.<sup>5</sup>

Lord Cork was designated on April 20th as sole commander of naval, army, and air units in the Narvik area—placing Gen Mackesy under Lord Cork’s command. It

<sup>5</sup>This figure represents the regular German troops at Narvik. From ships that had been sunk in Narvik waters, many seamen had made their way ashore. They were ill-equipped and untrained, however, for an infantry defense mission.



Scenes from the deck of a British cruiser during the bombardment and landing of troops in Narvik. British hesitated shelling the town because of the innocent Norwegians who would suffer.

had been hoped that this shift would bring about the direct assault—so long and often advocated. But the forces of inertia had reduced the expeditionary force to a state of torpid hibernation. The General could think of many reasons for not undertaking a decisive move against Narvik and the Admiral, not wishing to exert the full power lately accorded him, did not wish to dictate it.

With more German aircraft appearing over the Narvik area daily, and with a general increase in the number of planes which the Germans could bring to bear there, the situation was not improving. Summarizing the problem, Lord Cork wrote to Mr Churchill in part as follows: “. . . The initial error was that the original force started on the assumption they would meet no resistance. . . As it is, the soldiers have not yet got their reserves of small-arms ammunition, or water, but tons of stuff and personnel they do not want. . .

“What is really our one pressing need is fighters; we are so over-matched in the air. . . .

“It is exasperating not being able to get on, and I quite understand you wondering why we do not, but I assure you that it is not from want of desire to do so.”

☛ TO BREAK THE STALEMATE, Lord Cork decided upon a reconnaissance-in-force, under an umbrella of naval bombardment—probably with the hope that if the reconnaissance units could establish themselves ashore, reinforcing troops could be poured in behind them. A dissenting opinion, however, was quickly forthcoming from Gen Mackesy. Again he called attention to the instructions relative to bombardment and stated that every member of his command would be ashamed to subject innocent Norwegians to a naval shelling. Lord Cork forwarded Mackesy's objection without comment. His silence spoke chapters. It is almost superfluous to



state that the Defense Committee backed Lord Cork.

On 24 April a three hour naval shelling, fired by the battleship *Warspite* and three cruisers, failed to dislodge the Narvik defenders. No assault of the beaches was attempted.

☛ BY THE FIRST WEEK in May, the original Brigade which had accompanied Gen Mackesy from Britain was removed from the Narvik area and employed to the south in an effort to block the German advance from that direction. But Gen Mackesy remained. An influx of Polish, French, and Norwegian troops had built up the forces available for an attack on Narvik, there being four battalions of Polish troops, three battalions of Chasseurs Alpins, two battalions of the French Foreign Legion and a provisional Norwegian force of about 3,500 men.<sup>6</sup>

Nor had the Germans been idle; units from the 3d Mountain Division had reinforced the original garrison force and there was a general improvement of their defenses.

Finally, on the night of 12-13 May, a landing under Gen Mackesy was made at Bjerkvik (see map) with very little loss. Gen Sir Claude J. E. Auchinleck, who had been sent from Britain to command all troops in Northern Norway arrived on the 13th and took over. His orders were to seize and defend a foothold in Norway and to sever shipments of iron ore to Germany. With the landing at Bjerkvik, the ball was at last rolling—but like a snowball pitched up hill, destined to roll back again, looming larger and faster on its descent. The avalanche of misunderstandings, over-caution, and inadequate planning which had all but enveloped the Norwegian campaign, forced a climactic decision from London on 24 May: Norway would be abandoned. This decision was arrived at not only because of the snail-like speed of the Narvik operation, nor because of the failures at Trondheim, but also and especially because of the German moves into the Low Countries and France. Following an invasion on 10 May, Holland, Belgium, and Luxembourg had quickly fallen; by the 16th, Hitler's forces had pierced the northwestern extension of France's Maginot Line; a train of events rapidly leading to the Dunkirk catastrophe (1 June) was well in motion.

☛ THE DECISION to abandon Norway made, it still became necessary to seize Narvik—both to achieve destruction of the port, and more important, to provide a covering position for the withdrawal. Narvik was finally seized, practically without losses, on 28 May, following a shore to shore movement across Rombaks Fiord by two Foreign Legion battalions and one Norwegian battalion. In a related action, Polish troops seized

<sup>6</sup>Lack of command liaison and the language difficulties made this a very difficult affair.—HAD-B

Beisford, 10 miles to the southeast of Narvik. The Germans retreated into the hills to the east. (See map.)

But, as has been indicated, the prize—so long in attainment—was soon released. The evacuation commenced almost immediately, and by June all troops and large amounts of supplies and equipment were "bound for the land they adore." The withdrawal, unchallenged by German ground forces, was covered by planes from two carriers (*Glorious* and *Ark Royal*) and a land-based squadron of RAF fighters. The latter landed on the *Glorious* and departed Narvik in that ship. In addition to the planes, Lord Cork had two cruisers and 16 destroyers to protect the retiring convoys.

As this evacuation was carried out in the same week as the more famous Dunkirk withdrawal, a severe strain was imposed on the British Fleet. It now appears that their dispersion of forces was too great. On the afternoon of 8 June, the German battle cruisers *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst* spotted three British ships (carrier *Glorious* and two escorting destroyers) retiring from Narvik. In the ensuing battle, all three British ships were sunk with only about 60 survivors—the Germans' fire power was too much. The *Scharnhorst*, although sustaining heavy damage from a British torpedo, remained afloat and limped to safety.

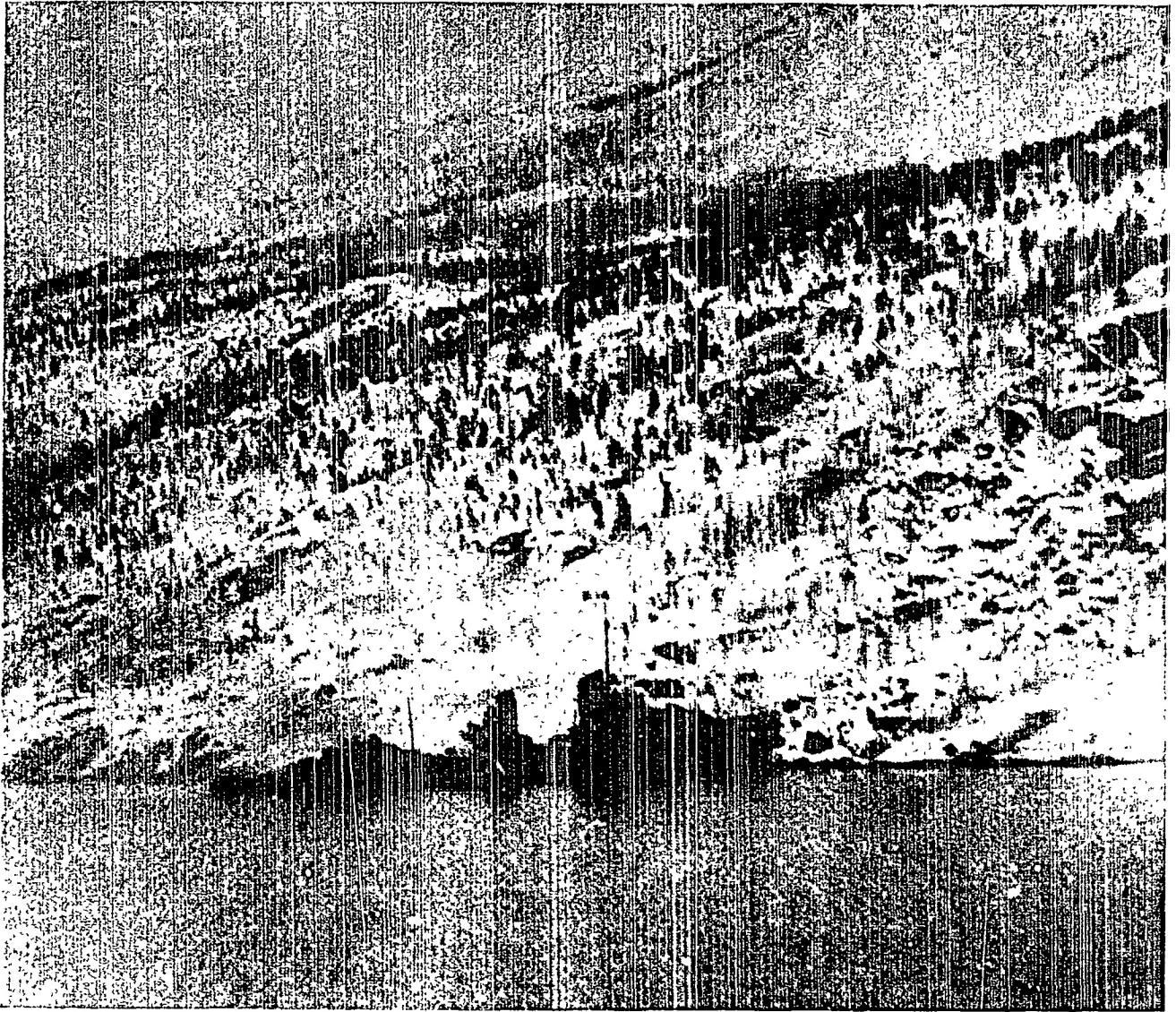
Thus ended the abortive Norway campaign.

☛ IN ANALYZING the reasons for the Narvik failure, we could dwell on many specific points: unwillingness of the British to take a risk, over-supervision by the Admiralty, contradictory instructions from the Army and Navy, faulty coordination between the attack force and landing force commanders (even extending to embarkation in separate ships), failure to exploit an advantage gained, lack of an adequate landing force (under naval command). Tossed into the air, however, these critical points all boomerang and neatly arrange themselves under the heading of "Britain's Unbalanced Fleet."

The fact is that Great Britain, the greatest naval power in the world at that time, could not successfully wage a naval campaign against a relatively inferior naval power. The reason is not mysterious or obscure: the British Navy needed a stronger naval air arm (as protection against German aircraft and also as a potent offensive weapon against German installations), and a Fleet Marine Force to be landed when favorable opportunity presented itself.

The Narvik operation has mainly emphasized the need for a specialized landing force (Fleet Marine Force, if you will) under naval command. The Trondheim operation (which will be covered in *The Norway Failure, Part II*) underlines this fact—and in addition—presents even more forcibly the case for a strong naval air arm.

What had the failure meant to the world? Most importantly, perhaps, the highly vaunted British sea



An enemy destroyer beached in the inner part of Rombaks Fiord off Sildvika during the British naval action 13 April 1940. Failure of the English to follow up initial success was fatal.

power was revealed as insufficient to prevent a relatively weak sea power (Germany) from seizing an area entirely favorable to the exercise of sea power. The Norwegians, reeling from the hard punches of the Germans, were all but "on the ropes." Yet, in the hope that help was coming, they somehow were managing to carry on the battle as a semi-effective fighting body. Norway fell with the British evacuation. In Italy, a country which was already giving thought to joining the Germans, the British failure had the effect of proving that the winning side was, indeed, Adolf's, and that the British were not nearly as powerful as at one time believed. Italy declared war only two days after the British evacuation of Narvik. In Britain, the populace was shocked; they had had no illusions about the weakness of their ground forces, but they had always pictured their Navy as in-

vincible. The reversal was frustrating and depressing. To the Germans, this was just another indication of Hitler's genius—another feather in Der Führer's war-bonnet. Thus it may be seen, that the political and psychological implications of the Norway failure are weighty with significance.

The late James E. Forrestal, when he was Secretary of Defense, summarized the Norway failure in these words: "This disaster, which profoundly affected the course of the entire war, was more than the failure of 16,000 men, but was a failure in the exercise of sea power on the part of the then greatest navy in the world and is entirely due to the lack of a small, specially trained amphibious force such as we have in the form of the United States Marines, to supplement the action of the Fleet at sea."

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