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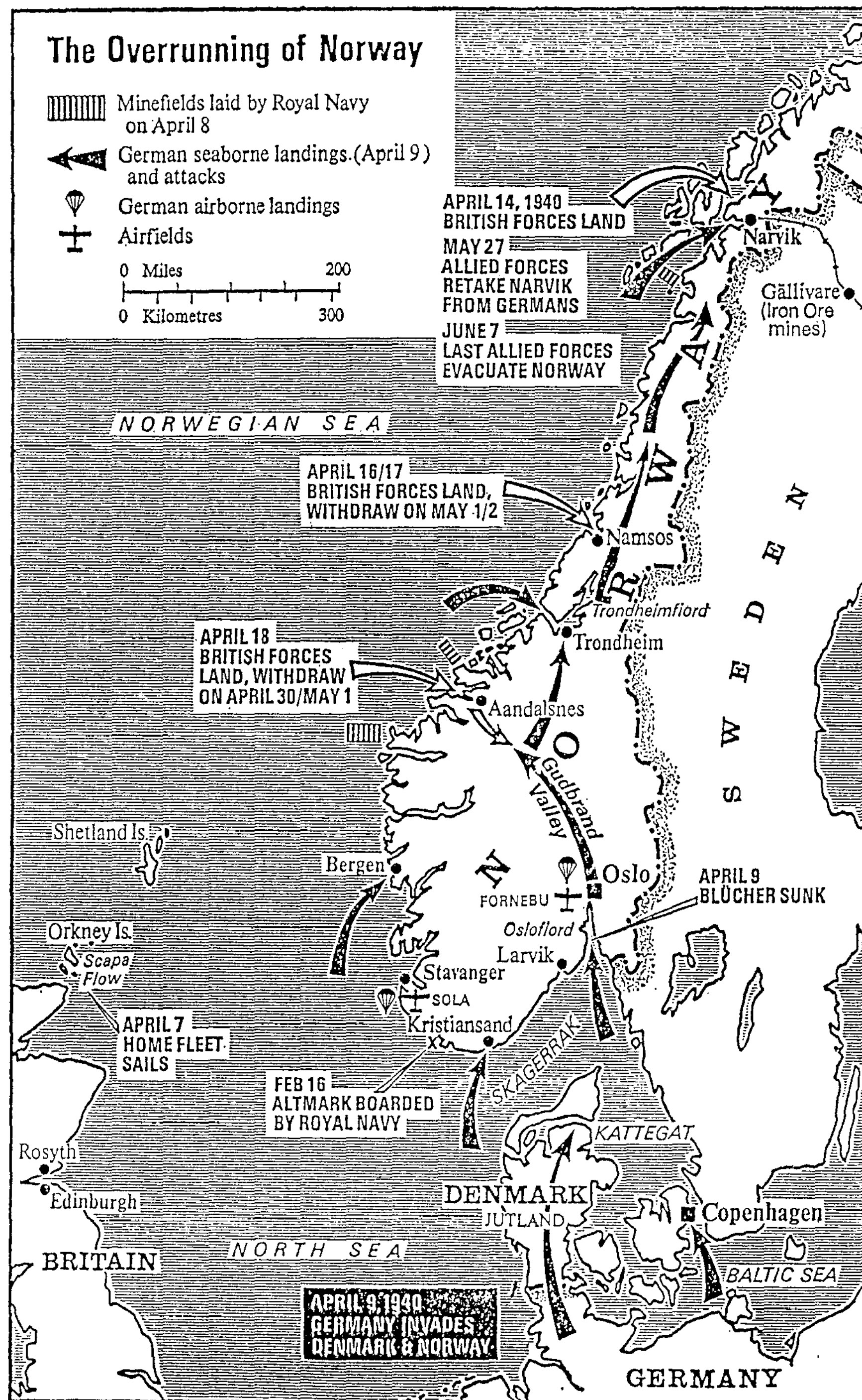

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CHAPTER 6

THE OVERRUNNING OF NORWAY

The six months' deceptive lull that followed the conquest of Poland ended with a sudden thunderclap. It came, not where the storm-clouds centred, but on the Scandinavian fringe. The peaceful countries of Norway and Denmark were struck by a flash of Hitlerian lightning.

Newspapers on April 9 featured the news that on the previous day, British and French naval forces had entered Norwegian waters and laid minefields there—to block them to any ships trading with Germany. Congratulatory comment on this initiative was mingled with justificatory arguments for the breach of Norway's neutrality. But the radio that morning put the newspapers out of date—for it carried the far more startling news that German forces were landing at a series of points along the coast of Norway, and had also entered Denmark.

The audacity of these German moves, in defiance of Britain's superiority in seapower, staggered the Allied leaders. When the British Prime Minister, Mr Chamberlain, made a statement in the House of Commons that afternoon he said that there had been German landings up the west coast of Norway, at Bergen and Trondheim, as well as on the south coast, and added: 'There have been some reports about a similar landing at Narvik, but I am very doubtful whether they are correct.' To the British authorities it seemed incredible that Hitler could have ventured a landing so far north, and all the more incredible since they knew that their own naval forces were present on the scene in strength—to cover the mine-laying operations and other intended steps. They thought that 'Narvik' must be a misspelling of 'Larvik', a place on the south coast.

Before the end of the day, however, it became clear that the Germans had gained possession of the capital of Norway, Oslo, and all the main ports including Narvik. Every one of their simultaneous seaborne strokes had been successful.

The British Government's quick disillusionment on this score was followed

by a fresh illusion. Mr Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, told the House of Commons two days later:

> In my view, which is shared by my skilled advisers, Herr Hitler has committed a grave strategic error . . . we have greatly gained by what has occurred in Scandinavia. . . . He has made a whole series of commitments upon the Norwegian coast for which he will now have to fight, if necessary, during the whole summer, against Powers possessing vastly superior naval forces and able to transport them to the scenes of action more easily than he can. I cannot see any counter-advantage which he has gained. . . . I feel that we are greatly advantaged by . . . the strategic blunder into which our mortal enemy has been provoked.*

These fine words were not followed up by deeds to match. The British countermoves were slow, hesitant, and bungled. When it came to the point of action the Admiralty, despite its pre-war disdain for airpower, became extremely cautious and shrank from risking ships at the places where their intervention could have been decisive. The troop-moves were still feebler. Although forces were landed at several places with the aim of ejecting the German invader, they were all re-embarked in barely a fortnight, except from one foothold at Narvik—and that was abandoned a month later, following the main German offensive in the West.

The dream-castles raised by Churchill had come tumbling down. They had been built on a basic misconception of the situation, and of the changes in modern warfare—particularly the effect of airpower on seapower.

There had been more reality and significance in his closing words when, after depicting Norway as a trap for Hitler, he spoke of the German invasion as a step into which Hitler had 'been provoked'. For the most startling of all post-war discoveries about the campaign has been the fact that Hitler, despite all his unscrupulousness, would have preferred to keep Norway neutral, and did not plan to invade her until he was provoked to do so by palpable signs that the Allies were planning a hostile move in that quarter.

It is fascinating to trace the sequence of events behind the scene on either side—though tragic and horrifying to see how violently offensive-minded statesmen tend to react on one another to produce explosions of destructive force. The first clear step on either side was on September 19, 1939, when Churchill (as his memoirs record) pressed on the British Cabinet the project of laying a minefield 'in Norwegian territorial waters' and thus 'stopping the Norwegian transportation of Swedish iron-ore from Narvik' to Germany. He argued that such a step would be 'of the highest importance in crippling the enemy's war industry'. According to his subsequent note to the First Sea

* Churchill: War Speeches, vol. I, pp. 169–70.

Lord: 'The Cabinet, including the Foreign Secretary [Lord Halifax], appeared strongly favourable to this action.'

This is rather surprising to learn, and suggests that the Cabinet were inclined to favour the end without carefully considering the means—or where they might lead. A similar project had been discussed in 1918, but on that occasion, as is stated in the Official Naval History:

> . . . the Commander-in-Chief [Lord Beatty] said it would be most repugnant to the officers and men in the Grand Fleet to steam in overwhelming strength into the waters of a small but high-spirited people and coerce them. If the Norwegians resisted, as they probably would, blood would be shed; this, said the Commander-in-Chief, 'would constitute a crime as bad as any that the Germans had committed elsewhere.'

It is evident that the sailors were more scrupulous than the statesmen, or that the British Government was in a more reckless mood at the opening of war in 1939 than at the end of World War I.

The Foreign Office staff exerted a restraining influence, however, and made the Cabinet see the objections to violating Norway's neutrality as proposed. Churchill mournfully records: 'The Foreign Office arguments about neutrality were weighty, and I could not prevail. I continued . . . to press my point by every means and on all occasions.'* It became a subject of discussion in widening circles, and arguments in its favour were even canvassed in the Press. That was just the way to arouse German anxiety and countermeasures.

On the German side the first point of any significance to be found in the captured records comes in early October, when the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, Admiral Raeder, expressed fears that the Norwegians might open their ports to the British and reported to Hitler on the strategic disadvantages that a British occupation might bring. He also suggested that it would be advantageous to the German submarine campaign 'to obtain bases on the Norwegian coast—e.g. Trondheim—with the help of Russian pressure'.

But Hitler put the suggestion aside. His mind was focused on plans for an attack in the West, to compel France to make peace, and he did not want to be drawn into any extraneous operations or diversion of resources.

A fresh and much stronger incitement, to both sides, arose out of the Russian invasion of Finland at the end of November. Churchill saw in it a new possibility of striking at Germany's flank under the cloak of aid to Finland: 'I welcomed this new and favourable breeze as a means of achieving the major strategic advantage of cutting off the vital iron-ore supplies of Germany.'†

In a note of December 16 he marshalled all his arguments for this step,

* Churchill: *The Second World War*, vol. I, p. 483.
† *ibid*, p. 489.

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which he described as 'a major offensive operation'. He recognised that it was likely to drive the Germans to invade Scandinavia for, as he said: 'If you fire at the enemy he will fire back.' But he went on to assert 'we have more to gain than to lose by a German attack upon Norway and Sweden'. (He omitted any consideration of what the Scandinavian peoples would suffer from having their countries thus turned into a battleground.)

Most of the Cabinet, however, still had qualms about violating Norway's neutrality. Despite Churchill's powerful pleading they refrained from sanctioning the immediate execution of his project. But they authorised the Chiefs of Staff to 'plan for landing a force at Narvik'—which was the terminus of the railway leading to the Gällivare ironfields in Sweden, and thence into Finland. While aid to Finland was the ostensible purpose of such an expedition, the underlying and major purpose would be the domination of the Swedish ironfields.

In the same month an important visitor came to Berlin from Norway. This was Vidkun Quisling, a former Minister of Defence, who was head of a small party of Nazi type that was strongly sympathetic to Germany. He saw Admiral Raeder on arrival, and impressed on him the danger that Britain would soon occupy Norway. He asked for money and underground help for his own plans of organising a coup to turn out the existing Norwegian Government. He said that a number of leading Norwegian officers were ready to back him—including, he alleged, Colonel Sundlo, the commander at Narvik. Once he had gained power he would invite the Germans in to protect Norway, and thus forestall a British entry.

Raeder persuaded Hitler to see Quisling personally, and they met on December 16 and 18. The record of their talk shows that Hitler said 'he would prefer Norway, as well as the rest of Scandinavia, to remain comletely neutral', as he did not want to 'enlarge the theatre of war'. But 'if the enemy were preparing to spread the war he would take steps to guard himself against the threat'. Meantime Quisling was promised a subsidy and given an assurance that the problem of giving him military support would be studied.

Even so, the War Diary of the German Naval Staff shows that on January 13, a month later, they were still of the opinion that 'the most favourable solution would be the maintenance of Norway's neutrality', although they were becoming anxious that 'England intended to occupy Norway with the tacit agreement of the Norwegian Government'.

What was happening on the other side of the hill? On January 15 General Gamelin, the French Commander-in-Chief, addressed a note to Daladier, the Prime Minister, on the importance of opening a new theatre of war in

Scandinavia. He also produced a plan for landing an Allied force at Petsamo, in the north of Finland, together with the precautionary 'seizure of ports and airfields on the west coast of Norway'. The plan further envisaged the possibility of 'extending the operation into Sweden and occupying the iron-ore mines at Gällivare'.

A broadcast by Churchill, who addressed the neutrals on their duty to join in the fight against Hitler, naturally fanned German fears.* There were all too many public hints of Allied action.

On the 27th Hitler gave explicit orders to his military advisers to prepare comprehensive plans for an invasion of Norway if necessary. The special staff formed for the purpose met for the first time on February 5.

That day the Allied Supreme War Council met in Paris, and Chamberlain took Churchill with him. At this meeting plans were approved for preparing a force of two British divisions and a slightly smaller French contingent as 'Aid to Finland'—they were to be 'camouflaged as volunteers' in an endeavour to diminish the chances of an open war with Russia. But an argument developed over the route of their despatch. The British Prime Minister emphasised the difficulties of landing at Petsamo, and the advantages of landing at Narvik—particularly 'to get control of the Gällivare ore-field'. That was to be the main object, and only a part of the force was to push on to Finland's aid. The British arguments prevailed, and it was arranged that the force should sail early in March.

A fateful incident occurred on February 16. A German vessel, the *Altmark*, which was carrying British prisoners back from the South Atlantic, was chased by British destroyers and took refuge in a Norwegian fiord. Churchill sent a direct order to Captain Vian of H.M.S. *Cossack* to push into Norwegian waters, board the *Altmark* and rescue the prisoners. Two Norwegian gunboats were on the scene, but they were overawed and the subsequent protest of the Norwegian Government about the intrusion into their waters was rebuffed.

Hitler regarded the protest as merely a gesture to hoodwink him, and was convinced that the Norwegian Government was England's willing accomplice. That belief was nourished by the passivity of the two gunboats and by

* On January 20 Mr Churchill, in a broadcast address, claimed success for the Allied navies at sea, and contrasted the losses of neutral ships to U-boat attack with the safety of Allied ships in convoy. Then, after a brief *tour d'horizon*, he asked: 'But what would happen if all these neutral nations I have mentioned—and some others I have not mentioned—were with one spontaneous impulse to do their duty in accordance with the Covenant of the League, and were to stand together with the British and French Empires against aggression and wrong?' (Churchill: *War Speeches*, vol. I, p. 137). The suggestion caused a stir, and the Belgian, Dutch, Danish, Norwegian, and Swiss Presses hastened to reject it, while in London it was announced, with some reversion to the days of appeasement, that the broadcast only represented Churchill's personal views.

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the reports of Quisling that the action of the *Cossack* had been a 'pre-arranged' affair. According to the German admirals, the *Altmark* affair was decisive in swinging Hitler in favour of intervention in Norway. It was the spark that set fire to the powder trail.

Hitler felt that he could not wait for Quisling's plans to develop, especially as German observers in Norway reported that Quisling's party was making little progress, while reports from England indicated that some action in the Norwegian area was being planned, together with the assembly of troops and transports.

On the 20th Hitler sent for General von Falkenhorst and appointed him to command and prepare an expeditionary force for Norway, saying, 'I am informed that the English intend to land there, and I want to be there before them. The occupation of Norway by the British would be a strategic turning movement which would lead them into the Baltic, where we have neither troops nor coastal fortifications . . . the enemy would find himself in a position to advance on Berlin and break the backbone of our two fronts.'

On March 1, Hitler issued his directive for the complete preparation for the invasion. Denmark was to be occupied, too, as a necessary strategic stepping stone and safeguard to his lines of communication.

But even now it was not a definite decision to strike. The records of Raeder's conferences with Hitler show that Hitler was still torn between his conviction that 'the maintenance of Norway's neutrality is the best thing' for Germany and his fear of an imminent British landing there. In presenting the naval plans on March 9 he dwelt on the hazards of undertaking an operation 'contrary to all the principles of naval warfare', while at the same time saying that it was 'urgent'.

In the following week the state of anxiety on the German side became more feverish. On the 13th it was reported that British submarines were concentrated off the south coast of Norway; on the 14th the Germans intercepted a radio message which ordered Allied transports to be ready to move; on the 15th a number of French officers arrived at Bergen. The Germans felt that they were certain to be forestalled as their own expeditionary force was not yet ready.

How were things actually going on the Allied side? On February 21 Daladier urged that the *Altmark* affair should be used as a pretext for the 'immediate seizure' of the Norwegian ports 'by a sudden stroke'. Daladier argued: 'Its justification in the eyes of world opinion will be the more easy the more rapidly the operation is carried out and the more our propaganda is able to exploit the memory of the recent complicity of Norway in the *Altmark* incident'—a way of talking which was remarkably like Hitler's. The French

Government's proposal was viewed with some doubt in London, as the expeditionary forces were not ready and Chamberlain still hoped that the Norwegian and Swedish Governments would agree to the entry of Allied troops.

At the meeting of the War Cabinet on March 8, however, Churchill unfolded a scheme of arriving in force off Narvik and throwing a detachment of troops ashore immediately—on the principle of 'displaying strength in order to avoid having to use it'. At a further meeting on the 12th the Cabinet 'decided to revive the plans' for landings at Trondheim, Stavanger, and Bergen as well as at Narvik.

The force landed at Narvik was to push rapidly inland and over the Swedish frontier to the Gällivare ironfield. Everything was to be ready for putting the plans into execution on March 20.

But then the plans were upset by Finland's military collapse and her capitulation to Russia on March 13—which deprived the Allies of the primary pretext for going into Norway. In the first reaction to the cold douche, two divisions which had been allotted for the Norway force were sent to France, though the equivalent of one division remained available. Another sequel was the fall of Daladier, and his replacement as Prime Minister of France by Paul Reynaud—who came into power on the surge of a demand for a more offensive policy and quicker action. Reynaud went to London for a meeting of the Allied Supreme War Council, on March 28, determined to press for the immediate execution of the Norwegian project that Churchill had so long been urging.

But there was no need now for any such pressure—for, as Churchill has related, Chamberlain had become 'much inclined to aggressive action of some kind at this stage'. As in the spring of 1939, once he had taken his resolve he jumped in with both feet. Opening the Council, he not only argued strongly for action in Norway but also urged the adoption of Churchill's other favourite project—that of dropping by air a continuous stream of mines into the Rhine and other rivers of Germany. Reynaud expressed some doubt about the latter operation, and said he would have to obtain the agreement of the French War Committee. But he eagerly embraced the Norwegian operation.

It was settled that the mining of Norwegian waters should be carried out on April 5, and be backed by the landing of forces at Narvik, Trondheim, Bergen, and Stavanger. The first contingent of troops was to sail, for Narvik, on the 8th. But then a fresh delay arose. The French War Committee would not agree to the dropping of mines in the Rhine lest it should bring German retaliation 'which would fall upon France'. They showed no such concern

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about the retaliation that would fall on Norway from the other operation—and Gamelin had even emphasised that one of its aims was 'to draw the enemy into a trap by provoking him to land in Norway'. Chamberlain, however, tried to insist that both operations should be carried out, and arranged with Churchill that the latter should go over to Paris on the 4th and make a fresh effort—which did not succeed—to persuade the French to adopt his Rhine plan.

That meant a short deferment of 'Wilfred', the Norwegian plan. It is strange that Churchill was agreeable to it, for at the War Cabinet meeting the day before, reports had been presented from the War Office and Foreign Office showing that large numbers of German ships were concentrated, with troops on board, at the ports nearest to Norway. Rather absurdly it was suggested—and astonishingly, believed—that these forces were waiting in readiness to deliver a counterstroke to a British descent on Norway.

The start of the Norwegian operations was postponed three days, until the 8th. That further delay proved fatal to its prospects of success. It enabled the Germans to get into Norway just ahead of the Allies.

On April 1 Hitler had finally made up his mind and ordered the invasion of Norway and Denmark to begin at 5.15 a.m. on the 9th. His decision followed a disturbing report that Norwegian anti-aircraft and coastal batteries had been given permission to open fire without awaiting higher orders—which suggested that the Norwegian forces were being made ready for action and that if Hitler waited any longer his chances of surprise, and success, would vanish.

In the dark hours of April 9 advance detachments of German troops, mostly in warships, arrived in the chief ports of Norway, from Oslo right up to Narvik—and captured them with little difficulty. Their commanders announced to the local authorities that they had come to take Norway under German protection against an Allied invasion that was imminent—a statement that the Allied spokesmen promptly denied, and continued to deny.

As Lord Hankey, a member of the War Cabinet at the time, stated:

> ... from the start of planning to the German invasion, both Great Britain and Germany were keeping more or less level in their plans and preparations. Britain actually started planning a little earlier ... both plans were executed almost simultaneously, Britain being twenty-four hours ahead in the so-called act of aggression, if the term is really applicable to either side.

But Germany's final spurt was faster and more forceful. She won the race by a very short head—it was almost a 'photo-finish'.

One of the most questionable points of the Nuremberg Trials was that the planning and execution of aggression against Norway was put among the major charges against the Germans. It is hard to understand how the British and French Governments had the face to approve the inclusion of this charge, or how the official prosecutors could press for a conviction on this score. Such a course was one of the most palpable cases of hypocrisy in history.

Passing now to the course of the campaign, a surprising revelation is the smallness of the force which captured the capital and chief ports of Norway in the opening coup. It comprised two battlecruisers, a pocket battleship, seven cruisers, fourteen destroyers, twenty-eight U-boats, a number of auxiliary ships, and some 10,000 troops—the advance elements of three divisions that were used for the invasion. At no place was the initial landing made by more than 2,000 men. One parachute battalion was also employed—to seize the airfields at Oslo and Stavanger. This was the first time that parachute troops had been used in war and they proved very valuable. But the most decisive factor in the German success was the Luftwaffe; the actual strength employed in the campaign was about 800 operational planes and 250 transport planes. It overawed the Norwegian people in the first phase, and later paralysed the Allies' countermoves.

How was it that the British naval forces failed to intercept and sink the much weaker German naval forces that carried the invading detachments? The extent of the sea-space, the nature of the Norwegian coast, and the hazy weather were important handicaps. But there were other factors, and more avoidable handicaps. Gamelin records that when, on April 2, he urged Ironside, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, to hasten the despatch of the expeditionary force, the latter replied: 'With us the Admiralty is all-powerful; it likes to organise everything methodically. It is convinced that it can prevent any German landing on the west coast of Norway.'

At 1.25 p.m. on the 7th British aircraft actually spotted 'strong German naval forces moving swiftly northward' across the mouth of the Skaggerak, towards the Norwegian coast. Churchill says: 'We found it hard at the Admiralty to believe that this force was going to Narvik'—in spite of a 'report from Copenhagen that Hitler meant to seize that port'. The British Home Fleet sailed at 7.30 p.m. from Scapa Flow, but it would seem that both the Admiralty and the admirals at sea were filled with the thought of catching the German battlecruisers. In their efforts to bring these to battle they tended to lose sight of the possibility that the enemy had a landward intention, and lost a chance of intercepting the smaller troop-carrying warships.

Since an expeditionary force was already embarked and ready to sail, why

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was it so slow to land and eject the German detachments before they had time to establish their grip on the Norwegian ports? The prime reason is contained in the last paragraph. When the Admiralty heard that the German battlecruisers had been spotted, they ordered the cruiser squadron at Rosyth 'to march her soldiers ashore, even without their equipment, and join the Fleet at sea'. Similar orders were sent to the ships in the Clyde that were loaded up with troops.

Why did not the Norwegians put up a better resistance against such a small invading force? Primarily, because their forces were not even mobilised. Despite warnings from their Minister in Berlin and urgings from the Chief of their General Staff, the order for mobilisation was not given until the night of April 8/9, a few hours before the invasion. That was too late, and the swift-moving invaders disrupted the process.

Moreover, as Churchill remarks, the Norwegian Government at the time was 'chiefly concerned with the activities of the British'. It was unfortunate, and also ironical, that the British mine-laying operation should have absorbed and distracted the Norwegians' attention during the crucial twenty-four hours before the Germans landed.

As for the Norwegians' chance of rallying from the opening blow, this was diminished by their lack of fighting experience and an out-of-date military organisation. In no way were they fitted to cope with a modern Blitzkreig, even on the small scale applied to their case. The weakness of the resistance was all too clearly shown by the speed with which the invaders raced along the deep valleys to overrun the country. If the resistance had been tougher, the melting snow on the valley-sides—which hampered out-flanking manœuvre—would have been a more serious impediment to the German prospects of success.

The most astonishing of the opening series of coups was that at Narvik, for this far northern port was some 1,200 miles distant from the German naval bases. Two Norwegian coast-defence ships gallantly met the attacking German destroyers, but were quickly sunk. The shore defences made no attempt at resistance—more by incompetence than treachery. Next day a British destroyer flotilla steamed up the fiord and fought a mutually damaging action with the Germans, which on the 13th were finished off by the inroad of a stronger flotilla supported by the battleship *Warspite*. But by this time the German troops were established in and around Narvik.

Farther south, Trondheim was captured with ease after the German ships had run the gauntlet of the batteries dominating the fiord—a hazard that had dismayed Allied experts who had considered the problem. By securing Trondheim, the Germans had possessed themselves of the strategic key to

central Norway, though the question remained whether their handful of troops there could be reinforced from the south.

At Bergen, the Germans suffered some damage from the Norwegian warships and batteries, but had little trouble once they were ashore.

In the approach to Oslo, however, the main invading force suffered a jolt. For the cruiser *Blücher*, carrying many of the military staff, was sunk by torpedoes from the Oscarborg fortress, and the attempt to force the passage was then given up until this fortress surrendered in the afternooon, after heavy air attack. Thus the capture of Norway's capital devolved on the parachute troops who had landed on the Fornebu airfield; in the afternoon this token force staged a parade march into the city, and its bluff succeeded. But the delay at least enabled the King and Government to escape northward with a view to rallying resistance.

The capture of Copenhagen was timed to coincide with the intended arrival at Oslo. The Danish capital was easy of access from the sea, and shortly before 5 a.m. three small transports steamed into the harbour, covered by aircraft overhead. The Germans met no resistance on landing, and a battalion marched off to take the barracks by surprise. At the same time Denmark's land frontier in Jutland was invaded, but after a brief exchange of fire resistance was abandoned. The occupation of Denmark went far to ensure the Germans' control of a sheltered sea-corridor from their own ports to southern Norway, and also gave them advanced airfields from which they could support the troops there. While the Danes might have fought longer, their country was so vulnerable as to be hardly defensible against a powerful attack with modern weapons.

More prompt and resolute action might have recovered two of the key points in Norway which the Germans captured that morning. For at the time they landed, the main British fleet under Admiral Forbes was abreast of Bergen, and he thought of sending a force in to attack the German ships there. The Admiralty agreed, and suggested that a similar attack should be made at Trondheim. A little later, however, it was decided to postpone the Trondheim attack until the German battlecruisers were tracked down. Meanwhile a force of four cruisers and seven destroyers headed for Bergen, but when aircraft reported that two German cruisers were there, instead of one as earlier reported, the Admiralty was overcome with caution and cancelled the attack.

Once the Germans had established a lodgment in Norway, the best way of loosening it would have been to cut them off from supply and reinforcements. That could only be done by barring the passage of the Skaggerak, between Denmark and Norway. But it soon became clear that the Admiralty

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—from fear of German air attack—was not willing to send anything except submarines into the Skaggerak. Such caution revealed a realisation of the effect of airpower on seapower that the Admiralty had never shown before the war. But it reflected badly on Churchill's judgement in seeking to spread the war to Scandinavia—for unless the Germans' route of reinforcements could be effectively blocked nothing could stop them building up their strength in southern Norway, and they were bound to gain a growing advantage.

There still appeared to be a chance of preserving central Norway if the two long mountain defiles leading north from Oslo were firmly held, and the small German force at Trondheim was quickly overcome. To this aim British efforts were now bent. A week after the German coup, British landings were made north and south of Trondheim, at Namsos and Aandalsnes respectively, as a preliminary to the main and direct attack on Trondheim.

But a strange chain of mishaps followed the decision. General Hotblack, an able soldier with modern ideas, was appointed as the military commander; but after being briefed for his task he left the Admiralty about midnight to walk back to his club, and some hours later was found unconscious on the Duke of York's Steps, having apparently had a sudden seizure. A successor was appointed next day and set off by air for Scapa but the plane suddenly dived into the ground when circling the airfield there.

Meantime a sudden change took place in the views of the Chiefs of Staff, and the Admiralty. On the 17th they had approved the plan but the next day swung round in opposition to it. The risks of the operation filled their minds. Although Churchill would have preferred to concentrate on Narvik, he was much upset at the way they had turned round.

The Chiefs of Staff now recommended, instead, that the landings at Namsos and Aandalsnes should be reinforced and developed into a pincer-move against Trondheim. On paper the chances looked good, for there were less than 2,000 German troops in that area, whereas the Allies landed 13,000. But the distance to be covered was long, the snow clogged movement, and the Allied troops proved much less capable than the Germans of overcoming the difficulties. The advance south from Namsos was upset by the threat to its rear produced by the landing of several small German parties near the top of the Trondheim fiord, supported by the one German destroyer in the area. The advance from Aandalsnes, instead of being able to swing north on Trondheim, soon turned into a defensive action against the German troops who were pushing from Oslo up the Gudbrand Valley and brushing aside the Norwegians. As the Allied troops were badly harried by air attack, and lacked air support themselves, the commanders on the spot recommended

evacuation. The re-embarkation of the two forces was completed on May 1 and 2—thus leaving the Germans in complete control of both southern and central Norway.

The Allies now concentrated on gaining Narvik—more for 'face-saving' purposes than from any continued hope of reaching the Swedish iron-mines. The original British landing in this area had been made on April 14, but the extreme caution of General Mackesy hindered any speedy attack on Narvik—despite the ardent promptings of Admiral Lord Cork and Orrery, who was put in charge of the combined force in this area. Even when the land forces had been built up to 20,000 troops, their progress was still slow. On the other side 2,000 Austrian Alpine troops reinforced by as many sailors from the German destroyers, and skilfully handled by General Dietl, made the most of the defensive advantages of the difficult country. Not until May 27 were they pushed out of Narvik town. By this time the German offensive in the West had bitten deep into France, which was on the verge of collapse. So on June 7 the Allied forces at Narvik were evacuated. The King and the Government left Norway at the same time.

Over the whole Scandinavian issue the Allied Governments had shown an excessive spirit of aggressiveness coupled with a deficient sense of time—with results that brought misery on the Norwegian people. By contrast Hitler had, for once, shown a prolonged reluctance to strike. But when he eventually made up his mind to forestall the Western powers he lost no more time—and his forces operated with a swiftness and audacity that amply offset the smallness of their numbers during the critical stage.