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Hitler at War: What *Really* Happened?

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Part 8

Chapter 7: Northern Conquest

"Brothers will fight and kill each other, men will know misery. An axe-age, a sword-age---shields will be cloven---a wind-age, a wolf-age, before the world's ruin."

The Norse Sibyl's Vision (circa 800 A.D.)

With the disappearance of the Polish state in early October, the Western Allies suddenly found themselves holding a declaration of war that had lost all meaning. Their purpose in issuing it had been to rescue Poland, but any chance of getting that country back had been lost forever. In fact, all talk of "liberating" the Poles had evaporated, because half of them were occupied by Russia, which the French and British dared not antagonize. A malaise of indecision and uncertainty settled

over London and Paris. And the war that had gotten off to so dramatic a start in the east, stagnated into virtual inactivity over the next six months.

But during that time, the Fuehrer was neither undecided nor unsure. Through every diplomatic channel at his command, he repeatedly notified the French and British authorities that he would withdraw from Poland (save for the German city of Danzig), and suspend all hostilities. To these offers of peace the Allies were deaf and dumb. Accordingly, Hitler prepared his offensive in the west. It had to be carried out with the same kind of Blitzkrieg rapidity that would end the fighting as quickly as possible. As in Poland, he knew that time worked against him. Germany did not possess the stocks of raw materials necessary for prolonged conflict. He remembered the extreme deprivations the home front had to bear during World War One, hardships which eventually crushed society and ushered in the collapse of November, 1918. He was no less conscious, as a veteran frontline soldier in the trenches, that static battles of attrition meant defeat as much in this war as in the last.

The original date set for his offensive was 17 January 1940. But just one week short of the German operation, its details fell into Allied hands, when a Luftwaffe major, disobeying orders, carried his top-secret copy of the attack aboard a small plane, whose pilot got lost in bad weather and landed in Belgium. The whole offensive had to be scrapped, and Hitler asked his generals to come up with something altogether different. A few weeks later, he was appalled to learn that they proposed a replay of World War One's attrition through trench-warfare between the German West Wall or Siegfried Line and the French Maginot Line. "Gentlemen," he fumed, "this is 1940, not 1914!" While sketching out his own ideas for a "lightning war" in the west, he learned by sheer chance that General Erich von Manstein had already composed plans for just such an offensive, long unbeknownst to the Fuehrer.

Although the Chief-of-Staff at Army Group "A" headquarters in Koblenz, Manstein had been shunted into the background, and transferred to an obscure command, the XXXVIII Corps being formed at Stettin, where he was effectively silenced. His concept of dynamic forward movement involving motorized units through the Ardennes, a region considered impassable for tanks and most other motorized vehicles, prompted his superiors, mired in Great War strategies of static trench warfare, to "rid themselves of an interloper," as he later said. Aware of the General Staff's hopeless addiction to obsolete tactics (but not yet suspicious of the treason its members were perpetrating against him), Hitler met secretly with von Manstein on 17 February. "With astonishing speed," von Manstein recalled, "he grasped points of view which the army group had been defending for months. He gave my ideas his full approval." Together, the two men worked out every point of

the new offensive, scheduled for early May. Their proposed strategies were remarkably similar, but necessarily complimentary: Details of the Fuehrer's overall view were filled in by von Manstein.

Whereas Germany possessed a definite edge against Poland, she was outnumbered by the combined forces of the Netherlands, France and Britain. Against the German Army's 106 divisions, the French alone fielded 110. Combined with the British Expeditionary Forces, Belgian and Dutch armies, Hitler's ground troops were at a distinct numerical disadvantage. Moreover, the Wehrmacht was technologically equaled or bested by much of the Allied equipment. For example, the 32-ton French *char de manoeuvre* B1 *bis*, with its 75-mm howitzer, was the finest tank in the world, far superior to the 2-cm gun fired by the Pzkw II, described by Innes as "the back-bone of the German Panzer forces until well after the beginning of the war" (43). It was actually a training tank pressed into service for lack of anything better. The Wehrmacht's armored divisions were so sparsely filled out by technically insufficient specimens like the Pzkw II, they relied heavily on the few, albeit out-moded TNHP tanks seized from the Czech Army after the crisis of 1938. Likewise superior was the fast French fast (25 mph) *Somua* S-35 medium tank.

The French Air Force boasted 1,300 often superb aircraft, such as the twinengine attack-plane, the Potez, and excellent fighters, especially the Dewoitine 520, Bloch 151 and Morane-Saulnier 406. Even the little Dutch Air Force flew state-of-the-art warplanes, including the twin-boom Fokker G-I. These considerations convinced the French Air Minister, Guy La Chambre, that the Luftwaffe could be easily defeated. General Maurice Gamelin, the Chief-of-Staff was no less confident, when he compared his seven motorized divisions against the Germans' five divisions of inferior armor.

The day before Hitler met with von Manstein to consolidate their efforts for a new offensive plan against the west, its May-time schedule was jeopardized when the British destroyer, *Cossack*, entered Norway's Jossing Fjord to attack an unarmed German prisoner-ship, the *Altmark*. Norway ignored this cowardly violation of its own sovereignty, but Hitler was now alerted to Allied intentions in Scandinavia. The rescue of a few prisoners from the *Altmark*, while the *Cossack*'s cover story, was not worth bothering about. Of real importance was Oslo's revealed collusion with the British.

At a German military conference as early as December, 1939, naval intelligence officers revealed in a situation report that Jewized politicians had already broken international law by violating Norway's neutrality: "... the present Norwegian government has signed a secret treaty with Britain to the effect that if Norway becomes involved in a war with one of the great powers, an invasion by Britain may be carried out with Norwegian consent. A landing is planned in the vicinity of Sta-

vanger, and Kristiansand is proposed as a possible British base. The present Norwegian government, as well as the Storthing (parliament) and the whole foreign policy, is controlled by the well-known Jew, Hambro (Carl Joachim Hambro, a.k.a., "Hamburger"), a great friend of Hore-Belisha (Britain's Jewish Secretary of State for War). For some time, the sympathies of the Norwegian people have been consciously driven in a pro-British, anti-German direction, and the whole Norwegian press is under British control. Hambro is misusing his position, and, with the help of numerous British agents, is trying to bring Norway under British influence or into complete dependence."

Churchill's plans for seizing Norway had already been adopted by the Royal Navy, which finalized its invasion preparations the following month. The peril was great. If the Allies seized Norway, their planes and ships would be in immediate striking range of the Reich, and its industrial life-line severed. With the enemy in Narvik, only 133 miles overland from Gaellivare, 11 million of Germany's 15 million tons of iron ore would be lost. Gaellivare was Sweden's most important mining complex.

Unbeknownst to Hitler, the Royal Navy, in collusion with France, scheduled the mining of neutral Norwegian waters for 8 April. He gave orders for the counter-invasion to begin on the very next day. Years later, the Fuehrer told ambassador Walter Hewel that he would have never invaded Norway, had the German intercept service failed to over-hear Winston Churchill tell the French Premiere, Paul Reyaud, that the British were going to seize Norway first. Thus alerted, Hitler mobilized a northward strike at once. German and Allied operations were so closely parallel, their forces actually met at sea before either could land, when the British destroyer *Glowworm* was sunk by *Admiral Hipper* after she rammed the heavy cruiser, tearing a 120-foot gash in her bows.

The invasion comprised Luftwaffe parachutists capturing the Stavanger airfield, with German sea-borne landings at Oslo ("the first metropolis ever to fall to troops that had descended from the sky," Grunwald, 50), Kristiansand, Bergen, Trondheim and the all-important Narvik. Norwegian shore-batteries hammered the Kriegsmarine's *Bluecher* before she could disembark her troops, then finished off the new heavy cruiser with a spread of torpedoes, which capsized her, drowning more than a thousand men. Meanwhile, the British submarine, HMS *Truant*, torpedoed and sank the light cruiser *Karlsruhe*. The following day, six English destroyers surprised ten Kriegsmarine destroyers. In the furious exchange of fire that ensued, both sides lost two ships.

On 12 April, the Royal Navy appeared in force at Narvik, which had been seized by a small force of Wehrmacht soldiers led by Major General Eduard Dietl, whose 2,000 men of the 3rd Mountain (*Gebirgsjaeger*) Division were trying to hold off

25,000 Allied troops. Large-scale landings by French and British forces were already taking place at Harstad in the Lofoten Islands opposite Narvik, Namsos, and Aandalesnes. Two days earlier, Royal Navy destroyers broke into the harbor, sinking or severely damaging every German ship there, including Dietl's ammunition supply freighter.

Three days later, the mighty British battleship *Warspite*, supported by a flotilla of v arious warships, sank all remaining enemy vessels, as well as seven destroyers, without significant damage to themselves. By then, the Germans had lost three cruisers, nine destroyers, plus a dozen merchant men, including two more cruisers and another destroyer severely damaged, against light Royal Navy casualties. Operation *Weseruebing*, as the Wehrmacht name for invasion of Norway was called, seemed headed for disaster, while Dietl's *Gebirgsjaeger* were utterly cut off in their Arctic hold-out, minus any supplies, against a numerically overwhelming enemy. With the French and British moving in for the kill, Dietl radioed the Luftwaffe for help. It came at once in an airlift of Ju-52s flying relays of parachute drops, the first of their kind. Soon, rations, ammunition, even reinforcements in the form of paratroopers, were drifting down to the besieged garrison. Once again, National Socialist innovation and courage reversed an otherwise hopeless situation.

Now the moment of revenge had come. May Day was just that for the British warships that had obliterated German vessels trying to supply Narvik. A squadron of Stuka dive-bombers and new Junkers Ju-88 medium-bombers appeared over Harstad, the Allies' chief port in Norway. They smashed the gigantic harbor facilities beyond all use. Screaming out of the sky like Valkyries, the warplanes of Luftflotte V sank the heavy cruiser HMS *Curlew*, together with a destroyer and troopship. The battleship, HMS *Resolution* and two more cruisers fled to Britain, badly damaged, even though these units bristled with deadly Bofors pom-pom artillery, among the most effective anti-aircraft guns of the war. This was only the beginning, however. In gathering numbers, the Stukas and Ju 88s proceeded to sink or disable every Allied warship in Norwegian waters. RAF and French fighters were hurriedly dispatched to intercept them, but they were swatted away by Messerschmitt-109s.

In a last, supreme effort, Franco-British forces eventually captured Narvik on 28 May, as Dietl and his band of defenders withdrew to the nearby mountains. The cost had been too great, however, and the impending fall of France forced the Allies to abandon the city almost as quickly as they occupied it.

Then, to everyone's astonishment, the English, without notifying other Allied commanders, suddenly evacuated southern Norway, leaving their stunned Norwegian and French comrades behind on the beaches littered with twisted, smoldering war materiel. It would not be the last time that Britannia left her allies in the lurch.

Nor would it be the last time her forces were pushed into the sea. The Germans, everywhere outnumbered, except in the air, had trumped her bid to take over Norway in one of the most hard-fought, brilliant, innovative military campaigns of modern times.

The National Socialist victory was far-reaching, because it not only frustrated British plans to attack northern Germany, and secured the Reich's vital iron ore supplies from Sweden, but gave the Kriegsmarine and Luftwaffe unprecedentedly important bases from which to operate against Allied shipping. Hitler's Norwegian Campaign proved that a determined group of ideologically inspired warriors, whatever their numerical disadvantage, can out-fight otherwise overwhelming enemies less motivated.







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