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A Research Paper
About the English and German
Attacks Upon Norway in 1940,
and Reasons for the Attacks.

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Both the English and the Germans had reasons for attacking Norway at the beginning of the Second World War, because Norway's geographical location would give the occupant important advantages over his enemy, both in sea-power and air-power positions, and ^{provide} access to iron ore for the steel industry and electric power for the development of nuclear experiments and the atomic bomb. (Norway was the only country in the world which produced "heavy water" that time, and heavy water, a mixture of the hydrogen isotops deuterium oxide (${}^2_1\text{H}$) and tritium oxide (${}^3_1\text{H}$), was the easiest moderator to use for control of the fission process in a nuclear reactor.)

For Germany, the most important thing was the very much needed supply of iron ore from northern Sweden, and most of this iron ore was exported over the Norwegian sea port Narvik, therefore, it was very important that Scandinavia was neutral and kept out of this war.

The alternative to a neutral Scandinavia was a German occupation of Norway to secure this vital iron ore for the German steel and armament industry.

The Germans also realized the great advantages of having submarine bases on the Norwegian coast, described in Vice-Admiral Wolfgang Wegener's book, The Sea Strategy of the World War, published in 1929, and studied by the German leaders.

For Great Britain and France, it was very important to try to stop the transportation of iron ore from Sweden over Narvik, Norway; therefore, Great Britain wanted to draw Scandinavia into the war because that would be advantageous for British sea-power in its blockade of the iron ore transportation to Germany.

The British fleet was bigger than the German, and with British occupation of the Norwegian coast, and thereby complete control over the sea lanes (The Leads), the British Navy would stop the German import of iron ore, and get the important naval bases along the Norwegian coast under their control, and thereby be able to shut off more German trade.

British control over the air fields in Norway would give the Royal Air Force shorter flying distance to the German heartland with its industry and big cities, therefore, a British occupation of Norway would be a big threat to Germany in many ways.

As soon as it became apparent that Great Britain and France were planning an attack and occupation of the Norwegian coast, Hitler had no alternative left but to attack Norway as fast as possible to prevent the Allies from reaching their goal in Scandinavia.

About the British pressure to get Norway into the war, the Norwegian Foreign Minister Koht stated, Jan. 8, 1940:

Norwegian "Landsmål" based on the Old Nordic language. —→ "Eg må vedgå at eg kann ikkje fri meg for den mistanken at den britiske regjeringa beint fram har sett seg til fyremål å driva oss inn i krigen." ¹

(I must admit that I cannot free myself from the suspicion that the British Government straight on has set its aim to drive (force) us into the war.)

¹ Johan Scharffenberg, Norske Aktstykker til Okkupasjonens Forhistorie, (Oslo, 1950), p. 307.

The British Government went even as far as to take mail from Norwegian ships and read important letters, including letters from U.S.A. to the Norwegian Foreign Minister Koht, and that way violating the Mail Agreement of 1907, XI,1.

A note of Sept.16, 1939 to Norway stated:

"The British Government demands that Norwegian merchant ships sail for the British war trade, if an agreement is not reached soon, Britain will cut off all deliveries of coal to Norway." 2

On September 26, the British Government demanded even more from Norway. A list with 10 points was given to Ambassador Colban, and among the 10 points were this:

"Transit trade traffic to Germany shall be shut off completely, both at sea and over land. British transit trade from the Baltic countries shall go over Norway." 3

On October 4, the British Government demanded that "at least 150 tank ships should be chartered for Britain." 4

The British memorandum of January 6, 1940, stated:

"4. His Majesty's Government accordingly find themselves obliged to take account of the situation this created and to extend the scope of their naval operations into waters which have thus become a theatre of operations for the enemy's naval forces."

"5. His Majesty's Government are therefore taking appropriate dispositions to prevent the use of Norwegian territorial waters by German ships and trade." 5

On January 7, 1940, King Haakon of Norway sent this telegram to the King of England:

" I must most earnestly appeal to You to prevent such steps which inevitably would bring Norway into war and imply the greatest danger for Norway's existence as a Sovereign State. Norway desires nothing else than to maintain strict neutrality, and has shown during the last war to be able to do this." 6

2,3,4 J. Scharffenberg, Norske Aktstykker til Okkupasjonens Forhistorie, (Oslo, 1950), pp. 31-32.

5,6 Ibid., p. 43.

As we can see from these documents, the British Government put more and more pressure on the Norwegian Government, and on Norwegian shipping associations, trying to force Norway into the war on the side of the Allies.

On the other side, the German leaders were very much interested in keeping the Scandinavian countries out of the war. Some of the documents from the German Foreign Office prove this to be so, and in a talk with the Swedish Naval Attache Captain M. Muhl, the Head of the German Political Division VI, Minister Grundherr stated:

"I told M. Muhl that personally I was firmly convinced that in case of war we contemplated no violation of Scandinavian territory whatsoever in our military operations on land, at sea, or in the air. On the other hand, in my opinion, the situation might take an entirely different and unforeseeable turn: (a) if one of the Scandinavian countries should participate at all in a so-called sanctions policy against us, and (b) if other powers should violate the neutrality of Scandinavian territory, especially at sea or in the air by establishing naval or air bases on Scandinavian territory, unless the Scandinavian countries did everything in their power to defend themselves against such violation." ⁷

So, as we have read here, the Germans were already in 1938 interested in keeping the Scandinavian countries out of a possible war, because that would serve their interest best.

In an other German Foreign Office document the same year we can read:

"I. The Scandinavian countries, including Finland, took a neutral stand during the Czech crisis. The Norwegian Minister President terms Norway's neutrality something that goes without saying." ⁸

⁷ German Foreign Office Document No. 448, Sept. 21, 1938, p. 595.

⁸ German Foreign Office Document No. 457, Pol. VI 2367, p. 605.

(Copies of these documents are in Glassboro State Coll. library.)

About the continued British pressure on Norway to get her into the war, and about the planned British-French attack upon Norway in the spring of 1940, we can find a lot of information in a book written by Captain Donald MacIntyre.

His book, Narvik, (New York: W.W.Norton & Company,1960,) was written with assistance from "Historical Section of the Admiralty", and based on Official History of the Campaign in Norway by Prof. T.K. Derry, and he writes:

"In October, 1939, a month after the outbreak of war, Churchill was already pressing the Cabinet to let the Navy lay a minefield in The Leads which would force the iron ore ships to seaward where they would be liable to interception by British warships."

"Only by drawing Norway into the war on the Allied side, which would entail occupation by British and French troops for her defence, could this disadvantage be overcome." 9 (page 11)

When, on November 30, 1939, Russia suddenly made an unprovoked attack on Finland, a proposal to send volunteers and equipment through Norway and Sweden to the aid of the Finns was wedded to a plan to occupy Narvik and Lulea and the railroad between these two towns, which constituted the most direct route to Finland.

"In Britain, the scheme for landing at Narvik and three other points (Trondheim, Bergen, Stavanger) was approved on February 5th and was timed to take place by the middle of March." 10 (page 16)
(20th)

"On March 12th at a meeting at No. 10 Downing Street, Admiral Evans expounded his views that a bold descent on the chosen landing points in Norway would be welcomed by the Norwegians or at worst would meet only token resistance." (p.19)

Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's instruction to the Force Commander was: "It is the intention of H. M. Government that your force should land provided it can do so without serious fighting." 11

9,10 Donald MacIntyre, Narvik, (New York: W.W.Norton & Co.,1960.) p.11,16

11 Ibid., p.19.

But. while the British cabinet meeting was going on something else had happened:

"The Cabinet meeting at which plans for the British operation were approved had not long ended when news was received that the Finns had surrendered. The pretext under which the Allied troops might have landed with some show of legality had evaporated." ¹² (page 19)

The British Cabinet at once withdrew their approval, and the troops were stood down for a time. Another excuse for an attack upon Norway had to be found. April 3rd, Kingsley Wood, defence coordinator, was dropped from the Cabinet, and a War-Committee under the heading of Churchill was formed. Winston Churchill at once began pressing for his long-desired minelaying operation in The Leads.

"When Paul Reynaud came to power in France on March 21st, support arrived from that quarter. The Supreme War Council at last decided in favour of the plan. Norway and Sweden were to be warned that their interpretation of their neutral rights operated to the advantage of Germany. The Allies could no longer tolerate this. As champions of the freedom and independence of small nations against totalitarian aggression they claimed the right to take appropriate action of which no warning would be given. Such was the justification for mining of The Leads." ¹³

The operation was called "Wilfred" by Churchill because it was supposed to be "minor and innocent", but the Allies expected German retaliation and the unfortunate Norwegians involved would be their targets and victims, therefore, a military expedition was once again assembled to go to the aid of the troops fighting against the Germans.

"By this plan, designated "R4", troops for Stavan-ger and Bergen, two battalions for each, would sail in four cruisers. A further battalion for Trondheim would arrive two days later in a transport. For Narvik there would be one battalion in a transport, accompanied by two cruisers. This force would be increased to a Brigade in the days following the initial landing and with the addition ¹⁴ of French troops would finally total 18,000 men." ^{12,13,14}

D. MacIntyre, Narvik, (New York, 1960), pp. 19, 20, 20.

France was also quite involved in this planned military operation in Norway, but we in Norway didn't know it.

"Daladier informed the French Chamber, March 12, that France had 50,000 men parat (ready). England had an equal amount of troops, and She shall take care of the transportation and escorte. The ships have been ready in British harbours for a long time." 15 (V.Mogens, Krigens Ar 1940, p.273)

In Britain the preparations were going on for the operation.

"British troops for Narvik and Trondheim were filling aboard transports in the Clyde where Admiral Evans had hoisted his flag in the cruiser "Aurora". Others for Bergen and Stavanger were aboard the ships of the First Cruiser Squadron, "Devonshire", "Berwick", "York", and "Glasgow" at Rosyth. Far to the north four destroyers were thrusting through heavy seas and snowstorms towards the Vestfiord at the entrance to Narvik which they were to lay their mines. In support of them were the battle-cruiser "Renown" and eight destroyers. Further south the minelayer "Teviot Bank" and four destroyers were heading for an area off Stadtlandet." (Western Norway) 16

(D.MacIntyre, Narvik, p. 23)

The Allies were on their way to attack and occupy Norway's

western coast and the four towns there; Stavanger, Bergen,

Trondheim, and the most important one, Narvik, but:

"A last-minute postponement altered the date for "Wilfred" from April 5th to the 8th. In the race for Norway the loss of these three days was to take the lead from the Allies and give it to the Germans - by only a few hours only, but they were to be crucial." 17 (D.MacIntyre, Narvik, p. 20.)

At 5.27 on the evening of April 7th, Sir Charles Forbes gave order to raise steam, and at 8.15 the fleet left the harbour with course for Stavanger, and arrived 5 P.M. April 8th.

Thus, during the first days of April 1940, both Allied forces and German forces were heading for the Norwegian coast, both trying to get there before the other side. The German "Operation Weserübung" had been planned in case the Allies attacked Norway, and

15 Victor Mogens, Krigens Ar 1940, (Oslo, 1940), page 273.

16, 17 D. MacIntyre, Narvik, (New York, 1960), pages 23, 20.

now had the time come to put the plan into operation.

"In the first days of March came firmer indications that an Allied landing might be imminent. The Finnish Government was exhorting its people to stand fast as outside help was on its way. Article XVI of the Covenant of the League of Nations was being referred to by the Allies." 18

Dark nights of the new moon period were ideal for the operation, and some time between April 7. and April 15. was recommended, and the decision was made.

"On April 1st the die was cast. Hitler signed the order, naming 5.15 a.m. on April 9th as Zero Hour for the assault. Between the morning of the 7th and early on the following day the entire German surface fleet fit for action would sail in six separate groups from their Home Ports at times calculated to enable them to reach their allotted assault points simultaneously." 19

In this way, Norway got involved in the Second World War against the people's wishes, and without their knowledge until the great tragedy hit innocent and peaceful people. When Great Powers are on their "war-path" to get hold of rawmaterials or strategic positions nothing can stop them. The British and the German warships were involved in sea battles along the Norwegian coast and in the fiords for several days, and Norwegian towns were bombed and burned to the ground by German air attacks.

What most people don't know is that the German attack upon Norway was provoked by Great Britain and France when they planned and executed similar attacks to stop the iron ore shipping from Narvik. Hitler was forced to act in German self-interest and self-defence, but was ^{unjustifiedly} blamed for the whole affair. But it was really Great Britain and France which started it all because they wanted to drive Norway into the war.

18,19 Donald MacIntyre, Narvik, (New York, 1960), pp.18,21.

The reason for the last-minute postponement that altered the date for the British-French attack upon Norway was later disclosed by the British military expert and war historian Sir Basil Liddell Hart in his big book, "History of the Second World War", chapter 6 "The Overrunning of Norway", pages 51 -63.

Quotations from Mr. Churchill's speech in the House of Commons:

"I cannot see any counter-advantage which he has gained (Hitler).... I feel that we are greatly advantaged by the strategic blunder into which our mortal enemy has been provoked." p.52.

The significance of Mr. Churchill's closing words were that he, maybe unintentionally, this time spoke the truth when he spoke of the German invasion as a step into which Hitler had "been provoked". Sir Basil Liddell Hart also wrote:

"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." (Sir Basil Liddell Hart:History...p.52.

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". 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."
(Sir B.L. Hart:History ... page 53.

It is interesting to read Mr. Churchill's note of December 16, 1939, where he marshalled all his arguments for an attack upon Norway, the "Stratforce Plan", which he described as a major offensive operation "likely to drive the Germans to invade Norway.

It is also interesting to note that it was the same day that Vidkun Quisling, a former Minister of Defence in a Norwegian Cabinet, (Kolstad, Farmers Party, 1931) and Hundseid's Cabinet, 1932) and head of the Norwegian Nazi-type party, "Nasjonal Samling", had his first meeting with Hitler and impressed on him the danger that Britain would soon occupy Norway. (How right he was!)
[my remark]

"Admiral 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 completely 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."

"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." (Sir B.L. Hart:History... page 54

The French Government and military leaders were pushing for an attack upon Norway during the early months of 1940.

(A friend of mine studied in France (Le Havre) that time, and he went to the harbour and talked with the soldiers who told him that "they were going to Norway to occupy the iron-ore harbour Narvik"!!) Sir Basil Liddell Hart wrote:

"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 Gallivare". (Liddell Hart, page 55

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 Gallivare 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."

(Sir B.L. Hart:History... page 55

On the 13th of March it was reported to the Germans that British submarines were concentrated off the south coast of Norway, and on the 14th of March the Germans intercepted a radio message which ordered Allied transports to be ready to move, and on the 15 th a number of French officers arrived at Bergen, on the west coast of Norway.

"On February 21 Daladier urged that the "Altmark" affair should be used as a pretext for the "immediate seizure of the Norwegian ports by sudden stroke".

Daladier argued:"Its justification in the eyes of the 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."

The "Altmark" affair occurred on February 16, and was the British destroyer "Cossack" chasing the German supply ship "Altmark", which was carrying British prisoners back from the South Atlantic, into the Norwegian fiord "Jøssingfjord" and boarding her and rescue^{ing} the prisoners in Norwegian territorial waters ; a clear violation of Norwegian neutrality by the British forces . In spite of the Norwegian diplomatic protest against the British action, this was the spark that set fire to the powder trail and turned Hitler in favour of intervention in Norway. Sir Basil Liddell Hart wrote:

"At the meeting of the War Cabinet on March 8, however, Churchill unfolded a scheme of arriving in force off Narvik." (Sir B.L. Hart:History... page 57

At a further meeting on the 12th of March the Cabinet decided to revive the plans for landings at Trondheim, Stavanger, and Bergen as well as at Narvik."

"But 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." (Sir B.L. Hart:History...p. 57

Prime Minister Chamberlain had to cancel his just issued order for attack, and the troops were "stood down" for the time being. Daladier was replaced as prime minister in France and the more aggressive Paul Reynaud took his place.

"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 when Chamberlain had become much inclined to aggressive action when he opened 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. This was the reason why the British-French attack upon Norway was postponed - by three fateful days that caused the British-French troops to arrive in Norway a few days too late.

"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 about the retaliation that would fall on Norway from the other operation-- and Gamelin even emphasised that one of its aims was "to draw the enemy into a trap by provoking him to land in Norway".

Churchill went to Paris on the 4th of April to try to persuade the French to adopt his Rhine plan, but he did not succeed.

That meant a short deferment of "Wilfred", the Norwegian plan renamed, and this postponement resulted in British-French loss of the chance to occupy Norway before the Germans could reach the Norwegian coast , April 9th, 1940.

"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."
(Sir Basil Liddell Hart, page 58.

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. 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. As Lord Hankey, member War Cabinet 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." (From Allied War Cabinet)

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 the 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." (Sir B.L. Hart: History... page 59.

The two powers, Great Britain and France, which planned and attacked Norway first, caused the German "counterstroke". The unjustified charges against Germany was hypocrisy at its worst!

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