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Author: Robert PALMER

A CONCISE HISTORY OF:

THE CAMPAIGN IN NORWAY (1940)

A concise history of the campaign in Norway during the Second World War in 1940 from perspective of the British Army.

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A Concise History of the Campaign in Norway (1940)

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Author: Robert PALMER (copyright held by author)
Assisted By: Stephen HEAL
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Background

With the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe on 3 September 1939, Norway opted to remain neutral; as did its neighbours of Sweden, Finland and Denmark. In 1939, Norway was a constitutional monarchy of about three million people; most of whom lived in settlements in the south of the country with the main centres of population being Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim. Inland, amongst the mountains, the country was sparsely populated. The geography dictated that there were few direct roads or railways between the centres of population. The reliance on merchant shipping meant that the country had a large and generally modern mercantile marine. This served the coastal trade that sustained large parts of the country and provided for much international trade.

In terms of defence, Norway had a system of compulsory military service. The Royal Norwegian Navy mobilised at the commencement of the war, but the Army did not. When the Soviet Union invaded Finland on 30 November 1939, the 6th Division (based in the north of the country) mobilised one mixed brigade in case of Soviet invasion. Five divisions covered the rest of the country, each based on a geographic locality, and each charged with raising one mixed brigade in the event of hostilities. The total number of men in the Army was about thirteen thousand.

The United Kingdom and Germany considered Norway as having strategic importance to their national interests. Control of its long coastline posed a threat to the Royal Navy's control of the North Sea, a matter of which the German Navy was very aware. In addition, Germany viewed the import of iron ore from northern Sweden through the port of Narvik in Norway as important to its war economy. For the U.K., the Royal Navy recognised the importance of controlling Norwegian waters and depriving them to any enemy.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, the Prime Minister appointed Winston CHURCHILL as the First Lord of the Admiralty, and only sixteen days into his role, he pressed the British Cabinet to agree to lay a minefield in Norwegian territorial waters to disrupt the transportation of iron ore to Germany. There was some support for this action, but officials in the Foreign Office brought to the attention of ministers the potential consequences of violating Norwegian neutrality.

The Germans began considering military action in Norway in November 1939. The driving force was the navy, which argued that if the Royal Navy controlled the North Sea operating from the U.K. and Norway, it would restrict the ability of the German Navy to operate outside the Baltic Sea. In addition, the German Navy saw the opportunity of using Norwegian bases for their surface fleet and their submarines.

A growing factor in the debate over military intervention in Norway was the increasing tension between the Soviet Union and Finland, and the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. On 17 September 1939, the Soviet Union demanded that the four independent countries agree treaties of mutual assistance that included the stationing of Soviet armed forces in their countries. In effect, this amounted to a degree of Soviet occupation and control, short of formal annexation. The three Baltic States felt obliged to accept these treaties, as they were isolated and militarily weak in comparison to the Soviet Union, but the Finnish government decided to resist these demands and began preparations for potential military action, leading to mobilization of the armed forces with effect from 9 October.

Negotiations continued, but agreement was intractable as the Soviets made demands that the Finns were not prepared to accept. Then, on 30 November, Soviet forces bombed Helsinki and invaded Finland at several locations. The next day, a Communist puppet government was established in Moscow, which the Soviet Union recognised. However, just six days into their offensive, the advance of the Soviet forces ground to a halt against astute Finnish resistance.

The United Kingdom and French governments decided to provide material support to Finland in their fight against a more dominant aggressor however, this required the agreement of Norway and Sweden that was not forthcoming. Planning began to send an Anglo/French expeditionary force comprising two British divisions and some French forces to Finland, a course of action fervently encouraged by CHURCHILL. He accepted that this action would probably lead to Germany invading Norway or Sweden or both countries, however, he perceived this risk to be tolerable. Many on the British Cabinet were of the view that it was not appropriate to violate the neutrality of these two independent countries, with the likelihood of them thereby becoming embroiled in this European war with the threat of a German invasion, however, British planning continued nevertheless.

The two governments confirmed their decision to send this expeditionary force on 5 February, but Finland agreed an armistice with the Soviet Union on 12 March before this force could be sent.¹ Germany was watching the actions of the British and French governments with interest. On 27 January, Hitler ordered that plans be finalised for an invasion of Norway, although at this time he felt that their continued neutrality was the best outcome for Germany. Then, on 16 February 1940, H.M.S. Cossack went into Norwegian waters to board the German ship, Altmark, and rescued two-hundred and ninety-nine British merchant seamen.

¹ It is mere speculation, but it is probably very fortunate that no expeditionary force was sent before the armistice. It was proposed to violate Norwegian and Swedish neutrality by landing the force at Narvik in Norway and sending it overland through Sweden to northern Finland. It is likely this would have provoked a military response from Germany and resulted in British and French forces fighting Soviet forces. It is not clear how the Soviet Union would have responded to this action. Likewise, in the light of the performance of the British and French forces in the Norwegian campaign, how well prepared this expeditionary force would have been is debatable.

The Norwegian government protested to the U.K. government about the violation of their territorial waters, but the U.K. ignored the protest. To the U.K. Government, this incident reinforced views that elements in Norway were tacitly supporting German military activity, whereas in Germany, the opposite conclusion was held that Norway was siding with the U.K..

The German High Command commenced planning an operation against Denmark and Norway on 14 December 1939, with the completed plan signed off by HITLER on 1 March 1940. The plan was for six echelons of troops, generally carried aboard warships, to be landed at six different locations from Oslo in the south to Narvik in the north. The innovative plan also included the use of airborne troops to secure a military airfield near Oslo, into which it was planned to land additional troops. The German plans included significant air force assets to secure air superiority over Norway. Meanwhile, the British War Council approved a plan to mine Norwegian waters with effect from 5 April 1940. In addition, plans were drawn up for the deployment of British troops to Norway, with two Territorial Army infantry divisions being held back from deployment to France for this purpose.

Operations Commence

In the first week of April, the British started to implement their plans. Troops boarded Royal Navy warships bound for Narvik and Trondheim. Elements of the Home Fleet set sail, with intelligence that the German Navy was at sea. In fact, the German invasion forces were already en-route to their destinations. Elements of the German 163rd Infantry Division were bound for Oslo and Kristiansand, to be followed up by the 196th Infantry Division. The 69th Infantry Division was to capture Egersund, Stavanger and Bergen, after which the 214th Infantry Division was to be landed. The 3rd Mountain Division was to secure Trondheim and Narvik. After being secured, the 181st Infantry Division was to assume responsibility for Trondheim, allowing the 3rd Mountain Division to consolidate around Narvik.

The first action of the Norwegian campaign was at sea. H.M.S. Glowworm, a destroyer, sighted the German heavy cruiser Admiral Hipper. Despite the disparity in armament, H.M.S. Glowworm engaged the Hipper, eventually ramming the larger vessel. H.M.S. Glowworm sank soon afterwards, taking most of her crew with her. Her commanding officer, Lieutenant Commander G. Broadmead ROOPE was later awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously.

See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6aKs1mcfQNA>

See: <http://www.hmsglowworm.org.uk/>

See: <http://www.thewarillustrated.info/213/now-it-can-be-told-last-glorious-fight-of-the-glowworm.asp>

The German landings commenced on 9 April. The main towns were seized quickly by German troops, but the German Navy suffered several significant losses to both Norwegian and British naval activity. The British responded to the German invasion of Norway with offensive naval actions. On 10 April 1940, Captain B. A. W. WARBURTON-LEE led his flotilla of Royal Navy destroyers into the fiord at Narvik to attack the German destroyers sheltering there. The ensuing action is known now as the First Battle of Narvik. On the same day, the German cruiser Konigsberg was sunk by aircraft from the Fleet Air Arm. Then, on the 13th April, the Royal Navy re-entered the fiords at Narvik to sink the remaining German destroyers.

The British response to the Norway campaign was confused by a muddled command structure. No less than six Chiefs of Staff, three government ministers and Major General ISMAY (as Head of the Secretariat for the Ministerial Committee on Military Coordination) all had a voice in the military operations in and around Norway.

The ground troops allocated to the original plan to secure Norway came from the 24th (Guards) Infantry Brigade and the three brigades of the 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division. The 1st Bn. Scots Guards were already embarked for Narvik when the Germans invaded, while the two battalions of the 146th Infantry Brigade were on the Clyde and at Rosyth, the latter having just disembarked from Royal Navy ships due to take them to Bergen.

The British Army had formed a specialist, mountain warfare battalion, the 5th (Special Reserve) Bn. Scots Guards in February 1940. Volunteers with skiing experience were sought from across the Army, including India and Hong Kong. About one-thousand men responded and ordered to report to Quebec Barracks at Bordon in Hampshire. Instead of being sent to Norway, the battalion was sent to the French Alps instead. The battalion returned to the U.K. after a short period of training, with the intention of deployment to Finland, but then the Finns agreed an armistice so the battalion dispersed by 20 March. The French committed a brigade of Foreign Legionnaires, which included several Spanish republicans and some German soldiers, and newly raised Chasseurs Alpin (mountain troops). The Polish Brigade comprised Poles recruited from within France (including miners) with officers that had escaped from Poland in September 1939.

On 10 April, Admiral of the Fleet the Earl of Cork and Orrery was appointed the Commander-in-Chief of the North-West Expeditionary Force. The War Office appointed with effect from 6 April 1940 Major General Pierse Joseph MACKESY, D.S.O., M.C., *p.s.c.*, the General Officer Commanding 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division, as Land Forces Commander. His instructions (dated 10 April 1940) were to establish his forces at Harstad to form a base from which an attack on Narvik could be launched. As part of the build-up of British forces in Norway, Lieutenant Colonel E. J. C. KING-SALTER was appointed the British Military Attaché, moving from the same post in Finland. He arrived in Norway on 14 April and went to the Headquarters of the Norwegian Army to establish liaison channels with them. On the same day, the British Chiefs of Staff authorised that the 146th Infantry Brigade be diverted from Narvik to Namsos as part of 'Maurice Force'.

The French agreed to a Demi-Brigade of Chasseurs Alpin being added to Maurice Force. Plans were discussed to land a force of British and French troops at Trondheim itself. This new force was called 'Hammer Force'. It was to comprise ten battalions, five British and five French. The British pulled the 15th Infantry Brigade back from France to form part of Hammer Force, and intended to add the 147th Infantry Brigade. Two Canadian infantry battalions were earmarked for this operation as well.

The commanding officer of the 2nd Armoured Division, fifty-three years' old Major General (Acting) Frederick Elliot HOTBLACK, D.S.O.*, M.C.*, *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.* was appointed by the War Officer to command Hammer Force. However, just after receiving his formal orders, he suffered a stroke on the 17th April shortly before his intended departure for Norway. With the sudden loss of Major General HOTBLACK, the War Office appointed Brigadier (Temporary) Horatio Pettus Mackintosh BERNEY-FICKLIN, M.C., the commanding officer of the 15th Infantry Brigade, to assume command of Hammer Force. Having been briefed in London, he flew to the Orkney Islands, but his plane crash landed on its arrival injuring BERNEY-FICKLIN and his staff officer, so he was forced to relinquish command. It was necessary to appoint a third commander for Hammer Force, so Major General Bernard Charles Tolver PAGET, D.S.O., M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.* was taken from command of the 18th Infantry Division and appointed to Hammer Force with effect from 19 April 1940.

PAGET was six months younger than HOTBLACK, and like him had served throughout the First World War being awarded the Distinguished Service Order and Military Cross for gallantry. All these changes meant a delay in the operation from 22 to 24 April. Then, on 19 April, the operation was cancelled due to fears about potentially high casualties from German air attack. Instead, the Chiefs of Staff decided to capture Trondheim through a pincer movement from north and south. The northern pincer was to be 'Maurice Force', commanded by Major General Sir Adrian CARTON de WIART, landing at Namsos; with the southern pincer now being called 'Sickle Force' based in Aandalsnes and to be commanded by Major General PAGET.² The Canadian troops were withdrawn from the operation.

With two operations now planned, each under the command of a Major General, the War Office decided to appoint Lieutenant General (Acting) Hugh Royds Stokes MASSY, D.S.O., M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.* to command all Allied forces in Norway, with the exception of Narvik, which came under command of Admiral of the Fleet the Earl of Cork and Orrery. Lieutenant General MASSY was the Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff, so had been involved in the initial planning of the Norway operations and therefore had appropriate knowledge to lead it. He formed a corps headquarters to command the operation, later to become Headquarters, V Corps.

² Major General CARTON de WIART was appointed on 13 April 1940.

Maurice Force

Major General (Acting) Adrian CARTON de WIART, V.C., C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., retired pay formed the small headquarters of Maurice Force on 15 April 1940 from staff from the headquarters of the 61st Infantry Division of which he was the General Officer Commanding.³ As he states: *'It dawned on me it might be Norway, especially as I had never been there and know nothing about it.'*⁴ Major General CARTON de WIART was a colourful character and one of the most decorated senior officers of the British Army of that period. Born on 5 May 1880 in Belgium, he was educated at the Oratory School, Birmingham, and Balliol College, Oxford. In 1899, he enlisted in Paget's Imperial Light Horse and saw service in the South African war where he was twice wounded.

He decided to pursue a military career, so on 14 September 1901, he was commissioned in the 4th (Royal Irish) Dragoon Guards. He served with distinction during the First World War, being wounded no less than eight times. This included him losing an eye and an arm. He was awarded the Victoria Cross (V.C.) for supreme gallantry in 1916, the Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O.) for leadership in action, and made a Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George (C.M.G.) in 1918. Immediately after the end of the war, he went to Poland as Head of the British Military Mission for three years and was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath (C.B.). He retired from the Army on 19 December 1923 in the rank of Honorary Major General, continuing to live in Poland. With another war looming, he was recalled and with effect from 25 August 1939, was appointed again as Head of a British Military Mission to Poland in the rank of Colonel. CARTON de WIART escaped from Poland following the German invasion, and returned to the United Kingdom. On 29 November 1939, he was promoted to the rank of Acting Major General on appointment General Officer Commanding 61st Infantry Division. This division was a second line (or duplicate) formation of the 48th (South Midland) Infantry Division. He was appointed to command of Maurice Force on 26 April 1940.

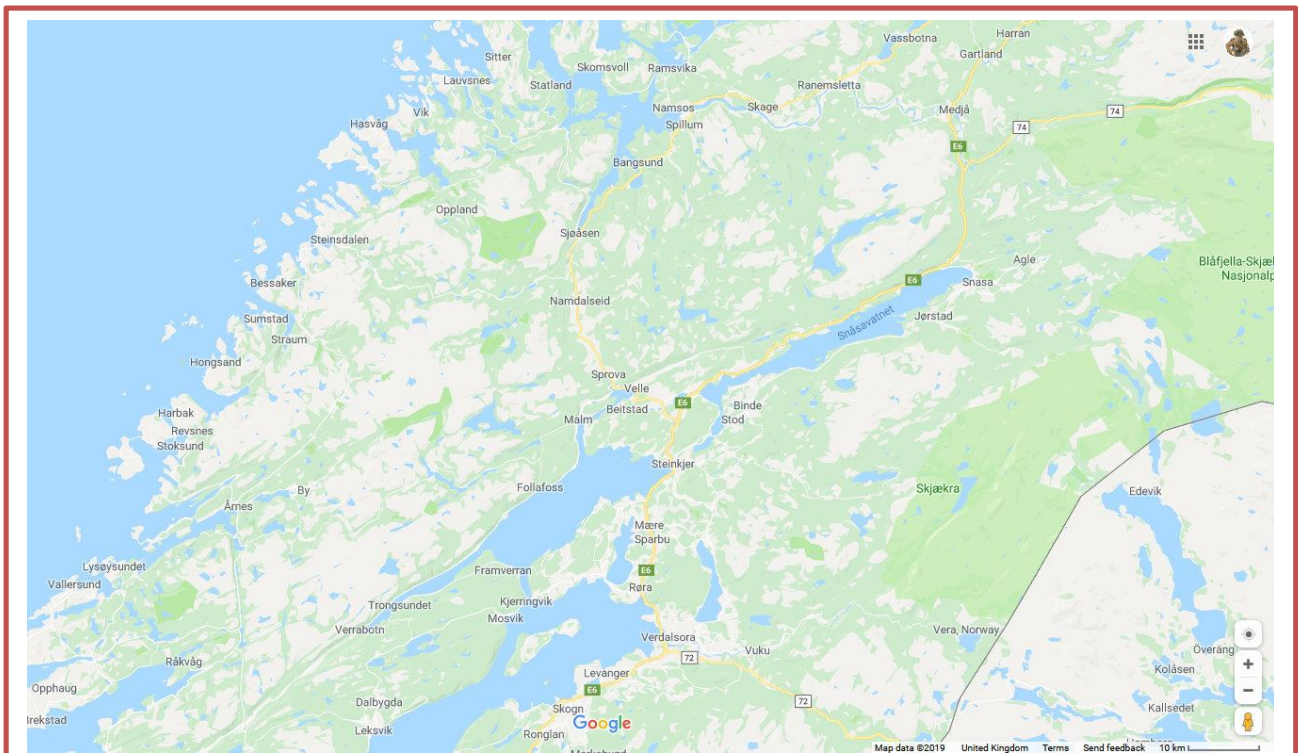
The British troops allocated to the operations at Namsos were the 146th Infantry Brigade, commanded by Brigadier (Temporary) Charles George PHILLIPS, D.S.O., M.C.. This was a Territorial Army formation, which had mobilised along with the rest of the Territorial Army on the 28th August 1939. It was part of the 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division. The units in the brigade were:

- Headquarters, 146th Infantry Brigade and Signal Section
- 4th Bn. The Lincolnshire Regiment
- 1st/4th Bn. The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry
- The Hallamshire Bn. The York and Lancashire Regiment

³ See JOSLEN,

⁴ CARTON De WIART, Sir Adrian *Happy Odyssey* (Barnsley, Pen & Sword Military, 2007 – Reprint of original from 1950) p.165

There were two anti-aircraft units earmarked for Maurice Force. The 193rd Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery of the 82nd (Essex) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, and the 166th Light Anti-Aircraft Battery of the 56th (East Lancashire) Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.⁵ The 166th L.A.A. Battery arrived at Namsos on 29 April. It went forward to protect the infantry, but found them retreating back towards Namsos. The guns deployed, but were attacked by German aircraft. Two were knocked out, but the other two were safely evacuated. The 193rd H.A.A. Battery did not reach Namsos before the decision to evacuate. The engineer element of the force was limited to one section of the 55th Field Company, Royal Engineers. Two field ambulances were allocated, the 158th (Welsh) Field Ambulance and 146th (West Riding) Field Ambulance. Both of these units had sent their 'A' Companies to join 'Sickleforce', so only comprised their Headquarters and 'B' Companies. The 158th Field Ambulance, which was detached from the 53rd (Welsh) Division, landed at Namsos, and moved forward with the 146th Infantry Brigade. The 146th Field Ambulance did not land before the evacuation took place.



Above – Map of the area between Namsos and Trondheim to the south.

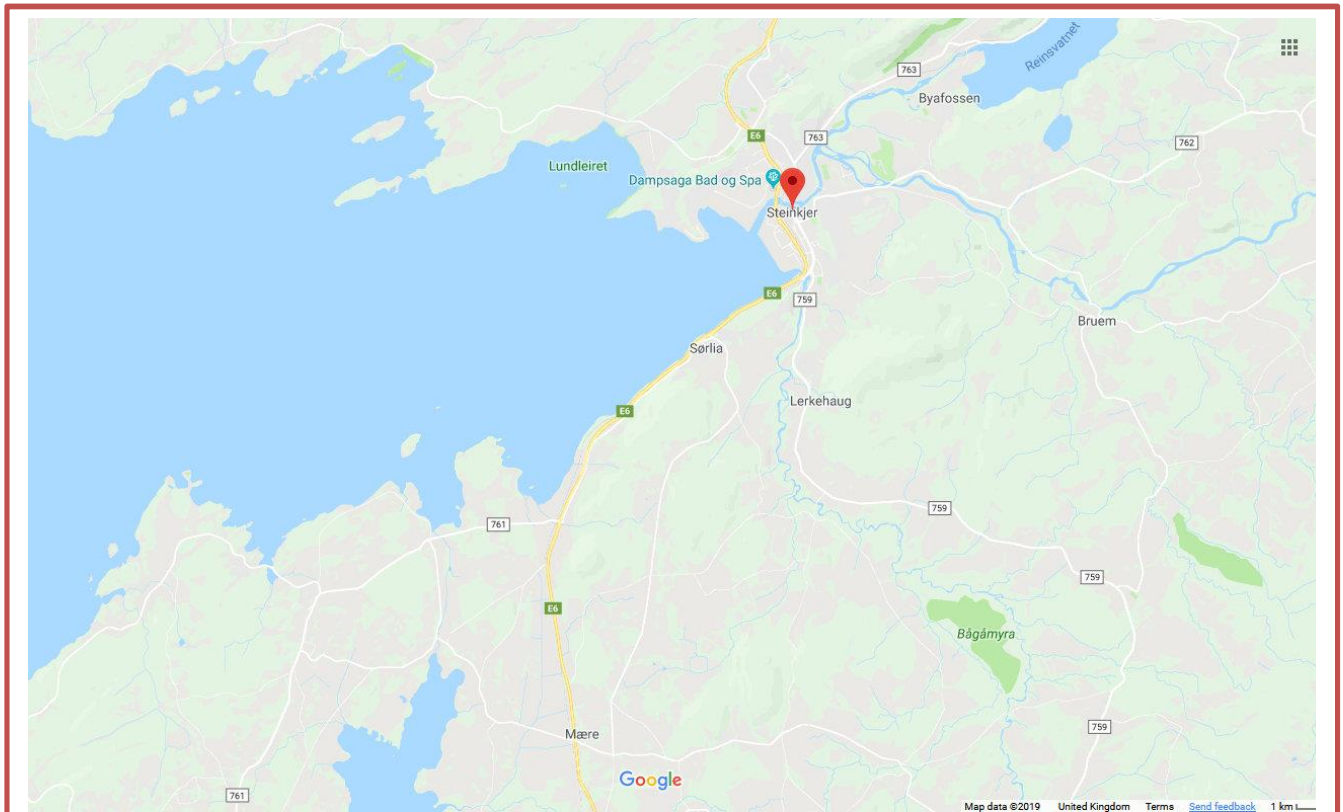
⁵ See: *The War Office, Operations in Central Norway – Supplement to The London Gazette of Tuesday 28th May 1946, Annexure I, (London, The London Gazette, 29th May 1946)*

Initial landings at Namsos were made at dusk on 14 April by about three-hundred and fifty Royal Marines. They secured the jetties and town to allow the rest of Maurice Force to land safely. The two-thousand, one-hundred and sixty-six men of the three battalions of the 146th Infantry Brigade were embarked on the transports, the Chrobry and the Empress of Australia. Last minutes concerns about the possibility of air attack forced some changes in the plan. The troops were to be transferred about one-hundred miles further north of Namsos. The 4th Bn. The Lincolnshire Regiment and the Hallamshire Battalion, The York and Lancaster Regiment were transhipped into five destroyers to land at Namsos in the middle of an air raid. The men of the 1st/4th Bn. The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry were kept aboard the Empress of Australia, but then were transhipped to the Chrobry so the Empress of Australia sailed back to the United Kingdom with one-hundred and seventy tons of stores still on board. The Chrobry sailed into Namsos that evening under escort and the men disembarked. Unfortunately, the brigade commander, Brigadier PHILLIPS was on board a different ship that was now routed for Narvik. 1st/4th

By the late evening of 17 April, Maurice Force was ashore, however, it was short of equipment and trying to operate in two foot high snow drifts. There was no artillery, and one battalion's 3" mortars had not been unloaded. Brigadier PHILLIPS managed to rejoin his brigade later that day. Despite these problems, the troops began to advance inland straight away. They used the line of the road and railway as their line of advance. Maurice Force joined up with the Norwegian troops of their 5th Division. In practice, most of the men were inexperienced militia with only enough ammunition to last one day's fighting. To improve the Allies strength, the men of the French 5th Demi-Brigade began landing overnight 19 to 20 April.

The German forces reacted quickly to the landings. The first German air raid on Namsos occurred on 20 April. With little anti-aircraft defences available, the wooden buildings in the town were easily destroyed. German naval activity also increased in and around Namsos. By the evening of 21 April, the 146th Brigade was strung out along the road to Steinkjer and Namdalseid. The 1st/4th K.O.Y.L.I. were the forward most battalion of the brigade, with the 1st Lincolns deployed on their right guarding the access to and from the Inderoy peninsula, with the Hallamshires back in reserve behind Steinkjer.

At about 04.00 hours, spotters drawn from the Lincolns and the Norwegian Dragoons saw a German destroyer enter the fjord. By 06.00 hours, Norwegian troops were engaging German troops advancing along the road from Trondheim towards Versalsora. A Norwegian machine-gun squadron together with a section of Royal Engineers were forced to withdraw inland to join a company of the 1st/4th K.O.Y.L.I. at Stiklestad. Intelligence reported that there was a body of about six-hundred German soldiers advancing along the coast towards Vist, and another that had landed on the quay at Kirknesvaag advancing south-eastward to cut the main road south of Vist. These German troops were in fact Austrians, who were generally well-equipped for the conditions. Like the British, the Germans were short of transport, and relied on motorcycles and motorcycle and sidecar combinations to ride along the few roads in this part of Norway.



Above – The Steinkjer area where the 146th Infantry Brigade fought its first action.

The British troops managed to hold the advance from Kirknesvaag, as they held a good defensive position at the Strommen bridge, the only land exit from the Inderoy peninsula. The 4th Lincolns now formed a front at Vist facing west, while the 1st/4th K.O.Y.L.I. attempted to hold the main road south of Vist. The Norwegians had abandoned the use of vehicles, and turned to skis and sledges to travel across country. It was at about 20.00 hours that one such patrol saw a German column of about one-hundred and ten troops approach the main British positions.

The Austrians attacked at about 09.30 on 22 April, using trench mortars carried in the sidecars, and machine guns. They explored farm tracks to ascertain if they could outflank the British positions, but remained generally confined to the roads. The Austrians managed to bring up some light field guns, which started bombarding British and Norwegian positions. In the afternoon, German air attacks commenced against Steinkjer where Brigadier PHILLIPS had established his Brigade Headquarters. By late afternoon, the mainly wooden buildings of the town were on fire, the water supply was damaged, the main road bridge destroyed, and the railway unusable. By nightfall, one company of the 4th Lincolns that had endured most of the fighting throughout the day withdrew having suffered 20% casualties. On the main road, two companies of the 1st/4th K.O.Y.L.I. withdrew to allow the Austrians control of the main road from Verdalsora to Vist.

Based upon the reports he was receiving, Brigadier PHILLIPS contacted Major General De WIART and sought permission for the Brigade to retire back towards Namsos. This was agreed, so by the close of 22 April, the Brigade started to pull back, and the first confrontation with enemy troops had resulted in a victory for the Austrians.

Casualties mounted in the three British battalions as the Germans pressed their advantage, but they held their ground. The Norwegians had not been attacked and still held key positions. The 13th Chasseurs Alpin came forward to relieve the Hallamshire Bn. The York and Lancaster Regiment. By 27 April, the situation had stabilised as the German forces only numbered about three battalions, so lacked the strength to push through to Trondheim.



<http://www.thelincolnsHIReregiment.org/britscheikiddell.shtml>

Sickle Force

British troops started landing at Aandalsnes on 17 April 1940. This village is smaller than Namsos, so the quay and landing facilities were less extensive. The first men ashore were Royal Marines under Lieutenant Colonel H. W. SIMPSON. Drawn from battleships in the Home Fleet, they numbered some forty-five officers and six-hundred and eighty men. The first element of Sickle Force was the 148th Infantry Brigade. This pre-war Territorial Army formation formed part of the 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division. It comprised two battalions, as below:

- Headquarters, 148th Infantry Brigade & Signal Section
- 1st/5th Bn. The Leicestershire Regiment
- 8th Bn. The Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment)

The headquarters of the brigade was based in Nottingham. The 1st/5th Leicestershire Regiment was based at Loughborough, the 1st/5th Sherwood Foresters at Derby, and the 8th Bn. at Newark. The 1st/5th Bn. The Sherwood Foresters left the brigade on 29 October 1939, transferring to the 18th Infantry Division. It was replaced by the 2nd Bn. The South Wales Borderers (S.W.B.), which transferred in from Londonderry. The brigade was earmarked for service in Norway, with the 2nd S.W.B. being detached and deployed to Narvik with the 24th Infantry Brigade (Guards), whilst the other two battalions formed 'Sickleforce'. The brigade came under War Office control on 5 April 1940. Fifty-two years old Brigadier (Acting) Harold de Reimer MORGAN, D.S.O., assumed command of the brigade with effect from 22 February 1940, having been promoted from command of the 2nd Bn. The Royal Northumberland Fusiliers. He was a Regular Army officer having joined the East Kent Regiment (The Buffs) in 1911 following his studies at Oxford University. He had served throughout the First World War having been awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his leadership and gallantry in action.

The men of the 148th Infantry Brigade had been due to sail for Namsos, so when the revised orders were issued on 16 April to Brigadier MORGAN, he had to devise new plans. The brigade landed at Andalsnes on 18 April, and came under command of the Norwegian Army the following day. This remained the situation until the arrival of the Headquarters, 'Sickle Force', on 26 April 1940. Having landed successfully on 18 April, the men moved rapidly inland towards Kvam. Sickle Force secured Dombass, placing it in a position to turn north towards Trondhiem. Problems arose as the 'Cedarbank', the ship carrying all the transport of the 1st/5th Bn. The Leicestershire Regiment, was sunk by a torpedo, which was witnessed by the half of the battalion on board H.M.S. Magnus.

Then confused priorities between the Norwegian High Command and British led to revised orders for the 148th Infantry Brigade. The new Commander-in-Chief of the Norwegian Army, General RUGE, wished to maintain his army's resistance as long as possible. He was still hoping the Allies would commit additional reserves to Norway.

For this reason, Lieutenant Colonel KING-SALTER sent Brigadier MORGAN an urgent message to continue operations to the south of Dombass. The 148th Infantry Brigade was to reinforce the Norwegian 2nd Division near Lillehammer. The British troops arrived at the front on the 20th April, but found themselves dispersed rather than concentrated. The Sherwood Foresters and 'A' and 'D' Companies of the 1st/5th Leicestershires were directed to the north of Lake Mjosa, while 'B' and 'C' Companies under Major ATKINS were directed around the south of the Lake. The men were facing their first action against an effective, all-arms enemy force without anti-tank or anti-aircraft artillery. The troops had little transport, and were short of supplies including ammunition. Most of the men were either pre-war Territorial Army soldiers, or men who had joined the Army since the outbreak of war only seven months previously.

On the morning of the 21st April, the men of the Leicestershires reached Lillehammer and immediately came under command of the Norwegian divisional commander stationed in Lillehammer. He ordered them to take over the front line, so Lieutenant Colonel G. J. GERMAN, a Territorial Army officer, deployed his troops astride the main road south of Aasmarken, and they dug in. At about 15.00 hours, Norwegian troops passed through their positions as they withdrew from the east. Shortly afterwards, the Germans attacked 148th Infantry Brigade with ground troops supported by air attacks. Confused fighting continued for the rest of the day, with the British troops struggling against the terrain and weather as well as the German troops. Both battalions suffered significant losses, as companies and platoons were cut off and captured. The Norwegians evacuated Lillehammer, with Allies regrouping to the north of the town, near a mountain called the Balbergkamp.

The Germans (some on skis) outflanked the British positions on the 23rd April, forcing the two battalions to withdraw back again. Some ill-feeling arose between the British and Norwegian commanders due to a lack of understanding of each other's issues and situation. The British troops had not slept or eaten for about thirty-six hours, so were very tired. Not all British troops had greatcoats, so many were suffering with the cold.

The next defensive position chosen by the British was at Tretten, where the valley narrows to a gorge. Fighting started at about 1.00 pm on the 23rd April, with three German tanks leading their advance. The British held on until about 9.30 pm, when the British troops retreated from Tretten. The strength of the brigade was now reduced to about nine officers and three-hundred men.

Reinforcements in the form of the 15th Infantry Brigade began landing at Aandalsnes during the evening of the 23rd April. Major General PAGET landed in the late evening of the 25th April with his small headquarters. One of his first actions was to request air support for his force. This was addressed with H.M.S. Ark Royal and H.M.S. Glorious sailing close to the coast to provide air cover for the British troops and the base.

The 15th Infantry Brigade was a pre-war Regular Army formation, which was part of the 5th Infantry Division stationed at Catterick in Yorkshire. The brigade was deployed to France with the division, arriving on the 6th October 1939. On arrival, however, it came under command of G.H.Q. B.E.F. and I Corps until returning to divisional control on the 30th December 1939. It was detached from the division on the 16th April 1940 and placed under War Office control. It arrived at Andalsnes in Norway on the 23rd April 1940 and came under command of 'Sickle Force'. The composition of the brigade was:

- Headquarters, 15th Infantry Brigade & Signal Section;
- 1st Bn. The Green Howards (Alexandra, Princess of Wales's Own Yorkshire Regiment);
- 1st Bn. The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry;
- 1st Bn. The York and Lancaster Regiment;
- 15th Infantry Brigade Anti-Tank Company;
- 55th Field Company, Royal Engineers;
- 146th (West Riding) Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps.

With the injuries sustained by Brigadier BERNEY-FICKLIN in his plane crash rendering him unfit for command, the commanding officer of the 1st Bn. The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, Lieutenant Colonel Herbert Edward Fitzroy SMYTH, M.C., *p.s.c.* assumed command of the brigade with Major E. E. E. CASS, M.C. assuming command of the battalion.⁶ SMYTH was fifty-three years' of age, one of three brothers who had all joined the Army. He had commissioned in the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry and had served in Mesopotamia and Russia during the First World War.

On the 24th April, Lieutenant Colonel SMYTH commanding the 15th Infantry Brigade, went forward to meet Brigadier MORGAN. The 148th Brigade had gathered in a few more men, but still numbered only about four-hundred and fifty men, with no company commanders left. The two brigade commanders agreed to take up a defensive position at Kvam, hoping to hold the German advance.

In order to provide air support for the troops on the ground, a makeshift airfield was established on the frozen Lake Lesjaskog. 263 Squadron took off from H.M.S. Glorious with eighteen pilots flying their Gladiator bi-planes, one-hundred and eighty miles through a snowstorm, with only four maps between them. They landed at about 6.00 pm on the 24th April. The Germans located the new airfield and attacked it the next day. One Heinkel bomber was shot down, but the mechanics struggled to get several of the Gladiators started. Then the Germans attacked the airfield, destroying five planes on the Lake. Two Gladiators managed to get airborne, with some others following later.

⁶ Accounts of the Norway campaign refer to Lieutenant Colonel SMYTH as holding the rank of Brigadier, but the Army List shows him remaining in the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

The ground crew were inexperienced and short of facilities, so it took on average one and half hours to refuel and rearm each aircraft. This left them vulnerable to air attack. During the day, the pilots of 263 Squadron flew forty sorties, claiming six German planes shot down. But, as the day progressed, increasing damage to the surface of the lake by bombs was causing problems. Later that day, the four remaining Gladiators transferred to a new landing ground nearby. On the 26th April, the number of serviceable aircraft dropped to just one. Plans to send 46 Squadron equipped with Hurricanes were halted, with the remaining personnel of 263 Squadron being evacuated with effect from the 28th April.

Originally, it was planned to send the 82nd (Essex) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment and 156th (East Lancashire) Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments to join Sickie Force.⁷ Instead, the 82nd Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment was sent to Narvik and the 260th (London Transport) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery from the 84th (Middlesex, London Transport) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment was sent to Aandalnes. The 168th L.A.A. Battery arrived at Aandalnes on the 19th and 21st April 1940, with the 260th H.A.A. Battery arriving on the same dates or shortly afterwards.⁸

The 168th L.A.A. Battery landed with four, 40 mm Bofors guns, but with only two Predictors. One troop moved forward to the front line straight away, some seventy miles up the valley. They met the troops of Sickie Force moving back down the valley. The guns were set up on the hillsides, but were singled out for attack.

The 260th H.A.A. Battery had significant problems. It was equipped with eight, 3" anti-aircraft guns, but six of these and all the battery's transport was lost when a torpedo sank the ship in which they were loaded. The two remaining guns were damaged when they were unloaded at Aandalnes. This meant the battery was unable to provide any anti-aircraft cover for Aandalnes. Both anti-aircraft batteries were to be evacuated on the 30th April.

Two field regiments were earmarked for dispatch to join Sickie Force, namely the 51st (Westmorland & Cumberland) Field Regiment, Royal Artillery and 71st (West Riding) Field Regiment, Royal Artillery.⁹ Neither of these regiments arrived at Aandalnes before the decision to evacuate Sickie Force. On the 27th April 1940, the 51st Field Regiment was due to arrive in a couple of days' time, but the 71st Field Regiment was reported as '*not yet embarked*'.¹⁰

⁷ See: The War Office, *Operations in Central Norway – Supplement to The London Gazette of Tuesday 28th May 1946, Annexure I*, (London, The London Gazette, 29th May 1946)

⁸ ROUTLEDGE, Brigadier N. W., O.B.E., T.D., *The History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery – Anti-Aircraft Artillery 1914 – 55*, (London, Brassey's, 1994)

⁹ See: The War Office, *Operations in Central Norway – Supplement to The London Gazette of Tuesday 28th May 1946, Annexure I*, (London, The London Gazette, 29th May 1946)

¹⁰ See: The War Office, *Operations in Central Norway – Supplement to The London Gazette of Tuesday 28th May 1946, Annexure I*, (London, The London Gazette, 29th May 1946)

The lack of both anti-aircraft and field artillery left the ground troops from the 15th Infantry Brigade vulnerable. The commanding officer of the 1st Bn. The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, Lieutenant Colonel Edward Earnshaw Eden CASS, D.S.O., M.C., reported after the campaign:

First came tanks and about fifty lightly equipped infantry. Behind came more infantry on foot, motor cyclists, machine guns in sidecars and towed guns. Behind again came motor vehicle after motor vehicle....It was a target that Guuners would dream about – three quarters of a mile of confined road, crammed with troops and vehicles, all clearly visible from our observation post. Just one battery of 25 pounders could have blown the enemy off the road.¹¹

On the ground, the 15th Infantry Brigade had moved forward to a position at Kvam. Another position in the valley of the River Laagen, this village lies between Lillehammer and Dombaas. There is a bend in the river here, with an island in the middle. Shortly after the British troops arrived, at about 11.30 am on Thursday 25th April 1940, a column of German troops arrived without warning. This column was led by a medium tank, light tank and armoured car. A British anti-tank gun situated on the island stopped both tanks, but the German infantry deployed quickly on the flanks. By 4.00 pm, the German infantry had forced the most forward company back. They gained ground on the eastern part of the island, both otherwise the defensive positions held firm. A second German medium tank was put out of action.

The British battalions had lost several men with Lieutenant Colonel SMYTH being injured early in the fighting, so as the senior battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel A. L. KENT-LEMON (commanding officer of the 1st Bn. The York and Lancaster Regiment) assumed command of the brigade. He made plans for the British troops to fall back to Dombass if necessary. The Germans attacked again early on the morning of the 26th April. An artillery barrage preceded the assault. A force of enemy troops of about a battalion in strength attacked up the left flank of the river valley. Steadily the German soldiers worked their way along the valley side, to a position where they could fire upon British positions from the side. German aircraft supported their troops, with low level strafing runs along the valley.

At around midday, the enemy made a determined attack down the road. This was held after severe fighting, but the enemy managed to establish a machine gun that could fire down the road and keep the defenders pinned down. Another tank appeared followed by a second. Both were destroyed by an anti-tank gun, which itself was then blown up. At about 5.00 pm, Major General PAGET realised that the situation was now deteriorating, even though the men of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and York and Lancaster Regiment had fought tenaciously. He decided to order a withdrawal under cover of darkness to a position some three miles further up the valley where the Green Howards had prepared a defensive position.

¹¹ Cited in FARNDAL, General Sir Martin, K.C.B., *The History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery – The Years of Defeat Europe and North Africa 1939 – 1941*, (London, Brassey's, 1996) – P.27

PAGET was ordered by Lieutenant General MASSY following consultation with the Norwegians to hold the Dombass – Opdal road, so he arranged a series of fall back positions as his view was that no one position could be held for more than forty-eight hours under current circumstances.

The next action was fought on the 27th April 1940 at Kjorem further down the valley of the River Laagen. Again, the German forces struck in the morning, this time at about 08.15 am. Machine guns and mortars were used to subdue the British defences, with tanks deployed in support of the infantry. The battle followed a similar pattern as the Germans began to work their way around the British positions. The British counter attacked where they could, but the pressure from the attackers started to take effect. The inevitable withdrawal began at about 11.00 pm.

These actions were wearing down the units of the 15th Infantry Brigade. When they reformed at a village called Otta, the 1st Bn. The York and Lancaster Regiment was reduced to thirteen officers and about three-hundred men. In consequence, they moved into reserve. The 1st Bn. The Green Howards assumed responsibility for the defensive positions at Otta. At first light on the 28th April, the German forces undertook a reconnaissance from the air of the British positions. The attack started about 10.30 am, with again an all arms force of tanks, artillery and infantry. Once again, the defenders acquitted themselves well knocking out three tanks. The Germans successfully infiltrated on the flanks, making the defensive line untenable. At about 10.00 pm, the withdrawal started again. This time, the German forces did not follow up immediately. It appeared that they needed a rest from the almost continuous period of fighting.

The Evacuation of Sickle Force and Maurice Force

The original plan for a two pronged advance to capture Trondheim was now redundant. Maurice Force and Sickle Force were operating independently, but Lieutenant General MASSY saw them as one combined force in terms of the need for evacuation. In effect, if one force was evacuated, the other would have to be evacuated as well.

Although Lieutenant General MASSY was still located in the United Kingdom, a small headquarters function under Brigadier Douglas McArthur HOGG, M.C., *p.s.c.* had been sent to Aandalnes to form an administrative base there. Brigadier HOGG's assessment was that an evacuation was required within the first ten days of May. Further signals passed between Major General PAGET and Lieutenant General MASSY in late April, clarifying the details of the impending evacuation. This matter was being discussed amongst the British only, so on the morning of the 28th April, Major General PAGET, went to see the Commander-in-Chief of the Norwegian Army, General RUGE. PAGET was accompanied by his General Staff Officer 1st Grade, Lieutenant Colonel Cameron Gordon Graham NICHOLSON, M.C.*, *p.s.c.*

Not surprisingly, General RUGE was not pleased and refused to accept this decision. He sent a telegram to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff complaining about the decision, but it made little difference. To place this matter in context, the German invasion of France and Low Countries was expected at any time. The German invasion of Norway was progressing well, with most of southern Norway now under their control. The operation to capture Trondheim had failed. No further reinforcements for the Norwegian operations were likely. The German forces had gained air superiority, and were using that to their benefit.

The decision to evacuate Sickle Force and Maurice Force was confirmed. Major General PAGET arranged for his troops to break contact with the enemy and make for Dombass. Some Royal Engineers constructed road blocks as the troops withdrew. On the 29th April, the 1st Bn. The York and Lancaster Regiment moved by train at night back to Aandalnes.

Then the men of the K.O.Y.L.I. saw a party of Germans approaching on foot, having circumvented the road block further up the valley. Fortunately, the British troops were well hidden, so the Germans were ambushed and suffered several casualties.

That evening, as darkness fell, the soldiers of the other two battalions of the 15th Infantry Brigade gathered at Dombass railway station. They boarded a train that had been hidden in a tunnel during the day. However, the railway line had been bombed and it was unclear whether it was safe to run all the way to Aandalnes. The train left at 8.30 pm, with a rearguard of Royal Marines carried on seven lorries.

The Royal Navy cruiser H.M.S. Glasgow put into Molde to embark King Haakon and the Crown Prince of Norway. In addition, other key government personnel boarded and some gold bullion was loaded. The Royal Navy arrived at Aandalnes on the 30th April, with four cruisers, six destroyers and a small transport vessel. Some one-thousand, eight-hundred men were embarked at this time. There remained the rearguard to embark, plus General RUGE had decided to leave his homeland reluctantly. Another one-thousand, three-hundred men were ferried by destroyers to the cruisers off shore.

By 2.00 am, the quay was deserted and Sickle Force was no more.

The evacuation of Maurice Force from Namsos proved to be more difficult. The order to evacuate was received by Major General CARTON de WIART on the 27th April. The town had been subject to regular bombing attacks by German aircraft. H.M.S. Bittern, a Royal Navy sloop, was badly damaged and abandoned. Lieutenant Richard Been STANNARD, R.N.R., the commanding officer of a Royal Navy trawler H.M.S. Arab, was awarded the Victoria Cross for his supreme gallantry during this period. His citation, published in the London Gazette on the 16th August 1940 read:

The KING has been graciously pleased to approve the grant of the Victoria Cross to Lieutenant Richard Been Stannard, R.N.R., H.M.S. Arab, for outstanding valour and signal devotion to duty at Namsos. When enemy bombing attacks had set on fire many tons of hand grenades on Namsos wharf, with no shore water supply available, Lieutenant Stannard ran Arab's bows against the wharf and held her there.

Sending all but two of his crew aft, he then endeavoured for two hours to extinguish the fire with hoses from the forecastle. He persisted in this work till he had to give up the attempt as hopeless.

After helping other ships against air attacks, he placed his own damaged vessel under shelter of a cliff, landed his crew and those of two other trawlers, and established an armed camp. Here those off duty could rest while he attacked enemy aircraft which approached by day, and kept anti-submarine watch during the night.

When another trawler near-by was hit and set on fire by a bomb, he, with two others, boarded Arab and moved her 100 yards before the other vessel blew up. Finally, when leaving the fjord, he was attacked by a German bomber which ordered him to steer East or be sunk. He held on his course, reserved his fire till the enemy was within 800 yards, and then brought the aircraft down.

Throughout a period of five days Arab was subjected to 31 bombing attacks and the camp and Lewis gun positions ashore were repeatedly machine-gunned and bombed; yet the defensive position was so well planned that only one man was wounded.

Lieutenant Stannard ultimately brought his damaged ship back to an English port. His continuous gallantry in the presence of the enemy was magnificent, and his enterprise and resource not only caused losses to the Germans but saved his ship and many lives.

During the night of the 1st to 2nd May 1940, the Royal Navy taskforce heading to Namsos had to retire due to dense fog. This meant a delay of a day in the evacuation, so the troops had to disperse during the day to avoid the bombing. The delay could have been dangerous, as the Prime Minister, Neville CHAMBERLAIN, made a speech in Parliament that afternoon reporting the evacuation of British troops from central Norway. This could have alerted the German forces to the impending evacuation from Namsos.

The evacuation took place overnight the 2nd to 3rd May 1940. The larger warships stayed off shore, while the transports and smaller warships went into dock at Namsos. H.M.S. Afridi took the rearguard on board at about 02.00 am, the last of the five-thousand, four-hundred men to leave Namsos. Sadly, two bombs hit H.M.S. Afridi at about 14.00 hours on the 3rd May, as a result of which she capsized and sank. About one-hundred men of the Royal Navy and fourteen from the Hallamshire Bn., The York and Lancaster Regiment, were lost.

Sickle Force had suffered one-thousand, four hundred and two men killed or taken prisoner, with Maurice Force only suffering one-hundred and fifty losses. The Norwegian Army south of Trondheim surrendered at 05.00 hours on the 3rd May, with those to the north surrendering at 14.00 hours on the 4th.

The repercussions of the failure of the campaign in Central Norway reverberated widely. It led to a contentious debate in Parliament that resulted in the Prime Minister, Neville CHAMERLAIN, resigning. Winston CHURCHILL was then asked to form a National Government, and the rest they say is history. On the 10th May 1940, German forces launched their attack on the Netherlands, Belgium and France. This led to the resignation of the British Prime Minister, Neville CHAMBERLAIN. After some negotiation, Winston CHURCHILL was asked by the King to form a National Government from across the political spectrum.

Narvik and Bodo

Narvik was one of the key objectives of the British involvement in Norway. The town was at one end of a railway line that carried iron ore from Sweden to the quayside at Narvik for export. Much of this iron ore was exported to Germany, so it was thought that it would be in the interests of the British government if this supply route could be closed.

The first military expeditionary force planned for Narvik was codenamed 'Avonmouth'. Major General Pieter Joseph MACKESY, D.S.O., M.C., *p.s.c.*, General Officer Commanding 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division, was designated as the force commander. His division was to supply most of the British troops earmarked for Norway. The newly formed 24th Infantry Brigade (Guards) was also committed to Operation 'Avonmouth'. The French government committed some Chasseurs Alpins and Polish units under their command.

On the 8th May, the situation was that the 1st Bn. Scots Guards embarked on the River Clyde with instructions to sail for Narvik, with the Hallamshire Bn. The York and Lancaster Regiment embarked for Trondheim. With the German invasion underway, the next day the orders were changed, with the Hallamshire Bn. now ordered to Narvik. The Scots Guards were ordered to secure a base in the area.

Both battalions set sail, reaching Scapa Flow on the Orkney Islands where they exchanged information and shared ammunition. Then a third set of orders were issued from the War Office in London. Delivered personally by the Deputy Director of Military Operations, they instructed the Major General MACKESY to proceed to the Narvik area immediately to take advantage of the naval actions in and around Narvik. The Chief of the General Staff, General IRONSIDE wrote, *'You may have a chance of taking advantage of naval action and you should do so if you can. Boldness is required'*.

Major General MACKESY transferred to H.M.S. Southampton with two companies of the Scots Guards and some staff. They sailed for Harstad on the Lofoten Islands at 1.00 pm on the 10th April. The rest of the ships carrying the 24th Infantry Brigade and 146th Infantry Brigade sailed on the same date. The convoy was about one-hundred and thirty miles off Norway, when orders were received to divert the 146th Infantry Brigade to Namsos. The other transport ships continued on to Harstad. They arrived on the morning of the 15th April with the 1st Bn. Irish Guards, 2nd Bn. The South Wales Borderers and the 3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Battery on board. There were also base personnel, including a railway construction company. All were disembarked by the 18th.

At this time, the town of Harstad had a population of about four-thousand people and was not under German control. There were three quays for loading and unloading ships, but they were designed for coastal shipping. This limited the scope of Harstad as a military base.

Admiral of the Fleet The Earl of Cork and Orrery advocated a quick strike to seize Narvik by landing soldiers from warships before the Germans could establish themselves more fully. Major General MACKESY was more cautious. He was uncertain about the strength of the German defences and to what extent the naval actions had negatively affected their morale. By the 15th April, Major General MACKESY had decided not to order a ‘*coup de main*’ attack on Narvik. He was concerned about the consequences and felt it could result ‘*in the snows of Narvik being turned into another version of the mud of Passchendale*’.¹²

The Earl of Cork decided to postpone the attack planned for the 16th April, but the next day, the Admiralty pressed for an immediate assault. Major General MACKESY went on a personal reconnaissance aboard H.M.S. Aurora, returning on the 20th April. MACKESY’s assessment was that:

*‘Owing to the nature of the ground, flat trajectory of naval guns, and the impossibility of locating the concealed machine guns, I am convinced that the naval bombardment cannot be militarily effective, and that a landing from open boats in the above conditions must be ruled out absolutely. Any attempt of the sort would involve NOT the neutralisation but the destruction of the 24th (Guards) Brigade.’*¹³

The 24th Infantry Brigade (Guards) were now spread over a significant area. The 1st Bn. Irish Guards were closest to Narvik, being stationed in some villages about ten miles from the town. The 2nd Bn. The South Wales Borderers were at Skaanland, about twenty miles from Narvik along the same road as the Irish Guards. The 1st Bn. Scots Guards were split in two, with two companies at Harstad and the other two at Sjøvegan.

The Earl of Cork and Major General MACKESY decided on the 21st April to have a show of force to induce the German garrison to surrender. If a white flag appeared, they would transfer the troops there without delay. Then heavy snow fell in the area, but in spite of this, a naval bombardment did take place on the 24th April. On the same day, the first of the French troops left Scapa Flow bound for Narvik.

Meanwhile, the German forces continued to strengthen their position. They continued to push the Norwegian troops back from the town and the railway line, so the Norwegians withdrew. Additional Norwegian troops were brought in from the far north of the country. The Norwegians decided on a limited attack on a German outpost, supported by two companies of the Scots Guards. Another heavy snow storm made conditions extremely difficult, even for the local troops. The Norwegian battalion attacking a place called at Lappaung, defended by about one-hundred and fifty German soldiers.

¹² Cited in ELLIS, *Campaign in Norway*, p.152

¹³ Cited in ELLIS, *Campaign in Norway*, p.153

The attack was unsuccessful, but another battalion on the flank continued on to Gratangen. The German's counter attacked, surrounded the Norwegian battalion. Only part of the battalion managed to escape, leaving about one-hundred men killed and wounded and one-hundred and fifty as prisoners of war. This action did have a result, as a few days later, the Germans withdrew these outposts.

The Gratangen locality was chosen by Major General MACKESY to be the start line for the French Chasseurs Alpins. The French 6th Battalion was sent there to secure this location for a future assault on Narvik. The Norwegians reorganised their forces into two brigades, the 6th and 7th Brigades. The 6th Brigade operated independently near the Swedish border, but the 7th Brigade (Colonel FAYE) comprising two battalions of infantry, a mountain battery and a motorised battery, operated in conjunction with the French.

Additional French reinforcements landed on the 4th May, including a colonial artillery battery. These were sent to reinforce the 6th Bn. The British were steadily advancing towards Narvik, reaching the outskirts of the town of Ankenes. On the 30th April, Brigadier FRASER was injured while undertaking a personal reconnaissance of German positions, with command of the brigade falling on Lieutenant Colonel TRAPPES-LOMAX.

On the 1st May, a German patrol came down from the mountainside to attack British forward positions. Guns of the Royal Navy were used to break up the attack, with the German soldiers melting away. The British troops were struggling with the conditions, so the 12th Bn. Chasseurs Alpins came forward to relieve the 2nd Bn. The South Wales Borderers.

The strategic position for the Allied forces in northern Norway was changed by the withdrawal of British forces from Central Norway. The likelihood existed that the Germans would now move reinforcements northwards towards Narvik. The strategic objectives remained to capture Narvik, with the thought that this would improve the standing of the British and French with the Norwegians and Swedish governments following the debacle in central Norway. It was also felt important to facilitate the Norwegians continued the fight against the German forces in their country.

The French and British Governments decided to reinforce the Narvik operation. On the 4th May 1940, Lieutenant General Claude John Eyre AUCHINLECK, C.B., C.S.I., D.S.O., O.B.E., Indian Army, *i.d.c., p.s.c.* was appointed the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief Northern Norway. He was at the time the General Officer Commanding IV Corps in the United Kingdom, so used his corps headquarters as the new force headquarters. Additional reinforcements identified for deployment to Northern Norway included a French Light Division located in Glasgow, and a third then located at Brest in France. It was agreed to withdraw the rest of the British 5th Infantry Division from France to send to Norway. The anti-aircraft units were to be strengthened by the deployment of the 6th Anti-Aircraft Brigade.

The French government expressed concerns about the security for the towns of Mo and Mosjoen, which lay on the road from Trondheim to Narvik. The distance between Trondheim is about three-hundred and sixty miles, but the actual road distance is much further due to the nature of the terrain. It was decided to send British forces to Mo to block the road towards Narvik. For this purpose, Scissors Force was formed under the command of Colonel C. McV. GUBBINS. It comprised five of the independent companies recently formed in the United Kingdom.

These companies were formed with volunteers from the Territorial Army divisions then stationed in the United Kingdom. They were:

- No. 1 Independent Company – Formed by the 52nd (Lowland) Division;
- No. 2 Independent Company – Formed by the 53rd (Welsh) Division;
- No. 3 Independent Company – Formed by the 54th (East Anglian) Division;
- No. 4 Independent Company – Formed by the 55th (West Lancashire) Division;
- No. 5 Independent Company – Formed by the 56th (London) Division;
- No. 6 Independent Company – Formed by the 9th (Scottish) Division;
- No. 7 Independent Company – Formed by the 15th (Scottish) Division;
- No. 8 Independent Company – Formed by the 18th (Eastern) Division;
- No. 9 Independent Company – Formed by the 38th (Welsh) Division;
- No. 10 Independent Company – Formed by the 66th Division.

Only companies No. 1 to No. 5 were deployed to Norway with Scissors Force. Each company comprised three platoons, each consisting of three sections. Unusually, an officer commanded each section. There was also some Royal Engineers, Royal Corps of Signals and Norwegian interpreters on the strength of each company. Each company had a support section equipped with four Bren guns. They were intended to be self-supporting units.

As they were raised for intended service in Norway, the units were equipped with Alpine rucksacks, snowshoes, Arctic boots, sheepskin coats and about £4,000 in cash. The role of the companies was seen as guerrilla tactics, in effect a forerunner of the commandos into which they evolved.¹⁴

Then, on the 10th May 1940, everything changed with the launch of the German invasion of the Netherlands, Belgium and France. Immediately, Norway was relegated to a sideshow in terms of strategic matters. Following a debate on the Norwegian campaign, the Prime Minister Neville CHAMBERLAIN resigned, with Winston CHURCHILL becoming the new Prime Minister with a War Cabinet drawn from all parties in a new, national government.

¹⁴ After the Norwegian campaign, the five companies returned to the U.K. On the 11th October 1940, the Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9 Companies formed the 1st Special Service Battalion, with Nos. 6 and 7 Companies forming part of the 2nd Special Service Battalion.

At first, CHURCHILL wished to continue the operations in Norway, on the basis it was tying down superior German forces. However, on the 20th May 1940, CHURCHILL changed his mind and informed the new Defence Committee of his reasoning to evacuate Narvik and leave Norway. One of the concerns were the burdens that single operation was placing on the Royal Navy. The decision to evacuate was agreed by the Defence Committee on the 24th May 1940, but, it was still argued over by the Chiefs of Staff and the Cabinet.

Maurice Force had deployed a small party of one-hundred Chasseurs Alpains to Mosjoen, where they joined a Norwegian battalion. On their arrival in Norway on the 4th May, the 4th and 5th Independent Companies were sent south to Mosjoen to relieve the French troops.

The German forces were prepared to be audacious. On the 10th May, they sent a party of about three-hundred troops by a coastal steamer to land at Hemnesberget, about fifteen miles from Mo. Two seaplanes brought another forty or so troops to the same location. No.1 Company fought a determined battle against the German troops, but they could not hold the quayside and fell back into the countryside.

This small battle is known to have claimed the lives of seven British soldiers from No. 1 Independent Company. They were:

1. Lance Corporal 3310910 Alex G. COWIESON from Partick, Glasgow, aged twenty-five years and a member of the 6th Bn. The Highland Light Infantry (City of Glasgow Regiment);
2. Private 3315133 Robert O'NEILL from Glasgow, aged thirty-one years, a member of the 1st Bn. The Highland Light Infantry (City of Glasgow Regiment);
3. Private 3313959 Daniel McQUEEN, from Glasgow, aged nineteen years and a member of the 1st Bn. The Highland Light Infantry (City of Glasgow Regiment);
4. Private 3313241 Alexander MATSON, aged thirty-three years and a member of the 1st Bn. The Highland Light Infantry.
5. Rifleman 3245939 Alexander CHISHOLM, from Hamilton, Lanarkshire, aged nineteen years and a member of the 6th Bn. The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles);
6. Sapper 1881273 William MOORES from Manchester, aged thirty-five years and a member of the Royal Engineers;
7. Signaller 2588118 Alexander Lugton HOWIE, from Greenock, aged twenty-three years and a member of the Royal Corps of Signals

All seven men are now buried in a collective grave in the Hemnesberget Cemetery, Norway.

With the German landing threatening his flanks, Colonel GUBBINS had little alternative but to withdraw No. 5 Company and No. 4 Company. The 1st Bn. Scots Guards were sent from Harstad to Bodo on the 12th May. The Norwegians had attacked Hemnesberget the day before, but even though they made some inroads into the town, in the end their attack was repulsed.

Consideration was given to using the Scots Guards to assist in another attack on Hemnesberget, but Lieutenant Colonel TRAPPES-LOMAX decided against this and ordered his battalion to take up a defensive position at Stein. On the 14th May, No. 1 Independent Company and some Norwegians were engaged in a sharp engagement at Finneid. They were forced to withdraw through the position held by the Scots Guards at Stein.

It became clear that the German forces in the vicinity were being reinforced. Unknown to the Allies at this time, the 2nd Mountain Division had been sent from Germany to Trondheim with orders to push north to Narvik. The Germans now had about five battalions and three troops of mountain artillery deployed around Mosjoen and Hamnesberget.

There was indecision on whether to hold the town of Mo and whether it could be held against the German advance. The Admiralty were keen for Mo to be held as long as possible as they felt its loss would jeopardise Narvik. Brigadier FRASER felt that with the resources available to him, there was no reasonable likelihood of Mo being held against a determined attack.

In the end, the position at Mo was determined by two related events that occurred at sea off the coast of northern Norway. On the 14th May, the 1st Bn. Irish Guards embarked aboard the Polish troopship Chrobry to be carried to Bodo to join Scissors Force. Shortly before midnight on the 14th to 15th May, as the ship left the protection of the Lofoten Islands, it was attacked by German aircraft. Three bombs hit the troopship aft, with fires breaking out. The firefighting response was hindered by problems with the fire hoses, so the fire took hold. As the fires reached some ammunition, the captain took the decision to evacuate the ship.

H.M.S. Wolverine, a British destroyer came alongside to take off the men of the Irish Guards and other military personnel. Although only a few men died in that attack, in effect it decapitated the command structure of the battalion as the commanding officer and several key officers were killed. Those killed were:

1. The commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel 15271 Walter Douglas FAULKNER, M.C.. He was aged forty-two years and was married. FAULKNER is now buried in Grave XI.K.5. of the Narvik New Cemetery;
2. The second-in-command, Major 10398 Cecil Leander John BOWEN. He was aged forty-four years and was also married. He was evacuated from the ship but died of his wounds the next day. John BOWEN is buried in Grave XI.K.3. of the Narvik New Cemetery;
3. The Adjutant, Captain 49895 The Honourable Brian Arthur O'NEILL. He was killed in his cabin when the bomb struck, so is commemorated on Panel 8 Column 2 of the Brookwood Memorial;
4. The commanding officer of Headquarter Company, Major 18189 Thomas Archibald HACKET-PAIN, (known as Tommy). He was forty years' of age and came from County Tipperary in the Irish Republic. He is commemorated on Panel 8 Column 2 of the Brookwood Memorial;

5. The commanding officer of Number 1 Company, Major 33666 Vivian Vandeleur GILBART-DENHAM. He was seriously injured and dragged from the wreck of his cabin by Guardsman ALLEN to be evacuated from the Chrobry. However, he succumbed to his wounds on the 27th May 1940, aged thirty-five years. A son of Sir James and Lady DENHAM from Nawton in Yorkshire and married, GILBART-DENHAM is now lies in a grave in Allied Plot E.2. of the Harstad Cemetery;
6. The commanding officer of Number 2 Company, Captain 27656 John Reginald DURHAM-MATTHEWS (known as 'Jack'). Aged thirty-six years, he is now commemorated on Panel 8, Column 2 of the Brookwood Memorial;
7. A platoon commander from Number 2 Company, Lieutenant 67054 Frederick Roberts Alexander LEWIN (known as Freddie). Aged twenty-five years, he was killed as he slept in his cabin and he is also commemorated on Panel 8, Column 2 of the Brookwood Memorial.

Guardsman 2717810 Edward William DRAPER was acting as the sentry at the head of stairs when the bomb landed. He was killed at his post. A pre-war soldier from Bantry in County Cork, he is commemorated on Panel 8, Column 3 of the Brookwood Memorial in Surrey.

Several other men were wounded or injured during the bombing and evacuation, so although losses in terms of numbers were not high, the battalion was taken back to Harstad to rest and reorganise. On the evening of the 17th May, this incident was compounded when H.M.S. Effingham ran aground about twelve miles from Bodo. At the time, she was carrying the 2nd Bn. The South Wales Borderers and the brigade headquarters. The ship was evacuated, with the men being returned to Harstad. This left the forces at Stein vulnerable to the attack that commenced in the afternoon of the 17th May. The Scots Guards had Left Flank and Right Flank Companies up front, with a third company and men from an independent company further back along the road to Mo. There were four 25 pounder guns deployed in support, but communications with the forward troops was problematic so they were of little use.

The German assault started at about 6.30 pm along the exposed road, but this was held by the Scots Guards. A bridge over a river running down the valley at this point was blown, and although the Germans attempted to repair it, they were unable to do so because of the fire from the Scots Guards. Then the Germans began to infiltrate into the positions of the Scots Guards in the river valley, having approached from across the hills. The Germans advanced steadily, with the Scots Guards having to give ground. By 02.00 am the next morning, their position was becoming untenable. With Brigadier FRASER now declared unfit to continue in command, Brigadier GUBBINS came forward to assess the situation. After speaking with Lieutenant General AUCHINLECK, he decided to withdraw back beyond Mo on the road towards Bodo. A couple of bridges were blown, but Mo i Rana was abandoned to the enemy by 03.30 hours., so the long trek back started for the British and Norwegian troops.

The 1st Bn. Irish Guards and 2nd Bn. The South Wales Borderers started to arrive at Bodo in small contingents, beginning on the 20th May. The Scots Guards took up new positions about thirty-two miles north of Mo, at a place called Messingsleten Bridge. Lieutenant General AUCHINLECK ordered that this location was to be held, stating it was '*essential to stand and fight*'.¹⁵

Brigadier GUBBINS slightly modified this order to withdrawing only if there was serious danger to the force. Lieutenant Colonel TRAPPES-LOMAX prepared three lines of defence at this location. The German forces attacked on the 21st May, quickly outflanking the first defence line. On reaching the main defence line, they were checked, but soon were bringing fire down onto the positions held by the Scots Guards from the flanks. Although the two bridges had been demolished, the German troops had bridging parties with them to repair the road in a short time. This decision was to have major consequences for Lieutenant Colonel TRAPPES-LOMAX. He was recalled to Harstad where he was relieved of his command. The second-in-command, Major GRAHAM, was placed in command of the battalion in the field.

Meanwhile, the Headquarters 6th Anti-Aircraft Brigade had arrived at Harstad, under the command of Brigadier (Temporary) Frederick Norman Chambers ROSSITER, M.B.E., M.C., *g.*. Under command of this brigade were the:

- 51st (London) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery;
- 82nd (Essex) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery;
- 55th (Devon) Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery;
- 56th (East Lancashire) Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery;¹⁶
- 3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, Royal Artillery.
-

The two heavy anti-aircraft (H.A.A.) regiments were equipped with 3.7" guns, with the light anti-aircraft (L.A.A.) units being equipped with 40 mm Bofors guns. The bases at Harstad and Skaanland were protected by the 51st H.A.A. Regiment and the 55th L.A.A. Regiment. A battery from the 82nd H.A.A. Regiment and troops from the 3rd L.A.A. Battery and 55th L.A.A. Regiment protected the airfield at Bardufoss to the north of Narvik. At Tromso were a battery of the 82nd L.A.A. Regiment and 167th L.A.A. Battery of the 56th L.A.A. Regiment. Troops from the 3rd L.A.A. Battery and the 163rd and 165th L.A.A. Batteries from the 55th L.A.A. Regiment were operating with the French forces. Finally, the 164th L.A.A. Battery from the 55th L.A.A. Regiment was deployed to Mosjoen with Scissors Force. This battery had to fight its way back to Bodo with the British forces for evacuation.¹⁷

¹⁵ DERRY, *Campaign in Norway*, p188.

¹⁶ Only the Regimental Headquarters and 167th L.A.A. Battery were deployed to Narvik. The other two batteries were sent to Aandalnes and Namsos.

¹⁷ ROUTLEDGE, Brigadier N. W., O.B.E., T.D., *The History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery – Anti-Aircraft Artillery 1914 – 55*, (London, Brassey's, 1994) p. 110

The town of Harstad was being bombed regularly by German aircraft as and when the weather conditions allowed. On the 22nd May, during one such attack, two brothers were killed together at Harstad. Twenty years' old Gunner 875492 Edward Melville YEOMANS from 256th (Barking) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery and his twenty-two years' old brother Gunner 867321 Douglas YEOMANS from the same battery were both killed in one air attack. They are buried alongside each other, Edward in Allied Plot G.7., and Douglas in Allied Plot G.8 in the Harstad Cemetery. Both men were the sons of Joseph and Sophia Mary YEOMANS from Leyton in Essex.¹⁸

The Scots Guards moved back in transport, including some Bren carriers salvaged from H.M.S. Effingham, to a new position at Viskiskoia. He the road crosses a river as it descends to a village called Saltdal. The Scots Guards were deployed to defend the bridge, with the men from No. 3 Independent Company high up in the hills to guard from infiltration. Once again, the 25 pounders were limited by the loss of their communication equipment as they arrived in Norway, with the Scots Guards only having one 3" mortar as artillery support.

By 4.00 pm on the 23rd May, the independent company had been driven from their positions, creating a threat to the flank of the main position held by the Scots Guards. At about 6.00 p.m., Brigadier GUBBINS gave the order for the Scots Guards to retire. Although they halted at a place called Storjord in anticipation of another delaying action, by now Lieutenant General AUCHINLECK had determined that the enemy could not be prevented from reaching Bodo. Brigadier GUBBINS arranged for a strong defensive position to be created at Pothus on the River Saltdal, which was the lowest bridging point of the river before it reached the sea some ten miles further on. The defence lines were manned jointly by British and Norwegian troops by the 24th May, during which the tired men of the Scots Guards passed through.

The Irish Guards and elements from two of the independent companies held the positions, with the Norwegians held in reserve. Lieutenant Colonel STOCKWELL commanded a reserve group from his own Number 2 Independent Company and other troops called 'Stock Force', which was also held in reserve. The British outpost positions first encountered German troops at about 08.00 a.m. on the 25th May. In the early afternoon, five German aircraft attacked the British positions with machine gun fire, during which German troops made an attempt to storm a ridge overlooking the main bridge. Although they were driven back, they steadily consolidated their positions threatening the bridge, so it was blown up. The last men of the Irish Guards situated on the wrong side of the river had to cross by use of handlines. Some of the reserves went forward, in particular No. 2 Company of the Irish Guards and No. 3 Independent Company. They secured a ridge by about 04.30 a.m. on the 26th May, thus restoring the situation on the left flank. The Germans brought up a floating bridge, which was constructed quickly to allow troops to cross the river and push back the British and Norwegians on that bank. No. 2 Independent Company were sent to restore the situation, but were outnumbered against strengthening enemy forces.

¹⁸ Taken from Commonwealth War Graves Commission website at: <http://www.cwgc.org/>

At about 11.30 am, Brigadier GUBBINS ordered a withdraw, but Lieutenant Colonel STOCKWELL was not able to pull back his force until later on that afternoon. It held a position to cover the withdraw until about 10.30 pm to allow the main force to pull back safely. Most of the British and Norwegian troops managed to extract themselves and made their way back to Rognan, where the road ended in a ferry across the mouth of the river to Langset, with the road continuing back to Bodo. The most remarkable event of this action was the appearance of one British Gladiator fighter that dived down and strafed the German troops. This was one of just three aircraft that had arrived at Bardufoss near Bodo, where an improvised airstrip had been built.

As the British and Norwegian were engaged in a series of actions intended to delay the German advance towards Narvik from Trondheim, additional Allied reinforcements were arriving at Harstad. The two battalions of the Foreign Legion arrived on the 6th May, with the Polish brigade arriving on the 9th May. Although designated as mountain troops by the French, the Poles had no experience and little training in mountain or arctic warfare. In terms of artillery, the 203rd (Cumberland) Field Battery arrived on the 22nd April, with some anti-aircraft units landing as well to defend the base. Plans were made for the French, Polish and Norwegian troops to advance on Narvik overnight the 11th to 12th May. The date of the advance was postponed for twenty-four hours, but this news did not reach the Norwegian 6th Brigade which attacked first on the original date planned. The Norwegians fought determinedly and after some bitter fighting, the Germans were forced off their positions on the heights surrounding Narvik.

There were few hours of darkness in north Norway, so the bombardment by the Royal Navy took place in daylight even though it was midnight. French and Polish troops were carried by ships up the fiord to locations near Narvik. The two landing met some opposition but they succeeded in making the first opposed landing by Allied troops during the Second World War. The French and Polish troops sustained only thirty-six casualties. On the 14th May, the French, Polish and Norwegian troops increased their pressure on the German forces in Narvik. British anti-aircraft guns supported them. The Norwegians were closing in from the hills surrounding the town from the side, while the French and Poles pressed along the shorelines of the fiords towards Narvik.

South of Narvik, the 2nd Bn. The South Wales Borderers were deployed on the Ankenes peninsula with a battalion of French Chasseurs Alpains, attacking the Germans stationed there and gaining ground. They were relieved by the 2nd Polish Battalion, so that no British troops were now employed in the direct attack on the town of Narvik.

The final assault on Narvik was planned for the 21st May, but was moved back in stages to the 27th May. The Norwegian 6th Brigade continued in its steady advance through the mountains to the north of the town. The French 14th Chasseurs Alpains linked up with the Norwegian 7th Brigade closing in on the railway line from Narvik to Sweden. The Poles continued to close in on Narvik from the south along the Ankenes peninsula.

General BETHOUART commanded the French forces, with General BOHUSZ-SZYZKO commanding the Polish troops. Together, they came under Lieutenant General AUCHINLECK as Commander-in-Chief of North Norway. Admiral of the Fleet the Earl of Cork and Orrery remained in command of naval forces in North Norway and surrounding sea areas. The Royal Navy began its bombardment overnight the 27th to 28th May, with the first troops landing from small vessels, with the French established on shore by 04.00 hours. This included two French tanks, although others remained stranded on the foreshore. The German air force responded by attacking Royal Navy warships causing some damage and casualties.

The French forces made steady progress and survived a spirited counter attack made by German troops. Then it became clear that the Germans were withdrawing along the line of the railway towards Sweden. At about 5.00 pm on the 28th May, General BETHOUART allowed the Norwegians to be the first troops to enter Narvik. They reported the town secured by about 10.00 pm that evening. The French, Polish and Norwegian troops suffered about one-hundred and fifty casualties, of whom about sixty were Norwegian. They captured between three-hundred and four-hundred German prisoners.

The decision to evacuate North Norway had been taken even before Narvik had been captured, however, the boost of an Allied victory was judged to too important to miss. The Norwegians found this decision difficult, particularly after the successful capture of Norway, but the British and French now had other considerations. The British troops were evacuated by warships and local 'puffers' from Bodo back to Harstad on the 29th May. The main evacuation from Narvik and Harstad commenced on the 2nd June 1940 in a major operation undertaken by the Royal Navy. The Headquarters, 6th Anti-Aircraft Brigade was ordered to bring back to the U.K. all light and heavy anti-aircraft guns as a matter of priority. Twenty-two 40 mm Bofors guns and five 3.7" guns were assembled at Harstad for evacuation. At 22.00 hours on the 7th June, all anti-aircraft defences stood down. The units of the brigade claimed the destruction of twenty-three enemy aircraft during the campaign. They suffered seven men killed, twenty-six wounded and eight missing.¹⁹

Some twenty-four thousand Allied troops were evacuated from northern Norway to the United Kingdom. The last to leave (including Lieutenant General AUCHINLECK and General BETHOUART boarded H.M.S. Southampton at about 09.00 am on the 8th June. The Hurricanes and Gladiators that had belatedly been deployed to Bardufoss with 46 Squadron were flown onto H.M.S. Glorious, despite the fact that the R.A.F. pilots had not conducted deck landings before. The troopship 'Orama' was intercepted and sunk on the 8th June. She was carrying about one-hundred German prisoners of war at the time. Nineteen men were killed, but two-hundred and eighty were rescued.²⁰

¹⁹ ROUTLEDGE, Brigadier N. W., O.B.E., T.D., *The History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery – Anti-Aircraft Artillery 1914 – 55*, (London, Brassey's, 1994) p. 112

²⁰ See: <http://www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?114925>

The greatest loss was that of the aircraft carrier H.M.S. Glorious and her two escorting destroyers, H.M.S. Acasta and H.M.S. Ardent. They were sighted by the German battle cruiser Scharnhorst, which shelled them from fifteen miles away. The two destroyed tried in vain to protect the carrier, all three being sunk by gunfire, but not before the Acasta hit the Scharnhorst with a torpedo. One-thousand, fifteen-hundred and fifteen men were lost, there only being thirty-two survivors picked up by Norwegian ships over the next few days.²¹

So ended the Norwegian campaign.

For some pictures and an account of the campaign in North Norway, see:

<http://www.g7smy.co.uk/war/?00>

²¹ See: <http://www.glarac.co.uk/>

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Author: Robert PALMER, M.A.

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