

6. Blitzkrieg in Poland

THROUGH THE LAST, all-too-short summer of peace, both the Germans and Poles had prepared frantically for what was coming. If the diplomats and the civilians hoped against hope for peace, the soldiers knew that war could come at any time, and they were doing their best to get ready for it; through August there was a palpable girding of loins.

The high command of the Wehrmacht had been planning the invasion of Poland since March of 1939; immediately after the takeover of the remains of Czechoslovakia, Hitler had called his generals together, told them Poland was next on his list, and instructed them to work up an operational plan. The occupation of Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia meant that Poland was all but indefensible, just as Czechoslovakia had been after the Anschluss. Very roughly, Poland consisted of a large irregular triangle, with the Polish Corridor jutting up out of the western apex of it. On two sides of the triangle Poland was bordered by East Prussia, Germany proper, and the occupied territory of Czechoslovakia. It was little comfort that the third side was bordered by Russia.

The German plan was to deploy two army groups; Army Group North and Army Group South under General Feodor von Bock and General Gerd von Rundstedt respectively. These would drive directly into Poland and meet at Warsaw, encircling and cutting off the main Polish forces, which the Germans expected to be deployed in the western part of the country. Von Bock proposed a second, deeper pincer farther to the eastward, but that was not adopted as a part of the original plan.

Army Group North had about 630,000 men in two armies. It was supported by the 1st Air Fleet with 500 bombers, 180 Stukas or dive-bombers, and about 120 fighter aircraft. It had one armored corps in the 4th Army, west of the Polish Corridor, whose task



was to cut the Corridor, link up with the other army in East Prussia, and then drive due south on Warsaw.

Army Group South had three armies consisting of about 886,000 men. The 4th Air Fleet was in support, with 310 bombers, 160 Stukas, and again about 120 fighters. Its central 10th Army, with one Panzer or armored corps, was to drive northeast to Warsaw, while 8th Army protected its left flank from the assumed mass of Polish troops, and 14th Army protected its right flank while taking Cracow, one of the great historic sites of Poland and the kind of city the Poles might be expected to defend to the last.

Most of the navy was held in the west, on the other side of the Danish Peninsula, to guard against possible British intervention, but some units were allocated for the bombardment of the Polish port and naval base of Gdynia and Hel, at the end of the Corridor. The Luftwaffe held in reserve 250 Junkers Ju52 transports, which could be used in an emergency to drop paratroops.

Hitler's generals were extremely worried about what the Western Powers would do. The British Army was incapable of doing a great deal, but the Royal Air Force was by now formidable, while the French were perceived as a definite threat. Nevertheless, Hitler remained convinced the French would not take the initiative. He put on a major propaganda campaign to convince the world that Germany's western fortifications were impregnable; at the same time, he could spare only understrength infantry divisions and a few light air-force units to man the "West Wall." The whole concept of the campaign was to break through the Polish frontier crust as rapidly as possible and gobble up Poland before her allies could do anything about it. Then, having achieved a fait accompli, it would be time to decide where to go next.

In retrospect, it looks as if the old adage, "Whom the gods would destroy they first drive mad," might be applied to the Polish government in 1939. That is only the accuracy of hindsight. At the time neither the Poles nor anyone else expected the Germans to fight the kind of war they did. It is possible that the Polish Army might have held the eastern part of the country, defending the line of the Bug River or conceivably even the San. That would have meant abandoning Warsaw, Poland's industrial areas, and all the parts of the homeland that were most dear to the people. The Poles were tough, they had no illusions that the war would not come, and they were determined to make the hated Germans pay for every inch of Polish territory. The Polish high command, therefore, decided to hold on the frontiers in a linear defense, fall

back as necessary under German pressure, and fight until the Western Allies came to their rescue.

To do this, the Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Edward Smigly-Rydz, had an army that at full strength would have mustered nearly 1,800,000 men. In the event, the Poles got about 1,000,000 called up, and of these about 800,000 actually seem to have gotten to their units and been taken on strength before Poland was overrun. These troops were disposed in six armies along the frontiers and one smaller "Operational Group" up near the juncture of East Prussia and Lithuania, plus a central reserve organized fifty miles or so south of Warsaw. The best of these armies, in terms of the modernity of its equipment, was the Poznan Army, at the western apex of Poland, in the area where the Germans did not intend to attack. The Poles had about 935 aircraft, almost all of them inferior to the equivalent German types, and no more than a few light tanks against the Germans' four armored divisions. They had impressive numbers of horsed cavalry, which they believed, probably correctly, to be the best in the world. Partly because of this they had not done much in the way of preparing field fortifications. The official Polish doctrine was that they would fight a mobile war, and that enemy penetrations would be quickly counter-attacked and sealed off and destroyed, a doctrine that would have been adequate had their enemy possessed, as the Poles did, a World War I type of army.

The Germans had been violating Polish air space all summer, flying photographic reconnaissance missions which the Polish fighters were too slow to intercept. Perhaps because the Poles were jaded by the unending atmosphere of crisis, the attack when it came caught them by surprise. Instead of using the standard border clashes of a more leisurely era, the Germans hit with everything they had. At dawn on September 1 the Luftwaffe struck at Polish airfields, the German battleship *Schleswig-Holstein* moved into Gdynia at point-blank range to bombard Polish naval installations, and artillery and tank engines roared all along the frontier.

Contrary to popular opinion, the Luftwaffe did not wipe out the Polish Air Force in its first strike. The Poles had dispersed their planes to operational fields a few days before the attack. The Germans did, though, inflict serious losses, and that, coupled with the overwhelming numerical and design superiority of the Luftwaffe, was enough to destroy the Polish Air Force within the next three or four days. Polish fighters took a relatively heavy toll of the German

planes—in some cases ramming them in desperation—but they were soon worn down, and the remaining fighters were pulled back for the defense of Warsaw. Their ground attack and tactical support aircraft, even more vulnerable than their fighters, were decimated in early attacks against the heavily armed German columns breaking across the frontier. The Luftwaffe was soon virtually free of opposition and turned its attention on the one hand to dive-bombing and strafing in support of the armored advance, and on the other to bombing communications and transport links, sowing confusion and despair in the rear of the Polish forces. Under this pressure, Polish mobilization broke down on the first day of the invasion, and was never completed.

The initial phase of the German attack consisted of the breaking of the frontier positions. This was achieved for practical purposes on the first day. The Polish idea of cut-off units establishing strongpoints until relieved by counterattacks was completely negated by the tank-aircraft combination. The counterattacks never got launched, and the "strongpoints" were quickly mopped up or dispersed by mobile artillery, by follow-up infantry units, or by dive-bombing attacks. The Poles fought stubbornly, and even, on occasion, tried their horses, swords, and lances against the German tanks. Nonetheless, by the evening of the first day, some of the German armor had made fifteen miles, and was practically into open country. By the 3rd, when Britain and France got around to declaring war, the Corridor was cut and the air force was all but wiped out. The last units holding on the frontier fell back on the 5th.

The linear defense being completely broken, the Germans entered the second phase of their operation, the pincer movement cutting off and destroying the remaining Polish forces. The Polish headquarters units were under constant air attacks, and the Poles were rapidly losing what little control they had over their battle. The roads were filled with panic-stricken refugees, and the motorized Germans could advance faster than the Poles could retreat. The Poznan Army was falling back eastward, seeking to reach Warsaw and defend it before the Germans could get there, but by the 7th, the German 10th Army, from the south, was only thirty-five miles short of the city. That day the Polish government left its capital and moved to Lublin.

The Germans won the race. They surrounded Warsaw on the 9th before the Poznan forces could get there. On the 10th, the Poznan Army, together with remnants of the other western Polish

armies, about 100,000 strong, attempted to break out to the south. For four days the issue hung in the balance, while the Poles struggled desperately. The Germans pounded them with artillery and Stukas, and were at one point forced to fly in reserves, the pressure was so heavy. Yet the German grip tightened inexorably, and the crisis was past by the 14th; the survivors of the Polish attacks, about 52,000 strong, finally surrendered on the 17th.

The Poles by then were completely broken up, and their still-existent main units were all surrounded. The German Army high command had already adopted von Bock's earlier suggestion of a second deeper envelopment to gather in Polish forces escaping to the east. This pincer was complete by the 19th. From then on, it was a matter of cleaning up pockets of resistance. Remaining major units surrendered or dispersed in the third week of September. Warsaw held out, under constant air and artillery bombardment, until the 27th. By then, food was giving out, the water mains were broken, fires were raging out of control, and the city had collapsed. Aerial defense consisted mainly of loudspeakers sounding warnings and playing Poland's national music, Chopin's "Polonaises." Hospitals were out of supplies and swamped with both civilian and military casualties, unattached soldiers were shepherded through the city and out to fend for themselves, as the city did not need and could not feed them; organized life and with it resistance ground down, and finally there was nothing left to do but capitulate.

A few strongpoints lasted longer. Up on the Baltic, at the little naval base on the Hel Peninsula, the garrison of a few hundred soldiers, sailors, and civilian workers stood off attacks by tanks, artillery, dive-bombers, and German battleships until the first of October. Finally, after thirty-one days—about thirty more than required by the dictates of military honor—having nothing left to fight with, the Poles surrendered. The last organized resistance was at Kock, southeast of Warsaw, and here about 17,000 remnants put up the white flag on October 6.

No one knows what the campaign cost Poland; the breakdown was so rapid and so complete that accurate figures were never obtained. The Germans said they took 694,000 prisoners, and they estimated that about 100,000 escaped across neutral frontiers into Hungary, Lithuania, or Rumania. The Polish combat losses are unknown, as is the exact number taken by the Russians. The Germans themselves lost about 14,000 killed and about 30,000 wounded.

The whole German plan had been to overrun Poland quickly, and they had done so with a speed that astonished the rest of the world. Even so, it had not gone as rapidly as they had hoped. It was an essential part of Hitler's idea that Poland should be swallowed up in one gulp, before the West had time to react. As early as the 3rd, therefore, Hitler was asking that the Russians should fulfill, or take advantage of, their part of the deal and move in from the east. Essentially, the Russians were caught flatfooted by this and did nothing; the Germans repeated their request on the 10th, but it was another week before the Russians lurched into motion. On the 17th, they got two army groups moving, the White Russian Front in the north, and the Ukrainian Front in the south. There was little resistance as they crossed the frontiers, the Poles being fully occupied in the west, and by the 17th already collapsing. The Russians did gather up more than 200,000 prisoners among Polish troops and potential troops fleeing eastward. The Red armies then closed up to the German stop line; both sides were very careful to avoid any clash between units as a result of mistaken identity; it was not, after all, a very comfortable alliance.

In fact, the original nonaggression pact had called for a buffer zone between the Germans and the Russians, but this was now renegotiated, each took a sphere of Poland, and the Polish state once again disappeared from the map. Hitler then announced that the central European situation was satisfactory, that it could be a basis for a lasting peace, and he called for negotiations with the Western Powers.

The big question of the 1939 campaign is not what happened to Poland, or to Germany or Russia, but what happened to France and Great Britain. At a time when the Germans were almost completely committed in Poland, why did Britain and France not strike quickly and hard? This was what the Poles expected as help from their allies; this was, in effect, what Poland died for.

The saddest aspect of the whole matter is that the Western Allies could have done so. There is virtually no doubt that had they attacked vigorously, they could have broken through the thin screen of Germans to and across the Rhine. They could, and should, have easily defeated Germany, and the Second World War would never have gotten off the ground.

The French were fully mobilized while the Germans were still enmeshed in Poland. Facing the German frontier they had eighty-five divisions. Some of them were not fully worked up, but the

lowest estimate by military experts gives the French seventy-two divisions. Against them the Germans had eight weak regular divisions, and about twenty-five reserve formations, some of them existing on paper, some made up largely of recruits who were not even half-trained. The Germans had 300 guns, the French had 1,600. The French had 3,200 tanks; the Germans had none—they were all in Poland. The French and British together had 1,700 aircraft; the Germans had almost none.

The French did undertake an offensive operation. They sent out patrols that penetrated about fourteen miles into German territory; they met no opposition. They then withdrew on order and never advanced again.

The Royal Air Force before the war had deliberately assumed a policy of building up a strategic bomber force. Now, with nearly 800 serviceable bombers against a virtually defenseless western Germany, it announced that its policy was not to use those bombers, but to conserve and build them up further. It would never again achieve a force ratio of 800 to nothing.

The facts seem to be that no one in the West really wanted to fight. German intelligence rated French morale as high, and the French Army as the most formidable possible foe; this was before its spirit was sapped by months of "phoney war." Yet the high command clung to its visions of French and Allied inferiority to German capability. Allied intelligence consistently overrated German strength, and underrated its own. The politicians were only too happy to listen to the generals, and the generals were afraid to risk a fight. Paralyzed by their fears and their memories, hamstrung by their doctrinal preconceptions, they wanted an absolutely guaranteed sure thing. Unwilling to accept the closest they would ever come to it, they let the opportunity pass. It was really a vicious circle; the military experts advised their governments that they were in a parlous position. The civilian leaders were therefore hesitant to dictate action. The military command drew the inference therefrom that the politicians were uncommitted to war, and might well be contemplating a deal with Hitler. That made the soldiers all the more reluctant to risk the issue of battle. So Poland went down, unaided. The French sat in the Maginot Line and let their army rot. The Royal Air Force dropped leaflets over Germany. The Allies' decision, or lack of it, would cost millions of lives and alter the shape of the world for the foreseeable future.

7. Northern Adventures

ADOLF HITLER WAS STILL on his winning streak, and immediately after the successful conclusion of the Polish campaign, he turned his attention westward. He wanted an offensive against France before the winter, but it was already late September, and his generals insisted that the sorting out and redeployment of the victorious army would take more time than was available. Grumbling, *der Fuehrer* let reality have its way.

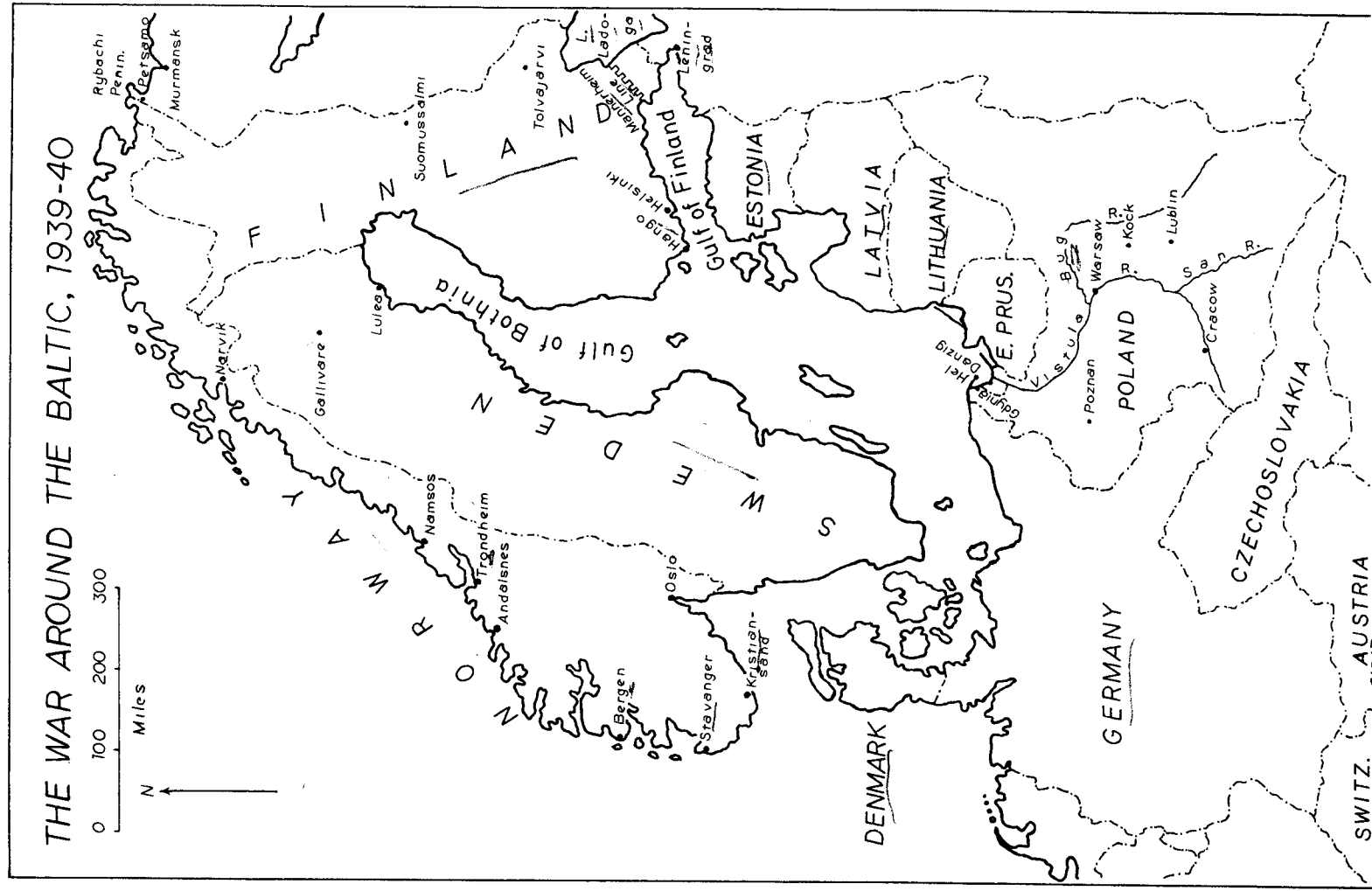
Hitler was reluctant to do nothing; the Western Allies were reluctant to do anything. The French were more than content to wait passively, and not stir up trouble for themselves. Counsels were divided in Britain; Winston Churchill had been taken back into the government as First Lord of the Admiralty, and Churchill as always was a notable fire-eater. He pressed for offensive action. The Chamberlain government as a whole, however, was quite happy to defer to the French vision of how the war should be fought. Britain's position was somewhat embarrassing anyway. She had sent the British Expeditionary Force (B. E. F.) to France, but it consisted in its entirety of less than half a dozen divisions. It was therefore impossible to press the French too vigorously to fight, when it would be the French who had to do all the fighting. The French view, perhaps never overtly stated but constantly implied, was that if Britain wanted to fight, she should send over an army the size of France's and then she could fight as much as she pleased. Chamberlain found it easier to resist Churchill's internal than France's external pressure, so the government remained quiescent, and adopted as their slogan for the war the totally uninspiring "Business as usual." It was hardly calculated to arouse martial ardor, but it was what a public who could still remember World War I was thought to want.

An uneasy calm settled over western Europe as the fall rains and fogs rolled in from the Atlantic. The troops huddled along

THE WAR AROUND THE BALTIC, 1939-40

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the frontiers, the French in the Maginot Line relatively comfortable, those to the north of it, and the B. E. F. on the Belgian border, making the best of a boring, wasting time. They dug, drilled, they attended lectures on "Why we are fighting," and they wondered why they were not fighting. American correspondents, quick to flock to the war zone, soon christened the whole affair "the phoney war," a label that stuck to it. Surely there was going to be a deal; Chamberlain had characterized Czechoslovakia as "a faraway country of which we know little," and now, in the German propaganda phrase, no one was going "to die for Danzig." There was nothing to do but wait.

This was not universally true. The Russians were not waiting. As they rolled into Poland, they had firsthand evidence of the effectiveness of Germany's military machine. They decided that they needed even more cushion than the hundred miles of Polish territory they had gained. Along the southern shore of the Baltic, from Prussia eastward almost to Leningrad, was a string of three Baltic republics: Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Residue of the great medieval Lithuanian empire, these areas had come under Russian domination as far back as the eighteenth century, and had formed the Baltic Provinces of the Tsarist realm. Like Poland, they had broken away in the general collapse of the Russian Revolution, and had been acknowledged as free states, in the post-World War I treaties. Somewhat precariously independent, they now formed a natural corridor from German East Prussia along the Baltic littoral to Leningrad, Russia's great industrial complex at the head of the Gulf of Finland.

As soon as the occupation of Poland was completed, the Russians put pressure on the three states. All three were pro-German by choice, but were not now in any position to exercise that choice. They each signed mutual-defense treaties with Russia, which had the effect of making them Russian satellites, and the Reds immediately moved troops in. Hitler was not pleased, but for the moment there was little he could do about it.

The Russians believed they were equally vulnerable in the north where Finland, another successor-state from the revolution, was seen by the Russians as a potential danger. The Finns had originally won their independence with the help of German troops and equipment, and they were pro-German, at least to the extent of being anti-Russian. The Russians therefore made the same kind of demands on the Finns they had made on the southern Baltic

states. The Russians wanted fifty miles of the Karelian Isthmus, the strip of land that ran between the head of the Gulf of Finland and Lake Ladoga. They wanted islands in the gulf, and a long-term lease on the Finnish base at Hango, which dominated the mouth of the gulf. Finland also stretched north to a small shore along the Arctic, the Rybachi Peninsula. This threatened the Russian port of Murmansk, and therefore the Russians demanded cession of it too.

Finland could have lived with this; in fact, she has since the end of World War II. But Russia was the traditional enemy, and memories of Russian misrule formed the recent history of the country. The Finnish Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Mannerheim, had led the country in its revolt against Russia in 1918-19. On November 26, the Finns rejected Stalin's demands and mobilized for war, ready to play David to Russia's Goliath.

They knew they could not win a full-scale war, but they hoped the Western Allies might come to their aid, or barring that, that they could make the price so heavy the Russians would sicken and give up. On the 30th, the Russians responded to the Finnish rejection by air attacks on the capital of Helsinki, and hostilities opened all along the frontier.

The ensuing Russo-Finnish War or Winter War distracted everyone's attention northward, and filled practically the entire world with admiration for the Finns. They were a hardy people, as they had to be just to survive in their country, and though they were relatively few in numbers, they had adapted their defense well to the demands of the situation.

The Finnish regular army consisted of about 300,000 men. Nearly all of these were stationed on the Karelian Isthmus, in a fortified belt made up of pillboxes and Great War-style trenches known as the Mannerheim Line. It was not up to western European standards, but it was formidable enough. The 700-mile-long frontier from north of Lake Ladoga all the way to the Arctic was held mainly by reserve forces known as the Civic Guard, about 100,000 men strong. Additionally, the Finns had a women's auxiliary, also about 100,000 strong, to take over administrative duties. They had a small air force, flying mostly license-built or foreign-made British and Dutch aircraft, and a minuscule navy. They lacked any amount of heavy armor or equipment, but were well equipped for light, mobile, small-unit actions.

Against this force the Russians deployed some thirty infantry

divisions and six tank brigades, roughly a million men, a thousand tanks, and about eight hundred aircraft. Nearly half their infantry and all but one of the armored formations were put in on the Karelian Isthmus, against the Mannerheim Line. Practically two separate wars were fought.

On the isthmus, the Finns were dug in and as prepared as they could be. Most of their artillery was used there, and they snuggled down in their pillboxes and trenches, disguised by the winter snows, dressed in white coveralls, ready for the Russians to come. The Russians, disdainful of tactical finesse, drove forward in heavy masses. With scanty artillery preparation, and using their tanks to support crowds of foot soldiers, they rushed headfirst into the slaughter. Huge formations, cumbersome, unwieldy, inflexible, drove against the Finnish positions. They coupled their frontal attacks with heavy bombing of the Finnish cities, but the result was more to strengthen the Finns' resolve than to weaken their resources. They also tried amphibious attacks along the Gulf of Finland, but these too were beaten off.

By early December, the Russians on the isthmus were exhausted, and the Finns even tried a short-lived offensive, which cost them more casualties than they could well afford. The turn of the year saw both sides in the area fought out and waging a war of positions.

North of Lake Ladoga, all the way up along the frontier, the story had different details. The Russians launched five separate drives in corps strength. In the far north they made some progress, putting in an amphibious assault against the Arctic port of Petsamo and taking it. In central Finland, however, they suffered defeat after defeat. Here they readily broke across the frontier, but as their heavy columns advanced along the few roads, the Finnish Civic Guards coalesced against them like white corpuscles around a foreign body in the bloodstream. Just north of Lake Ladoga a Russian division and a tank brigade were stranded in the middle of nowhere and forced to surrender in February. Another division barely held on until it could pull itself out of the fighting; two more divisions were virtually wiped out at Tolvajarvi. Attacks were turned back in the north-central area, and at Suomussalmi the Finns added a small-action classic to military studies.

The frontier was crossed by a Russian division fresh from the open spaces of the Ukraine. It had heavy equipment which made it roadbound; as there was only one road this meant a thin column of vehicles, with soldiers floundering along in four feet of snow, and

temperatures forty below zero. The first Russian division was followed by a second; together they made a column twenty miles long and one tank wide.

The Finns came in against them on skis, a squad or a platoon at a time, carrying rifles and light machine-guns. Their targets were less the heavy weapons and tanks that held the Russians to the road, than the machines that enabled them to survive: field kitchens, supply trucks—anything that could give shelter. Russian aircraft could not operate in the blizzards: reconnaissance patrols went out and usually did not come back. The Russian tanks tried to break out over the ice of frozen lakes; the Finns blasted holes in the lakes and drowned the tanks, forcing the survivors back to the choked road. The Finns got a few guns up and ranged on the road, systematically blockading it; Russian artillery fired blind in reply, hitting nothing. On Christmas Day, the first Russian division tried to break clear and was annihilated. The Finns turned their attention to the second division, broke through the column at several points, and then wiped out the pockets one by one. By the time it was over, the Finns had taken 1,300 prisoners and the full equipment of two divisions. They themselves had suffered 900 dead and about twice as many wounded. Nearly 28,000 Russians were killed or frozen.

Yet the Russians were no more prepared than the Finns to give up, and the Russians could afford their heavy losses better than the Finns their light ones. In February, they gave up their assaults in the north, where the country could not support their masses, and instead they concentrated on the Karelian Isthmus. They also did some housecleaning. To some extent their humiliation had been the price of the Stalinist purges, when political reliability and mediocrity had been more important than military expertise. There now came a ruthless weeding out of officers, and a re-emphasis on efficient staff work. They crowded twenty-four divisions into the isthmus, supported them with masses of tanks and artillery, and brought in large numbers of aircraft. On February 1, they launched heavy attacks with dense artillery preparation. For nearly two weeks they ground on, ignoring losses which reached fantastic proportions, and finally, on the 13th, the Finnish line cracked. Fighting desperate rear-guard actions, the Finns were pushed back to their end of the isthmus, and on March 1, exhausted and having no hope of rescue from the West, they opened negotiations. The war ended on March 12, and the Russians took pretty much what they had originally demanded.

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The Winter War was extraordinarily fruitful of by-products, reassessments, and misconceptions. The greatest of these last was the widespread opinion that the Russians could not fight. After the war ended, the Russians busily replaced generals and reworked their military doctrines. Ironically, while they did so the rest of the world drew its own conclusion from the evidence presented, that the Russian forces were big but clumsy and that they would be no match for a modern army employing blitzkrieg-style strategies.

While the war was being fought, the question of the northern countries and their neutrality had become acute. The Allies had seriously considered active help to Finland; given the atmosphere after the Russo-German Nonaggression Pact, it seemed they might as well fight both totalitarian states as either one of them. They did send aircraft and artillery to Finland, and several thousand foreign volunteers, mostly Scandinavian, also went to her assistance, though few of them saw any fighting before the collapse.

It was the secondary motives that intrigued the Allies, though. The major obstacle to providing aid to Finland was the determined neutrality of Norway and Sweden. Baltic geography was such that the Allies could get help to the Finns only if they were granted transit rights through these two countries. Such rights were resolutely refused, both governments being justifiably afraid of giving Germany or Russia any excuse to intervene in the north. From the Anglo-French point of view, transit rights were highly desirable, because they would probably lead to more than that. If the British and French sent troops to Finland, they would do so across central or northern Norway and Sweden. The prize here was the control of Swedish iron ore being sent to Germany.

Swedish ore came out of the Gallivare iron fields, which were north of the Gulf of Bothnia. In summer, the ore was sent by rail to the Swedish port of Lulea at the head of the gulf, and then taken by ship south through the Baltic. In winter, however, the Gulf of Bothnia froze over. Then ore went by rail across the frontier to the Norwegian port of Narvik. It then went south by ship through Norwegian coastal waters, known as the Norwegian Leads, to Germany and the rest of the world.

The Allies, in the process of considering troops for Finland, centered also on Swedish iron. They were thinking in terms of economic warfare and blockade of Germany. If in transit to Finland they occupied the Gallivare fields, they would shut off a major supply of German ore. The British were also conscious

of the desirability of making their naval blockade as tight as possible and they knew that the Germans had used the officially neutral Norwegian Leads heavily during the last war. The Royal Navy was therefore eager to mine the Leads, or to occupy Narvik, or indeed to do anything, under Churchill's eager prodding, that would make the war a little livelier.

As early as mid-February, the problem of the Norwegian Leads had become front-page news. The German supply ship *Altmark*, which had served as tender to the raider *Graf Spee*, was making her way back home to Germany. She was carrying nearly 300 imprisoned British merchant-navy men hidden below decks and was sailing down through the Leads. A cursory Norwegian search had failed to find the prisoners, so the British, after protestations of good intent, had sent in a destroyer division, violated Norwegian neutrality, boarded the *Altmark*, and rescued the sailors. The Norwegians protested, but were embarrassed by the fact that they had missed the prisoners. The British pointed out that the Germans were the original sinners, and they were just reacting to it. Hitler was furious at what he regarded as violation of his right to violate other peoples' rights. By mid-February, then, the Germans as well as the Allies were thinking of occupying Scandinavian territory, and everyone's plans matured soon after.

In March, the British and French had gotten close enough to action to be loading troops in northern Scottish ports, ready to go. They had then had the ground cut from under them by the Finnish collapse. Once the Finns asked for an armistice, there was no more pretense of going to their aid, and no excuse for moving into northern Norway and Sweden. They downgraded their operation to the mining of Narvik harbor and the Norwegian Leads. As they were doing this, the Germans struck.

The German plan and operation were both masterpieces of improvisation. On February 21, Hitler called in a relatively obscure general, Nikolaus von Falkenhorst, and told him he was to command the operation; von Falkenhorst spent the afternoon with a travel-guide book and came back with the nucleus of a plan and a list of his operational requirements. The navy, the key element in the affair, was called in only later, but the German machine slipped readily into high gear. Within a week, Hitler decided to occupy Denmark on the way by, as an afterthought.

The German flotilla put to sea late on April 7. By coincidence, that day the British were starting out on their mining of the Leads.

The Norwegians fought but they were caught by surprise, and their response was more a spastic reaction than a calculated campaign. In every case, the Germans were soon in possession of the ports and airfields, and the Norwegians were falling back in disorder into the countryside. The Germans rapidly brought in follow-up waves of reinforcements and heavy weapons and began in their turn fanning out to break up the Norwegians before they could fully organize.

There were chaotic and inconclusive naval clashes. Ships stumbled on each other through the fog and mists of the Norwegian Sea. The British destroyer *Glowworm* emerged from a squall to find herself facing four German destroyers and the pocket battleship *Hipper*, on their way to the landing at Trondheim. She responded to these daunting odds by ramming the *Hipper*, being sunk herself in the process. The Royal Navy might have been caught on the hop, but were still prepared to assert it was their ocean. The same day, a British submarine sank a German light cruiser in the strait between Denmark and Sweden, and the next day, dive-bombers of the Fleet Air Arm sank another one in Bergen Harbor.

Farther north, five British destroyers dashed up Narvik fiord and surprised the ten Germans who had landed troops there. They sank two and damaged three, for two losses of their own. On the way back out they ran into the supply ship carrying all the German ammunition for the landing force, and sank it too. Three days later, the British came back and finished the job, this time with the battleship *Warspite*, and the German Army units in Narvik found themselves all alone.

In the south the campaign hung in the balance. Within forty-eight hours of the landings the scattered Norwegians were trying to pull themselves together and hoping for help from the Allies. Air power decided the matter. German air control of southern Norway prevented the Royal Navy's operating in adjacent water, so the Germans were quickly able to consolidate there. In central and northern Norway, however, the British could work. Within a week they had put forces ashore at Andalsnes and Namsos, either side of Trondheim, about 30,000 all told. They also landed another 15,000 at Narvik and began pushing the Germans back toward the Swedish frontier.

The Andalsnes force advanced south and linked up with the Norwegians in the valleys leading to Oslo. German air superiority told, however, and they found themselves flanked, strafed, and

Churchill, moving more and more to the front as the pusher on the war in the British cabinet, had wanted to act earlier, but had been delayed by consultation with the French. The German forces were spotted by British reconnaissance planes, but the information was misinterpreted. The Admiralty knew something was going on in the north German ports, but it was preoccupied with the idea that the German fleet was preparing a breakout into the Atlantic. This preconception was reinforced by the fact that the sightings were of fleet units rather than transport vessels, as most of the German invasion troops were carried aboard warships. As the British Home Fleet sailed, therefore, it headed for an interception point that would block the breakout which never came, while the unmolested Germans followed the Norwegian coast north.

The Norwegian government was warned of what was afoot, but the army was capable only of local defense at best. It consisted of about 15,000 men, plus small reserve forces. The government hoped to the end that Norwegian neutrality could be preserved, and it was also to a certain extent victim of divided counsels. There were substantial numbers of German sympathizers in Norway, though the extent to which they sabotaged Norway's defenses has probably been overstated; in reality, there were few defenses anyway.

The Germans struck simultaneously in several places. Early on the morning of the 9th, heavy naval forces entered Oslo fiord, the long reach approaching the capital. They hoped that by speed and bluff they might even get ashore unopposed, but the coastal forts were waiting for them, and in the fiord they took severe losses, including the sinking of the heavy cruiser *Blucher*. The check allowed the Norwegian royal family to escape northward, but von Falkenhorst responded swiftly. He had originally intended to bring in troops by air as reinforcements for the seaborne landing; now he reversed that, and even while his ships were being held up, he landed troops at Oslo's airport, Fornebu. This small airborne force, only 3,000 men, managed to secure the city and keep it quiet until the coastal forts were subdued, whereupon the original assault force landed at the docks.

The Germans poured ashore right up the coast. They landed at Kristiansand, 2,500 men came in by aircraft at Stavanger, 2,000 by ship at Bergen, nearly the same number at Trondheim. Up in the north, ten destroyers supported by battlecruisers landed 2,000 men at Narvik. While all this went on, the Germans also moved into and occupied Denmark, against only sporadic resistance.

slowly forced back to the north. Eventually, they were back at Andalsnes, and evacuated on the 1st and 2nd of May. The Namsos unit had little-better luck; the Germans leapfrogged their air units northward, the Trondheim forces turned the Allies back, and they were back on ship on the 2nd and 3rd of May. The British tried to supply air cover from carrier-based planes, but the planes were inferior to land-based types, and the carriers themselves were put under attack. The aerial units that operated from shore, usually from frozen lakes, were soon overwhelmed by the Luftwaffe.

Only in the north was some kind of equilibrium established. The Narvik area was out of range of German air cover, and the British and French forces landed here were numerically superior to the Germans left stranded by their naval defeat. The Allies handily held the town, but did not quite get up enough momentum to drive the Germans over the border into Sweden and internment. Before the issue was decided, however, the campaign of France had opened, and the Allied forces, by then built up to 24,000, were pulled out in early June as the magnitude of the French disaster overwhelmed all other considerations. By then, the last Norwegian units were breaking up, King Haakon VII and his ministers had escaped to Britain and set up a government in exile, and Norway, like Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Denmark, was gone.

The results of all this were problematic but significant, both in the long and the short term. The Norwegian campaign made the Allies look pretty inept. Britain had been confident that the Royal Navy ruled wherever the water would float a keel; no one up to that point had any real experience of the relative value of air power versus sea power, or the ways in which they might have to be combined. It was therefore an inordinate shock to the British view of themselves and of the way the war ought to be fought, that German air power might reach across the open sea and snatch a country practically from under their noses. Again, since it was difficult to judge the effect of air superiority on land fighting also, their military response had looked as ill-handled as their naval one. Probably the most important side effect of all this was the fall of the Chamberlain government. In early April, he had announced complacently in the House of Commons that Hitler "had missed the bus." Then came Norway. Ironically, it was partly through Churchill's riding off in all directions at once that the campaign went quite as badly as it did, yet popular fury hit

on Chamberlain the appeaser, rather than Churchill the fighter. Chamberlain resigned on the 10th and Churchill came to power as a result of a disaster that he himself had done as much as any one man to engineer.

On the other side of the fence, Norway made the Germans look as good as it did the Allies look bad. There had been close cooperation between land, sea, and air units, and the machine had functioned smoothly; setbacks and shortcomings were promptly rectified, and the Germans showed themselves to be expert opportunists. They derived very real benefits; the Swedish iron ore supply was now secured for the rest of the war. They also had a safe funnel to get raiders out into the Atlantic, and later on they would have both air and naval bases from which to attack Allied convoys to north Russia. The British blockade was further loosened, and the problems of controlling the sea magnified for them.

But there were drawbacks to this as well. For practical purposes the German Navy had been crippled, and its efficiency and its numbers were diminished for months to come. Later in the year, one of the items that would militate against the invasion of Britain would be the weakness of the navy, stemming in good part from its wounds in Norway. There was also the fact that the more territory Hitler conquered, the more he would have to garrison. He was always tied up in fantasies about Nordic Scandinavia and its military significance, and eventually he would put more than a quarter of a million men in Norway and Denmark, and keep them there for the rest of the war. The effort might have been better placed elsewhere—but that can be said of everything in war, and indeed of war itself.

The Norwegian Army command finally surrendered on June 9. By then the unhappy story of the campaign was back-page news.