

Also by Henri Michel

THE SHADOW WAR

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THE SECOND
WORLD WAR

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CHAPTER I

The Obliteration of Poland from the Map of Europe

I HITLER'S 'TOTAL WAR'

THE Polish campaign allowed the Nazi Reich to show, at its very first attempt, its mastery of methods of warfare; the surprise and ruthlessness of the onslaught shattered the enemy's armed forces; terror paralysed the civil population; the 'Fifth Column' caused its opponent to disintegrate from within. These methods were to change but little in future operations.

The architect of victory on the ground was the armoured corps; the German Army had succeeded in solving the most awkward problems involved in its use: the difficulty of having thousands of motorised vehicles strung out over many miles; overall control combined with the independence of the constituent elements; direct communication with units which become dispersed in the course of the fighting. The Panzer division had already become a small army in its own right, combining speed and strength. Its reconnaissance groups, with their machine-gun carriers, anti-tank gun and pontoon sections, were sufficiently powerful in themselves to overcome any minor enemy obstacles placed in their path. The main body consisted of two brigades, one of tanks – between 250 and 320 per division – the other of motorised light infantry. The heavy tanks had the task of demolishing the enemy force as soon as it had been detected, assessed and located; their job was to break through the front. The medium tanks were to open up the breach, both to some extent on each flank to protect the advancing army, and above all in depth, to enlarge the breach in the enemy lines. 'They tear into the flesh of the defending force,' wrote Bauer, 'like the fingers of a steel gauntlet.' The rifle brigade with its artillery, its AA and anti-tank weapons, its guns, howitzers and trench-mortars, would mop up the isolated centres of resistance by-passed by the tanks. The rear sections, also completely motorised, could provide petrol supplies and repairs with minimum delay.

The Panzer division moved forward under the protection of the Air Force, which preceded it, bombing the opponent's positions as required. It would drop paratroops behind the enemy lines to capture and hold any



important point; during the attack itself, the aircraft would attack the enemy tanks, force any reinforcements coming to their aid to disperse and pound the defender's strong points with bombs. With his mobile command post, the Panzer division commander, equipped with two-way radio link could, in the thick of the fighting, give orders instantaneously according to the course of the operation.

This combination of tank and aircraft ensured the success of the German armies. But the Air Force had other roles. At the outbreak of hostilities, it could achieve command of the air by surprise attacks on enemy airfields, thus destroying its aircraft on the ground. It could paralyse any communication centres that might have enabled the enemy to regroup its forces. It could cause havoc and spread panic in defenceless towns: although Warsaw had been declared an open town, bombs were dropped on it as early as September 1, and it was bombed thirty-seven times within the week.

The Nazis' third weapon of the war was the 'Fifth Column'. As early as May 1939, thousands of young Poles of German extraction from the district of Poznan and Upper Silesia had gone to Germany to receive special training; hundreds of others, when called up for military service in Poland, deserted *en masse*. At the same time, German propaganda was loudly denouncing the 'persecutions' being inflicted on the German minority in Poland. The decisive phase was begun even before the end of August by German activities, described as 'Polish provocation': ss disguised as Polish soldiers set fire to buildings housing German organisations; after September 1, commandos of Polish 'German patriots' attacked radio stations, industrial establishments and even single Polish units.

On September 2 in Bydgoszcz (Bromberg) the Poles reacted by shooting 150 Germans in order to put down an actual uprising. As soon as the town was taken by the Wehrmacht, the ss retaliated by the mass execution of thousands of Polish civilians. The result of this initial subversive activity and subsequent terror was not only to increase the alarm and despondency of the civilian population, already sorely tried by the extent and suddenness of the tribulations that had overtaken it; it also heralded the important part that the ss was going to play in the territories conquered by the Wehrmacht, by working apparently independently of this but in agreement with it and, when necessary, with its help.

II THE DEPLOYMENT OF THE GERMAN AND POLISH FORCES

Hitler had always thought — as he wrote in *Mein Kampf* — that a Polish state which had the impudence to cut into German territory and had an-

nexed German territory offered unforgivable affront to the German nation. As early as April 1939, he had decided to smash Poland. At that time, it is true, he was convinced that the western democracies would show the same lack of response in Poland's case as they had for Bohemia and later on for Czechoslovakia.

When France and England had then pledged themselves to come to Poland's aid, Hitler had hesitated momentarily as to which course to take: should he attack first in the east or in the west? In any case, as he had specifically stated at a high-level conference of generals in May 1939, his war aims in Poland went far beyond the obliteration of the last clauses of the Versailles Treaty: 'Danzig,' he had emphasised, 'is not the real issue; the real point is for us to open up our *Lebensraum* to the east and ensure our supplies of foodstuffs.' Poland was condemned with no possible reprieve: 'she would not resist Soviet proposals'; she was 'a doubtful obstacle to Russia'.

In the end, it was Hitler himself who had failed to resist discreet approaches by Stalin. Ribbentrop's talks in Moscow had decided on 'concrete action' by the USSR in Poland. The German-Soviet pact signed Poland's death-warrant. It also finally decided in which direction Hitler would strike: Poland would be the Wehrmacht's first victim. Of course, should the western democracies come to her aid, the ultimate decision would have to be reached in the west and Hitler had not disguised from those close to him that it would be 'a fight to the death' and that a 'swift victory in the west was a matter for conjecture'.

This was not the case in the east. Leaving just sufficient forces in the west to man the Siegfried line, Hitler, gambling successfully on the hope that the Anglo-French forces would take up their positions ponderously and slowly, launched the main weight of his attack against Poland: sixty-three divisions, including five mobile army corps – with six armoured divisions, supported by 2,000 aircraft.

The German plan was to launch converging attacks from Prussia and Silesia, from each side of the Polish Poznan salient; General von Rundstedt's troops were to join up with those of General von Bock roughly on the Vistula-Nareth line, after disrupting the Polish forces.

The latter should, in theory, have amounted to some forty divisions; but at the request of the French and British ambassadors the Polish government delayed their mobilisation for twenty-four hours. Léon Noël has written that his British colleague and himself had suggested a delay of a few hours and that it was the Polish general staff which had decided on a whole day's postponement. General Anders is no doubt exaggerating the importance of this action when he says that it hastened the Polish defeat by a fortnight. In fact, it was the swiftness of the German advance, facilitated by the confusion created by this delay, that reduced the avail-

able divisions to twenty. The Polish Army had twelve cavalry brigades but only one of them was mechanised; out of 600 aircraft only 300 were modern; 500 AA guns, mainly old ones, were in service whereas the plans for the modernisation of the Army, which were not yet complete, provided for 2,000. The concentration of armaments factories in Warsaw made them particularly vulnerable. A few extra tens of thousands of badly armed conscripts would hardly have remedied such an inherent weakness.

The Polish defence also suffered from the country's geography: the immense plain did not lend itself to fortification but did offer great possibilities for the movement of motorised units: the tributaries of the Vistula opened up the road to Warsaw for any invader. Above all, the occupation by the Germans of Slovakia meant that Poland had to defend a frontier some 1,000 miles long.

Marshal Smigly-Rydz, the Polish Supreme Commander, had refused to shorten his lines of defence by withdrawing them towards the centre of the country; apart from the unfortunate psychological effect of a deliberate withdrawal of this sort at the very beginning of the campaign, it would have meant abandoning to the enemy the most fertile parts of Poland and the industrial area of Silesia. He decided, therefore, to make a stand on his own frontiers and even in the 'Polish corridor', which involved a dangerous dispersal of the meagre forces under his command.

III BLITZKRIEG IN POLAND

The ruthlessness and suddenness of the German attack made any concentration of Polish troops impossible; apart from a few squadrons camouflaged on secret airfields, most of the Polish aircraft were destroyed on the ground. Very soon the channels of communication were put out of action as well. As the Polish Army had no intermediate link between the Supreme Commander and his subordinate generals, from the start the fighting could not be controlled from above. Although the Polish troops were cut to pieces in every sector, there was no panic retreat. The Tenth German Army in the south, which advanced most rapidly, reached the outskirts of Warsaw on September 8 and was momentarily repulsed. No order for a general withdrawal of the Polish troops had been given until the 6th; but it was too late. Better news was a Polish counter-attack on September 9 in the central sector, towards Lodz, on the Bzura; but despite initial success and dreadful slaughter – Polish lancers were seen charging tanks – this attack was smashed.

The struggle continued in great confusion: large pockets of encircled Polish troops at Kutno and Radom resisted for some days before sur-

rendering. In the battle area, the Polish state completely disintegrated - officials abandoned their posts and the civilian population fled in disorder. On September 3, the government itself decided to leave Warsaw. The capital was invested by the armies in the central sector and outflanked to the east by two pincer movements from north and south of the city; by September 14 it was completely cut off from the rest of the country.

On September 17, Soviet troops invaded Poland in their turn, meeting no resistance. The Russians seem not to have had time to prepare their intervention. They announced their intention to the Germans on September 9 but stated that they still needed two or three weeks to organise the invasion. They feared that the Wehrmacht might encroach on the zone allotted to them by the German-Soviet pact and Ribbentrop had to give full reassurance on this point. They were anxious to make the exact pretext for their intervention very plain and they disagreed with the Germans as to the wording. Now that Poland had collapsed, in order not to appear as aggressors, the Russians wished to base their case on 'the need to come to the help of the Ukrainians and White Russians threatened by Germany'. Ribbentrop objected that the two partners would then run the risk of appearing to be opponents. The Russians dug in their heels; they asked the Germans to make allowance for their embarrassment; 'up till now, they had shown little concern for their minorities in Poland'. At the end of the day, the Russian communiqué was a joint production; the Germans pledged themselves not to grant the Poles an armistice which would have the effect of making the Russian intervention seem pointless; they were eager for it to take place since it would obviate their having to pursue the remnants of the Polish army too far or too long. Every precaution was taken to avoid accidents or incidents.

Minister Potemkin, either through embarrassment or cynicism, justified the invasion by the Red Army to the Polish ambassador in these terms: 'The Polish state and its government has ceased to exist. Such a situation constitutes a threat to the USSR and makes it impossible to remain neutral any longer.' According to General Anders, the first result of the Russian intervention - which the Polish government seems not to have anticipated - was to prevent large numbers of Polish officers and men from escaping into Hungary and Rumania.

From now on, the struggle was confined to a few isolated points, and the main thing now at stake, if not indeed the only one, was Warsaw. The city had been fortified in great haste, thanks to the short respite afforded by the Polish counter-attack on the Bzura. Any attempt to defend the suburbs was abandoned for lack of resources; in the city's historic centre barricades were put up, anti-tank ditches were dug and barrels of turpentine were set on fire when the German army approached. Hitler hoped to capture the town before September 21, on which date the American

Congress was due to meet; he was very disappointed. So that troop movements should not be impeded, he ordered that none of the civil population should be allowed to leave. From September 24 onwards, Warsaw was without gas, light or water; it was becoming impossible to fight the fires caused by air raids; the food supply would hardly last a week, the ammunition two days. On September 26 German tanks and infantry launched their attack. That afternoon, the Poles asked for an armistice which was not granted until the following day; but during that time the Germans made little progress. The Polish general Rommel was captured with all his troops and granted military honours. On October 1, the German 10th Division entered Warsaw. A few days later, Hitler went there to review the victory parade.

Gdynia, the last Polish town to offer any resistance, capitulated on October 2. The Poles had lost 450,000 prisoners to the Germans and 200,000 to the Russians. On March 8, 1940, Hitler put the German losses at 8,400 killed, 28,000 wounded or taken prisoner and 3,000 missing. The German victory was complete.

IV FRENCH INACTION. THE SAAR OFFENSIVE

While this victory was being achieved the French remained almost completely inert, although the Germans had left no more than forty-three divisions in the west, only eleven of which were regular divisions, concentrated mainly on the French frontier. And yet France was solemnly pledged to help her Polish ally, as was Britain, though in September there were as yet no British troops on the Continent.

The protocol drawn up in May 1939 between the Polish Minister of War, Krasprzynski, and General Gamelin, provided for immediate action by the French Air Force, followed without delay by a limited attack by the first available forces as soon as Poland found herself too hard pressed by the German offensive; in any case, not later than the sixteenth day of the war. In fact, on July 24, the instructions of General Georges, the commander of the French North-East Army Group, had stated that progressive action should be taken against the German system of fortifications between Hardt and Mosel.

As a result, on September 8, the Fourth French Army made a small advance from Sarreguemines; on the 9th it made contact with the forward approaches of the Siegfried line. This line was several kilometres deep in parts; more important, it was studded with small concrete defence-works and the French troops did not attack it. Instead, they confined

themselves to methodically clearing the Warndt forest. On September 22, the attack planned by the Third Army towards Sarrelouis was called off because of the bad news from Poland. On October 1, when the Germans had started to bring back reinforcements from the east, the French advance came to a halt. On October 16, at the first German attack, the French troops withdrew to beyond their initial starting point and gave up Forbach.

Why did the French troops confine their activity to this futile demonstration against the enemy, in flagrant violation of solemn pledges? Liddell Hart put the blame on the slowness of the methods of French mobilisation, which he called 'obsolete'. But the French military leaders knew very well how long it would take when they pledged themselves to help the Poles in the formal military convention. Perhaps they had hoped for longer resistance on the part of the Poles. If such a calculation had been made, it would prove how greatly the French general staff were mistaken as to the Wehrmacht's fighting capacity and methods. If not, why was the date of the French intervention fixed for the sixteenth day following mobilisation when it was obvious that this was a promise that could not be kept? We are thus justified in wondering whether the French general staff had pledged itself to help the Polish army for psychological rather than military reasons – scared, in fact, that, if they did not know that their allies were supporting them, the Poles would give in to the German demands without a fight?¹

Whatever may be the reasons for all this, the consequences of Hitler's decisive victory were plain to see on the map. As long as the German-Soviet pact lasted, Hitler was relieved of any concern in the east and of a war on two fronts. After having allowed Austria to be annexed and Czechoslovakia dismembered, France had proved incapable of preventing her brave Polish ally from being crushed or even delaying it; worse still, she had failed to keep her word. What a confession of weakness or pusillanimity! In the eyes of the world, Hitler's victory greatly increased his prestige; it placed central and eastern Europe at his mercy. The initiative was now his – whether he wished to proclaim his desire for peace or to launch his full strength against his western opponents. At the first crisis, cruel proof had been given that France's army was inadequate to meet her political obligations. Would it have improved sufficiently by the time the enemy turned its attention to her? And should some breathing space still be given, would she be able to take advantage of it?

1. After the war an argument arose on this point between General Gamelin and the Sikorski Institute in London. General Gamelin declared that in the absence of a political agreement binding France and Poland, France could have refused to carry out the military protocol. In that case, why sign it? It is true that the political agreement had *followed* and not preceded the military agreement. M. G. Bonnet, in his memoirs, acknowledges that he completed the political agreement *after* the declaration of war! Why not before?

V THE PARTITION OF POLAND

What would become of Poland now that she had been conquered and completely occupied by her two large neighbours? The first problem for these to settle was the careful marking out of the limits of their respective portions, a difficult task since their troops had overlapped in the course of the fighting; it was made even more laborious by Stalin's pettifogging and suspicious attitude during the preliminary talks. Once again, Ribbentrop had to go off to Moscow.

The difference of opinion concerned the extent of the territories due for partition. The Germans were inclined to the view that after each had taken his cut, there should remain a residual Polish state with 12 to 15 million inhabitants, all Polish – a sort of Grand Duchy of Warsaw. Such a state, the German ambassador Moltke considered, might provide the basis for discussions with France and England and facilitate a return to peace. Could such a Poland reasonably do anything but put itself under German protection, if only in order to obtain German help in recovering one day the territories the Russians had annexed? Moltke was already suggesting as the head of this rump state the name of General Sonskowski, who was known to be cool towards the USSR.

It seems that, though Hitler had quite firm ideas as to his aims in Poland, he was much less clear in his mind how to put them into effect now that victory had made their realisation possible. Had he not told von Brauchitsch on September 7, after the first brilliant successes, that he was ready to conclude peace with the Poles, thus assuming the survival of Poland?

But Stalin, at first agreeable, quickly detected the hint of anti-sovietism concealed by the plan for the creation of a Polish rump state. He was at pains to emphasise how important it was 'to avoid anything liable to create friction between Germany and the USSR'. During the discussion over the exact line of demarcation, he invoked the will of the Ukrainian people – who had never been consulted – and vehemently opposed the idea that the Germans should keep a small area of territory allegedly inhabited by Ukrainians. Stalin's major argument was that it would be unreasonable to partition the Poles between the two states. He suggested an exchange: Lithuania would be joined to the Russian zone whilst the province of Lublin and part of the province of Warsaw would be included in the German zone. If agreement were reached, he did not disguise the fact that 'the USSR would tackle the problem of the Baltic states without delay'.

It is probable that Hitler was most anxious at this time for a good understanding with Stalin. In the short term, he saw it as offering the immediate possibility of exerting strong pressure on France and England

to induce them to make peace. Should they refuse and the war continue, the economic co-operation of the USSR would be indispensable. But by September 17, no start had yet been made in implementing the economic clauses of the pact and the German experts noted little eagerness on the part of the Russians to honour their contract. It was better not to irritate Stalin.

That was why in Moscow Ribbentrop in the end accepted all the Soviet's conditions. The German-Soviet treaty of 'delimitation and friendship' of September 28 partitioned Poland definitively in accordance with Stalin's proposals. It provided that Germans living in the zone of Russian influence¹ as well as the Ukrainians and White Russians living in the German zone would be free to emigrate from one zone to the other. Anxious to establish 'a solid basis of friendly relations' between themselves, the two parties pledged themselves 'not to tolerate any Polish agitation in their territories that might be liable to affect the maintenance of law and order in the other's territories' – a euphemism which condemned the Polish Communists who had taken refuge in the Russian zone to remain silent, if not to be interned. A programme of exchange of trade satisfactory to the Germans was drawn up. Ribbentrop achieved a small personal triumph: an area specially reserved for his hunting activities was left in Reich territory! On October 4, an additional agreement approved the line of demarcation drawn with the greatest accuracy by a mixed German-Russian commission.

VI POLAND'S MARTYRDOM BEGINS

Hitler despised the Poles. He used one word to define the reasons for their defeat: it was because their organisation for war had been *Polish*. He explained the 'dreadful opinion' that he had of Poland and of the 'wretched lot of the Poles' by quoting the silting-up of the Vistula as an example of Polish incompetence! However, even after the agreement with Stalin, he persisted for some time in his intention of allowing a residual Polish state to continue in existence and he explained to Count Ciano on October 2 'that the form [of that state] would depend on the way pacification would be achieved politically'. He could not yet say if Poland would be an independent state or a protectorate.

But when France and England refused to rise to the bait, Poland's fate was settled in accordance with the Führer's real feelings on the subject. By an order dated October 8, Hitler decided on the straightforward annexation by the Reich of the Polish territories that had formerly been German before 1918, i.e. east Prussia and the province of Poznan and Silesia,

1. That is, those living in the Baltic states.

which now became 'the incorporated Eastern Territories'. Four days later he made the rest of the German-occupied zone into the 'General Government' of the occupied Polish territories, under the rule of the Third Reich's legal expert, Dr Frank – a bargaining counter for later developments, perhaps, but meanwhile an amorphous state in which the victorious Germans could exercise completely arbitrary power. In a letter to Mussolini dated March 8, 1940, contradicting what he had said to Ciano five months earlier, Hitler explained to the Duce that, had he not assumed control of the 'General Government', Poland would have fallen into 'appalling chaos'. The country would have starved; 'the priests would have had their heads chopped off' – by the basically Catholic Poles presumably? 'The Poles could consider themselves lucky to have had to deal with the good-natured Germans!'

And here are the blunt terms in which this 'good nature' was expressed at a conference held on October 2, when Hitler met Bormann, Frank and a few minor aides. Hitler uttered one or two peremptory judgments on the Poles: the Pole was really made for dirty work. . . . You could not turn a Slav into anything but what nature had intended him to be. And the Pole was lazy by nature and had to be forced to work. As a result, there must be no question of mingling German and Polish blood; and the Poles should be given inferior status: 'Every chance of promotion should be given to the German worker but the Poles should be given no chance of this; it was, indeed, necessary for their standard of living to be low or kept down.'

Thus the 'General Government' would become a reserve of manpower for the Reich. It would be entirely under the control of 'a strict German administration'; it would not form a 'tight homogeneous' economic region, equipped with industrial plant. It would provide the Reich with 'cheap labour', which would be summoned to Germany for seasonal requirements and then sent back to live in Poland once the work had been completed. The 'General Government' would, in short, be 'one vast labour-camp'. The Poles would benefit 'since the Germans would look after their health and see to it that they did not go hungry'; but 'they must not move up in the world' and the Roman Catholic priests' task was to 'keep them in a state of ignorance and stupidity', in the interests of the Germans.

It is unlikely that the exploitation of slave-labour had ever been so systematically planned and cynically expounded. But beyond this exploitation there loomed an even more atrocious plan. It followed from the assumption of the inferiority of the Poles that they could have only Germans in control of them. As a result, Hitler said 'it was absolutely essential to ensure that no Poles remained in positions of responsibility; wherever this was the case, they would have to be executed, however brutal this

might seem.' A little later on, Hitler stated that 'all the Polish intelligentsia must be executed'.

Experts in this field were already on the spot, following in the wake of the Wehrmacht and with its agreement, *Einsatzgruppen* – special action groups – of the Reich security police had moved into Poland. Their role was to 'counter any elements in the occupied territories that were hostile to the Reich'. They began by 'taking care of' the Jews. The latter were expelled from the territories annexed by Germany and forced to go back into the 'General Government' where, by the beginning of October, they were already being gathered into ghettos. The same meeting on October 2 arranged that Viennese Jews should be transferred to the 'General Government', which was thus fated to become the 'Jewish reservation' of Europe.

Poland's martyrdom was beginning and the calvary of the Jews was already plain to see. Racialism was being confirmed as the most powerful motive force behind Hitler's policy.

CHAPTER 2

The Phoney War

(October 1939–May 10, 1940)

I HITLER AND PEACE

THROUGHOUT the Polish campaign, Hitler had instructed the Wehrmacht to exercise the greatest caution in the west, to remain indeed completely on the defensive. In his directive of August 31, 1939, he ordered that 'any hostile initiative should come from England and France'; in a further instruction, issued after some days of success in Poland, he allowed the Navy and Air Force to engage the enemy if necessary, but reiterated the injunction that 'any opening of hostilities must be made by the enemy'. The Führer was endeavouring to reduce to a minimum the disadvantages of a war waged on two fronts: his first and most urgent objective was rapid victory over Poland.

The manner in which this was achieved filled Hitler with optimism; by September 12 he was confiding to his aide, Colonel Schmundt, that he felt certain that France could be quickly conquered and England then persuaded to come to terms. On September 27, he made known his plans to the commanders-in-chief of the three services at a meeting in Berlin. Pointing out that time was working against Germany, he announced his intention of attacking in the west very shortly. Otherwise, the favourable impression created on the neutral countries by the triumphal success of the Wehrmacht in Poland would quickly fade; in addition, the industrial regions of west Germany which were particularly vulnerable had to be protected – according to Halder, Hitler was afraid that Belgium would enter the war. In addition, Italy could be brought into the war. Von Brauchitsch ventured a few timid comments which the Führer brushed on one side.

However, it was always possible that the democracies might climb down; anyway, it was worth trying. By occupying, under the terms of the agreement with the USSR, the whole area of Poland inhabited by Poles, Hitler had a trump card which he could play against the democracies, independently of Russia. So, on September 30, he made it clear to the

CHAPTER 3

The War in Norway

THE Allies could not hope for very much from a blockade riddled with gaps; so, if it could hardly be expected to shut off the flow of Caucasian oil, might it not at least be possible to cut the supply route of Swedish iron? As for Hitler, the Finnish war had revealed to him the strategic importance of Scandinavia. The stage was set for a race between the opposing sides: the goal was Narvik.

I THE OPPONENTS' PLANS

On the military level, there is a striking parallel between the German and Allied preparations for a Norwegian operation: each wanted to forestall the other.

On March 28, the Allied Supreme Interallied Council decided to demand that Sweden stop exporting iron ore to Germany, to lay mines in Norwegian territorial waters and to send an expeditionary force to Norway which it was hoped to land without difficulty with the tacit agreement of the Norwegians. Churchill and Reynaud had engineered this decision and even carried Chamberlain with them since, according to Churchill, the latter suddenly became an enthusiastic supporter of the offensive.

All the same, the French and British did not quite see eye to eye. The French primarily emphasised the importance of the iron traffic via Narvik, the British were more interested in the Baltic theatre of operations. Now that the Baltic was about to thaw out, the British would have liked to bomb the shipping concentrated in the German Baltic ports; but the French were afraid of bombing reprisals which would hinder their re-armament effort.

On April 5, similar notes were delivered by the two Allies in Oslo and Stockholm; they showed obvious embarrassment because they had to justify the violation of a neutral state; this is why the arguments put forward may seem surprising. Attention was drawn to the possibility of a further attack by the Soviet Union on Finland, in order to obtain bases in Norway - no doubt the Allies wanted to exploit the feelings aroused in Scandinavia by the Finnish-Soviet war but for the Scandinavians their

enemy seemed the Soviet Union, not Germany. On April 8, another note informed Norway of the mine-laying in her territorial waters, an operation that had started three days earlier.

In theory, the Allied Expeditionary Force was ready: it was the one that had been intended to go to the help of the Finns. There should have been no problem about shipping it since the Allies had command of the seas. In fact, there was a shortage of specially equipped units and the British had to call on one of their BEF divisions in France. According to the French commander, the whole thing was a makeshift operation; there was poor co-ordination between the Allies.

As a result, there were delays which the Germans were able to turn to advantage. In concentrating on his scheme for a decisive offensive against the west, Hitler had over a long period been determined to respect the neutrality of Scandinavia. The Kriegsmarine, the service most closely involved, were divided on the subject. Admiral Raeder was convinced that a British action was imminent and must be forestalled but the 'Operations Division' feared that unilateral action on the part of Germany, which would make Norwegian territorial waters an operational area, might result in greater difficulties for German shipping in using them as extensively as it was now doing under cover of their neutrality - a practice which had become universally known when the British Navy challenged the tanker *Altmark* which was carrying British prisoners of war. According to the German admirals, it was this incident that convinced Hitler of Anglo-Norwegian connivance and made him decide to act.

But he had taken his decision for three reasons which he confided to Mussolini on April 18. Militarily it was necessary to prevent Britain from spreading the war into the Baltic; should she succeed in doing this, it would be impossible for Germany to continue her counter-blockade of the British Isles in the North Sea and the Atlantic. On the other hand, large bases could be set up in Norway which would enable the Luftwaffe practically to exclude the Royal Navy from using the North Sea.

Economically, it was impossible for Germany to manage without a regular supply of Swedish iron ore; and if British power were established in Norway, how long would Sweden be able to withstand her pressure? Moreover, depriving Britain of Danish foodstuffs and Scandinavian raw materials was a counter-blow of some importance.

Finally, there were ideological considerations. Rosenberg, the upholder of Nazi philosophy, was the 'patron' of a 'Nordic Association' intended to bring together all pure Aryans. He had under his wing a Norwegian by the name of Quisling, leader of the *Nasjonal Samling*, a tiny Norwegian Fascist party which wanted to link Norway and Germany in a large 'German-Scandinavian community'. Quisling had received funds from Rosenberg, large enough to publish 25,000 free copies of each

number of his paper; his party had sympathisers in the Norwegian Army and administration; he had set up an intelligence organisation which was working for the Reich, and the Germans had thereby discovered how useful it was, as the ambassador Brauer emphasised, 'to be collaborating with a political movement whose members are acting for reasons of conviction rather than with paid agents who are more easily detected'; and who cost more, anyway. Hitler had thought Quisling interesting enough to be worth meeting in the autumn of 1939, although he had made no promises nor disclosed any secrets. But on December 15, 1939, Hitler, backing up Rosenberg, dictated a minute emphasising the need to create 'a Greater German Federation of States'.

However, Hitler's conceited statement to Mussolini that 'he had left the Allies at the post' because he had learnt of their intentions through Churchill's and Reynaud's indiscretions and that, thanks to his outstanding qualities of mind 'the outcome of the war had perhaps been settled within the space of ten hours', was merely a boast. In fact, he had ordered the possibilities of operations in Norway to be investigated as early as January 1940. On March 1, he had issued his directives for the 'Weserübung operation', the occupation of Denmark and Norway, and on April 2, he ordered their execution. The Germans were the first to arrive in Norway because they had a start of a few days. But this short start was to upset the Allied plans completely and put them in an unexpectedly awkward situation.

II THE OCCUPATION OF DENMARK

Both for the Wehrmacht and Wilhelmstrasse the occupation of Denmark passed off without a hitch; it took place in the twinkling of an eye. Launched on April 9 before sunrise, four hours later the operation was all over. Whilst one armoured column crossed the Jutland frontier, paratroops were being dropped and ships were landing commandos at various strategic points, even in the very centre of Copenhagen. As he got up that morning, the King was handed the thirteen-point ultimatum from the German minister, von Renthe-Finke. At 6 a.m., after a dramatic session, the Danish Cabinet accepted the ultimatum and the King ordered his guard, which had been resisting the German patrols, to lay down their arms. At 8 o'clock, the bewildered Danes heard a German officer reading out on the radio an appeal from Hitler – written by the officer himself since by some mistake he had been handed the message intended by the Führer for use in Norway.

The Danes had been completely taken by surprise. It would seem that the government, made up of a radical-socialist coalition, although anti-Nazi in its views, had given no heed to the alarming reports emanating

from their naval attaché in Berlin. In any case it could hardly have done anything, except prolong the fighting in order to save face – but at the sacrifice of human lives.

Under protest, the Danish government therefore agreed to 'place its neutrality under the protection of the Germans'. The Germans had thus completely achieved their aim, which was a peaceful occupation. Their troops were ordered not to interfere in the administration of the country, except in case of dire necessity; strict measures had been taken to ensure that there would be no looting or even excessive purchases of commodities on the part of the soldiers. The German government guaranteed the integrity of Danish territory; consequently, the German minority in Schleswig had been strictly advised not to indulge in any action of a provocative nature or in any victory celebrations and to behave with complete propriety towards the Danish authorities – they were not yet 'liberated'.

The Danish economy was to be entirely integrated with that of the Reich, which would supply limited quantities of coal and fuel. It was agreed that Danish industry should work 'indirectly' for the Reich, in 'friendly co-operation'. The maintenance of law and order and stable prices was declared to be 'highly desirable' by the two parties. In Denmark the German authorities seem to have perfected the methods adopted in their occupation of the western European countries which they conquered, with the one exception that on this occasion the occupation costs fell on the Reich, although the Danish National Bank did agree to advance the necessary amount in kronen. But the occupation soon showed its other face – the face of the Nazi Third Reich; as in Poland, from May onwards, ss units started to move into Denmark, following in the footsteps of the Wehrmacht 'in search of volunteers so as to interest them in the idea of a Germanic community'. A 'Danish National Socialist Party' immediately asked for representation in the government. For the moment it was not included in the unified coalition cabinet formed by the King from the four main traditional parties. So Denmark would still be running her own affairs, at least in appearance. Anxious to appear willing, the government even announced its 'full understanding and co-operation'. But Nazi Germany was holding other cards up its sleeve – *Volksdeutsche* in Schleswig, local Nazis – which she would be able to play when the need arose.

III THE OPERATIONS IN NORWAY

Events followed a very different course in Norway because the German troops landed there had to fight a force composed of French and British

and also because the Norwegian authorities preferred fighting and exile to submission.

The speed of the Germans took the Allies by surprise. Whilst the first mines had been laid on April 5 and the British began embarking their troops on the 7th, on that same day the squadron under the command of Admiral Lutjens, whose movements had escaped detection by the RAF, put detachments ashore in the chief Norwegian ports. The German forces were not very considerable: seven cruisers, fourteen destroyers and about 10,000 men; at no point were more than 2,000 men landed initially. A parachute battalion had seized the Oslo and Stavanger aerodromes. But the decisive factor was the German Air Force, which terrified the Norwegians and was to paralyse the Allied counter-attacks.

Although lagging somewhat behind, the Allies had at least partly achieved one of their aims: they were engaging German forces in a remote theatre of operation. Were they going to take advantage of this to seize the initiative in Belgium, the main scene of operation? Admiral Darlan strongly supported this idea and suggested that the Allied troops should cross into Belgium if possible with the agreement of the Belgians but, if necessary, without it. But the government could not agree to violate Belgian neutrality. On April 9 another urgent appeal was thus made to the Belgians emphasising their 'weighty responsibilities'. General Gamelin pointed out that, given time, he could still move the bulk of his forces up to the Albert canal. He emphasised that it was a suitable moment, since the Luftwaffe was tied down in Norway. But once again the Belgians replied in the negative, and the Dutch followed suit. At this point, the French government's short-lived desire for action faded. Gamelin's only decision was to go to the aid of the Dutch, should they be attacked, whether the Belgians agreed or not. For the moment, the only result of the emergency was that, once again, Belgian troops manned the frontier facing France, since it was from that side that danger of invasion threatened!

It seems likely that the Allies had thus relinquished their last chance of taking the initiative and conducting the defensive battle that they desired in the most favourable circumstances: they were now reduced to conducting their first military operations in Norway but not in the circumstances they would have chosen. For one thing, instead of landing unopposed, they were forced to attack an enemy already established; for another, they were obliged to modify their plans; whereas they had intended to operate only in Narvik, they had to come to the help of the Norwegians, now under attack, and had to move the bulk of their landing forces into central Norway.

Nor was Allied co-ordination very good. The coalition lacked a permanent controlling body that could make decisions and ensure that they were carried out. Each government made known its views to the other at

meetings of the Supreme Council, which were inadequately prepared and too infrequent. All that had been arranged was that, since the Norwegian sea area was the preserve of the Royal Navy, the expedition was under British command, overall control would thus be in the hands of a British admiral and, consequently, the expeditionary force would be under an English general.

It would seem that, at the start, the British Admiralty committed the blunder of seeing the whole operation with blinkers. It was obsessed by the idea of destroying the German squadron that had incautiously ventured within its reach. While the main British force was off Bergen, instead of trying to make a landing which at that time might have enabled the town to be recaptured, the Admiralty gave the order to seek out and destroy the enemy cruisers – thus losing the opportunity of intercepting the troop-carrying vessels, which were of minor importance in their eyes. This decision, which involved abandoning a military expedition that had been carefully prepared, was taken, according to Mr Derry, by the British Admiralty alone, which probably means by Churchill.

In fact, the only major naval battle took place in the north, in the Narvik fjord, where on April 13, the battleship *Warspite* pursued and disabled ten German destroyers. It was a good beginning but a short-lived triumph. Later, the English learned by bitter experience one important new lesson of this war, namely that the best armed warship was an easy victim for aircraft and that it was pointless to have mastery of the seas if you did not have mastery of the skies at the same time.

To avoid endangering its ships, the British Admiralty abandoned the idea of a landing at Trondheim and replaced it by landings to the north and south at Namsos and Aandalsnes, points not occupied by the Germans; however, they had to be abandoned a fortnight later as a result of heavy Luftwaffe attacks, against which the troops which had been put ashore had no defence.

The struggle in Norway, wrote Admiral Barjot, became one between 'Britain, a maritime power almost without aircraft and an air power supported by weak naval forces'. The British had too few planes – their heaviest raid comprised a hundred aircraft whereas the Germans had sent a thousand to Norway. Their planes often proved inferior to their opponents', with the exception of the Hurricane fighters. Above all, the conditions were uneven: the German Air Force was home-based on well-equipped Norwegian aerodromes; the British aircraft had to come from at least 300 miles away; providing them with intelligence required many hours of flying time with the result that the intelligence (when it reached them) was often out of date. Moreover, the area covered was immense. It was a task that only naval aircraft could have undertaken successfully but all aircraft-carriers except one were in the Mediterranean.

Until they arrived, it was necessary to make do with makeshift airfields in Norway. But no provision had been made to protect the engines against the cold, the only remedy being to keep them running all the time; the aircraft had to be refuelled with jugs and buckets and as a result, patrols could not always take off when required. When the *Ark Royal* and the *Glorious* arrived from Alexandria on April 24, the Luftwaffe had been established for fourteen days. Thanks to the long period of daylight, aircraft were able to fly almost continuously but the aircraft-carriers proved vulnerable when they kept too close to land. The *Conrageous* was sunk; the Royal Navy had now lost two out of their five aircraft-carriers since the beginning of the war.

To sum up, the RAF destroyed a few ships; it damaged a hundred or so aircraft but it lost many more itself; it failed to interrupt enemy communications; it proved unable to protect the expeditionary force that had been landed at Namsos, whose equipment was partly destroyed by Heinkels while it was still on the quayside. Reluctantly and with great difficulty, the force had to be taken off; it was a pitiful failure.

IV THE STRUGGLE FOR NARVIK

In the extreme north, however, the fight had gone better for the Allies, although not without providing some awkward problems. The first of these, unlikely as this may seem, was the rivalry between the naval and army commands of the Allied Expeditionary Force, despite the fact that both were British. They had received different orders! General Mackesy was instructed not to attempt a landing if the risk was too great; Admiral Cork, on the other hand, had been ordered to seize Narvik quickly, without counting the cost.

The first plan, hastily worked out by the Admiral, was rejected by the General, who pointed out that naval guns, with their flat trajectory, would be unable to reduce the German machine-gun nests and that since there were no proper landing craft, his men would have to be landed in open boats without protection. What is more, the ground was covered in snow and the British soldiers had not been provided with skis or snow-shoes.

French *chasseurs alpins*, better equipped, arrived at the end of April. Their commanding officer, General Béthouart, had the dual advantage over his British colleague of knowing Norway and being familiar with mountain warfare in winter. He suggested landing on the peninsulas to the north and south of Narvik. Two battalions of the Foreign Legion and two Polish battalions having arrived at the beginning of May, it proved possible to launch the attack in the night of May 27-28. At the spot chosen, the German machine guns were not protected from the British

naval guns. The operation was successful; Narvik was captured and its German defenders pushed back eastwards.

But the situation in France had by that time become catastrophic. As a result the victorious troops were taken off from June 2 to 7. The operation went off without hitch, thanks to air cover helped by bad weather. But it was nonetheless a retreat. The expeditionary force had at last succeeded in providing itself with a well-equipped airfield, with wire-mesh landing strips and camouflaged shelters! But these efforts had all been in vain.

V THE NORWEGIAN RESISTANCE

The German victory was, in fact, complete. Contrary to Paul Reynaud's clarion call, the 'iron-supply route' had not been cut. But their military victory had not solved the problems of the occupation and administration of Norway for the Germans.

Although Norway was economically and sentimentally linked to Great Britain – 'public opinion', so ran a telegram from the German ambassador Brauer, 'is entirely on the side of the British' – nevertheless, before the German attack the Norwegian government had decided not to relinquish its attitude of neutrality. According to Brauer, the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Koht, was irritated by Churchill's alleged offensive preparations and he called him bluntly 'an inconsistent demagogue'. All the same, it was probable, in Brauer's estimation, that merely passive resistance would be made to a British landing. But the Germans had arrived first. How were the Norwegians going to react?

It was a hostile response, above all because of Hitler's psychological error in allowing Quisling to come to power, despite the continual warnings of Brauer who had long been emphasising that Quisling's party had no great following and its leader no political influence. On the morning of April 9, Brauer handed the Norwegian Premier an ultimatum; the latter took his time in replying and finally rejected it. In the ensuing confusion in Oslo, Quisling seized power, made a broadcast appeal denouncing all resistance to the aggressor and tried to paralyse the mobilisation of the Norwegian army to the best of his ability. Militarily, he had thus rendered good service to the Germans, even if the German military blamed him for some of his rather muddled measures – he had not been informed of their intentions. But politically he was a failure; he had formed a makeshift and inexperienced government, some of whose members had not even been consulted; most of the civil servants considered him a traitor to his country and refused to recognise his authority. King Haakon, who had left Oslo, also refused to recognise him or have any contact with him.

Realising that the Germans were barking up the wrong tree, Brauer took energetic action; he too withdrew his recognition from the Quisling government; he even had guards posted in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to prevent Quisling from entering. But Hitler himself, not wishing to have anything to do with 'Marxist politicians' – the Norwegian cabinet was socialist – gave instructions from Berlin that Quisling was to remain in power and Brauer was forced to obey. As a result of his actions, he was relieved of his post.

King Haakon was certainly greatly shocked by the 'Quisling manoeuvring'; what is more the Germans had tried to kidnap him and use him as a hostage. From that moment, his decision was irrevocable and unanimously approved by his government: Norway would resist invasion; and Norwegian troops did, in fact, fight side by side with the French and the British, particularly in Narvik. As for the King, when his position in Norway had become untenable, he left with his government for Sweden and then London and a large part of the Norwegian Merchant Navy took refuge in British harbours. Norway was an example both of the legal government of a small country refusing to submit to the right of conquest and of an illegal government of collaborators trying to hold power against the will of the people, with the backing of foreign troops. The name of Quisling became synonymous with this sort of behaviour.

But this did not solve the problem of governing Norway. Seeing Quisling's inability to assert himself with his compatriots, General von Falkenhorst declared himself unable to support him, as did even the special envoy sent by Ribbentrop. As a result of this, Hitler decided to appoint a 'Reichskommissar for occupied Norway', Gauleiter Terboven, a Nazi of long standing. Contrary to what they had done in Denmark, contrary to their intentions and their own interests, the Germans had been forced into the position of governing Norway directly.

A bitter power struggle now ensued between Terboven and Quisling. As his authority was steadily being eroded, Quisling appealed to Berlin. He was ill-advised to do so, for Hitler, although offering him bouquets, turned against him. He decided that Quisling should not take over the government again until his party had become stronger; in a word, the Norwegians were being advised to become collaborators in order to put an end to the direct control of the Reichskommissar. Meanwhile, Quisling was made commissioner for demobilisation – a pure sinecure, since there had been no mobilisation. The Germans then set up a 'Directory' with the 'Norwegian Supreme Court'; but they were forced to admit that, for the Norwegians, their legal government was in London. Their political failure was patent for all to see.

Economically, however, Hitler was pleased at having brought the whole of Scandinavia into his orbit. Sweden had done nothing to help Norway;

her co-operation with the Reich, under cover of neutrality, was more complete than ever. The Reich would not go short either of iron or timber.

VI CONSEQUENCES OF THE GERMAN VICTORY IN NORWAY

Diplomatically, Germany benefited from her military success; the small countries had been shown that it was inadvisable for them to oppose the Führer of the German nation. Romania took the hint and agreed to let the Germans have more and cheaper oil. The Soviet Union was glad to see the disappearance of any Franco-British threat to the northern regions of her immense territories.

Above all, although kept in the dark as to his partner's intentions until the very last moment, Mussolini showed effusive approval. He immediately cast his eyes on Croatia. Ciano refused to accept a 'special French envoy' – Pierre Laval – and on April 27 Mussolini made a very tart rejoinder to a letter from Paul Reynaud. Better still, the Duce wrote to the Führer that 'the Italian fleet had been put on a war-footing'. He called up the 1916 class on May 15; by the summer, he said, Italy would have 'two million men under arms'. In his metaphorical style, in tune with what he considered his mission, Mussolini stated that 'he could not stand by with his arms crossed while others were making history'. The defeat of Norway was the invitation to go into the kill against France.

The fact was that once again Hitler had achieved complete success in a Blitzkrieg. Another area of Europe had come under German control. Their failures had taught the Allies what were the chinks in their armour: their co-ordination was faulty; their plans were makeshift ones; they had been unable to conduct combined operations where success depended on the close co-operation of the three services; above all, their equipment had been shown to be inadequate in quantity and in quality and their air force grievously inferior. This was why the British Admiralty decided not to send naval surface units into the Skagerrak or the Kattegat, although that would have been the only way to halt the flow of German reinforcements into Norway.

The Allies had shown aggression disproportionate to their limited means and a lack of skill in using them to the best advantage: but although their failure left them rather discomforted, the final result was not entirely disastrous. The Norwegian Merchant Navy would enable them to increase both the number and the frequency of their Atlantic convoys; Iceland and Greenland, now separated from Denmark, would provide valuable sites for naval and air force bases. Above all, the German Navy had suffered such losses that it was practically impossible for it to expose its surface ships to further risk. Yet the immediate need was that the now imminent

German offensive in the west should not lead to another complete victory for Germany. The replacement of Chamberlain by Churchill gave British policy a determination which had been lacking but it did not increase the size of the Allied armed forces. How would they stand up to the German onslaught? And how were they deployed to meet it?

PART II

THE DEFEAT OF FRANCE