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THE BATTLE FOR NARVIK

An account by Lt.-Col. Dr. Günther, based on war diaries of XXI Battle Group, Luftflotte 5, X Fliegerkorps and Supreme Command of the German Navy, and on reports by Major Haussels and Lt.-Cdr. Erdmenger

TRANSLATED BY
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The basic operational order of 12 March 1940 for the occupation of Narvik ran as follows:

"Operation Weser North

(1) For locations and disposition of 6th Norwegian Division and military geographical data see special supplement ¹⁾ and in Naval Staff Handbook. For coastal fortifications see also Navy directions for occupying these installations.

(2) The battle group of 3rd Mountain Division will early on "Weser-Day" take Narvik by surprise, the training area at Elvegardsmoen and the fortifications south of the Ramsundet (very narrow channel between the fjords 35 km west of Narvik), so as to secure for Germany the Norwegian part of the ore route (Narvik - Lulea railway) with the port of Narvik as well as the export of ore from the Swedish mines. The commander of the battle group will exercise full military powers in the occupied area. He has no executive powers. He is however authorised to take any steps necessary to the fulfilment of his task. See supplement for details of chain of command.

(3) For the occupation of Narvik the first task of the battle group is to take by surprise also at dawn the fortifications along the fjord, the port of Narvik and the training ground at Elvegardsmoen and to eliminate any possible resistance by Norwegian forces.

(4) The next tasks are:

(a) To make contact with the Staff of 6th Norwegian Division in Harstad. Every effort is to be made by friendly means to control mutual relations and these include:

loyal attitude of all the troops under 6th Norwegian Division. In event of resistance the garrison of Harstad is to be disarmed. The Norwegian forces detailed to guard the frontier with Finland are not to be interfered with in this duty as they confine themselves to it. Norwegian forces which threaten our own area are to be put out of action or destroyed. As far as Tromsø is concerned, nothing is to be undertaken for the time being, XXI Battle Group will give orders later for this area to be occupied.

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In lieu of this supplement -

The 6th Division - Headquarters at Harstad - consisted of:

Sør-Halogaland Infantry Regiment 14	in Mosjoen
Nord-Halogaland Infantry Regiment 15	in Narvik
Troms Infantry Regiment 16	in Tromsø
Finmark Battalion	in Kirkenes
7th Mountain Battery	in Harstad
6th Administration Company	in Harstad
6th Medical Company	in Harstad.

Besides these, other troops were brought in by sea from central Norway after the start of the operations.

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- (b) The occupation of the strongpoints lying north and north-east of Narvik; Training area at Saetermoen near Bardu 60 km north-east of Narvik; Salangen (Army workshops and possibly an airfield) 50 km north of Narvik; Bardufoss airfield near Rusta 80 km north-east of Narvik.

It should be possible to reach all the above places by means of the main road leading northward from Narvik.

The condition of the airfield installations is to be ascertained, and as far as condition and labour forces permit, repairs are to be carried out so that aircraft can land. Flying operations and destruction of any ground installations are to be prevented. Workshops, fuel and communications are to be safeguarded.

- (5) In order to make early contact by air with the south (Trondheim), an airfield is to be made serviceable with the forces available.

(6) Co-operation with the Luftwaffe

For anti-aircraft protection at Narvik the 3rd Mountain Division is dependent on I/Flak Regiment 32, which is under direct command of X Fliegerkorps.

This comprises Staff, Signals Platoons 1, 2 and 4/32.

Of the above the following will arrive in Narvik:

- a) Equipment and ammunition in supply ships,
- b) Advance detachment in warships,
- c) Rest of the personnel later.

The advance detachment on its arrival in Narvik will see to

- a) unloading and guarding Luftwaffe equipment,
- b) reconnoitring sites and installing the guns,
- c) placing and manning each gun for protection against air-raids and landings from the sea.

It is the task of the Flak Battery to protect Narvik and if necessary later an airfield from air-raids and also to cooperate in defence against enemy troop landings. The commander is instructed, so far as the air position allows, to meet the requirements of the commander of 3rd Mountain Division in this respect.

The appearance of our own land and sea-planes on reconnaissance and transport missions must be expected in Narvik within a day or two. (Aircraft types Ju 90, Fw 200, Ju 52, occasional He 111, sea-planes He 59, Do 24, Do 26 He 115.) Care must be exercised when opening fire on aircraft.

- (7) The 15-cm battery is to be used by arrangement with the Port Commandant appointed by the Navy as required either to reinforce the coastal batteries at the southern end of the Ramsundet or for the immediate defence of Narvik.

- (8) Further forces will be moved to Narvik as the situation requires by coastal vessels or air transport, these being:

- a) first of all the elements of the 3rd Mountain Division employed in the Trondheim area after they have been relieved by other troops of the Group;

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- b) the remainder of the Division by sea as far as Oslo and thence by rail to Trondheim (possibly via Sweden).
- (9) For signals communications see special orders. Constant wireless contact and quick reports are important. Everything depends especially on
- a) whether the landing is successful,
 - b) the attitude of the Norwegians,
 - c) what other places are occupied,
 - d) the first appearance of enemy naval and air forces,
 - e) one airfield being serviceable.

The Commander of XXI Battle Group,
signed: von Falkenhorst "

The enemy news sheet "Narvik" says the following about Narvik and the installations of military importance there:

" I. General:

Narvik is the main export port for Swedish iron ore. It is therefore of special importance, because during the winter no export is possible through Sweden owing to the freezing of the Gulf of Bothnia. The town, founded in 1902, is small but flourishing briskly.

II. Armed Forces:

(a) Air

Narvik is not an air base and possesses no aerodrome, but is sometimes approached by seaplanes. It is possible to land on the water at many places. The only airfield of importance is the aerodrome lying 82 km to the north-east at Bardufoss (2.5 km east of Lake Andsvatnet).

The seaplane bases in the neighbourhood are:

Tromsø: 5 km north of the town, on the eastern side of the island. There are sheds and a slipway. A He 115 was in Tromsø during mid-March 1940.

Harstad: possible for seaplanes to alight on the coast in the southern part of the town.

(b) Anti-aircraft artillery

In mid-March 1940, two anti-aircraft sites with 4 guns each were set up on the peninsula stretching south-west from Narvik. Anti-aircraft and machine-gun defence is to be expected. See (c).

(c) Army

The Nord-Halogaland 15th Infantry Regiment is stationed in Narvik.

Neighbouring garrisons are at

Harstad: Staff of 6th Division, Mountain Artillery Battery Nr 3,
Halogaland Engineer Battalion.

Tromsø: Tromsø 16th Infantry Regiment.

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(d) Navy

The port of Narvik has important installations for shipping ore. There are dockyards capable of carrying out minor repairs.

(e) Fortifications

- 1) Sea-ward side: there are coastal fortifications on the north and south sides of the Ofotfjord where the Ramsundet joins it (35 km west of Narvik).
- 2) Land-ward side: no fortifications have been located at Narvik. On the other hand defence posts have been reported along the ore line leading to Narvik from the east, namely field fortifications at Sildvik (16 km ESE of Narvik), and three concrete gun emplacements east of the railway between Hundalen and Björn fjell (25 km east of Narvik). "

The occupation of Narvik and the Ore Railway

On the appointed day, 9 April 1940 at 05.15 hours, the German destroyers (Narvik Group - Commodore Bonte) entered Narvik bay according to plan, after they had torpedoed and sunk the Norwegian armoured coastal vessel "Eidsvoll" which showed resistance. Soon afterwards the second armoured coastal vessel "Norge" went down in Narvik harbour after a brief exchange of fire. Three of our destroyers landed Dietl's staff and accompanying troops (Mountain Rifle Regiment 139) in Narvik, four others went to Elvegaarden, 10 km north-east of Narvik on Herjangsfjord, while three more which had been patrolling disembarked their troops in Narvik and Elvegaarden at 14.00 hours. Being taken completely by surprise the Norwegians made no serious resistance. II/Mountain Rifle Regiment 139 occupied the most important points in the town and harbour at Narvik, including the railway station, which as terminus of the electric railway to Kiruna was of the greatest importance. General Dietl himself undertook negotiations with the Norwegian military authorities (neutrality guard). These led to the Norwegians laying down their arms except for a detachment on skis who moved off eastwards along the ore railway line and dug themselves in at the fourth tunnel. As this detachment had heavy weapons, they were easily able to hold off the handful of German riflemen who, unequipped with skis, were laboriously pursuing them in the deep snow. Some of our small detachments were now equipped as quickly as possible with whatever skis could be found. Meanwhile I and III/Mountain Rifle Regiment 139 had landed in Bjerkvik. No. I Battalion seized the few fortifications there and covered the furthestmost part of Herjangsfjord (bay of Bjerkvik). The regimental staff and No. III Battalion marched to the training ground two kilometres away at Elvegardsmoen. As a result of energetic moves by the commander of III/Mountain Rifle Regiment 139 the Norwegians (5 officers and 200 men) put up no resistance. The enemy was deprived of a comparatively large amount of weapons, ammunition and clothing. In and around Narvik a total of 8,000 rifles, 300 light and 15 heavy machine guns with ammunition were captured, which came in especially useful for equipping the naval elements which had been landed.

The German destroyers had orders to return the same day directly their mission was accomplished. Oil replenishments had arrived at Narvik in the large German steamer "Jan Wellem", but refuelling proceeded very slowly. The second tanker carrying oil supplies ("Skagerrak") had not arrived. On 10 April between 05.30 and 06.30 there was fighting with superior British naval forces, which made a surprise attack under cover of mist. The Germans had two of their destroyers sunk, one badly damaged and four others disabled; three enemy destroyers went down and another was badly damaged. Lt-commander Erdmenger,

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hitherto in command of the destroyer "Heidkamp", formed his Naval Battalion from the shipwrecked sailors of the two sunken destroyers. The two destroyers which were still seaworthy and fuelled were unsuccessful in their attempt to break out during daylight nights as superior British forces were blocking the entrances to the fjord.

After the town of Narvik, the ore railway and the coast along the Herjangsfjord had been saved from the first hostile attack from the sea, scouts and guards were sent inland to the north and east.

Although the surprise landing and occupation of Narvik had been successful, General Dietl and his weak forces continued to be in a critical position. The British fleet, which bombarded Narvik for the first time at 11.30 hours on 13 April without doing any damage worth mentioning and also carried out air raids, was in command of the sea, especially since the use of submarines, which could have been dangerous to the fleet, was very much restricted by the narrow fjords. Contrary to what had been expected, there were no coastal batteries and the artillery taken ashore from the destroyers could only be used in a minor degree. None of the merchant vessels detailed for Narvik reached their destination, a misfortune which was at least partially counterbalanced by the supplies from the Jan Wellem, especially foodstuffs. Owing to the impassability of the country the airfield lying north of Bjerkvik at Bardufoss was difficult to reach and was for the time being useless for landing aircraft or airborne troops owing to the deep snow. Because of the Russo-Finnish conflict, Norway had a larger number of well-equipped troops in northern Norway than usual. It was impossible to get the airfields near and beyond Narvik in working order because of the difficulties of terrain, so that the Luftwaffe could not be used immediately. All the available paratroops were required for the fighting in central and southern Norway. Nevertheless the defenders did not lose heart although all they had in their favour was the fact that the enemy too was faced with these difficulties of their inhospitable country, which made it easier to defend.

At this period only a very insignificant amount of troops and material could be brought in by air.

During these days the British Fleet with light naval and air forces kept the garrison of Narvik and the surrounding coastal areas in suspense and bombarded the ore line whenever traffic showed itself. The British made no large scale attempts to land near Narvik, but on 12 April British troops disembarked at Harstad. On 13 April at 12.15 hours superior British light naval forces broke into the Narvik area (Repulse, Warspite, 5 Tribal class ships, 4 destroyers and probably an aircraft-carrier). In the unequal struggle that followed, the remaining eight German destroyers were destroyed, only some of these being capable of putting up a fight. Most of the crews found their way ashore and with a great effort reached Hundalen station on the ore line. On 14 April, a Naval Battalion under Commodore Bey was formed taking over the defence of the railway line between Hundalen - Sildvik - Straumsnes with a link to Narvik. The shipwrecked men were armed, equipped and clothed from Norwegian stocks in Narvik.

The fighting at Björn fjell

The Fuehrer's order to General Dietl, who to begin with remained in Narvik with his staff, said that Narvik was to be held at all costs. In the period from 15 April to 4 May 1940, Narvik Group came under direct orders of the OKW, reverting later to Battle Group XXI.

" 4 May, 1940-20.00 hours - OKW to XXI Group

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From 00.00 hours on 5 May the Narvik Group will come entirely under the command of XXI Group. In cooperation with Luftflotte 5 every available means are to be used to get supplies to it as quickly as possible.

(2) XXI Group is to report which division is to return to Germany and when it will be ready to move off.

(3) After this division has left, XXI Group will have at its disposal 5 divisions besides the Narvik Group. Elements of the 3rd Mountain Division now in the Trondheim area (the reinforced Mountain Rifle Regiment 138) will be counted in with the 2nd Mountain Division.

Elements of the five divisions which are still in Germany are only to be moved to Norway when required there.

(4) XXI Group, C.-in-C., Navy and C.-in-C., Luftwaffe are to submit their anticipated final requirements. In this connection the Navy, Luftwaffe and XXI Group are to cooperate closely where necessary. "

Reconnaissance showed that the Norwegians had established themselves at the tunnel before the Norddal bridge, blocked the tunnel itself by placing upturned ore trucks on the track and had blown the bridge which leads over a deep gorge.

General Dietl's most important task was to seize the ore line as far as the frontier. To achieve this the Norwegians at the Norddal bridge had to be driven off and as much country as possible gained to the north. For the time being no danger threatened from the south or southwest. In a bold raid the German mountain riflemen and a group of sailors succeeded after a hard fight on 16 April in defeating the enemy at Spionkop and Björn fjell on the ore line near the frontier, capturing some of them and forcing others over the border into Sweden.

The fighting by Windisch's group up to the beginning of May

Already on 10 April Windisch's group (I and III/Mountain Rifle Regiment 139 and a detachment of marines) had set off in a northerly direction with the distant objective of seizing the airfield at Bardufoss and the training ground 20 km southwards at Saetermoen. With the bad roads and unfavourable weather (snowstorms and mist), lacking skis, with which only the patrols ahead and on the flanks could be equipped, the companies of No. I Battalion only got as far as Gratangsbotn, which lies about 20 km north of Bjerkvik, and the valley leading eastwards. Here they encountered a Norwegian infantry force vastly superior in numbers and with artillery, which the German riflemen there did not have at all. It is true that an advance further towards the north had to be abandoned, but they succeeded anyway in halting the enemy who sustained very heavy losses on 24 April at Nyland and Dalstetten (2-3 km east of Elvenes). Battle reconnaissance meanwhile showed that another Norwegian regiment and the Alta Battalion (a ski battalion based on Altengaard, some 80 km south-east of Hammerfest) were on their way from the north and that French troops had disembarked in Harstad, who by advancing from the southern end of Gratangen fjord on the Storvand sector, which lies about half-way between Bjerkvik and Elvenes, could cut off the German companies near Elvenes. When the French landing was confirmed, these companies were brought back to the Storvand.

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No. III Battalton fought a similar action on the high ground on both sides of the Grasdalen, which lies about 10 km east of the Storvand, and later on each side of the Raudalen which leads towards the frontier. On 30 April the Norwegians attacked at Grasdalen. The riflemen fighting in small bodies, only loosely connected and indeed mostly acting independently, by cleverly exploiting the terrain put up a tough resistance and beat the enemy off. After careful preparation the latter made a fresh attack on 3 May. Again he was driven back, to return against the German positions on 4 May with reinforcements and supported by airmen who attacked with bombs and armament. During the following days up to 12 May they succeeded in pushing forward where forces were superior. (The War Diary of Luftflotte 5 under entry of 6 May 1940 states:

Course of the front line:

Enemy: Rivtind - Bukkefjeld - northern edge of Gralsvand - Stort - 559 - 698 - 785 - southern edge of Reisevand - 141 (4.5 km south-east of Laberget).

Own line: 2 km south of Bukkefjeld - 265 - Leigastind - Skogfjeldet.

Lively firing on 6 May near Roasme (west of Leigastind). The Britat, Leigastind and Roasme were lost in this fighting.)

Especially noticeable was the enemy's superiority in artillery, all the more since the British fleet also often intervened in the land fighting, bombarding among other places Bjerkvik and the camp at Elvegardsmoen.

At the same time the French who had landed in Gratangenfjord (according to prisoners' statements 1,500 Alpine riflemen) joined up with the Norwegians and advanced from the north and north-west against the Storvand position, without at first gaining any success there. Furthermore during these days of fighting, mist, storms and driving snow predominated, which while on the one hand limited operations, on the other hand offered opportunities for surprise moves. All the time the Windisch group was in such a position that the enemy was increasing in numbers continuously, and the threat to its left flank and rear from the British naval forces became serious, so that the idea of shortening the front by withdrawing between the frontier and Rombakenfjord was considered.

The Narvik Battle Group was under the command of Major Haussels of II/Mountain Rifle Regiment 139.

Haussels Battle Group (Narvik)

Since mid-April the town and port of Narvik and the surrounding country had been bombarded with increasing violence by British and later also French naval forces and by the British air forces, which the Germans could only answer with captured small-calibre cannon, mountain guns, anti-tank and light anti-aircraft guns and heavy infantry weapons, which had far too short a range compared to the enemy. German bombers appeared for the first time on 16 April. These had been directed to attack the naval forces and transports off Harstad and with a weaker force the light naval forces off Narvik. The main base of the enemy fleet off Narvik was Bogen Bay, some 20 km west of Narvik.

On 22 April a message arrived that the Fuehrer left it to General Dietl to decide whether to destroy the harbour installations in Narvik and the ore line and if necessary to evacuate Narvik and gradually withdraw to the Swedish frontier. Whereupon on 23 April wharves and jetties were blown up and the remaining machinery, tool sheds, repair shops, railway bridges, boiler houses, oil tanks and the electric locomotives in Narvik were destroyed by dynamite or fire.

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All the signs and reports indicated a major offensive against Narvik was imminent, and this was also broadcast by Tromsø on 28 April. On 25 and 26 April two British battalions were brought across from Bogen Bay to the bay of Haakvik, which lay only five or six kilometres west of Narvik. Our own weak defence line could not prevent the landing. This presented a serious threat to the left flank of the coastal defences in and near Narvik, especially since a penetration far to the rear of Narvik through Beisfjord was thereby probable.

In spite of the critical situation, General Dietl ordered Haussels' group to give up two companies to the hard-pressed Windisch group. Haussels' group consisted of II/Mountain Rifle Regiment 139 and one naval battalion. Some of the sailors were guarding the coast and ore line, some were carrying out technical duties in Narvik harbour, whilst others were transferred to Windisch's group. The sailors quickly adapted themselves to their duties and carried them out energetically and diligently.

One company of sailors and a weak composite company of sailors and riflemen accordingly moved off. On 1 May further enemy landings (Polish and French) took place in the bay of Haakvik. In spite of the weakness of his force, Major Haussels harassed the enemy attacking whenever possible. It was difficult to pull out the assault group required for this in face of the enemy, because at the time of the midnight-sun the nights were no longer dark and the enemy crews crossing about 1,000 metres from the shore were therefore able with their powerful field-glasses to observe every movement on the part of the defenders. A raid during the night 1-2 May by the 6th Company with part of the 7th Company to try if possible to recapture the village of Haakvik presented exceptional difficulties, since the Beisfjord had to be crossed in boats in the face of the ships' guns. The crossing was successful. The attack which began successfully finally broke down under naval gunfire some 300 metres short of Haakvik. During the next few days there was fighting on the Ankenesfjell, which lay between Ankenes and Haakvik, and was finally taken by the stronger enemy. From this point, after 8 May, fire from artillery which had been landed could be effectively directed against Narvik; besides this the town and harbour of Narvik were subjected to frequent bombardments by heavy naval guns. Against these last the German bombers, which in early May were making more frequent appearances although in small numbers, were the only effective means of hitting back.

The supply service of the Battle Group, which had received food and medical supplies via Sweden, encountered increasing difficulties in bringing them in from the end of the railway line at the frontier when the snow began to melt. Up to the beginning of May, Haussels' group met their requirements by supplies borrowed from the "Jan Wellem". After that, supplies for this group had to be brought in by trolleys along the ore line. When the railroad became more and more exposed to enemy mortar fire, this method too broke down, so that instead freight had to be carried by porters, when the 16 tunnels offered at first welcome protection during a bombardment. However this too broke down after the British started systematic bombardment of the entrances and exits to the tunnels.

The Allied landing in the Herjang and Gratangen fjords

Attack on the Windisch group

It was a relief to the morale of the campaigners in Narvik, fighting in lonely parts under most difficult conditions of climate and locality, and far outmatched in numbers and weapons by the enemy, when the news came through on 12 May that Feuerstein's battle group from the 2nd Mountain Division was on its way to Narvik and after actions with Norwegian and British detachments had reached the neighbourhood of Mosjoen. Of course the increasing activity of

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the bomber and transport units of the Luftwaffe also had a similar effect. All the same as a result of the superior enemy weight and his growing supply by sea the situation had little prospect, especially since the expected large-scale offensive was imminent. This started in the night of 12-13 May. Sixteen warships, including one battleship and two cruisers, followed by numerous transports and fishing cutters, left Bogen Bay and set a course with the right flank on a line 3 to 4 km north of Narvik church and the left flank towards Bjerkvik. About midnight all the ships opened fire on the craggy shores, huts and houses from Gjeisvik to Herjangen. After a bombardment lasting two hours, the enemy landed a French regiment consisting of Foreign Legionnaires and Alpine riflemen, against which the weak flanking guard of Windisch's group at Bjerkvik was powerless. At the same time the Norwegians and French attacked in the north. Most of the Allied attack in the north was absorbed and repulsed, the seriously endangered left wing withdrawn behind the Hartwigvand, and a new front formed from the Storebalak to the Mebyfjeldet. The enemy was exceptionally reinforced from the direction of Gjeisvik, so that on 14 May the Mebyfjeldet had to be evacuated and a position taken up behind the heights east of the Fishlössvand. Windisch Group's new defence line now ran from the Kuberget and the heights to the east along the northern slope of the Kobberfjell - Storebalak - Lillebalak - eastwards of Fishlössvand. The extension southwards was necessary because the enemy attack was concentrated on both flanks, here and also in the north-east near the frontier.

By a Luftwaffe directive of 14 May allowance was made for the situation which had arisen by making support for the Narvik group the prime responsibility of Luftflotte 5. In conformity with this order bomber attacks were stepped up on enemy naval forces at Harstad, and in Lavangen and Ofotfjords. Field Marshal Goering once again emphasised in a teleprint of 16 May the urgency of Luftwaffe activity for Battle Group Narvik, even if he did add that it was not possible to send any further forces, which in view of events on the western front was perfectly plain. On 16 May the first paratroops with heavy and light machine-guns were dropped, after weak elements of Mountain Rifle Regiment 138 had already arrived by air. In wearying and fluctuating defensive battles Windisch Group succeeded in holding the line they had taken, although the enemy made numerous attacks and attempts to break through. This has to be appreciated all the more since the German position did not consist of anything like a continuous line; on the contrary the individual groups were mostly fighting on the bare rock and separated by half to one kilometre from one another, so that the enemy could in the mist easily break through this thin line and here and there move into a position from which as a rule he was driven out again by a counter-attack. But as the enemy, with plenty of artillery against which Windisch group who had no guns could only use mortars, prepared to make a break-through with strong forces along the Swedish frontier towards Björn fjell, the 3rd Mountain Division was obliged to shorten its front still further.

In the new position, which was taken up during the night of 20-21 May without any noticeable interference from the enemy, mountain riflemen from Styria, with sailors adjoining them, occupied the sector south of the Karen and Holm streams from the frontier over Hill 620 to the upper Jernvand, III/Mountain Rifle Regiment 139 that between the upper and lower Jernvand, and I/Mountain Rifle Regiment 139 from the lower Jernvand over the Tverfjell and along the Stor stream to Rombakenfjord between Hergotten and Tytteboervik.

The supply route by air from Trondheim had to contend with layers of fog which often enveloped the whole of the Lofoten area and compelled aircraft to turn back. The most urgent needs in ammunition, equipment and food were dropped at a suitable place north of Björn fjell. Furthermore casualties which were

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fortunately relatively small were compensated by reinforcements of the Mountain Rifle Regiment 138 which came by air, especially since on 20 May C.-in-C. Luftflotte 5 ordered for the time being transport of riflemen and paratroopers to take precedence over supplies of ammunition.

The landing of the British in Narvik

General Dietl had moved his divisional headquarters from Narvik first of all to Sildvik and then to Spionkop. Messages that came in showed that the next move to be expected was a thrust against the ore line between the third and fourth tunnels. A rifle company of the 2nd Mountain Division, who had been dropped near Björn fjell and been allocated to Battle Group Narvik, was already posted in this district. The enemy could direct his artillery fire on Narvik and traffic on the road to Beisfjord from the line of heights 295 to 405 on the Ankenesfjell rising south of Ankenes and from points 677, 734 and 668. Our own defence line, connected to the village of Ankenes, consisted of small groups of five or six men, with gaps of 500 to 600 metres between them. So as to prevent the enemy on Ankenesfjell from pushing eastwards a small patrol was posted on the saddle of 606 and a company of riflemen with four Norwegian machine-guns was posted on Skavtuva (650) and on Hestefjell. Towards the end of May the two companies of riflemen on the Ankenes peninsula were therefore reinforced by heavy mortars and machine-guns, the heavy weapons as well as the H.Q. company and part of the engineers and signals platoon being deployed along a front of $3\frac{1}{2}$ kilometres. Further support was given by heavy infantry weapons and a couple of guns at Frammes on the opposite shore. The approaches to the road from Haakvik were covered by a single anti-tank gun. The combatant strength at Ankenes was not quite 200, and about 100 men at the upper end of Beisfjord. Mines were laid and barbed wire set up at suitable spots. On the left wing a particularly well-tried naval assault troop was also available. The last reinforcement to arrive was a company of Mountain Rifle Regiment 137 which had been dropped near Bjoernfjell on 27 May. The garrison of Narvik consisted of the remainder of three rifle companies together with a small detachment of sailors. The total strength of the widely scattered Narvik Battle Group amounted to 1,100 men; headquarters were located in the Taraldsvik district, 250 metres north-west of Narvik railway station.

Late on the evening of 27 May the expected Allied attack opened. Towards 23.00 hours the enemy fleet, comprising 1 battleship, 3 cruisers, 10 destroyers and a large number of auxiliary vessels, took up position in a large arc around Narvik, from the fourth tunnel of the ore railway line to Emmenes and opened fire at 1,000 to 2,000 metres range when dawn broke at 23.30 hours. The main targets were the Orneset headland, Hill 79 in Taraldsvik, where the Battle Group observation positions were situated, Narvik harbour, the Fagernes cliffs, the town of Ankenes and the entrances to tunnels on the ore line. The two land batteries, at Oeyord in the north and Haakvik in the south, concentrated their fire on the squares and main roads of the town. An enemy force about 700 strong had already attacked Skatuva hill shortly before the bombardment began, the main enemy effort, therefore, being centred on the left flank of Battle Group Narvik. At about 00.30 hours on 28 May, 10 large motor boats landed 500 men at Orneset and, in spite of a number of casualties sustained whilst crossing over, the enemy forced back the Naval Artillery Company, which comprised only 50 men, 1 heavy and 6 light machine guns. The commander of Battle Group Narvik sent in all available forces against the enemy landing:

the Naval Company on the right of the Naval Artillery Company which had been forced back,
1 Paratroop Company at Tunnel 4,
40 specialists of a Naval Company, who were standing by at the railway station,
Half of a machine-gun platoon, which was brought over from Fagernesfjell, and the last elements of the rifle company at Vashnik.

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Meanwhile, two more enemy groups each of 500 men were landed, one of them at about 04.00 hours, giving the enemy about 1,500 men to press his attack at this point. For this reason there was little prospect of driving him back again at Orneset. Communication with divisional headquarters had broken down, but in spite of this Major Haussels decided to continue resistance, even though the enemy was still gaining ground on the Ankenes peninsula despite stubborn resistance by the numerically weak defending force. Unfavourable reports began to pile up at Major Haussel's command post. An enemy detachment of about 300 men, some of them on snowshoes, were attempting to move round the left flank; the threat to Skavtuva was serious and the attack by superior enemy forces on Hestefjell was continuing. Moreover, the situation at various points indicated that in view of the losses in men and materials, the positions could be held only with difficulty. There was no news at all from Ankenes. Two German aircraft which attacked the warships in spite of strong enemy defensive fire temporarily relieved this extremely critical situation. Soon afterwards the enemy landed 3 tanks at Taraldsvik scarcely 250 m. from the Battle Group. Tanks had already been reported advancing on Ankenes from Emmenes, but these were brought to a standstill by the minefield which had been laid at Ankenes. At the last moment the 3 enemy tanks were stopped by 2 cm A.A. guns, one tank being knocked out whilst the other two took over. However, owing to the situation it was now absolutely impossible to hold Narvik any longer. Only then did the Battle Group Commander order the withdrawal to a new line above the town of Beisfjord to cover the crossing to Sildvik. The withdrawal was generally successful owing to skilful leadership; only the units fighting at Ankenes sustained appreciable losses as they had to cross the Beisfjord under enemy fire.

The new position above Tunnel 4 - Beisfjordtoetta - Resmaalakola - Durmaalsfjell was reached on the morning of 29 May. The enemy continued attacking, still with the main effort on the German left flank, and the Narvik Group fell back to the line Sildvikfjell - Sildvikvand and the hills to the east during the night 31 May/ 1 June. Thus the enemy was able to force a way through the minefield at Stroemmen and send destroyers into Rombakbotn. The warships and a French 105 mm battery which had been brought into position at Lilleberget shelled the mountain troops on the ore line and the railway supply line.

At this time a new problem had arisen at German headquarters: the threat from the south might become serious if the troops landed at Skjommen Bay advanced through Norddalen in the direction of Hundalen Station. The enemy had set up A.A. positions in Skjommen Bay but ski patrols had ascertained that so far no preparations to advance had been made.

Final Operations by the Windisch Battle Group

During the night 29/30 May, 9 enemy aircraft dropped bombs on the right flank of the Windisch Battle Group without causing losses.

Owing to the withdrawal of the right flank of the Haussels Battle Group from the southern bank of Rombakenfjord behind the Stroemmen narrows, it was also necessary to move back the left flank of the Windisch Battle Group (1/139 Mountain Infantry Regiment) on to the northern bank of this fjord behind the Lakse river and the Svardal on to the Rauberget and Haugsfjeldet plateau. This movement was carried out successfully and was completed on 1 June. On 31 May superior enemy forces from jumping-off positions several hundred metres above attacked Hill 620 on the right flank of the Group. Heavy fighting continued into the early morning hours of 1 June. In view of the superiority of enemy forces, which were beaten back three times, orders were issued for the evacuation of Hill 620. However, the heights about 1 km to the south (including Hill 698) were to be held at all costs. The enemy made ineffectual attacks on

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this new position throughout 2 June, using newly-arrived reinforcements, heavy weapons and French artillery. On 3 June the defenders were reinforced by 1 heavy machine-gun and 3 mortars. German dive-bombers as well as enemy aircraft participated in the fighting. The German defence posts held out and the attacks diminished when a snowstorm, mixed with rain showers, blew up.

At 02.00 hours on 8 June the whole sector on the Swedish border was heavily bombarded again by artillery and mortars. Under cover of mist, the enemy launched a surprise attack, advancing over Swedish territory. Although the enemy was not observed until he had almost reached the German peak position, he was thrown back by a spirited counter-attack, whilst at the same time unsuccessful attempts were made to break through the thinly-held German line from Hill 620. Following a protest from the German commander, a detachment of the Swedish Frontier Guard dug in at the threatened point.

Cessation of Operations

On 5 June the following order from the Fuehrer was issued to Luftflotte 5:

- "(1) All necessary preparations will be made to bring down the Dietl Group from the north to force a final decision at Narvik. In addition arrangements will be made for an Army landing in strength in Lyngenfjord east of Tromsø, which is at present clear of enemy forces. From this point the landing force will advance along the coastal road leading south, take the enemy units opposite Battle Group Windisch in the rear, and capture the area around Narvik. At the same time the Luftwaffe will establish an air base in the Bardufoss area, from which it will support the Army advance.
- (2) The whole operation is dependent on the Dietl Battle Group being fully effective. It will be thrown entirely on its own resources, as it is hardly likely that the reinforcements moving up from the south by land will arrive in time.
- (3) Thus the Luftwaffe will continue with the important task of flying reinforcements and supplies to the Dietl Battle Group whenever weather conditions permit. "

Although it was too late to carry out these measures to the full, they did not fail to produce the desired result. The enemy perceived the futility of his efforts.

Shortly after midnight on 8 June patrols of the Haussels Battle Group discovered that the enemy positions had been evacuated. Narvik was thereupon re-occupied at 18.00 hours on the same day, the enemy having withdrawn by sea on the previous evening.

When the mist cleared on the morning of 9 June, Norwegian units were observed falling back in groups from the stubbornly defended Hill 698 on the right flank of the Windisch Battle Group. Practically at the same time, at 08.10 hours, a Norwegian officer reported that Norwegian troops were ceasing hostilities in view of the armistice negotiations which had been opened. All remaining Norwegian troops had capitulated by 24.00 hours on 9 June.

Thus, contrary to all expectations, the operation in northern Norway had also resulted in a German victory. The situation remained critical until the last moment. However, the Fuehrer had already issued instructions to General Dietl on 8 May to the effect that after completely destroying the ore line

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"a nucleus of picked troops well trained in mountain warfare and supplied by air will fall back in the direction of Bodoe, while the remainder can be ordered to cross the Swedish frontier if necessary." The advanced battle group of 2 Mountain Division, commanded by Lt/Col. Hengl, reached Hellemobotn on 6 June. The advance was halted when hostilities ceased. Two patrols only, one consisting of mountain riflemen and the other of mountain engineers, broke through to Battle Group Narvik, the engineers arriving on 14 June and the riflemen on the following day.

On 11 and 12 June paratroops occupied Bardufoss airfield, the headquarters of the Norwegian Commander of northern Mo/Appenberg, as well as the town, harbour and radio station of Tromsø, and on 14 June, Battle Group Narvik made contact with Bardufoss airfield.

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