

Secret History OF 1939-1940

FROM THE ARCHIVES OF THE FRENCH GENERAL STAFF

"THE NORWEGIAN CAMPAIGN"

With an Introduction and Notes
by

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PRICE ONE SHILLING

Published by



162 BUCKINGHAM PALACE ROAD, LONDON, S.W.1

TRÈS SECRET

SEANCE DU COMITE DE GUERRE

du 26 Avril 1940 .

Le Président du Conseil expose le but de la réunion : examen de la situation en Norvège .

Les Allemands ont réussi à mettre la main sur les points importants . Les débarquements des Alliés sont difficiles . Les Norvégiens sont frappés .

Le prestige des Alliés est engagé .

Cependant les Anglais étaient prévenus depuis longtemps, puisque c'est le 28 Mars que l'opération a été décidée .

Ils ne voulaient pas la faire, remarque le Ministre de la Défense Nationale et de la Guerre .

Le Président du Conseil ajoute qu'on aurait dû faire un effort massif sur TRONDJHEM . Il demande au Général GAMELIN comment il juge la situation .

Le Général GAMELIN fait connaître que les Allemands ont fait la jonction de leurs forces d'OSLO et de celles de TRONDJHEM.

Le Général LELONG lui a fait savoir que les Anglais avaient l'intention de réembarquer leurs troupes destinées à l'attaque de TRONDJHEM .

Le Général GAMELIN expose qu'évidemment la situation est difficile, en particulier à cause des attaques de l'aviation allemande, mais que les troupes débarquées à NAMSOS (Nord de TRONDJHEM) paraissent pouvoir résister . Il serait d'ailleurs possible d'organiser une ligne de communication et de retraite, si c'est nécessaire, le long de la côte dont les principaux points seraient à tenir

.....

INTRODUCTION

As war becomes more total, and more a war of the people, by the people, for the people (on the people), it also becomes more secretive and security minded.

This is not a complaint; it's a statement of fact.

Obviously in time of war secrets must be kept from the enemy. In the small wars of the past few people had to know the secrets, but in a war such as we have just experienced a great many people were necessarily concerned with a great many secrets. It is therefore insufficient (for security purposes) to keep silence. It is necessary to tell untruths, or at any rate to let out enough of the truth to suggest the untruth.

Moreover, in these days of B.B.C. and popular Press, and Parliament in almost continuous war-time session, with occasional secret sessions in order to give M.P.s the impression they were in the know, the people must have news. Also, the public morale can be worked upon by means of news. One of the techniques in the last war (1939-45) was to give the public the impression it was being given the bad news because the British people "could take it". I daresay they could, but the Government was often pretty careful not to run any risks in case they couldn't.

In due course the truth will emerge. People will find out that there *was* a tank scandal; they will find out that the Board of Admiralty were quite inexcusably unprepared for anti-submarine war; they will find out what happened at Singapore and what happened in Burma when the Australian divisions didn't stop off; they will find out that Mr. Neville Chamberlain was not such a silly and misguided man as many think him to have been; they will find out about the goings on in the Ministry of Aircraft Production; they will learn how Italians walked about under British battleships in Alexandria harbour and fastened mines to their bottoms (the battleships) and blew one up. But she sank in an upright condition and still looked all right from the air! And so on and so forth.

This report enables you to find out what really happened in connection with the Norwegian campaign.

You will learn, may be to your surprise, that the British and French Governments planned to invade Norway and seize the ports and aerodromes on her west coast, but that they were so dilatory in their methods that Hitler decided to go there first. You may remember (perhaps) that, when the Germans did invade Norway, they announced the capture of documents which they claimed showed that they were forestalling an Allied invasion. This statement was treated by those who heard it on the wireless with the contempt it appeared to deserve. When you read the documents which follow you may revise your opinion.

A word about the documents. They came into my possession long before the end of the war, so I locked them up. They were captured by the Germans in 1940 at the town of La Charité and reproduced with a limited circulation in order to convince the French that "the capacity for action of the Allies did not measure up to the grandeur of the plan and that (these documents) reveal to a staggering extent the incapacity of the Allied politicians and military commanders".

I am bound to say that this German criticism had substance in 1940. For example, to quote from a document I have not included in this collection, it is hair-raising in retrospect to learn that on March 16th, 1940, General Gamelin in a Most Secret Memorandum, No. 325 Cab/D.N., was outlining plans to tighten up the blockade "in order to force Germany, through a combination of economic pressure and certain military operations, to *emerge from her attitude of military expectancy*".

It will be found (when *all* the records are available)—I have good reasons for saying this—that Mr. Neville Chamberlain was very anxious not to incite Hitler to emerge from his waiting attitude. Moreover, I will go so far as to hazard the opinion—and I base it on some first-hand information from the late M. Mandel—that if M. Daladier had not trapped M. Reynaud into forming a government and M. Reynaud, supported by Mr. Churchill, had not persuaded the British Government to undertake its offensive in Norway, it is quite possible that Hitler would not have put his expedition into Norway and there might not have been an attack in France, at least in 1940.

However, these are speculations. The documents you are now invited to study contain facts hitherto unknown to most of the British people. Here, as Mr. Bevin would say, are some cards on the table, face up.

Stephen King-Hall

21st January, 1946.

DOCUMENT I (Telegram)

From: M. Daladier, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

To: M. Corbin, French Ambassador, London.

Object: Assistance to Finland. Intervention in Scandinavia.

Paris 21 Feb. 1940:15h.45

"In continuation of my preceding telegram.

"1. The assent of Sweden governs all direct intervention by the Allies in Finland. It would suffice for the Swedish Government to cut off the power which feeds the railway line Narvik-Kanni in order to deny the Allies all access to Swedish territory and in consequence access to Finland.

"2. The Swedish Government appears to be determined both not to go to the military aid of Finland nor to allow foreign troops to use Swedish territory. It is very doubtful whether, by itself, the camouflage of allied detachments as 'volunteers' would overcome this negative attitude.

"3. It is most doubtful, notwithstanding Chamberlain's hopes, that Sweden will go herself to the aid of Finland as a set off against her refusal to authorize the passage of allied troops. We know in fact (through a telegram of M. Roger Mangras) that the Reich has intimated to Sweden that any official aid to Finland will be considered a *casus belli*.

"4. There is only one factor which might have some likelihood of modifying the attitude of the Swedish Government: this would be the conviction that the Allies are in a position to give Sweden immediate and efficacious assistance against a German reaction. It should not be a question of promises nor even of assurances for the near future. It is only the actual presence of forces on the Swedish frontier, forces ready to go into immediate action, which might weigh in a favourable sense with the Swedes when they make the final decision.

"5. The occupation of the principal Norwegian ports, the landing in Norway of the first wave of Allied troops, would give the Swedes the beginnings of a sense of security. This operation should be worked out independently from the Finnish appeal and carried out rapidly after an incident of which the Altmark affair gives us the basis.

"6. Norway, in authorizing the passage through its territorial waters and in giving protection to an armed German ship (the Altmark), has gravely neglected its duties as a neutral. The British Government is entitled to insist upon reparations and guarantees. It is in particular justified in demanding the internment of the Altmark and her crew, and in informing the Norwegian Government that in future H.M.G. will undertake that necessary supervision of Norwegian territorial waters, whose inviolability the Oslo Government has consistently shown itself incapable of defending.

"7. If, as is very likely, this proposal meets with a Norwegian refusal, the British Government, taking note of Norwegian impotence, must immediately seize the bases necessary for the safeguarding of its rights. This occupation of the Norwegian ports should be a sudden operation, undertaken by the British fleet alone, or with French naval co-operation without using the allied detachments destined for Finland. Its justification in the eyes of world opinion will be the more easy the more rapidly the operation is carried out and the more our propaganda is able to exploit the memory of the recent complicity of Norway in the Altmark incident.

"8. It is superfluous to emphasize the sensation which will be created by such an operation in Germany and Russia and the confusion it will produce there. British forces as substantial as possible, accompanied if need be by French detachments, should be landed as soon as possible and concentrated in the occupied ports, so that, as soon as the Finnish appeal for help is received, Sweden will recognize that their presence guarantees the further arrival of French and Polish forces and provides tangible evidence of the support we can give her if she decides to help Finland or allows us to do so.

"9. Even admitting that Sweden still remains obdurate and that means of access to Finland are still denied to us, we shall (by this operation) retain the advantage of a dominating position over Germany in the North; we shall have stopped the sea transport of Swedish minerals; we shall be within air raid distance of the mines; we shall be in a good position to counter any proposed German and Russian moves in Scandinavia. It is necessary to remember that our main objective is to cut off supplies of minerals to Germany and that any Allied activity in Scandinavia is only justified, by reference to the over-all war plan, when it assists this purpose.

"10. Furthermore there is every likelihood that, if we do *not* exploit the Altmark affair by immediately seizing bases in Norway, then Sweden, caught between her fear of Germany and her doubts of the efficacy of our help, will both refuse the Finnish appeal and deny us the use of her territory (to help Finland). Our projected expedition (to Finland) will collapse without even having started, allowing Germany, Russia and the neutrals to take the measure of our impotence to pass from inclination to action.

EDOUARD DALADIER"

DOCUMENT II

"Note by General Gamelin, Supreme Army Commander.

"MOST SECRET

"No 104/1

10 March 1940

"Note relating to the participation of Franco-British forces in operations in Finland.

"From the opening of hostilities (30 Nov. 1939) between Finland and the Soviet Union the French and British Governments have shown their willingness to give Finland useful and rapid assistance in the shape of aviation equipment and munitions. The first consignments began on about 20th December. . . ."

[Here follow some technical details of no particular interest.—K-H.]

"By January 16th the French High Command was drawing up in outline a plan for armed intervention in Finland. This scheme was based on the landing of allied forces at Petsamo,* with eventually, as a precaution, the seizure of ports and aerodromes on the west coast of Norway. The plan further envisaged, if all went well, the possibility of extending the operation into Sweden and of occupying the iron ore mines at Gallivare, an important source of German supply, while creating for ourselves a new line of communication by way of Narvik-Lulea.

"The projected Petsamo operation fitted in with the views which Marshal Mannerheim had put before Major Ganeval. In the course of official meetings the British High Command appeared to be in agreement with our views.

"Nevertheless, in the course of the inter-allied military meetings of 31st January and 1st Feb., preceding the Supreme Council of 5th Feb., the British, putting the question of direct aid to Finland into a subsidiary category, showed themselves to be resolute advocates of an operation against the iron ore mines in the north of Sweden. This operation was to have as a side line, at least in the initial stages, the passage of only a part of the forces engaged into Finland. This meant that in practice the Petsamo operation was abandoned except as an eventual and secondary affair.

"This point of view prevailed at the Supreme Council. The preparation of the Scandinavian expedition was immediately put in hand and the transportation of the Franco-British forces was ready to begin in the early days of March.†

"The direction of the operations to be undertaken in Scandinavia has been confided to the British High Command. It could not, apparently, be otherwise. . . ."

[General Gamelin then gives reasons why the British had to have control, e.g., burden on British fleet, French commitments in the west, etc.—K-H.]

* This, of course, meant war with Russia. Petsamo was in Russian hands.—K-H.

† The first contingent of French forces (Brigade of Chasseurs-Alpins) was embarked by 1st March, 1940. An advance guard could have been despatched much earlier if an immediate landing at Petsamo had been agreed to.

... "The opening up of a Northern theatre of war is an attractive proposition from the point of view of the general conduct of the war. Apart from the moral benefits, the operation will tighten up the blockade, and the stoppage of mineral traffic to Germany is of capital importance.

"In this general scheme, operations in the Balkans" [also being planned at this time.—K-H.] "will add to the economic asphyxiation of Germany. Germany will then only have Russia as a window to the outside world and it seems that the exploitation of Russian resources is the subject of long delays.

"Nevertheless, on the military level, an effort in the Balkans* would from the point of view of FRANCE produce better returns than an effort in SCANDINAVIA. The general theatre of operations would be greatly extended. YUGOSLAVIA, ROUMANIA, GREECE, TURKEY would bring us reinforcements of 100 divisions.† SWEDEN and NORWAY will only bring us the feeble support of ten divisions. The Germans would doubtless have to divert forces in proportion from the North East [the main front] in reply to what we were doing.

"The advantages of opening up a Scandinavian theatre of war are none the less beyond dispute, but one must not minimise the technical difficulties which it involves. . . ."

[There follow detailed considerations of a military character.]

Note added in General Gamelin's own hand.

"We should therefore pursue resolutely our projects in Scandinavia to save Finland, at the least, and to lay hands on the Swedish iron ore and the Norwegian ports. But we must say that, from the point of view of military operations, the BALKANS and the CAUCASUS, where one can deprive Germany of petrol, offer greater returns. But Italy holds the key to the Balkans.

GAMELIN"

DOCUMENT III

"Proceedings of the 18th meeting of the Committee concerned with the study of the Scandinavian project.

"No 926. S/C E.M.I.

London 11 March 1940

"MOST SECRET

"Landing at Narvik

"The committee was convened unexpectedly on 9th March to take note of observations made in the course of the War Cabinet Meeting of 8th March. At this meeting Mr. Winston Churchill had expressed his anxiety that eventually the Norwegian attitude might compromise assistance to Finland, especially after the first landings at Narvik. In these circumstances the First Lord indicated that in the first instance it would be best to arrive in force off Narvik. It was not a question of making a landing in strength but rather of 'displaying strength in order to avoid having to use it'. Mr. Winston Churchill pictured a squadron of one cruiser and some destroyers arriving off Narvik and throwing ashore troops up to a battalion in strength before the arrival of the first convoy of transports. It was understood that this operation should be carried out by British effectives.

"The War Cabinet also doubted the value of occupying Stavanger and Bergen.

"The Committee examined the details of the operation forecast for Narvik and saw no particular difficulties therein. But the Committee expressed the view that serious consequences would result from a decision *not* to occupy Bergen and especially Stavanger where the airfield could easily be taken by the Germans if we were not there first."‡

* Subject, of course, to the question of Italy's attitude.

† Not to mention the question of oil; the Roumanian fields could be covered or destroyed: also, Transcaucasia. (Plans were in hand to bomb Batum and Baku.—K-H.)

‡ The members of this Committee turned out to be perfectly right in their apprehensions. See Document X, page 9.—K-H.

DOCUMENT IV

"Resolutions of the 6th meeting of the Supreme Council.

"MOST SECRET

28 March 1940.

"The Supreme Council decided:

"1. That the French and British Governments should on Monday, 1st April, send a note to the Norwegian and Swedish Governments, based on Para. 7 of the aide-memoire prepared by the British Government, that is to say:

- (a) The Allied Governments cannot permit a new attack on Finland,* either by the Russian or the German Government. If a new aggression did take place and if the Norwegian and Swedish Governments refused to facilitate the efforts of the Allied Governments to help Finland, under such conditions as they deemed appropriate and, *a fortiori*, if those governments [Norwegian and Swedish] tried to prevent such aid being given, this attitude would be considered hostile to their vital interests by the Allies and would provoke an appropriate reaction.
- (b) The conclusion of a political agreement of an exclusive character with Germany by Sweden and Norway would be considered by the Allies as an unfriendly act. . . .
- (c) Any attempt on the part of the Soviet Union to obtain from Norway a base on the Atlantic coast would be contrary to the vital interests of the Allies and would provoke appropriate reactions.
- (d) The Allied Governments would have to take appropriate measures to safeguard their interests if the Norwegian and Swedish Governments were to refuse, withdraw, or restrict commercial deliveries and the merchant tonnage which the Allies consider indispensable for the conduct of the war and which the Scandinavian Governments could reasonably supply.
- (e) Finally, considering that the Allies are making war for aims which are as much in the interest of the small States as in their own, the Allies cannot allow that the course of the war should be affected by the advantages which Sweden and Norway give to Germany. Hence they declare that they reserve the right to take such measures as they may deem necessary to hinder or prevent Germany from obtaining in Sweden and Norway resources from which she might, in the conduct of the war, derive advantages to the detriment of the Allies.

"2. This note will be followed on 5th April by minelaying operations in Norwegian territorial waters and operations against German shipping thus deflected from Norwegian waters.

"3. Subject to the approval of the French War Committee the operation 'Royal Marine' will commence on April 4th and aerial action on April 15th.

"4. The French and British General Staffs will make plans to interrupt German traffic proceeding from Lulea as soon as the Gulf of Bothnia is open to navigation.

"5. Such steps as will appear possible will be taken to diminish the supplies of oil from Roumania to Germany.

"6. A study will be undertaken at once by French and British experts to examine the project for bombing the Russian oil area in the Caucasus. In particular a study will be made of:

- (a) the possibility of obtaining effective results by such an operation,
- (b) the probable repercussions of the operation on the Soviet Union,
- (c) the probable attitude of Turkey.

"7. Detailed plans for this will be prepared by the British and French General Staffs and all preparations which can be made in advance (such as the despatch of bombs to the Middle East) will be made so that there will be no delay if a decision is taken to carry out the operation."

* Finland had accepted the Russian peace terms on March 13, 1940.

DOCUMENT V

A SECRET and PERSONAL note from Admiral of the Fleet Darlan to the Minister of War and National Defence. Dated 12 April 1940.

This document is not reproduced here. It is a justification by Darlan of his warnings that time had been wasted in launching the Norwegian expedition. He proves that "owing to the lack of discretion in Allied circles" the German Command "must have known our decisions", and he points out that on 30th March he urged the need for speed. He produces evidence blaming the British who on 5th April suddenly announced that "the first convoy could not start till the 8th and that as the port chosen in Norway could only take six ships the *French contingent should not expect to land until the 26th April*". (The italics are Darlan's.—K-H.)

DOCUMENT VI

[This is an undated and unsigned note with a direction in handwriting across the top "A Churchill". It is marked MOST SECRET. It was probably a draft (perhaps from Reynaud) prepared towards the end of April. Its contents are as follows: K-H.]

"The expedition to Norway has collapsed, principally because no one has commanded it. For some time it was the War Cabinet, meeting as an Administrative Council, which took decisions very slowly and without being willing to run the slightest risk, as if they were handling an industrial or commercial undertaking.

"At present, it is a 'Committee' of War Office, Admiralty and Air Ministry representatives who take the decisions.

"Neither the English General Massy (who was being talked about at one time) nor the French General Audet give one the impression of being Commanders.

"We know nothing of what is going on at Narvik.

"There must be one Commander, and only one, of this expedition."

DOCUMENT VII

"Proceedings of the Meeting of the French War Committee 26 April 1940 at the Palais de L'Elysée at 15 hours.

"Very Secret:

"Present: [Here follows a list of those present, which includes the President of the Republic, Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs, National Defence and War, and Service Ministers; three Service C.-in-C.s and Chiefs of Staff.—K.H.]

"The Prime Minister said the purpose of the meeting was to examine the situation in Norway. The Germans have succeeded in capturing the important points. The disembarkation of the Allies is difficult. The Norwegians are finished.

"The prestige of the Allies is at stake.

"Nevertheless the British had plenty of warning since the operation (to land in Norway) was decided on March 28th. 'They did not wish to do it', remarked the Minister for War. The Prime Minister added that a great effort should have been made against Trondhjem. He asked General Gamelin to give his views. The General announced that the Germans had effected a junction between their forces at Oslo and those at Trondhjem. General Lelong had reported to him that the British had decided to re-embark the troops destined to attack Trondhjem. General Gamelin added that it was evident the situation was difficult, especially through the German air attacks, but the troops disembarked at Namsos seemed able to resist. . . . He thought that the British decision to re-embark was deplorable and, to try to oppose it, asked the Committee for authority to go to London (where he had already sent General Mittelhauser) to convince the British. . . . The Committee agreed. . . ."

[General Gamelin then continued his account of the tactical situation.] "General Gamelin had never ceased to press for the continuation and intensification of the operations. On the morning of March 29th he had drawn the attention of General Ironside to the necessity of having everything fully prepared for a rapid occupation of the Norwegian ports. He had made the same point to Mr. Churchill during a visit by the latter to Paris. . . ." [After hearing the details of the organization of the Command the Prime Minister and the War Minister registered their regret that there was not one Commander-in-Chief. . . .]

Admiral Darlan "pointed out to the Committee that Trondhjem could be attacked from the sea. The Prime Minister asked whether troops could not be transported by commercial aircraft." . . . "The Air Minister remarked that he disposed, for this operation, of only a very limited number of Bloch 220s.

"The Minister of National Defence and War said that we were ahead of the dates fixed by the British and that the Clyde was packed with men.

"The President of the Republic asked how many men the British actually had in Norway. General Gamelin replied that they had 15,000. They had planned to have 100,000. On our part, we foresee that we shall ultimately send a force of over 40,000. . . ."

[General Gamelin went on to explain that France was the principal theatre of war; no colonial troops could be used in Norway; special equipment was essential. Finally, there was the question of having enough troops to advance into Belgium in order to fight in open country at which business the French were much more apt than the British. It was therefore logical for the British to make the principal effort.] . . . "In addition we [the French] must give them [the British] moral support, help them organise their command and give them 'method and guts' (de la méthode et du cran). . . .

"Resuming the discussion, the Prime Minister emphasized the material and moral importance of continuing the struggle and organising the command and said that . . . it was necessary, even at the price of sacrifices, to seize Trondhjem. . . .

"General Gamelin left at once for London."

DOCUMENT VIII

"Telegram from the French Prime Minister, M. Reynaud, to the British Prime Minister, Mr. Chamberlain.

"No. 1443 Urgent. Secret.

Paris 26 April 1940. 20h.30"

In this telegram M. Reynaud conveys to Mr. Chamberlain: the conclusions of the French War Committee (see document VII).

The telegram is strongly worded and is in four parts:

- (1) Arguments against the evacuation of the Trondhjem region with the concluding remark: "So far as the French are concerned they will not proceed with this evacuation."
- (2) The statement that the capture of Trondhjem is possible.
- (3) The need of a single commander.
- (4) More reinforcements must be sent.

The message concludes as follows: [K-H.]

"In the grave situation in which we find ourselves, I am sure that like me you will feel that two thoughts must be in our minds." [These are that] "one must take big views or else give up making war", [and] "we must act quickly or lose the war.

PAUL REYNAUD."

DOCUMENT IX

"From M. Corbin, French Ambassador in London to the Foreign Office, Paris.

"No. 517-521. Strictly Secret

London 26 April 1940. 23 hrs."

M. Corbin in this telegram describes his protests in London on his receipt of the news that the War Cabinet had decided to evacuate the Trondhjem area—"a retreat decided

upon even before the battle had been joined'. He (Corbin) claims that Sir A. Cadogan did not contradict his arguments, all of which had been carefully considered by the War Cabinet, but ruled out because it was impossible to cope with the German air attacks. Corbin continues: "I spoke to him of a naval attempt to force the Fjord of Trondhjem in accordance with the plan which had previously been drawn up by the Allied General Staffs. He replied that this plan had not been lost sight of but had been finally abandoned because, even should the operation succeed, it would be impossible to count on maintaining oneself at Trondhjem so long as the Germans retained the advantages which the possession of all the aerodromes in Norway assured them. . . . Furthermore, it seems (added Cadogan) that the enemy has succeeded in installing or re-establishing coastal batteries along Trondhjem Fjord which would make a naval attack very difficult.

"Sir A. Cadogan added that if General Gamelin could suggest any means of remedying the inferior position in which we found ourselves they would be examined with the greatest eagerness."

[Note by K-H.: The question of the attack on Trondhjem was undoubtedly the crux of the matter once the enemy had succeeded in establishing himself in Norway. According to my information, certain members of the naval staff implored the First Lord (Winston Churchill) and C.N.S. (Admiral Sir Dudley Pound) to make the attempt with old battleships. It has been suggested that the memory of the Dardanelles was decisive. In the light of subsequent events it was probably as well that we did not find ourselves with another evacuation on our hands at Trondhjem after the fall of France. As it was, we had to evacuate Narvik which was only retained for a short time as a face-saving device and in order to bluff the House of Commons and convince the nation that something had been saved out of the wreck. The Admiralty pointed out that it was impossible to maintain communications to Narvik. The next document to be reproduced brings all the threads together and is of the greatest historical interest. It is reproduced in full.]

DOCUMENT X

"Proceedings of the 9th meeting of the Supreme Council.

London 27 April 1940."

[The passages reproduced below are those relative to the Norwegian Campaign.]

"SECRET

"Those present: BRITISH: Mr. Neville Chamberlain, Lord Halifax, Mr. Winston Churchill, Sir Samuel Hoare, Mr. Oliver Stanley, Sir Dudley Pound, Sir Edmund Ironside, Sir Cyril Newall, Sir Alexander Cadogan, Sir Edward Bridges, Colonel Hollis, Captain Berkeley.

FRENCH: M. Reynaud, M. Daladier, M. Campinchi, M. L. Eynac, M. Corbin, General Gamelin, Admiral Darlan, General Vuillemin, General Mittelhauser, General Lelong, General Decamp, Count Raczynski, M. Colban.

"After having welcomed the French delegates and reminded them that at the meetings of the Supreme Council held on the 22nd and 23rd April a complete agreement was reached between the two governments as to the measures to be taken in Norway, *Mr. Neville Chamberlain* intimated that he desired to explain briefly the circumstances which, since those dates, had completely altered the situation and of which M. Corbin must have informed the French Government.

"The Allies had succeeded in landing 13,000 men . . . at Namsos and Andalsnes without the loss of a single man. On the southern front a detachment had pushed forward as far as Lillehammer and made contact with the Norwegians. On the northern front, the British contingents had reached Steinkjer. These movements had met with no enemy resistance.

"The plans presupposed the regular reinforcement of these two groups and it was hoped to encircle Trondhjem, to place the town between the pincers formed by the two armies and finally to capture it.

"Before his departure for Paris last Monday, the Prime Minister had learnt that an air attack had been made on the previous Saturday on Namsos and that the town and the railhead had been destroyed. This news had greatly disturbed the British Government, but on the same day two further messages had been received which were of a definitely more encouraging character. The first was an appeal for help from the German Commander at Trondhjem, intercepted by the British. The second was the report that the transport 'City of Algiers' had arrived at Namsos and had been able to disembark the troops she was carrying. The British Government had thence concluded that the first account of the air attack on Saturday had probably been exaggerated.

"The situation then appeared to be as follows: A reverse had been suffered at Namsos, but Andalsnes had not been seriously bombed. In other words, to the North of Trondhjem our advance had been checked; to the south it was developing in a satisfactory manner.

"Mr. Chamberlain and his colleagues had always considered that the Norwegian venture was full of risks and perils. They had never believed that its success was assured. At the last meeting of the Supreme Council, Mr. Chamberlain himself had pointed out that the Allies could not hope to reinforce their troops in Norway as quickly as could the Germans. The First Lord had in his turn uttered serious warnings about the future of the expedition and had declared that they must not blind themselves to the fact that the operation was extremely hazardous.

"Nevertheless, at that time, no serious anxiety was being felt in London. Preparations were being made to put into effect plans for disembarking more troops and despatching equipment, especially A.A. batteries. An unfortunate incident had occurred when a ship carrying transport and Bofors guns for Andalsnes had been torpedoed, but such losses had always been expected and no one had been greatly impressed.

"Unfortunately, the general situation had deteriorated very rapidly. The same evening, news had reached London that General Carton de Wiart's column had clashed with German forces and had had to retreat after suffering considerable losses. The report indicated that the British had acted alone and without keeping in touch with the French troops who had also landed at Namsos. Later reports explained that the British troops had advanced immediately after landing whilst the French troops had been unable to move because the air attack of the 20th had destroyed part of their material and their stocks of munitions.

"Then came news of repeated air attacks in the South. Then the news, even more serious, that the brigade which had pushed forward to Lillehammer had been obliged to retreat before German forces well armed and abundantly provided with artillery and tanks. Finally, it was learned that large German forces were advancing along the eastern line of the Oslo-Trondhjem railway and had succeeded in advancing 70 kilometres in 48 hours.

"All the reports received in London emphasized the destructive effects of the constant German air attacks and the enormous advantage conferred upon the enemy by their air superiority. This superiority was largely due to the fact that the English could not bring their fighter aircraft to Norway. They had no air fields where they could be serviced. All the R.A.F. could do was to go each night in considerable force to bomb the airfields at Stavanger, Oslo and Aalborg (in Denmark). The latter was, of course, the base being used by the German transport planes.

"These attacks were not without results. Considerable damage was done to the aerodromes and many enemy machines destroyed. But it must be borne in mind that the number of bombers used by the Germans in Norway amounts to barely 10 per cent. of their total force, nine-tenths of which remains quietly in Germany. The British, on the other hand, are obliged to use practically their total strength and are suffering daily losses which, though small in each operation, in the aggregate are beginning to cause concern.

"In other words, it is becoming clearer every day that operations which during the last war would have been quite simple ran today into almost unsurmountable obstacles in the face of air attacks directed not so much against the troops as against their bases. Only

this morning the British Government had learnt that an air attack at Andalsnes had either completely destroyed or at any rate seriously damaged the only remaining intact jetty.

"It is really a terrible problem to have to operate an Expeditionary Force when the enemy has the mastery of the air.

"At this moment, the situation is as follows: on the Namsos front, the shattered remains of the English brigade have been able to establish contact with the French Chasseurs Alpins. On this front the Germans have ceased to advance and have dug themselves in around Steinkjer. Hence the situation is static and there is a stable point here, at least for the moment. General Gamelin has made suggestions for the best use of this fact. He suggests in particular a progressive retirement northwards so as to protect the Narvik region. These proposals must be discussed by the military experts, but they are certainly worthy of examination.

"In the South, the British are retreating down the western line of the Oslo-Trondhjem railway. One must note that the two lines which unite these towns are separated by a chain of mountains and that the British have never succeeded in reaching the Eastern line. This is held by the Norwegians and it was hoped that our allies would have been able at least to carry out demolitions and so hold up the advance of the enemy. For one reason or another, it appears that these demolitions have not been carried out and the Germans are advancing rapidly. They have already passed Roeros and are near Stoeren, where the two lines join. When they reach the junction they will have linked up with their troops at Trondhjem and will menace the branch line to Dombas. This branch is at present held by British troops who have been reinforced by the 15th brigade of the regular army disembarked at Andalsnes. The question is what orders should be given to these troops?

"All this information only reached London on Thursday. Until then only fragmentary news was received which made it impossible to obtain an exact picture of the situation. Now, on the other hand, one can see only too clearly that the situation is growing worse from day to day. The British are discouraged by the failure of their efforts to reply to the German air attacks. They had hoped to use a frozen lake as a taking off ground for fighter planes. Eighteen of these aircraft succeeded in landing on it. But they were bombed by the enemy, before they were able to start operating. The Admiralty in its turn made a desperate effort. Two aircraft carriers were taken to within 100 miles of the Norwegian coast and 33 machines were sent against the enemy bombers. They accomplished their mission and shot down a number of enemy aircraft but 10 British planes, about one-third of the total, were lost. It is clear that fighter aircraft embarked on carriers cannot have the same performance as those operating from shore bases.

"The British Government has therefore reached the conclusion that it is not possible to face up to the air situation when operating from bases several hundreds of miles from the theatre of operations. The British planes are, in fact, operating at about their extreme radius of action. The only way of meeting the German air force on equal terms is to establish an aerodrome on the spot. Unfortunately, the Allies have no air-field in Norway and something of that kind cannot be improvised.

"The consequence of all this is that it is practically impossible to land heavy material, first because the bridgeheads have been destroyed and secondly because unloading is only possible during the dark hours which are now becoming shorter and shorter in those northern regions. It is therefore no longer possible to hope for the capture of Trondhjem. He [Mr. Chamberlain] believes that this is also the view of General Gamelin.

"Such a conclusion is doubtless not the same thing as a decision to evacuate. Even though it believes that the capture of Trondhjem is impossible, the British Government recognizes that the struggle on this front should be maintained as long as possible. It recognizes the very serious consequences which would result from an evacuation. At the same time it cannot but have doubts about the length of time during which it will be possible to maintain troops in this region. General Gamelin has made some suggestions. These are now being examined by the military experts. It is for them and not for civilians to decide what is best to be done in the light of practical possibilities.

"The Prime Minister repeated that, whether the evacuation took place sooner or later, the consequences would certainly be of a most disagreeable character.

"The situation at Narvik is quite different. This place has always been considered essential as it is the place of access to the Swedish iron ore mines, and the denial to the Germans of this source of supply constitutes one of the principal objects of the allies. For the moment, operations at Narvik are held up by the weather which is appalling. Deep snow covers the region and violent snow-storms succeed each other without intermission. All preparations have nevertheless been made for a vigorous attack as soon as the weather permits. The attack is designed to seize the town and then push forward with the help of the chasseurs alpins to the Swedish frontier. The British Government realize that it is necessary to launch this attack at the earliest possible moment. An allied success at Narvik coinciding with our retirement in the South would demonstrate the will and strength of the Allies.

"It is, however, impossible to deny that the Swedish situation has deteriorated as a result of the German advance on the Swedish flank. The Government at Stockholm is in a weak position to resist German pressure. It is to be feared that the Germans will bring heavy pressure to bear on the Swedish Government to induce it to prevent us by threats from approaching the mining area. It is therefore not certain that, even if we capture Narvik, we shall be able to seize the iron mines. It cannot be doubted that, could the Allies gain control of them, it would be a heavy blow for Germany. Even so, the effect would not be so immediate as the results of an action against the sources of Germany's oil supply.

"The Prime Minister [Mr. Chamberlain] was in entire agreement with the account which M. Corbin had given the day before of the serious political and psychological consequences of an Allied evacuation of Norway. It would certainly lead to deep discouragement amongst neutrals both in the Low Countries and the Balkans.

"As for Italy, the consequences might be still more serious.

"During the past 24 hours the British Government has received some information about Italy from a source which has already on several occasions proved reliable. It appears, according to this report, that the last meeting of the Grand Council was very lively but that, in the end, M. Mussolini carried the day and it was decided that Italy should enter the war on the 1st or 2nd of May and should begin with attacks on Malta and Gibraltar. The mention of the latter place gives cause to fear that there may be an understanding between Spain and Italy.

"It is, therefore, possible that in the next few days the Allies may be at war with Italy as well as with Germany.

"It must be recognized that Allied military and air resources are not sufficient to make it possible to wage one war in Central Scandinavia and another in Italy. The entry of Italy into the war would be sufficient to oblige us to abandon the Scandinavian expedition.

"The eventuality of an attack by Italy against the Allies raises questions which were not studied at the last meeting of the Supreme Council. At that meeting the possibility of an Italian move against us, which fell short of an act of war, was discussed. No more was done than to consider what reply could be made following an Italian aggression against Yugoslavia and Corfu, and it was decided that the Allies could not remain passive.

"Mr. Chamberlain only wished, for the moment, to allude to this new aspect of the question. The allies must not keep their eyes fixed on any one point, but must take all-round views. The British Government believe that, should the Supreme Council today decide that it is not possible to maintain the allied position in South Scandinavia, it would be essential to stage a come-back elsewhere. This counter-blow might consist of an attack directed against the heart of Germany. The Prime Minister was not at the moment making any precise proposals. He was confining himself to raising the question and suggesting it should be examined. Among possible objectives were sources of German oil supply inside the Reich; the shipping on the Rhine, etc. . . . One could certainly find an effective counter-blow somewhere, but once again Mr. Chamberlain was refraining, for the time being, from making precise suggestions.*

* A typical politician's observation in war.—K-H.

"M. PAUL REYNAUD declared on behalf of himself and his French colleagues that they were very pleased to be able to have a frank discussion about the very serious situation in Scandinavia. Mr. Chamberlain had first described it on its own merits and then in relation to a possible Italian action. On this last point, M. Reynaud was bound to say he had his doubts. With Italians one should never ignore the possibility of a bluff.

"So far as Scandinavia was concerned the operation of the allies had two objects: (1) to land in the Trondhjem area sufficient forces to sustain Norwegian resistance and produce a salutary effect on the Swedes. The basic object was to create a new theatre of war in which the Germans would use up their men, their material, and in particular their air force, and above all their reserves, especially of petrol.* (2) To cut off supplies of iron ore to Germany. On this point and in reply to the remarks just made by Mr. Chamberlain, M. Paul Reynaud said that, in his opinion, petrol was not more important to Germany than iron ore and in any case the allies were not so well situated to act in Roumania as they were in Scandinavia.

"A retreat by the allies in central Norway would be, one must not be afraid to say it, a great disaster morally and politically. The effect it would produce on the Germans, on the neutrals, even on the allies was incalculable. Nevertheless, having heard Mr. Chamberlain's review, the French Prime Minister's personal opinion was as follows: The expedition to Central Scandinavia, to which the allies had committed a considerable number of troops and engaged their prestige, was based on a technical error. It was impossible to carry out the operation without having one good harbour and some air bases. Without one of these the operation would already have been difficult; but without either the question arose whether the expedition had ever had the slightest hope of success.

"In these circumstances what should be done? M. Paul Reynaud thought an attempt should be made to achieve a double purpose. First, face-saving to the small extent to which it was still possible. To this end, would it not be possible to destroy the German ships at Trondhjem and to endeavour, as General Gamelin had suggested, to maintain some forces in the Southern massif to harass the enemy and show that we had not entirely lost our footing? Secondly, we must defend Narvik. The expedition in the North is far from being hopeless. In fact, it must be made to succeed. But we must reckon with an adversary very rapid in movement and capable of hard hitting who, if we threw up the sponge in the centre, would at once throw all his strength against Narvik. If only to protect the attack on this port, it would be advisable to keep up a certain resistance near Trondhjem. Would it be technically possible, asked the [French] Prime Minister, to undertake a blocking operation at Trondhjem similar to that of Zeebrugge in the last war. Moreover, we must guard the road, poor though it is, which leads from Trondhjem to Narvik. General Gamelin considers that the allied forces which disembarked north of Trondhjem could, by a progressive retreat north of Namsos and as they were forced to withdraw, delay the advance of the Germans towards Narvik. This is a technical question, but we had better reach a conclusion at once about the two proposals put forward by General Gamelin as to what should be attempted south of Trondhjem and at Namsos.

"As regards an operation against the iron mines, M. Paul Reynaud asked himself whether it were not possible to make to the Swedish Government an offer analagous to that made to Roumania in the 1914-18 war as a result of which the Roumanian oil wells had been destroyed. One could offer to the Swedes a certain sum of money as compensation for the destruction of the iron mines, a destruction which we might have to undertake.

"In fact, after intervening without success in Scandinavia for the defence of one free country, it would be particularly distasteful for the allies simply to violate another free country, and the offer of an indemnity to Sweden might induce that country to let us act against the mines.

"There was another question which was worrying the French Government. In view of the retreat of the allied forces might not the Norwegian Government resign itself to making

* It is hard to imagine a more absurd strategical conception. Is it not fearful that such men and such minds should be in charge of nations at war and responsible for decisions affecting thousands of lives. This is enough to make Mars a pacifist!—K-H.

peace with Germany? Where was the King of Norway? Might it not be advisable to give sanctuary to him and his Government as had been done with the Polish Government? What was needed was to show that there still existed, side by side with the allies, a living Norwegian entity and thus avoid a peace treaty between Norway and the Reich.

"Finally, there was no use blinking the fact that the evacuation of Scandinavia would come as a shock to the French and British public who had in no way been prepared for such a reverse. It would be well to harmonize the news in the Press of the two countries and M. Paul Reynaud suggested that immediate contact be made between the Ministers of Information of the two countries.

"In conclusion, the [French] Prime Minister declared that he was sure he was expressing not only his own opinion, but also those of all his colleagues and especially M. Daladier's, when he asked categorically that, on the one hand, they should save face as much as possible by not precipitating the evacuation from the South, and on the other hand, that the road to Narvik be defended energetically.

"MR. NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN replied at once to the three specific points raised by the French Prime Minister:

"(1) As regards an offer to Sweden to induce that country to destroy the iron mines, the Prime Minister considers that it is not a question of money. Sweden will now be cut off from the world as a result of the German occupation of Norway, and will only be able to communicate with the outside world by the will of Germany. It is Germany who will give her what materials she needs and it is almost certain that Germany will insist on being paid in iron ore. Can one really expect the Swedes to agree to destroy the only bargaining asset they have with the Germans? The Roumanian precedent was quite different. The Roumanian Government destroyed the oil wells after the country had been invaded by the Germans. If Sweden were invaded by Germany she would probably consent to the destruction of the iron mines, otherwise it was most unlikely she would do so.

"(2) In regard to the King of Norway, M. Paul Reynaud's suggestion is excellent. The Prime Minister did not know where the King was, except that he was somewhere south of Trondhjem. In any case, nothing is easier than to get in touch with him. The British proposals are as follows. If, in accordance with his public statements, King Haakon decides to remain in Norway, he would be offered transport to Narvik or Tromsø or elsewhere in the North. If that is impossible the British Government would certainly offer him hospitality. As the [French] Prime Minister said, it was essential to show that Norway continued to exist, even if only in name.

"(3) The suggestion of M. Paul Reynaud about harmonizing the presentation of the news in France and Great Britain is also excellent and the British Minister of Information would be very happy to get in touch with his French colleague on this matter. In addition the British Press has already begun this morning to prepare public opinion, which had been led to anticipate an allied success. But this morning's papers have stressed the difficulties of the enterprise and in particular those which arose from the enemy superiority in the air. It is necessary not only to guide the Press, but also the B.B.C.

"Furthermore, the British Parliament will meet on Tuesday and will certainly ask the Government to make a statement. If the Government has to speak in open session it will, of course, not be able to say much. But it is probable that a secret session will be held and then the Government can speak with greater frankness and reveal the real nature of the difficulties which have arisen. The last time a secret session was held at Westminster, secrecy was well maintained. Naturally, the decision to evacuate will be kept secret until the operation has been accomplished.

"As regards the fundamental question of what initiative should be taken given the situation in Norway, the [French] Prime Minister has in fact expressed the same opinion as Mr. Chamberlain. We must save face and safeguard Narvik. How is face to be saved? The Trondhjem Fjord is already guarded by the British fleet. There is only a German destroyer and torpedo boat inside the fjord. As for General Gamelin's suggestions, they are

in the sphere of the military experts, but they are in broad agreement with the views of the British Government.

"M. PAUL REYNAUD expressed pleasure that agreement in principle had been reached on General Gamelin's proposals. It was for the military experts to work out the details of the decisions.

"Returning to his suggestion of an offer of an indemnity to Sweden in compensation for an eventual destruction of the iron mines, the [French] Prime Minister said that it was a question of finding out whether the Swedish Government would willingly lend itself to such an operation. The hypothesis which he had in mind was one in which the allies found it impossible to stay at Narvik and decided themselves to destroy the mines. The offer of compensation was intended to soften the shock which such a decision would certainly provoke in the Swedes.

"The French Government, concluded M. Reynaud, take note of the gravity of the situation. They consider that the graver the situation the more necessary it is to maintain Franco-British solidarity, and they are determined to express this solidarity in action.

"Mr. NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN then asked M. Paul Reynaud if he desired to make any remarks about the matter which he (Mr. Chamberlain) had raised at the end of his review of the situation (i.e., a riposte to atone for the failure in Norway).

"M. PAUL REYNAUD indicated that he was not anxious to do so."

DOCUMENT XI

"Draft of a letter from M. Reynaud (French Prime Minister) to Mr. Chamberlain, British Prime Minister.

"Note written by hand: Not sent in this form. Redrafted as a telegram 1st May, 1940."

[Explanatory Note: The part of this document printed in italics is crossed out in the original.—K-H.]

"My dear Prime Minister,

"A month ago when after the most careful study and detailed discussion we decided in agreement to lay mines in Norwegian territorial waters we did not conceal from ourselves the importance of this operation or the ultimate developments which it might bring about.

"The stakes at issue were so great that they seemed to us to justify taking certain risks, even grave risks.

"The first results of the naval battle which took place off the Norwegian coast and later near Narvik justified our hopes. They confirmed the valour and superiority of the British fleet, they gave the world proof that the allies were capable of initiative, courage and tenacity, and rallied the confidence of neutrals who were shaken by the impunity with which Germany had hitherto conducted her aggressions.

"For the past three weeks, the eyes of the world have been on Norway. On the issue of the battle now taking place in Norway depend the hostile plans which some are preparing [Italy, K-H.] and the friendly gestures which some are still afraid to make in our favour.

"The strength of the German air force quickly showed us that this important operation was going to be difficult, perhaps costly. Notwithstanding our first experiences, we decided at the Supreme Council meeting of the 22nd April to carry on with the operation until a successful result was obtained.

"Later on, as a result of the views of the British High Command, we agreed at the Supreme Council of April 27th to limit ourselves to a more modest objective. We still had in mind a bridge-head south of Trondhjem; the establishment of an expeditionary force at Namsos and the conquest of the region around Narvik. In addition we emphasized the opportune character of a naval attack on the port of Trondhjem. These plans were intended to establish a constant menace to the enemy garrison at Trondhjem; to give Sweden adequate support in case of German aggression and lastly to sustain the prestige of the allies.

"General Gamelin informed me yesterday evening that during the night of the

27th-28th April, as a result of further air attacks on Andalsnes, the British High Command has definitely decided to abandon the whole of the Trondhjem region and even perhaps that of Namsos. In the course of a final interview between our military Chiefs of Staff, General Ironside did not appreciably shift his ground.

"General Gamelin asserts that the proposals he made, which were designed to maintain the position already occupied, were practical, though naturally not without risks. But he informs me that the British experts have a profound anxiety to preserve intact their fleet and their air force and not to risk them even in operations where they could be employed.*

"I understand the sentiments of the British Government and appreciate the important part played by the British Fleet and Air Force in our common struggle too well not to admit that, in this sphere, your judgment must be decisive.

"Nevertheless, I feel I must tell you that if you decide, while there is yet time, to cancel the order to evacuate, we are ready today, as we were yesterday, to give you all the resources in men and material needed to consolidate our occupation.

"You know that already the unfavourable reports about the battle in Norway are producing reactions among the neutrals, in Sweden as well as in the Balkan countries. This very day, the Norwegian Minister has warned me that his Government may have to enter into negotiations with the Germans.

"I fear also—it is my duty to tell you this—a serious reaction on the part of French public opinion.

"The confidence which our public had in the British fleet was such that it will be difficult to prevent them from believing

—either that the fleet has suffered, without admitting it, serious losses which have gravely affected its strength,

—or that, in a battle upon whose result may depend the issue of the war, the British fleet hesitates fully to commit itself.

"I shall use my utmost endeavours to combat these tendencies, but in the name of the friendship which unites our two peoples, I ask you to think again about the serious character of the problem which confronts you."

DOCUMENT XII

Extract from NATIONAL NEWS-LETTER (then K-H. News-Letter) No. 196, of 12th April, 1940.

"Why did he (Hitler) suddenly invade Denmark and Norway? We believe that the answer will turn out to be because he attributed to the allies an intention of invading Scandinavia in order to cut him off from all the Swedish iron ore, and eventually turn his flank. This may seem ridiculous to us and it is of course perfectly clear that he had launched his expeditionary force *before* the allies had laid their three minefields in Norwegian waters. The German excuse that they are in Scandinavia because the allies laid mines off the Norwegian coast is a palpable lie. . . ."

Footnote to News-Letter No. 196

(Written in December, 1945)

Yes, it was a lie. But some regard for historical accuracy and truth obliges me to point out that the reason the Germans went to Scandinavia was because they found out we were going and decided to get there first.

In the light of the documents published in this report Mr. Churchill's remark in his speech in the House of Commons on 11th April, 1940, takes on a new and fuller meaning. He said: "I must declare to the House that I feel we are greatly advantaged by what has occurred, provided we act with increasing and increasing vigour to turn to the utmost profit the strategic blunder into which our mortal enemy has been *provoked*." (*Hansard*, col. 749.)

PROVOKED seems in retrospect to have been the operative word!—K-H.

*I have always understood that during this period the heavy units of the Home Fleet were forbidden by the Admiralty to operate south of Lat. 60 N.—K-H.

The draft telegram shown below is not translated in the report
It is reproduced as an item of historical interest. Had this appeal
been heeded by H.M.G. the Battle of Britain would have been lost R.H.

Présidence
du Conseil

Paris le

TELEGRAMME POUR MONSIEUR CHURCHILL

De la bataille qui se déroule actuellement sur
la Somme et sur l'Oise dépend le sort de la Grande-
Bretagne comme celui de la France.

Il serait inadmissible que les forces des deux
Pays n'y soient pas engagées dans leur totalité.

[Si la partie qui se joue ^{est} ~~est~~ perdue, l'effort
d'armement du Royaume-Uni n'aura plus aucun sens.

Je ne comprends pas, dans ces conditions, pour-
quoi vous continuez à conserver en Angleterre, pour la
sauvegarde de vos Usines, la majorité de vos forces
aériennes.

Je vous demande de la façon la plus instante
d'envoyer immédiatement en France, où des terrains
sont préparés pour les recevoir, 500 avions de chasse.

Je vous prie d'autre part de jeter toute votre
aviation de bombardement dans la bataille et de renon-
cer à des expéditions telles que celle que la Royal-
Air-Force vient d'entreprendre sur la Ruhr, alors que
l'Infanterie française, qui se bat seule, a le plus
impérieux besoin de l'aide des bombardiers britanniques.]

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