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EXERCISE/EXERCICE NEW HORIZONS

## **Operation “Weserübung Nord”**

**The first Joint Operation of the Wehrmacht and the implications for success**

by / par Korvettenkapitän Henning Faltin (GE N)

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## **ABSTRACT**

‘Weserübung Nord’, the invasion of Norway by Germany during World War II, deserves special contemplation because it is the first jointly planned and conducted operation in modern warfare. This paper focuses on the command structure on the operational level and demonstrates its contribution to the success. Moreover it demonstrates the tremendous effort undertaken by the German troops on the tactical

*When The First Mountain Troops In Parachutes Were Dropped At Narvik, One Soldier fell directly in the water. Asked how he end up there he replied:  
With the help of the three branches of the 'Wehrmacht':  
The army sent me up here, the air force transported me,  
and the navy pulled me out of the water.*

*General Dietl, "Das Leben eines Soldaten"*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Operation 'Weserübung', the German invasion of Norway and Denmark in April 1940, was a very interesting campaign. Firstly, it was characterized by speed, focus, bold action and surprise and hereby represents a perfect example for the German *Blitzkrieg* philosophy; and secondly, it was the first German operation in modern warfare, which was planned and executed jointly by navy, army and air force. These facts are the reason that operation 'Weserübung' is one of the best-examined military episodes of World War II. The main focus of research however, emphasized the reasons for the campaign whereas the study on the aspects of the joint command structure and the resulting implications for the success of the invasion was only conducted with minor efforts. Only during the recent decade with the restructuring of NATO and the tendency towards joint headquarters on the operational level has the interest of military academics shifted to joint warfare. From this perspective, operation 'Weserübung' definitely warrants examination, because it was truly 'joint' in planning and conduct. But despite this fact it was overshadowed by serious rivalries and disputes among the strategic headquarters of

air force, army and navy and the newly invented *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (high command) under Hitler's direct control.

'Weserübung' was the first test for this new command structure. The success of this operation was at risk during all of its three phases: the planning for an invasion in Norway from 1939 on; the invasion itself; and the consolidation against an allied counter-invasion. This paper will initially analyze new joint command structure of the *Wehrmacht* and will illustrate the different motivations for or against this operation demonstrate the degree of influence during the three phases.

'Weserübung Nord' was a strategic and military necessity in the eyes of the German high command. It was planned and conducted as a joint operation and was heralded as a success from this standpoint. However, analysis indicates that this was not a matter of course. With disputes and rivalries on the strategic level between the army, navy, air force and high command and with Hitler assuming strategic command of the forces for the first time, joint operations were severely hampered and a defeat could only be prevented because the efforts on the operational and tactical level made up for the weak strategic level.

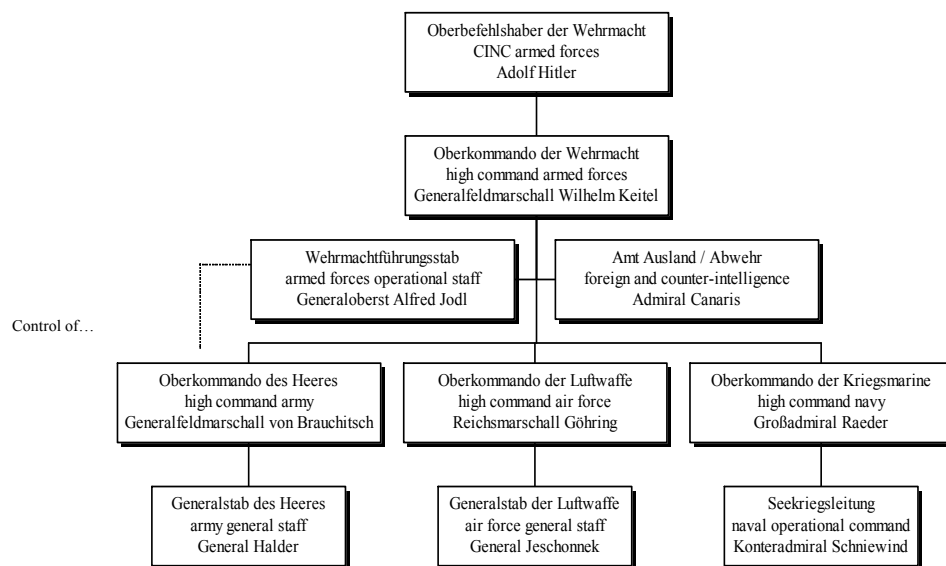
This paper concentrates on the so-called 'Weserübung Nord', the invasion of Norway. The occupation of Denmark –or 'Weserübung Süd'- will not be reviewed because this part of the operation faced, due to the early capture and cooperation of the Danish king, little military resistance.

## DISCUSSION

At the time operation 'Weserübung' was executed the German strategic command was in a transition<sup>1</sup>. Starting with the death of then German president von Hindenburg in 1934, Hitler had fastened his grip on the *Wehrmacht* (armed forces) and intended to convert the politically independent general staff, capable of making and unmaking governments, into an instrument of his will<sup>2</sup>. Until 1938 the *Reichskriegsministerium* (war ministry of the Reich) led the *Wehrmacht*, where Hitler had no direct influence. Within this ministry the three services were organized beside each other; a joint command structure did not exist. The operational command for each branch was the traditional general staff. Basic principles within this command structure were unity of command, mission tasking and delegation of authority. Regarding a possible war in the future the German general staff identified the need for transition towards a joint command, which should draw up a unified military strategy and should support the Commander in Chief (CinC) in the conduct of the common operations of the three branches of the armed forces (*Gesamtkriegführung*). It was supposed to be the coordination instrument between navy, army and air force. Hitler realized the chance that such an idea bore -centralized control of all branches of the armed forces. Consequently, in 1938 he dismissed the war ministry and created the new joint command, the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW)*. It had no command authority over the three services and was not designed as a true joint operational staff. It rather gave Hitler the control over the German military. Irrespective of his lack of experience and capacity<sup>3</sup> he

announced himself as CinC of the armed forces and assumed command over the three services. Furthermore he gave up the general staff system in favour of a joint High Command, which had merely the function to advise Hitler and to mediate between him and the CinC's. Its command structure was designed according to the national-socialistic ideology, *the Führerprinzip*<sup>4</sup>, and enabled Hitler to assume overwhelming joint command.

This modification was a major failure and had disastrous impacts on the course of World War II. Hitler, now head of the state, political leader and CinC, was simply not able to fulfill the various duties involved. Additionally, his personality did just not allow delegation and relief. Permanently presuming conspiracy, Hitler preferred close control rather than trust, and always remained more “concerned with the unquestioning obedience of his disciples than with the capacity of his collaborators.”<sup>5</sup> Through this new *OKW* Hitler generated the war machinery, which denied any possible opposition<sup>6</sup>. The following graph illustrates the strategic command structure from 1938 on:



The operational level of command was embedded in this structure as *Wehrmachtführungsstab* (armed forces operational staff) under Jodl. The major problem here was that it proved itself as too small in the conduct of any large-scale operation. The navy for example was represented only by a handful of staff officers, which “suited the continental conceptions of Hitler himself”<sup>7</sup>. The small size of the *OKW* would admittedly ensure the mobility and flexibility needed for the application of the *Blitzkrieg* strategy and would make certain that Hitler would not lose the overview.<sup>8</sup> The manpower and experience especially for combat support requirements was not sufficient at all. “Jodl’s staff was in any case too weak and too one-sided for conducting a global war.”<sup>9</sup> The general staffs of the branches had the adequate staffs at their disposal, but they remained reluctant to accept the *OKW* as superior command.<sup>10</sup> The refusal by the CinC’s of the army, navy and air force thwarted a clear line of command on the operational level throughout the war. The high command on the other hand never became independent from Hitler and could not accomplish its role as superior command for the coordination of the three services.

This difficult command structure took away the operational command from the general staff and lifted it on the strategic level under the direct influence of Hitler. Hereby it also permitted the CinC’s and the ideological leaders to interfere with operations. In fact, it was not a military tool towards more joint efficiency; it was merely Hitler’s instrument to control the armed forces. For ‘Weserübung’ this bore a huge risk because the CinC’s were not uniformly convinced about the necessity of an invasion in



Norway but had divergent motives. The following paragraphs will demonstrate the problems among navy, air force, army and political party concerning 'Weserübung'.

The navy, under Admiral Raeder, initially drew the attention to the northern theatre of operation. The roots lay in the experiences of World War I.<sup>11</sup> During this war, the contribution of the navy, in comparison to the German army, remained marginal until its end.<sup>12</sup> Great Britain had, despite the fact of Norway's neutrality, closed the bottleneck between Scotland and Norway and hereby contained the German *Hochseeflotte* (Grand Fleet) in the North Sea. Raeder was determined to avoid the same situation and to secure a decisive role for the navy in World War II. Therefore Norway played a key role in his considerations.<sup>13</sup>

After the outbreak of World War II the Royal Navy tried again to enclose the German navy within its territorial waters, and this challenged the aim of Raeder's naval strategy - disruption of the British trade routes in the Atlantic mainly with surface ships.<sup>14</sup> But at first Norway remained strictly neutral and the British embargo failed to be effective.<sup>15</sup> German warships and merchant ships could still enter the Atlantic via Norwegian territorial waters. Furthermore Germany's special concern, the flow of iron ore from the Swedish city Kiruna<sup>16</sup>, remained unobstructed.<sup>17</sup> As long as Norway's neutrality was not violated by the allies, Germany had unlimited access to the Swedish iron ore and to the Atlantic. Therefore, Germany formally notified the Norwegian Government at the start of the war that Germany would respect its neutrality.<sup>18</sup>

For Great Britain the Norwegian neutrality was their Achilles heel. Winston Churchill, then First Sea Lord, was well aware of the possibilities of blockading Germany

through Norway and of opening a northern front for Germany by landing troops, but under the given situation the Royal Navy could not control the leak of the Norwegian territorial waters, and especially the delivery of iron ore to Germany.<sup>19</sup> Raeder became alerted when at the end of September 1939 Admiral Canaris, then *Chef der Abwehr* (Chief of Foreign and Counter Intelligence), informed him “that certain ominous signs pointed to Britain’s intention to land forces in Norway.”<sup>20</sup> On October 10, 1939 Raeder briefed Hitler about the latest intelligence and drew his attention onto a possible invasion of Norway by Great Britain.<sup>21</sup> Until that time Hitler had given no thought to this potential problem because “he was not very familiar with the conditions of naval warfare.”<sup>22</sup> Hitler and Raeder came to the agreement that the neutrality of Norway was in Germany’s best interest and that no imminent threat existed so far. But in November 1939 the issue was raised again when the Soviet Union invaded Finland. After all, this aggression gave Churchill a good opportunity to order preparation for an invasion in Norway, not only to land troops for the support of Finland, but furthermore in order to gain control over the iron ore resources around Kiruna and to threaten Germany from the North. Once more intelligence warned about an Allied intent to land in Norway in order to intervene in favour for Finland. It was confirmed in December 1939, when Vidkun Quisling, the leader of the Norwegian nationalists, met Hitler.<sup>23</sup> As a result from this meeting Hitler ordered the *OKW* to deal with the Norway subject. The product of this planning, *Studie Nord* (Study North), was completed at the end of December and again came to the result that Norwegian neutrality was favoured; however, it was decided to start joint preparations for an invasion in Norway.<sup>24</sup> Raeder realized that sea power is a

product of the fleet and sufficient bases<sup>25</sup> and he recognized that he had to focus Hitler's attention to the operational need of bases outside of the German Bight in order to avoid containment of the navy by Britain.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, he saw the risk of a northern Allied front and the implications for the control of the Baltic Sea and the North German coastline. Finally, he realized the strategic necessity of the iron ore supply from Sweden to Germany via Norwegian territorial waters. His influence was the initial driving force for conduct of 'Weserübung'.

The position of the air force was different. Feldmarschall Göhring endeavored to prove the decisive importance of the air force for modern warfare and especially for the *Blitzkrieg* strategy. Within the last few years they had developed capabilities that would be described today as revolutions in military affairs. For example, paratroops or strategic airlift that had huge significance during the later conduct of 'Weserübung'. Even Göhring intended to increase the importance of the air force relative to the two other services. But Göhring had concentrated his efforts on air-land war. The component for air-sea war consisted only of two groups comprising some sixty aircraft, which had previously belonged to the navy.<sup>27</sup> It had been neglected because Hitler had positively assured him that any war with Britain before 1942 could be ruled out<sup>28</sup>. Consequently, Göhring focused on Fall Gelb, the invasion of France, and intended to concentrate his efforts. 'Weserübung' meant a distraction for him, and he was very reluctant to assign forces. He argued that the German offense in France would bind all allied forces. No Allied troops would be available for any operation in Norway, and all own forces should be employed in France. When he realized in January 1940 that 'Weserübung' was

inevitable, Gohring became over-confident, claimed that the German dive-bombers were able to drive the allied naval forces from the sea<sup>29</sup> and intended to take over the operational planning for 'Weserbung'. Hitler was aware about Gohring's ambitions<sup>30</sup> but refused this approach because he regarded the air force general staff and in particular Gohring himself as not qualified for the planning and conduct of joint operations and he was aware that the navy

command for the first time assumed responsibility for operational planning, which until then had been the general staff's alone.<sup>35</sup> Halder concluded that this arrangement would usurpate the role of the general staff. 'Weserübung' would reduce the role of the general staff and entail a huge aversion among the strategic level of the army towards this operation.

Finally, the Nazi party has to be taken into account. Rosenberg, the chief ideologist of the Nazi party and Hitler's advisor, promoted the invasion in Norway for two reasons. In his view the Scandinavian race was regarded as truly Arian, and Norway played a key role in the future *Grossgermanisches Reich* (Greater German Empire). Trondheim for example should be developed as one of the main German cities.<sup>36</sup> The second consideration was the access to heavy water. This material was necessary for the production of the atomic bomb, and the only company in Europe that produced it was located in Norway. Even though these thoughts were out of the focus of the military leaders, it probably motivated Hitler to agree on the invasion in Denmark and Norway.

On January 27, 1940 Hitler ordered, based on intelligence reports about increasing Allied activity in Norway,<sup>37</sup> to establish a special staff within the *OKW*, which should encompass one senior officer from each branch of the armed forces. He was aware that the navy held the main effort at the initial stages of 'Weserübung' and assigned the lead of the planning staff to a naval officer.<sup>38</sup> When this staff under the command of Kapitän zur See Krancke constituted on February 5, 1940 the representative of the air force was still missing due to Göring's protest.<sup>39</sup> The staff developed a plan of operations for the invasion in Norway called 'Weserübung'.<sup>40</sup> During the planning the

operations staffs of all three services were excluded from participation.<sup>41</sup> The army was especially embarrassed when the naval officer Krancke, who was not even a member of the general staff but the commanding officer of the cruiser *Admiral Scheer*, increased the earlier demand for one division of army troops up to corps size without even consulting the army headquarter and general staff.

‘Weserübung’ started off under these diverging motives. Despite the need for joint cooperation on the operational level intense rivals on the strategic level in fact had a huge influence and endangered the whole operation. The next section will show how the Hitler and the operational command dealt with this problem.

On February 16, 1940 the discussion about Norwegian neutrality reached a peak due to the *Altmark* incident<sup>42</sup>. The attack by the British destroyer *HMS Cossack* within Norwegian territorial waters and the inability of the Norwegian navy to prevent the border violation alerted the German military planners. Raeder stated, “This incident proved without a doubt that Norway was completely helpless to maintain its neutrality even if the Norwegian government wished to do so.”<sup>43</sup> Hitler chose to intervene with military means<sup>44</sup> and ordered to establish a special joint staff (*Sonderstab Gruppe XXI*) under the direct command of the *OKW*. Instead of assigning the operation to the general staff of the army under General Halder, Hitler chose to appoint a relative junior officer at the lower corps command level, General der Infanterie von Falkenhorst<sup>45</sup>, who accepted gladly<sup>46</sup>. The army was not even officially informed and found out about this assignment only when the *OKW* bypassed the normal army channels and started assigning units to the operation.<sup>47</sup>

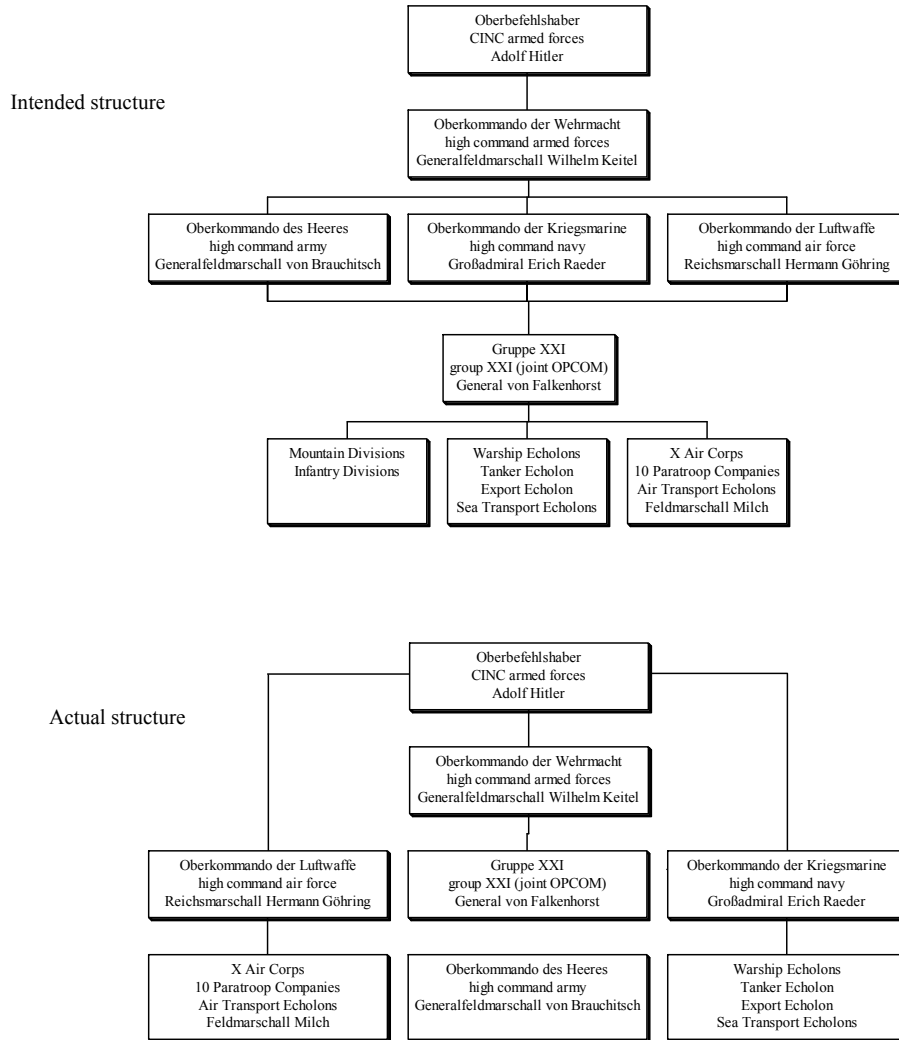
By putting von Falkenhorst directly under his command Hitler deliberately excluded the army general staff and the staff of the air force from any active participation in the planning of 'Weserübung'. Hereby he neutralized the negative influence of both branches. But he had generated another problem: The *OKW* and the general staff became two parallel headquarters.

Von Falkenhorst's staff –*Gruppe XXI*– encompassed only fifteen officers,<sup>48</sup> and suffered from the lack of manpower within the *OKW*. His group was simply too small to oversee all the associated functions such as logistics or intelligence and called upon the general staff for help. The general staff branches had to formulate large parts of the plan, "their efficiency suffered from having two sets of superiors simultaneously"<sup>49</sup>, and this caused further friction between the army and *OKW*.<sup>50</sup>

The navy and the air force were not assigned under the command of this staff. Raeder and Göhning had the political power to keep the *OKW* out of their spheres and both services remained independent from von Falkenhorst<sup>51</sup>. Another reason might have been that Hitler anticipated seniority problems between Raeder and Göhning as CinC's on the one side and von Falkenhorst as Joint Task Force Commander on the other side.<sup>52</sup> This entailed an organizational problem because the operational headquarters were not established in one location. Von Falkenhorst's *Gruppe XXI* planned to operate from Oslo, the air force general staff stayed in Hamburg, and the *OKW* and the navy remained in Berlin, and the operational planning staff had no joint structure.

The latter facts show that during the planning phase the concept of 'joint' was merely a phrase than reality. In fact, navy and air force conducted their planning for

‘Weserübung’ completely separate from von Falkenhorst’s staff. ‘Weserübung’ lacked a single line of command at the operational level from the onset, and unity of command was not achieved. The following graphs demonstrate the intended and the actual command structure during operation ‘Weserübung’ and support this statement:





On March 1, 1940 Hitler issued his 'Directive for occupation of Denmark and Norway'. The mission statement is an early indication of the limited authority that von Falkenhorst had as joint commander over his naval and airborne assets:

“The task of group XXI: Capture by surprise of the most important places on the coast by sea and airborne operations. The navy will take over the preparation and carrying out of the transport by sea of the landing troops as well as the transport of the forces which will have to be brought to Oslo in a later stage of the operation. It will escort supplies and reserves on the way over by sea. The air force, after the occupation has been completed, will ensure air defense and will make use of Norwegian bases for air warfare against Britain.”<sup>53</sup>

General von Falkenhorst developed, based on Krancke's preparations, the operational plan<sup>54</sup>. He knew that the operation depended on the navy and air force for solving the transport problem and probably expected difficulties with Raeder and Göhring in the conduct of the operation. Therefore his operation order was very detailed and left no questions open. This bore a huge risk. He employed several new ideas like transport of infantry by combatant ships and airlift and he relied on forces like the paratroops, which had not yet proved their combat efficiency.

During the initial phase of the conduct, the transportation of the ground troops into theater, the main effort lay on the navy; and this phase remained under the command of Admiral Raeder. Several supply ships deployed towards Norway and waited for the main force to follow. Von Falkenhorst held command over all land forces. The initial landing was conducted on April 9, 1940 with small detachments<sup>55</sup> at five cities along the Norwegian coastline between Narvik and Oslo.<sup>56</sup> The remaining army troops arrived via airlift and sealift during the following week. The parachute troops were tasked to seize airfields in order to enable close air support for the ground troops provided by the air

force. The air force contributed some 1,000 aircraft with the initially tasks to suppress the Royal Navy and the Norwegian fortresses at the fjord entrances and to conduct strategic airlift. All movements were precisely timed and alternatives in case of failure were foreseen. The drop of paratroops at Oslo airport for example was ordered for 'Weserzeit' plus 185 minutes, and they were given twenty minutes to secure the landing area for the landings of infantry, which should occur from plus 205 minutes on.

Initially the plan worked out very well. The majority of the German navy ships avoided encounters with the Royal Navy and could transport the troops to all ports of debarkation as previously planned. Only in the Oslo Fjord Norwegian opposition delayed the landing for half a day. During this time the Norwegian king could escape, which led to a strong Norwegian resistance throughout the occupation of Norway. But in general the landing of ground troops was conducted as preplanned and shocked the Norwegian civilian and military authorities. The ground and parachute troops took the mobilization centers and the airfields and thereby paralyzed the Norwegian military and enabled employment of the air force against the Royal Navy. This allowed the rest of the German sealift echelons to land without hindrance.

Von Falkenhorst at first was favoured by fortune. All operational objectives were achieved without significant delay<sup>57</sup>. This was achieved firstly due to his detailed operation order, where all actions were coordinated upfront. Furthermore the operational component commanders worked closely together. Hitler had no direct influence on the assets of navy and air force, and therefore the high command had no chance to direct any action. Besides this, the initial invasion was victorious because the transport units of the

navy and air force accepted to operate under a very high risk. The major surface ships deployed into the North Sea despite the superior Royal Navy and entered the Norwegian fjords in face of the coastal batteries. The paratroops suffered heavy losses but could achieve their mission and the air force transport groups landed their infantry battalions even before some of the airfields had been secured.<sup>58</sup> But during the following defense against an Allied counter-invasion and consolidation of German military power the successful and detailed plan showed its two major weaknesses: insufficient flexibility and the lack of the ability to quickly re-assess the developing situation because of the dispersed location of the operational staff. Fortunately, for Germany, the *Wehrmacht* suffered the majority of losses among units, which had already fulfilled their task for ‘Weserübung’.

This confirms that the problems on the strategic level and the lack of joint structure on the operational level was compensated by a operation order, which left no room for discussion, by cooperation of the operational component commanders and by the bold actions of the formations on the tactical level.

The German navy endured the worst losses. Firstly, Hitler ordered the surface ships to remain in port after the landings in order to encourage the army troops. Hereby he enabled quick location and concentration for the Royal Navy.<sup>59</sup> On April 13, 1940 a British destroyer group under command of Admiral Sir Forbes encountered a large group of German ships. A heavy fight started until the German ships ran out of fuel and were beached or sunk. At the end of the day Germany had lost half of its destroyers and the German surface fleet was severely crippled.<sup>60</sup>

The German campaign ashore was more successful. The terrain of Norway did not allow mutual support between the different army contingents. They had to rely only on their organic resources and fought independent battles, only supported when air force or navy assets were available. The following two examples will display the tremendous efforts on the tactical level, which finally ensured the German victory. The Allies landed ground troops<sup>61</sup> from April 14, 1940 on near Andalsnes and Namsos in order to break the German hold on central and northern Norway. But during the next two weeks the numerically superior Allied forces (6:1) were defeated by the supremely confident German Group Trondheim under tactical command of General Woytasch and by the air force, which provided aggressive air support.<sup>62</sup> The situation in Narvik was less favourable for German troops. Cut off from reinforcements by British sea control and bare of air support due to weather limitations the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mountain Division under the command of General Dietl had to fight on their own. His Division included only 2,000 infantrymen and 2,600 disembarked sailors<sup>63</sup>. At the beginning of May he faced an Allied strength of 24,500 troops. But Dietl did not resign: He was aware that Narvik was the most important port for the iron ore supply and fought aggressive delaying actions to maintain a foothold in this region. Hitler was not willing to give any reinforcements to this vital area and was willing to sacrifice his troops in the north of Norway. He did not see at that moment that all success of 'Weserübung' was dependent on one objective - the access to Narvik. On April 18, 1940, in a fit of nervousness he drafted an order for the force in northern Norway to withdraw into neutral Sweden and allow itself to be interned.<sup>64</sup> Only the deliberate delay of Hitler's order by a relatively junior officer –and

in the meantime a congratulatory telegram to the troops in Narvik by von Brauchitsch, army commander in chief- prevented that the order to withdraw was finally sent.<sup>65</sup> This first panic attack of Hitler and his inclination to coordinate and control down to the tactical level sent ripples of anxiety through the high command and von Brauchitsch, CinC army, raised the question “how they were going to manage in the coming offense in the west if the *Führer* was already losing his nerve in front of Narvik.”<sup>66</sup> Only on May 14, 1940 Hitler finally granted limited reinforcements.<sup>67</sup> General Dietl, with his iron will and the confidence of his men could remain in the area until the Allies, in the face of the German invasion of France, which shifted priorities, gave up Narvik and evacuated on June 8, 1940. A regiment of infantry and a sprinkling of troops from other arms, supported by a crescendo of bombing by the air force, which, after capture of the airfields by paratroops and infantry, established air superiority over Norway, had held the north, and largely contributed to the swift German success.<sup>68</sup> These two scenarios are excellent examples how strong-minded tactical commanders and confident troops fought the battles in Norway. It becomes especially evident how the sailors, infantrymen and airmen on the tactical level fought a joint war together despite the abuse on the strategic level.<sup>69</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

Operation 'Weserübung', as the first joint operation of the Wehrmacht, was from a German perspective certainly very successful in its execution. The reasons for the triumph were manifold: Of course, the invasion in France shifted the Allied focus from Scandinavia to Western Europe and led to the end of the Allied counter-invasion.<sup>70</sup> But the key factor was the personal effort of the tactical commanders to cooperate and to coordinate military action and the courage and will of the German troops to fight together.

On the contrary, the German triumph was not however the result of the newly established and highly insufficient joint command structure of the *OKW*. This structure undermined basic principles of the traditional German general staff system. Hitler assumed overall command for an operation for the first time, and he continuously intervened during the conduct of the operation down to the operational level and even to the tactical level and hereby contradicted the authority delegated to von Falkenhorst as joint task force commander. Moreover, the navy and the air force did not comply with the requirement for unity of command. Instead of being subordinated under the command of von Falkenhorst the participating forces remained under the command of the respective strategic and operational commanders. Göhning and Raeder still had the possibility to interfere with von Falkenhorst's decisions throughout the operation. These problems in the command structure had several implications for the execution of the operation: The joint character of the operation was seriously hampered by a lack of understanding

among the services on the strategic level. This led directly to possible friction between the services when it came to mutual support.

‘Weserübung’ bore the potential for several lessons learned. The new command structure of the *OKW* was, for the first time, responsible for the conduct of an operation. Hitler, for the first time assumed operational command. Finally, some new types of forces like the paratroops were employed for the first time. But the lessons were not learned, mainly due to the success of ‘Weserübung’. Hitler did not see that it was not his leadership, but the operational and tactical level of command compensating his disability. Therefore the inadequate<sup>71</sup> command structure was not changed. Furthermore, Hitler did not realize that he had an insufficient picture of the situation. Despite this fact, he incessantly tried to intervene even with tactical decisions. With his totalitarian command style, he did not learn throughout the war how to delegate and never allowed Keitel or Jodl to exercise any authority independently.<sup>72</sup> In fact, Hitler dominated or even eliminated every competing individual personality like for example later Raeder. The German general staff kept their distance from Hitler as best as they could, but their sense of duty and their oath of loyalty made resistance impossible. Furthermore Hitler did not agree with Jodl to increase the size of the staff within the *OKW* because he favoured a staff, which was small enough to pack up and move on short notice.

This paper has explained the problems on the strategic level and it has exemplified the efforts on the operational and tactical level during the conduct of operation ‘Weserübung’. It has proved that operation ‘Weserübung’ was not won by a superior joint command structure and a decisive strategic commander, Adolf Hitler. On

the contrary it confirmed that the rivals on the strategic significantly hampered efficient joint operational planning and execution of 'Weserübung'. The German defeat was only prevented by a tremendous effort of cooperation between the operational component commanders and by the courageous joint fight of German soldiers at sea, in the air and on the ground. Because of that they were able to compensate for Hitler's inadequate military ability, the divided strategic level of command and the weak high command.



## GLOSSARY

Fall Gelb	Codename for the attack on France
Kaiserliche Marine	Imperial German navy
Kriegsmarine	German navy
Luftwaffe	German air force
Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW)	Joint High Command Armed Forces
Oberkommando des Heeres (OKH)	German army High Command
Seekriegsleitung (SKL)	German navy High Command
Wehrmacht	German armed forces
Wehrmachtführungsstab	Armed Forces operational staff
Weserübung Nord	Codename for invasion of Norway
Wesertag	Codename for D-day
Weserzeit	Codename for H-hour

## **ENDNOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> “Oberkommando der Wehrmacht”. Internet: <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/wk2/kriegsverlauf/oberkommando/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> Trevor-Roper, H. R.: “Hitler’s war directives 1939-1945.” London: Sidgwick and Jackson 1964, pg. xviii.

<sup>3</sup> Ruge, Friedrich: “Sea Warfare.” 1939-1945. A German viewpoint. London: Cassell and Company Ltd. 1957, pg. 42.

<sup>4</sup> The ‘*Führerprinzip*’ encompassed the centralization of authority within one person. All subsequent levels of command became remotely controlled and had merely a coordinative function. It relied on a high degree of coordination and on command tasking (in opposition to mission tasking and delegation of authority).

<sup>5</sup> Ruge, pg. 42. This in fact was the reason why he chose Keitel as chief of the *OKW*, an officer with limited capabilities whose major traits were unconditional loyalty to Hitler and opportunism

<sup>6</sup> Trevor-Roper, pg. xviii.

<sup>7</sup> Ruge, pg. 42.

<sup>8</sup> Trevor-Ropers, pg. xx: In fact, when *Hitler* got more and more involved in operational and tactical affairs the Fuehrer Hauptquartier and the assigned *OKW* moved from one theatre of operations to the next and became more and more detached from the armed forces. However, during ‘Weserübung’ der *OKW* remained in Berlin.

<sup>9</sup> Ruge, Friedrich, pg. 42.

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<sup>10</sup> In fact, during the course of World War II especially the general staff of the army produced the draft operation orders on behalf of the OKW, which promulgated the final operation orders as their own products.

<sup>11</sup> Ottmer, Hans-Martin: “Skandinavien in der Deutschen marinestrategischen Planung der Reichs- bzw. Kriegsmarine.” Kiel: 1991, pg. 51. At the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century *Admiral Tirpitz* was in charge for the Imperial German Fleet. He ordered a huge shipbuilding program during which the German fleet became the second largest in the world, only topped by the Royal Navy. The idea behind this was the so-called ‘risk theory’: According to this the German navy should be strong enough that it would be an unacceptable risk for an aggressor to get involved with it.<sup>11</sup> But this defensive posture came hand in hand with an offensive intention à la *Mahan*: *Tirpitz* saw a reasonable chance to destroy or significantly weaken the British dominance of the world with a victory over the Royal Navy in one decisive battle. But after the outbreak of World War I Great Britain did not act offensive as assessed by Germany. On the contrary they used their fleet in a defensive attitude by protection of their sea lines of communication, containment of the German fleet within the German Bight and avoidance of the decisive battle. Germany could not act in accordance with the offensive doctrine and attack the Royal Navy because it lacked suitable bases.

<sup>12</sup> Ottmer, pg. 51.

<sup>13</sup> Wegener, pg. 33. Based on the experience of World War I, Admiral Wegener published in 1929 his paper ‘Die Seestrategie des Weltkrieges’ (‘The naval strategy of the World War’)<sup>13</sup>. He developed the conclusion that Germany needed bases in Norway

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in order to conquest the Shetland Islands as the gate to the Atlantic. These thoughts had a huge influence on the naval officers in Germany and focused on Norway as enabler for the decisive battle against England. At first Raeder rejected Wegener's theory. The reason for this rejection was less military necessity but moreover the fact that *Wegener* had criticized *Tirpitz* and by this had disrepute the corps spirit of the German navy.

<sup>14</sup> Salewski, Michael: "Die Deutsche Seekriegsleitung 1935-1945." Frankfurt am Main: Bernhard und Gräfe 1970, pg. 119.

<sup>15</sup> Riste, Olav: "The neutral ally." Norway's relations with belligerent powers in the First World War. Oslo: 1965. Riste describes that Norway could not maintain its neutrality during World War I de facto, but was dependant on Great Britain.

<sup>16</sup> During the summer months the import was mainly shipped via the Baltic Sea. During winter, when the Baltic Sea was frozen, the transport was conducted via land towards Narvik in Norway and then via sea towards Germany.

<sup>17</sup> This was a critical vulnerability of Germany, which was planning for the conquest of France (Codename *Fall Gelb*) and the Benelux-countries, because Germany lacked its own resources and therefore needed the iron ore for the armament industry.

<sup>18</sup> Raeder, Erich: "My life." (Translation). Annapolis: US Naval Institute 1960, pg. 301. This was only the official note. In fact The '*Kriegsmarine*' was planning for the war against England since 1938. With the concept paper 'Seekriegführung gegen England' ('naval warfare against England') the navy demanded from the army to occupy the coastline along the Channel up to Brest (later 'Fall Gelb') in order to gain bases for the attack on Great Britain (later operation 'Seelöwe'). But the following war-gaming of

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these plans demonstrated that this was not achievable (despite the later success).

Therefore alternative planning focused on Denmark and Norway, and here especially Trondheim. The result of the second war-gaming was positive and the Kriegsmarine concluded that they could wage war at sea with Great Britain if they had bases in Norway and France at their disposal.

<sup>19</sup> Great Britain faced a dilemma: On the one hand it claimed for itself the morality to accept and defend the territorial integrity of nations like Poland against Germany. On the other hand Great Britain knew that it had to violate exactly this rule in order to strike Germany significantly.

<sup>20</sup> Raeder, pg. 301.

<sup>21</sup> Ottmer, pg. 64. Before he spoke with Hitler, he ordered the *SKL* to plan for the submarine war against England, and special deliberations were given to the expansion of the operational bases to the west and to the north.

<sup>22</sup> Raeder, pg. 304.

<sup>23</sup> Raeder, pg. 305: He was introduced to *Raeder* by *Alfred Rosenberg*, then chief ideologist of the NSDAP and confirmed to the chief of the German navy that Britain had definite plans to land in Norway. *Raeder* relayed this message to *Hitler* and arranged an audience for December 14, 1939. *Raeder* argues that *Quisling*'s motive was his fear of the Soviets. He thought that only Nazi-Germany was the adequate counterpart, and that any crushing of Germany would led to the reign of communism in Europe.

<sup>24</sup> 1. Seekriegsleitung: "Kriegstagebuch." (transl.: War Diary.) 1940, pg. 392.

<sup>25</sup> Salewski, pg. 122. At this point Raeder adapted Wegener's view.

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<sup>26</sup> Salewski, pg. 119.

<sup>27</sup> Bekker, Cajus: “The Luftwaffe war diaries.” (Translation). London: MacDonald 1966, pg. 64: “For years navy and air force had disputed as to which should have the conduct of air operations over sea.” Finally, according to *Göhring’s* maxim ‘Everything that flies belongs to me’ the air force got that responsibility.

<sup>28</sup> Therefore the air force had not yet achieved its aim to have thirteen air-sea bomber squadrons available.

<sup>29</sup> Bekker, pg. 92.

<sup>30</sup> Hooker, Richard D. Jr./ Coglianesi, Christopher: “Operation Weserübung and the origins of joint warfare.”, pg. 103.

<sup>31</sup> Warlimont, Walter: “Im Hauptquartier der Deutschen Wehrmacht 1939-1945.” Band 1. Koblenz: Bernhard und Graefe 1986, pg. 87.

<sup>32</sup> 1. Seekriegsleitung. *Halder* expressed towards *Schniewind* that the capture of sufficient bases for the navy would exceed the capacities of the army.

<sup>33</sup> 1. Seekriegsleitung. Part A. Admiral *Schniewind*, then chief of the naval staff, argued with *Halder* in 1939 about the question whether the army could gain access to bases in France or Norway.

<sup>34</sup> Megargee, Geoffrey P.: “Inside Hitler’s high command.” Lawrence: University Press of Kansas 2000, pg. 73.

<sup>35</sup> Megargee, , pg. 78.

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<sup>36</sup> Salewski, pg. 125: Salewski demonstrates that Norway in fact should be integrated in the German world empire. For this reason Norway should be connected with Germany with a huge bridge construction over the Skagerrak.

<sup>37</sup> Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the British Admiralty, on January 20, 1940, invited Norway and Denmark to join the Allies, but both nations rejected this request.

<sup>38</sup> Warlimont, pg. 88.

<sup>39</sup> Warlimont, pg. 88.

<sup>40</sup> Hooker, pg 102: Two special conclusions were drawn out of his planning's: Firstly, in the face of superior British sea power surprise would be essential, and secondly in order to speed up the shipping parts of the landing force had to be transported onboard of German warships.

<sup>41</sup> Hooker, pg. 103.

<sup>42</sup> Raeder, pg. 306: The *Altmark* had managed to break through the British blockade and was on her way back from providing provisions and fuel to the *Graf Spee* in the Southern Atlantic. She had embarked some 300 prisoners whom she had taken from *Graf Spee* prior to her self-sinking. When challenged by a Norwegian torpedo boat, the captain of *Cossack* replied that he had strict orders to take the prisoners even against the opposition of Norway.

<sup>43</sup> Raeder, pg. 306.

<sup>44</sup> Salewski, pg. 117. Salewski argues that Germany had no interest in any peaceful solution towards the Norwegian issue. On the contrary it was an expression of the Nazi-German will towards totalitarian aggression.

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<sup>45</sup> The Avalon Project and Yale Law School: “Hitler’s directive for the occupation of Denmark and Norway.” *Hitler set von Falkenhorst* officially in charge on March 1,

1940. Until that time *von Falkenhorst* was in command of the XXI army Corps.

<sup>46</sup> Jodl, Alfred: “War Diary.” Volume IV (February 1940 to May 1940), pg. 377.

<sup>47</sup> Megargee, pg. 78: *Halder* wrote in his war diary that *Hitler* did not inform the head of the army, *von Brauchitsch*, about this fact. See also: Warlimont, Walter: Inside Hitler’s headquarters 1939-1945. (Translation). New York: Praeger 1964, pg. 89: *Keitel* and *Jodl* did the assignment of army groups under exclusion of the army itself.

<sup>48</sup> Hubatsch, Walther: “Weserübung.” Die Deutsche Besetzung von Dänemark und Norwegen 1940. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Göttingen: Musterschmidt-Verlag 1960, pg. 39.

<sup>49</sup> Megargee, pg. 78.

<sup>50</sup> Megargee, pg. 84: “*Halder* continuously expressed his disgust at orders for which the OKH had done the work, but which gave the outside world the impression that OKW was responsible.”

<sup>51</sup> Trevor-Roper. The head of the army, *von Brauchitsch*, lacked the personality of *Raeder* or *Göhring* and could not assert himself against *Hitler*.

<sup>52</sup> Burdick, Charles/ Jacobsen, Hans-Adolf: “The Halder war diary 1939-1942.” (Translation). Novato: Presidio 1988, (Feb. 21, 1940): *Hitler’s* argument for the subordination of Gruppe XXI under the OKW was that he wanted to avoid difficulties with the air force.

<sup>53</sup> The Avalon Project and Yale Law School: “Hitler’s directive for the occupation of Denmark and Norway.”



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<sup>54</sup> Generalkommando XXI Armeekorps (Gruppe XXI): “Operationsbefehl für die Besetzung Norwegens.” (transl.: Operation order for the occupation of Norway.) Berlin 1940. In: Ottmer, Hans-Martin: “Weserübung.” Der Deutsche Angriff auf Dänemark und Norwegen im April 1940. München: Oldenbourg Verlag 1994.

<sup>55</sup> Two Mountain Divisions and five Infantry Divisions: 3<sup>rd</sup> Mountain Division, 69<sup>th</sup>, 163<sup>rd</sup>, 181<sup>st</sup>, 196<sup>th</sup>, 214<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and later 2<sup>nd</sup> Mountain Division und command of *Gruppe XXI*.

<sup>56</sup> Hooker, pg. 104: The initial plan of *Krancke* contained six objectives which had to be achieved simultaneously: Oslo as the Norwegian capital (this included the capture of the king); the seizure of the populated Southern areas; Bergen as probable British landing site; Trondheim as key to control central Norway and as bas for future maritime operations; Narvik as the crucial port for the supply with Swedish iron ore; and Tromsø and Finnmark.

<sup>57</sup> One strategic objective was not achieved. The delay of the landing on Oslo made it possible for the king to escape, which initiated years of resistance against the German occupation.

<sup>58</sup> Bekker, pg. 83. This is an example both for the boldness of the troops at the tactical level and for the fortune of *von Falkenhorst*. At Oslo-Fornebu airport the paratroops did not arrive due to weather. When the approaching landing groups received this information they decided to land the infantry opposed, i.e. with Norwegian troops defending the airport.

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<sup>59</sup> Furthermore the logistic planning, done mainly by army officers, proved to be insufficient for naval operations. It was assuming that all supply ships would arrive in the Norwegian harbors, an assumption, which was not permissible in view of the British sea control. The German warships could not sufficiently re-supply.

<sup>60</sup> Indeed after ‘Weserübung’ Germany held the bases for operations in the Atlantic which *Wegener* had demanded in his paper but lacked the surface fleet to exploit this advantage until the end of the war. Again, the German surface fleet was marginalized!

<sup>61</sup> The landing force consisted of four allied brigades concentrating on Trondheim where they faced only seven German infantry battalions. The Allied force encompassed Royal Marines, 146<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, French 5<sup>th</sup> Demi-Brigade de Chasseurs-Alpins, 148<sup>th</sup> Brigade and 15<sup>th</sup> Brigade. These forces were augmented by some 6,000 Norwegian troops.

<sup>62</sup> Bekker, pg. 89.

<sup>63</sup> These sailors came from the sunken German destroyers. They had no sufficient training in land warfare and above that had no sufficient equipment but were armed with Norwegian weapons.

<sup>64</sup> Warlimont, pg. 79.

<sup>65</sup> Warlimont, pg. 79: Colonel *von Lossberg* insisted towards *Keitel* and *Jodl* that he would not sent the withdrawal order. *Jodl* agreed to delay the message. *Von Lossberg* arranged with *von Brauchitsch* the congratulatory telegram. The next day *Jodl* went to *Hitler* and explained “that they could not very well order the withdrawal of a unit that the army commander in chief had just congratulated.”

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<sup>66</sup> Megargee, pg. 79.

<sup>67</sup> Hooker, pg. 108. *Hitler* had to be convinced by massive pressure of Group XXI and *OKW* about the importance of Narvik and the consequences of its loss. He gave absolute priority to Fall Gelb, did not see relevance of Norway at that time and was aware that any diversion of troops from France would have drawn strong opposition from his commanders in France. The reinforcement encompassed only one parachute battalion and two mountain infantry companies.

<sup>68</sup> Bekker, pg. 90.

<sup>69</sup> Lucas, James: “Alpine Elite.” German mountain troops of World War II. London: Jane’s 1980, pg. 35: The batch awarded to the victorious troops was the first truly joint decoration, the Narvik arm shield. On its surface were a propeller, an anchor and an edelweiss (the flower symbolizing the mountain troops) surmounted by the single word ‘Narvik’.

<sup>70</sup> Hooker, pg. 103: In fact the Allies were quite aware of the planning’s for an invasion in Norway from December 1939 on when a Luftwaffe major carrying the invasion plan for Fall Gelb was forced down in Belgium and the intent became obvious.

<sup>71</sup> Megargee, pg. 230. The exact phrase, which high ranked officers like *von Stauffenberg* used for the command structure of the OKW from 1941 on, was ‘idiotic’.

<sup>72</sup> Megargee, pg. 84. **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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