

War in the Fjords

Norway - The Coldest Naval Battlefield in World War 2

With
Rear Admiral (Retired) Simon Hardern

Celebrity APEX is just entering the Fjord Where the Tirpitz Meant Her End



0900 Position





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ENRICHMENT
SERIES



The Beauty of Norway

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THE
PODIUM
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Mainland coastline (no islands, no fjords):

1,650 miles

2,650 km

This is the simple, straight outer edge of mainland Norway

Including fjords and major islands:

15,600 miles

25,000 km

This reflects the deeply indented coastline most people picture

Including every island and every fjord (the full official figure)

64,000 miles

103,000 km

It includes over 50,000 islands and every twist of the fjord system



Why Norway Mattered



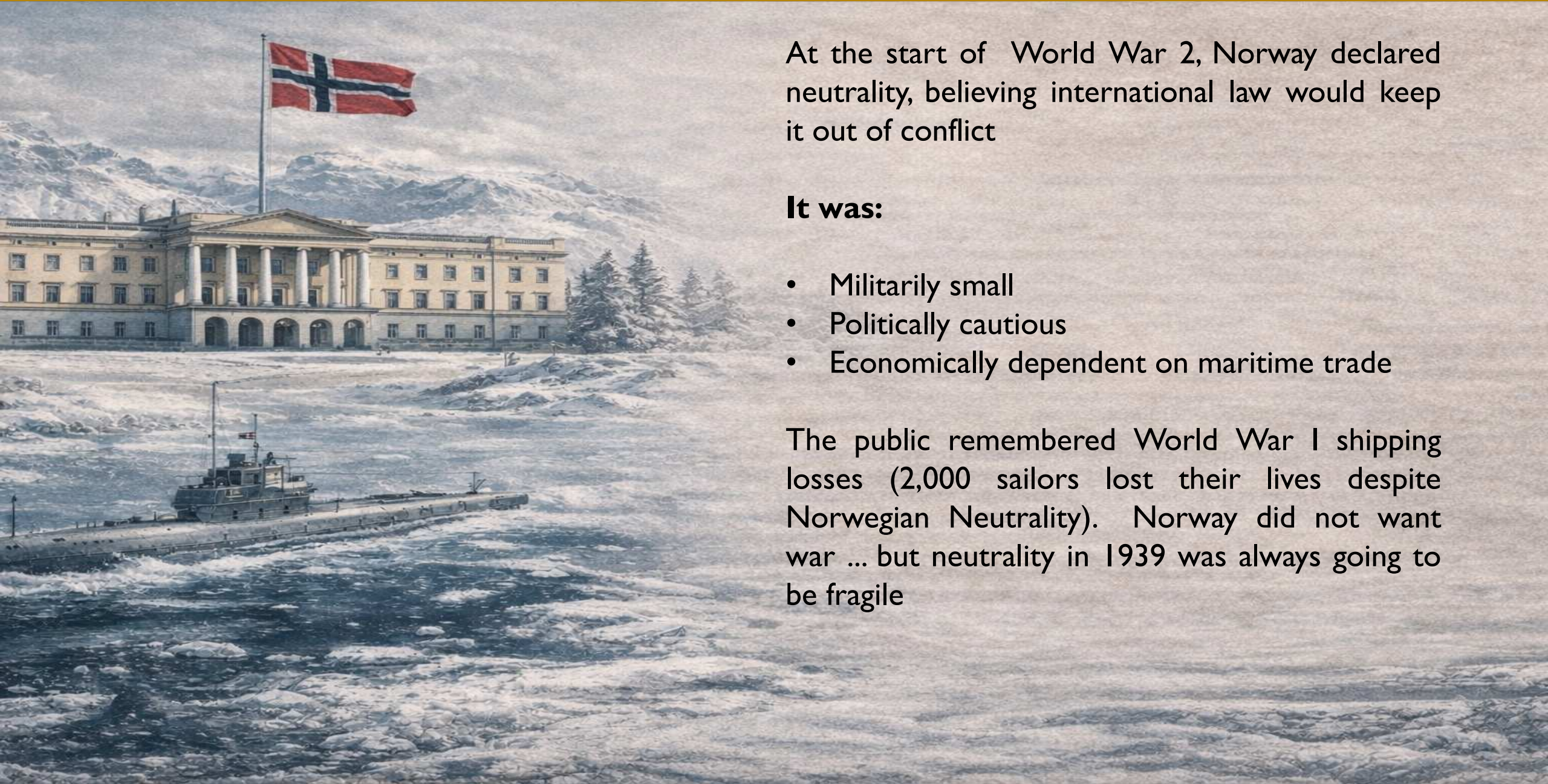
The Situation in 1940

- Over 1,600 miles of coastline, the Norwegian fjords offered perfect shelter
- Iron Ore from Sweden was shipped via Norway's port of Narvik
- Norway controlled access to the Arctic, North Sea, Baltic Sea and the North Atlantic

Norway's importance was geographical and industrial
Both Britain and Germany were watching closely



But a Neutral State ... On Paper



At the start of World War 2, Norway declared neutrality, believing international law would keep it out of conflict

It was:

- Militarily small
- Politically cautious
- Economically dependent on maritime trade

The public remembered World War I shipping losses (2,000 sailors lost their lives despite Norwegian Neutrality). Norway did not want war ... but neutrality in 1939 was always going to be fragile



Vidkun Quisling



- Served as Norwegian Minister of Defence 1931 to 1933 and then went on to found the Norwegian fascist party Nasjonal Samling in 1933
- Worried about a Soviet incursion in 1939, encouraged Hitler to occupy Norway
- Cooperated with Nazi Germany during the occupation of Norway, leading a collaborationist puppet government (as Minister President) from 1942 to 1945
- Was executed for high treason on 24 October 1945, making his last name a global synonym for a traitor or collaborator



The Norwegian Armed Forces

Norway was not prepared for modern war

- A small, outdated army based on mobilised reservists
- Minimal air power
- Modest navy of coastal defence ship

In Oslo, an invasion seemed unlikely ... but that was a mistake





Operation Weserubung - The German Invasion of Norway

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The German Invasion Begins

On 9 April 1940, Germany shocked Norway with a surprise invasion including:

- Amphibious attacks hit Oslo and coastal cities all at once
- German Airborne forces landed at key sites, including Stavanger
- Allied plans to encircle Germany were threatened



**Norwegian resistance mobilised ...
but the bold German assault had the element of surprise**

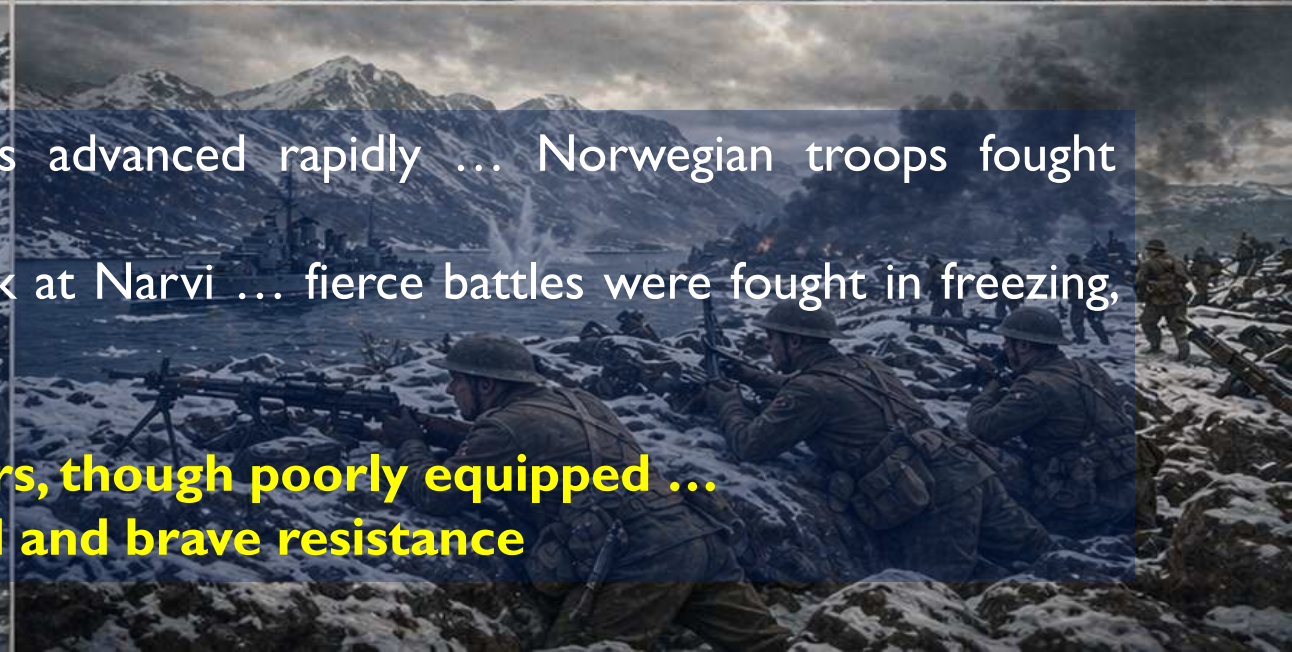
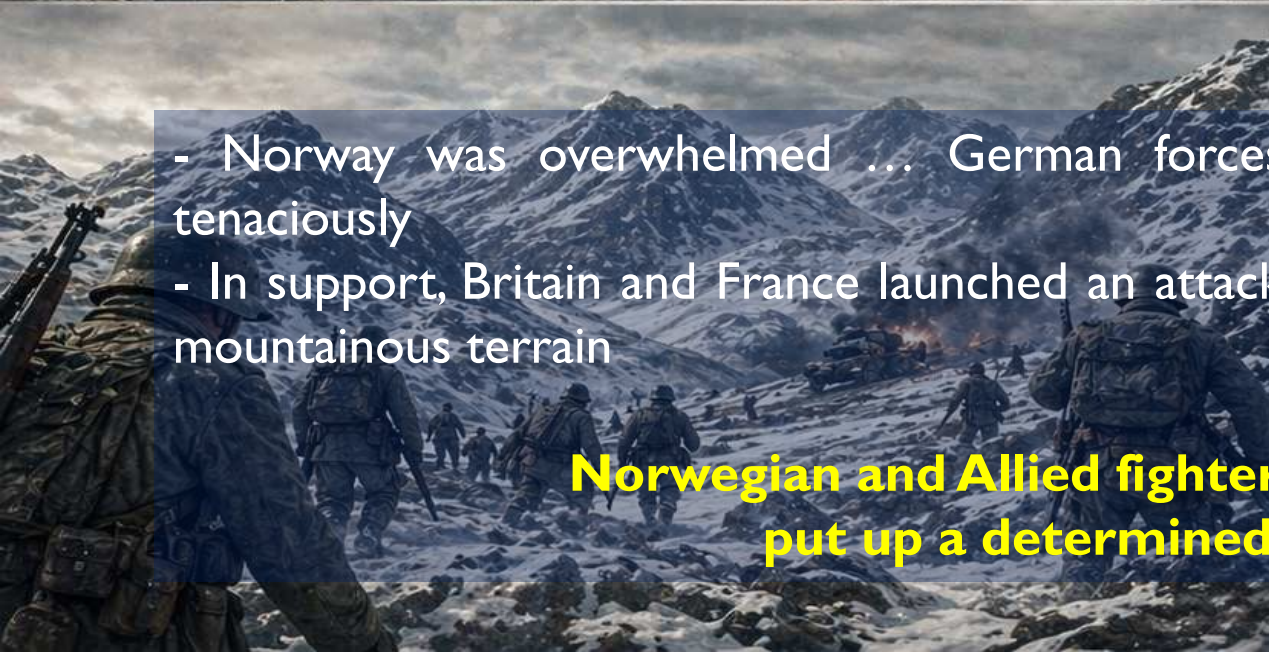


The Fight Begins



- Norway was overwhelmed ... German forces advanced rapidly ... Norwegian troops fought tenaciously
- In support, Britain and France launched an attack at Narvi ... fierce battles were fought in freezing, mountainous terrain

Norwegian and Allied fighters, though poorly equipped ... put up a determined and brave resistance



Some Early Norwegian Success



German Heavy Cruiser Blücher

The invasion flagship, heading into Oslo, was engaged by battery guns and torpedoes at the Norwegian Military coastal fortress at Oscarsborg







The King Refuses to Surrender



At dawn on 9 April 1940, as German forces approached (delayed by the the sinking of the Blücher), King Haakon VII refused to surrender to the occupiers - he left Oslo by train with his Government. For nearly two months, he led from within Norway and inspired resistance

A man in a dark coat and hat stands by a window, looking out at a sunset. The room is dimly lit, with a lamp on a desk in the foreground. The man is standing with his back to the camera, looking out the window. The window has a blue frame and is partially covered by dark curtains. The sunset is visible through the window, with a bright orange sun low on the horizon. The desk in the foreground has a lamp with a white shade, a rotary phone, and some papers. A chair is visible behind the desk.

He did not flee ... he withdrew ... and refused to surrender his authority



Why Narvik Mattered - The Iron Lifeline





The Swedish Iron-Ore Lifeline

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The Battle of Narvik

April to June 1940





Aftermath of Narvik



German victory in Norway demonstrated Allied vulnerability and was a setback for Allies

... Norway was occupied until 1945



Fighting in the Fjords

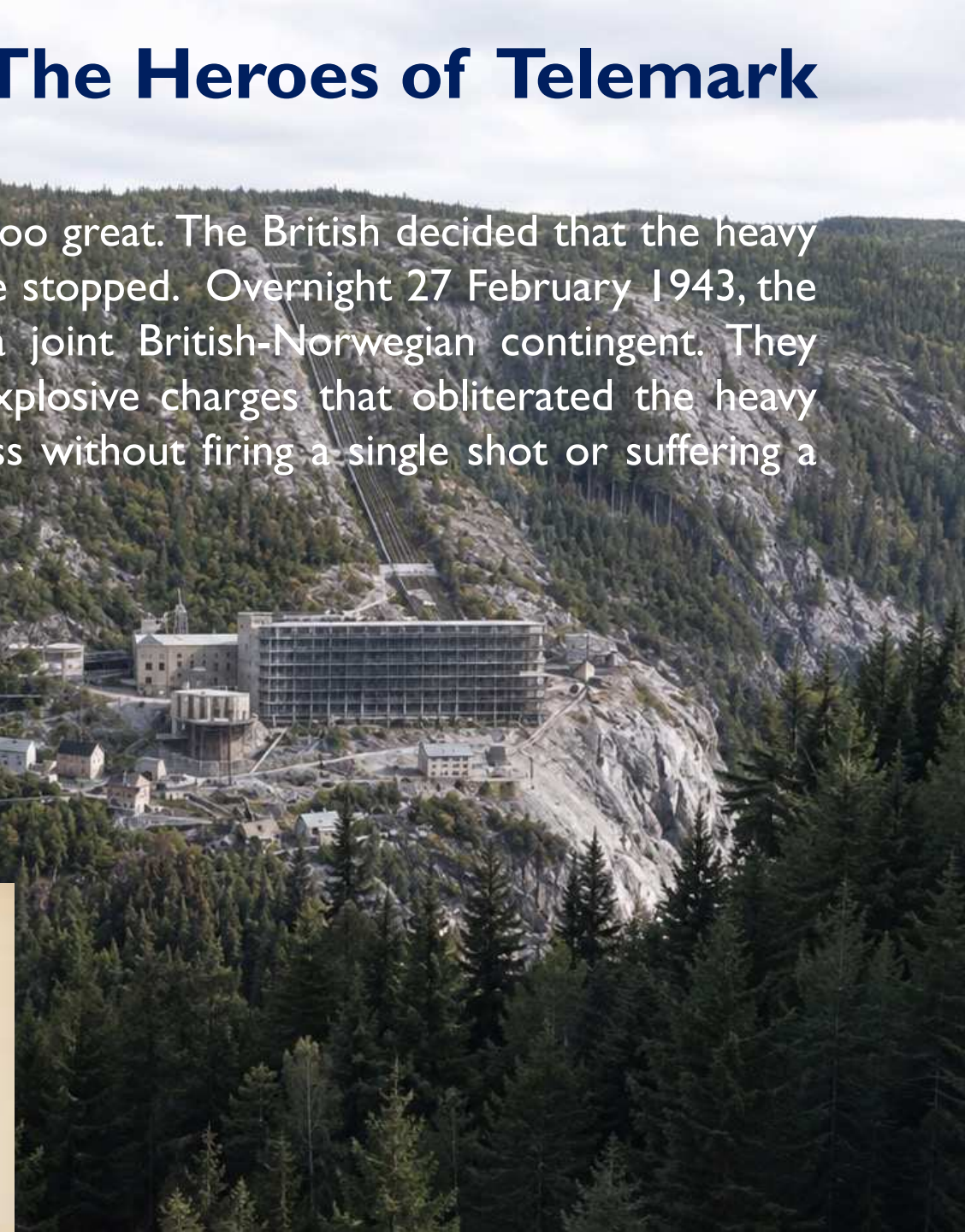
Norwegian Resistance Begins

A group of Norwegian resistance fighters, including soldiers and civilians, are positioned on a forested hillside overlooking a deep fjord. They are armed with rifles and machine guns, ready for combat. The landscape is rugged, with steep, rocky cliffs and dense evergreen forests. The fjord below is a deep blue, winding through the valley. The sky is overcast with grey clouds. The overall mood is one of determination and readiness for battle.

Groups such as Milorg built an underground force, gathered intelligence for the Allies, supported escape routes to Sweden, distributed illegal newspapers, and carried out sabotage - most famously against the heavy-water production linked to Germany's nuclear research. Civilians also resisted through strikes, protests, and refusal to cooperate with Nazi-controlled institutions, while Norway's government and armed forces continued the struggle from exile in London

The Heroes of Telemark

In 1942, the risk of a German atomic bomb has become too great. The British decided that the heavy water production at Vemork (district of Telemark) must be stopped. Overnight 27 February 1943, the definitive, successful sabotage raid was conducted by a joint British-Norwegian contingent. They infiltrated the heavily guarded fortress and detonated explosive charges that obliterated the heavy water production cellar. They escaped into the wilderness without firing a single shot or suffering a single casualty





Arctic Convoys

North Cape
Scharnhorst Destroyed

Honningsvåg
1944 - Scorched Earth

Kirkenes
Arctic Front - 300+ Bombings

Murmansk

Tromsø
Tirpitz Destroyed

Narvik
Iron Ore Battles

Arkhangelsk

Trondheim
U-Boat Base Dora

Ålesund
Festung Norwege

Molde
Government in Retreat

Telavåg
1940-42 Shetland Bus

Bergen
1940 - Königsberg Sunk

Stavanger
1940 - Sola Airfield Seized

Oslo
1940 - Blücher Sunk

Telemark
1943 - Op GUNNERSIDE

Arctic Convoys 1941-1945

Lend-Lease to the Soviet Union
Murmansk - Archangel





The Dangers

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Extreme Cold: Freezing temperatures, icy seas and violent storms threatened ships and men



Luftwaffe: German bombers attacked convoys from the air, day and night

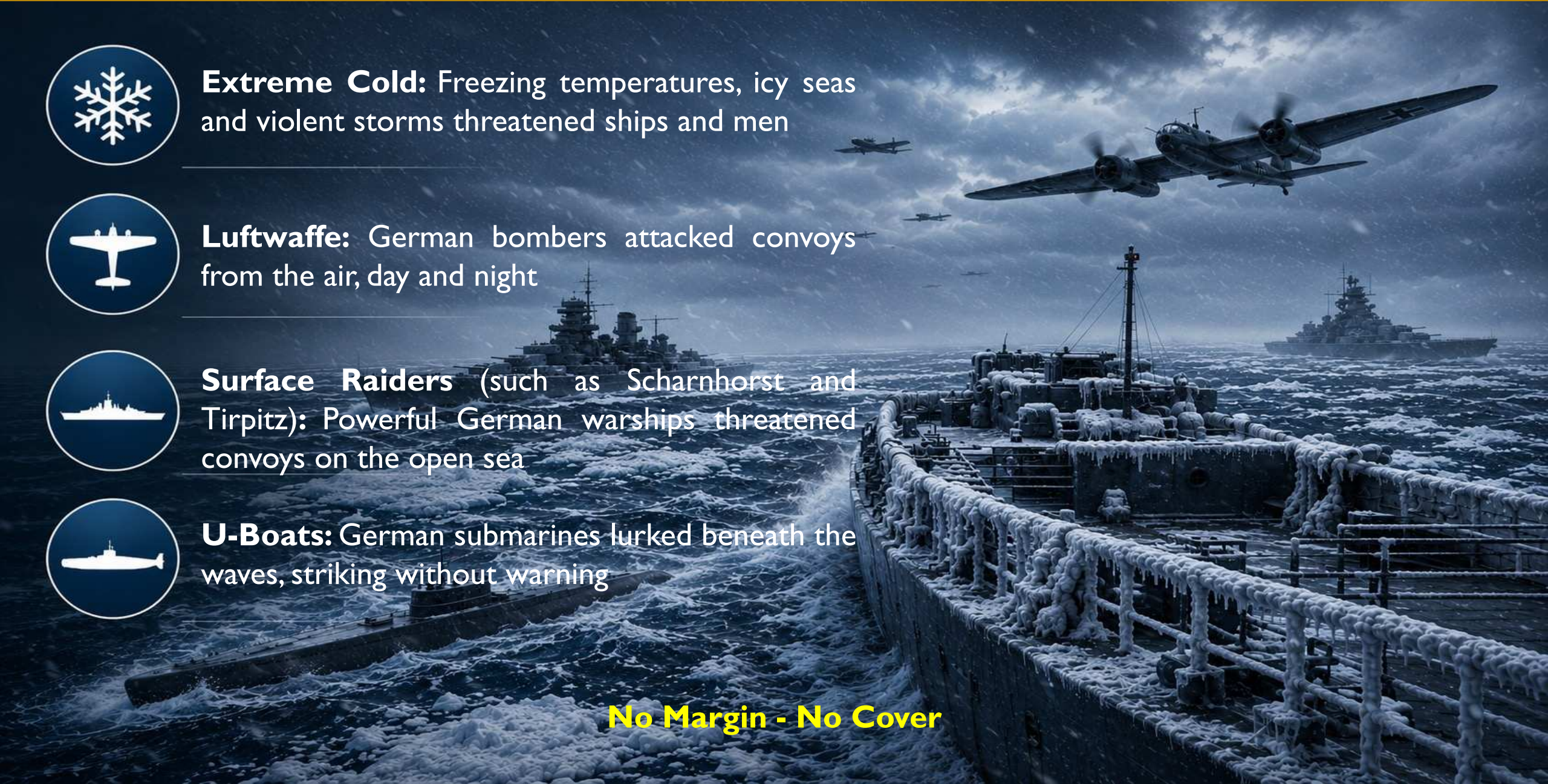


Surface Raiders (such as Scharnhorst and Tirpitz): Powerful German warships threatened convoys on the open sea



U-Boats: German submarines lurked beneath the waves, striking without warning

No Margin - No Cover





The Arctic Convoy System

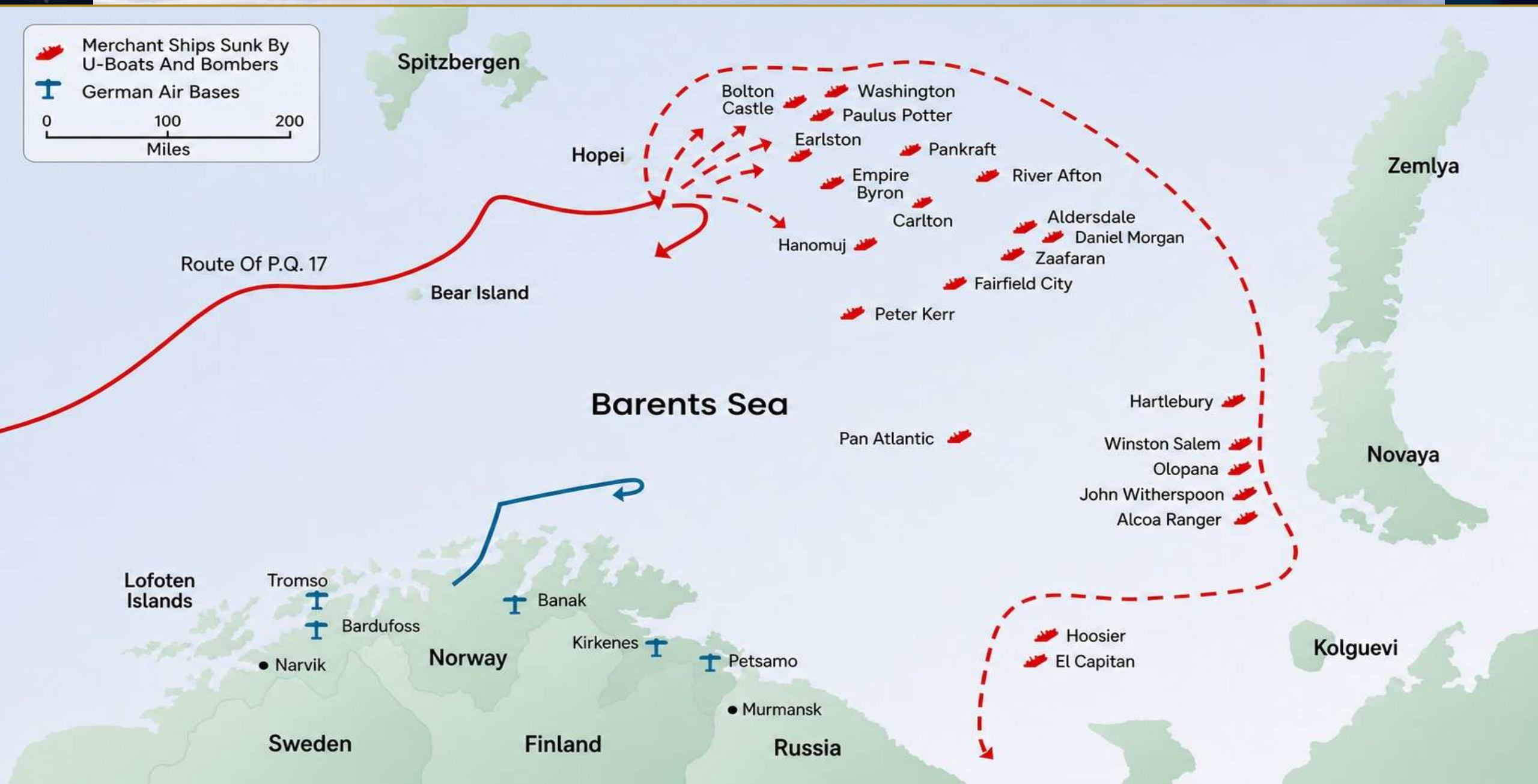
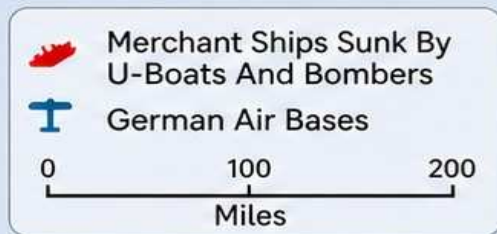
- 78 convoys covering ~1,400 merchant ships
- 3 million tons of equipment and stores delivered
- 85 merchant ships lost
- 3,000-3,500 Allied lives lost



**More sailors were lost on the Arctic route than on many major fleet engagements
... most died in freezing water rather than from gunfire**



PQ17 - July 1942 - The Route





PQ17 - The Devastation



- Of the 35 Ships, 24 were lost, scattered, hunted and destroyed
- With nearly two-thirds of the convoy destroyed, this was the worst single Arctic convoy disaster of the war, and one of the worst convoy losses in British naval history. The convoy was dispersed on 4 July because of a perceived threat from Tirpitz ... but Tirpitz never attacked





The German Pocket Battleship

- Versailles Treaty Limited to 10,000 tons (on paper ... though 12,000 tons in reality). Germans were very clever and adopted new shipbuilding techniques including welding
- A top speed of 29 kts
- Heavy Guns 11-inch main battery
- Built for Commerce Raiding

Three ships:

Deutschland
Admiral Scheer
Admiral Graf Spee





Follow-On Battleship Classes



Scharnhorst Class:

- Launched 1936-37
- 31,000 tons displacement with a top speed of 31 kts
- 9 × 11-inch (28 cm) guns

Scharnhorst and Gneisenau



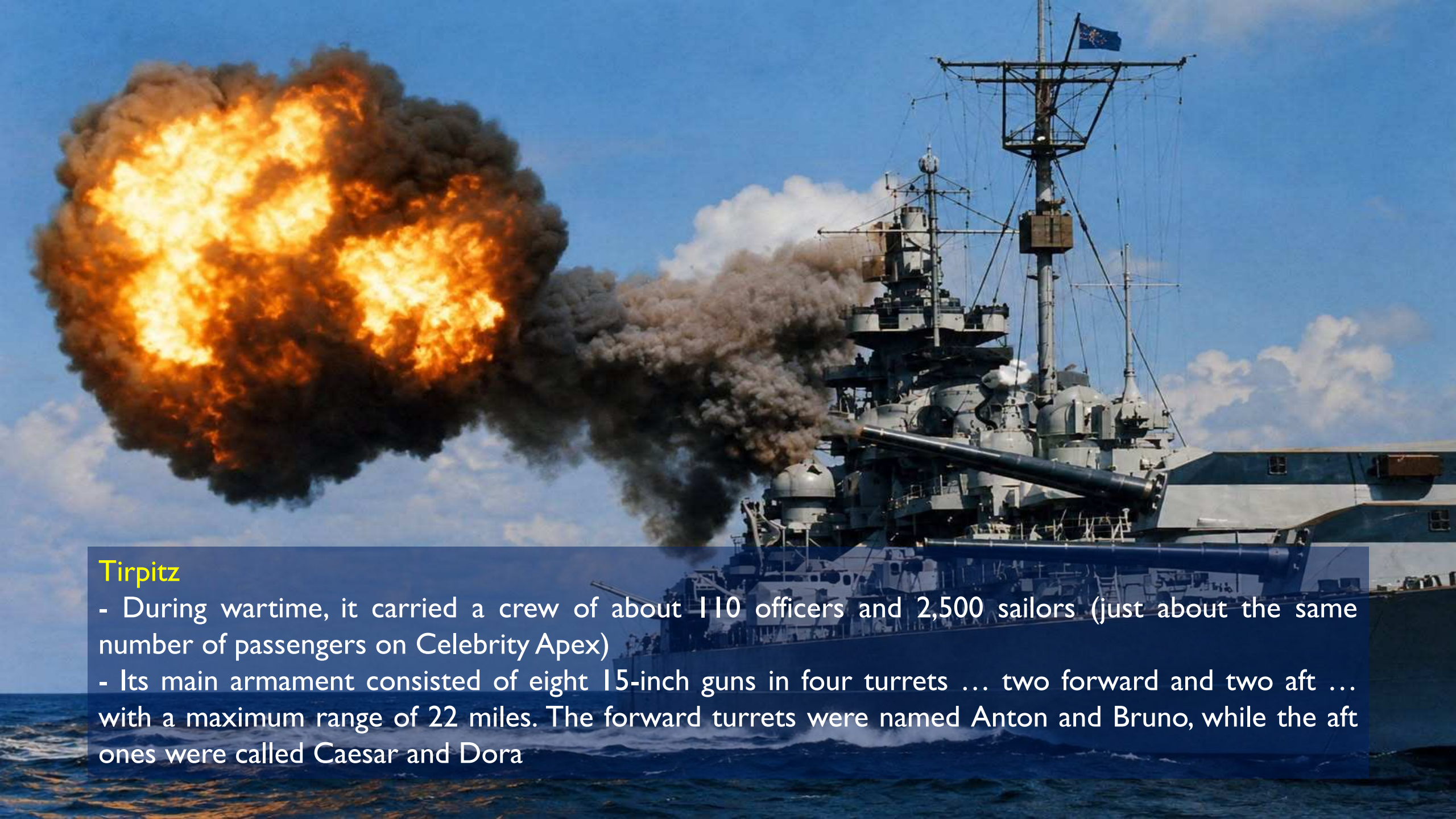
Bismarck Class

- Launched 1939-40
- 51,000 tons displacement with a top speed of 31 kts
- 8 × 15-inch (38 cm) guns

Bismarck and Tirpitz

Scharnhorst was launched 3 January 1936 at Wilhelmshaven





Tirpitz

- During wartime, it carried a crew of about 110 officers and 2,500 sailors (just about the same number of passengers on Celebrity Apex)
- Its main armament consisted of eight 15-inch guns in four turrets ... two forward and two aft ... with a maximum range of 22 miles. The forward turrets were named Anton and Bruno, while the aft ones were called Caesar and Dora

By Way of Comparison!



Celebrity Apex

Length	306 m (1,004 ft)
Beam	39 m (128 ft)
Tonnage	131,000 Gross Registered Tonnage
Top Speed	24 Kts

Tirpitz

251 m (824 ft)
36 m (118 ft)
51,000 Displacement Tonnage
31 Kts

Scharnhorst and Tirpitz!



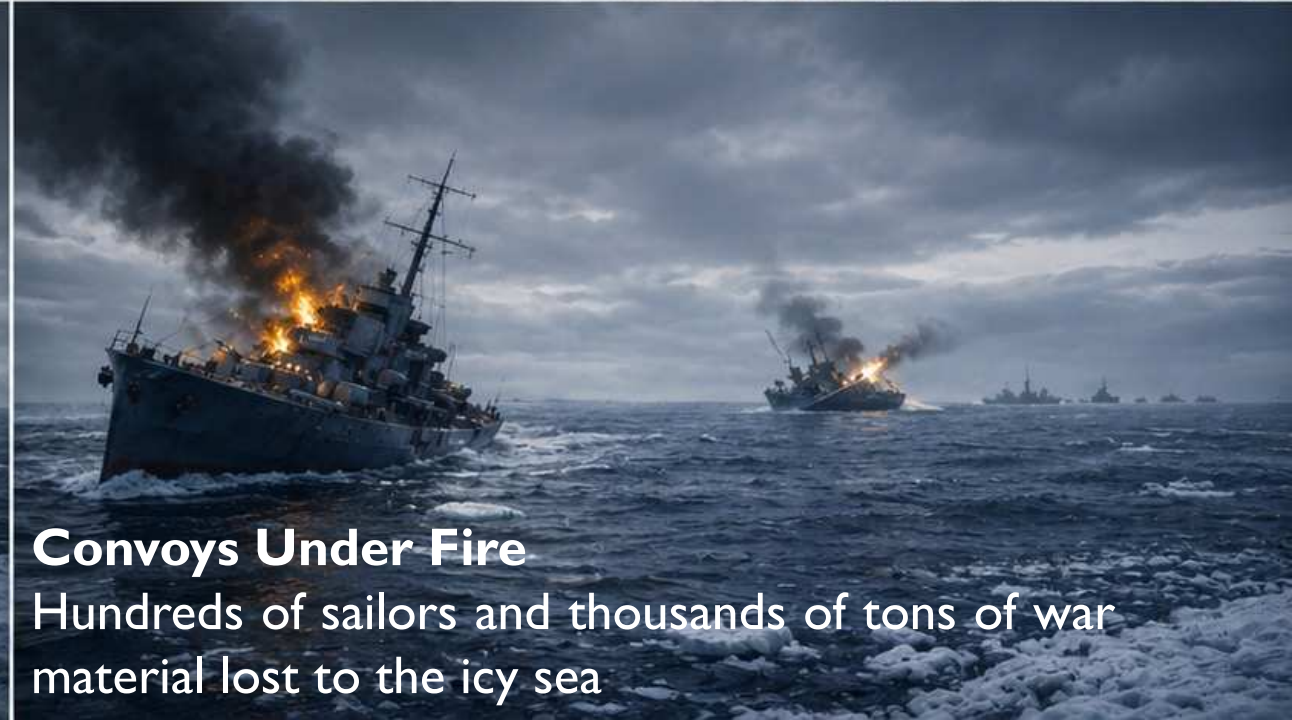
The Shadow in the Fjord
Tirpitz anchored in Norway



Weapon of Denial
Could strike convoys or threaten Britain herself



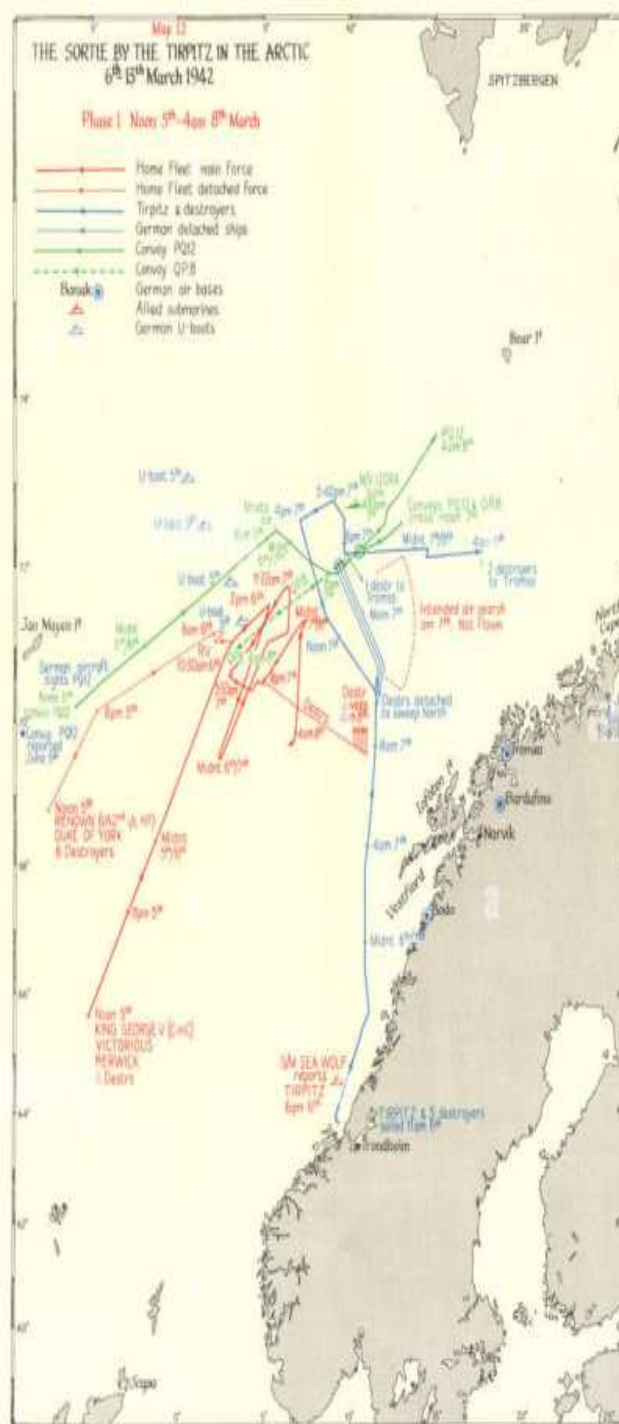
Threatened the Arctic Convoys
A constant , yet unseen, threat



Convoys Under Fire
Hundreds of sailors and thousands of tons of war material lost to the icy sea

One-by-One
24 ships were sunk

... but merchant Ships kept sailing
... through the storms
... through the icy waters
... through the losses





Christmas 1943

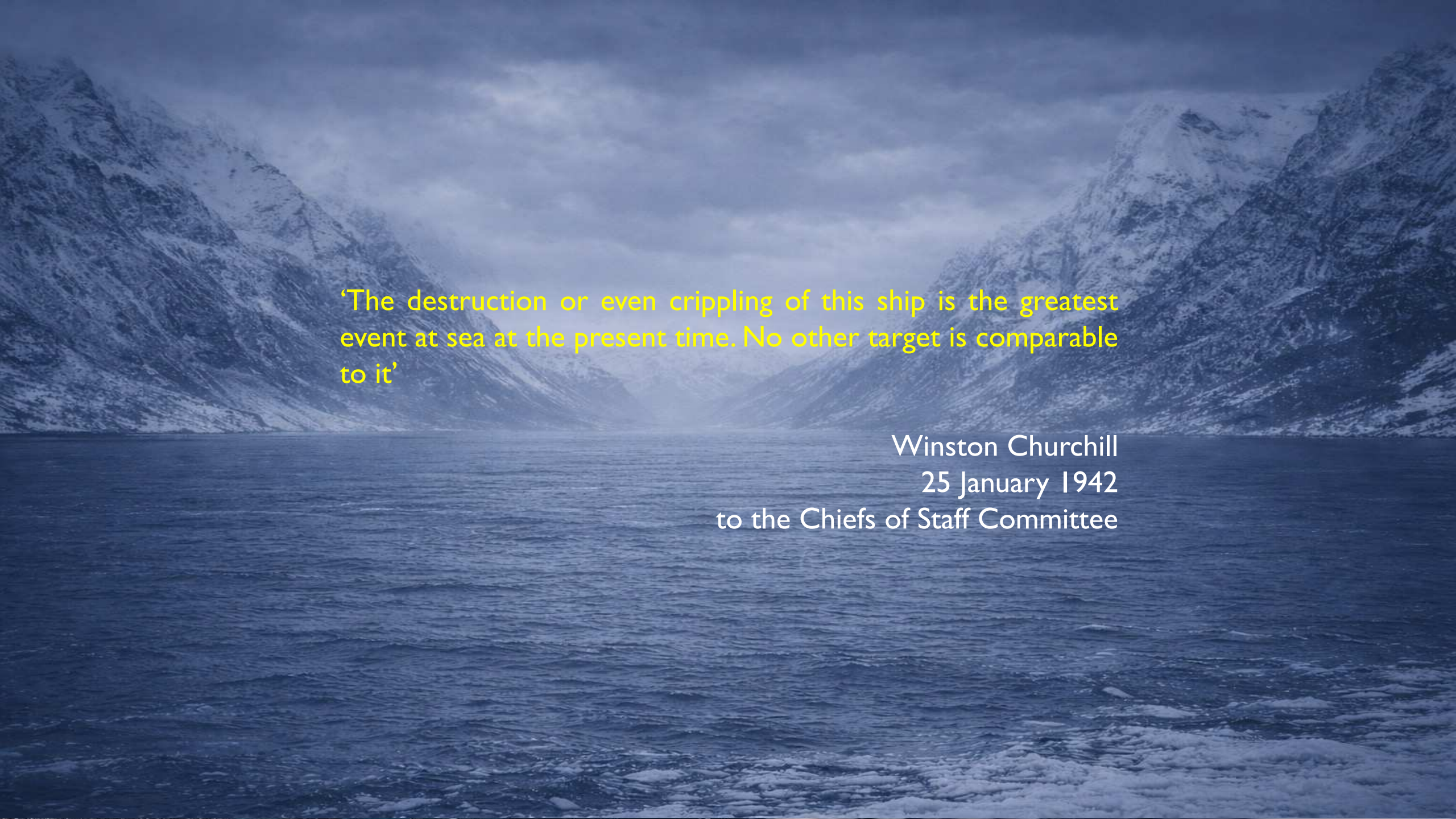
Scharnhorst is targeting Arctic Convoys in the Winter darkness

The Arctic Closes in for Scharnhorst

... only 36 survived

On Boxing Day 1943, the Scharnhorst, caught alone without her destroyer escorts in the storm-tossed North Cape sea, was encircled by British warships, led by HMS DUKE OF YORK, and struck repeatedly by gunfire and torpedoes

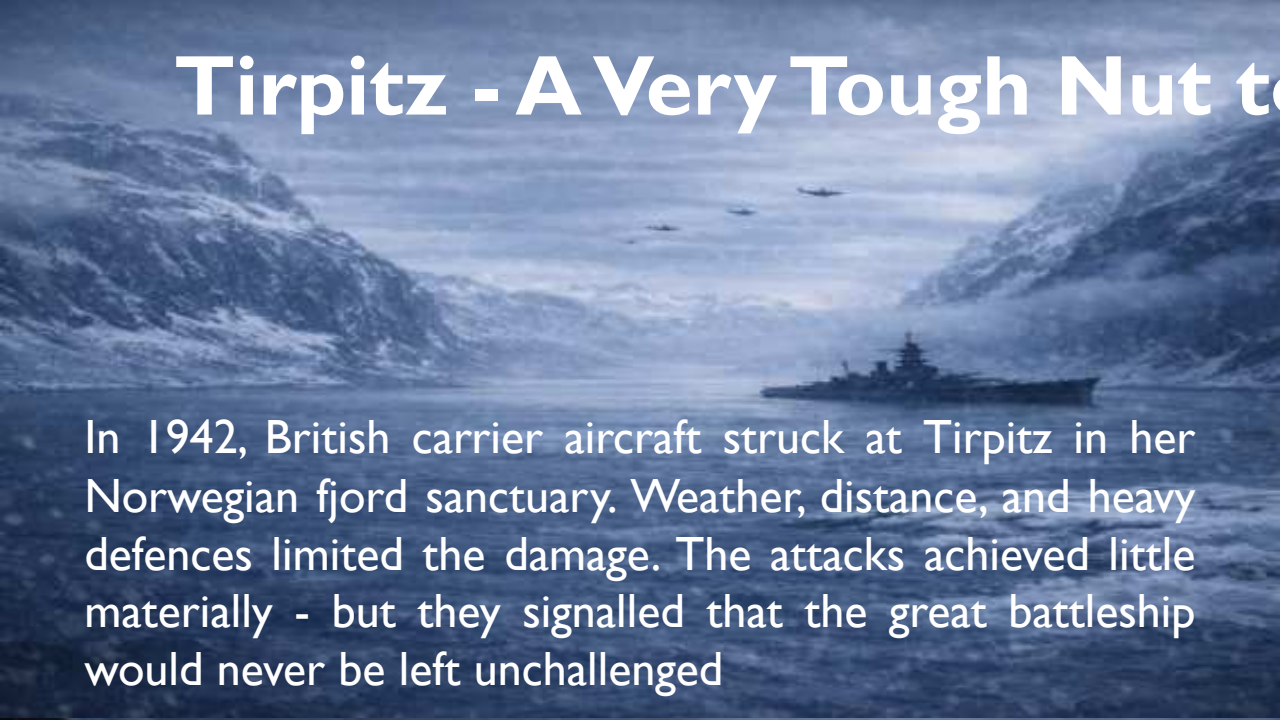
Scharnhorst went down in the dark in freezing ocean with the loss of 1,932 men



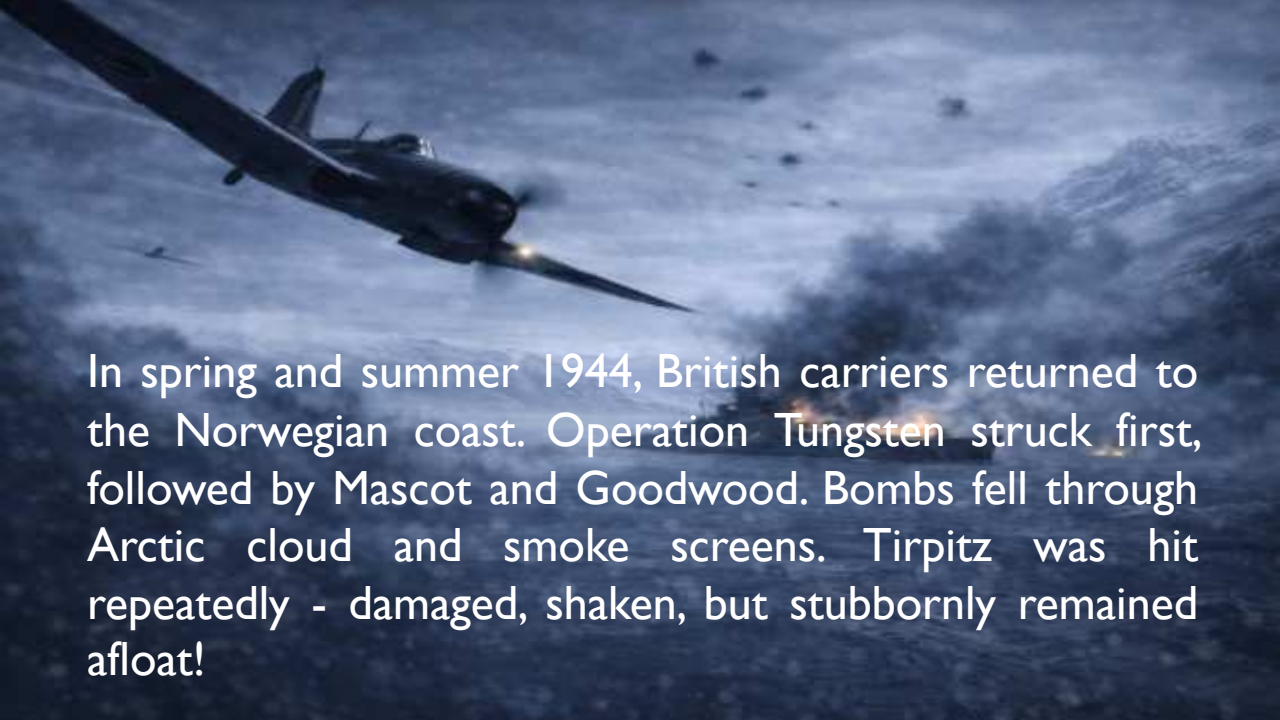
‘The destruction or even crippling of this ship is the greatest event at sea at the present time. No other target is comparable to it’

Winston Churchill
25 January 1942
to the Chiefs of Staff Committee

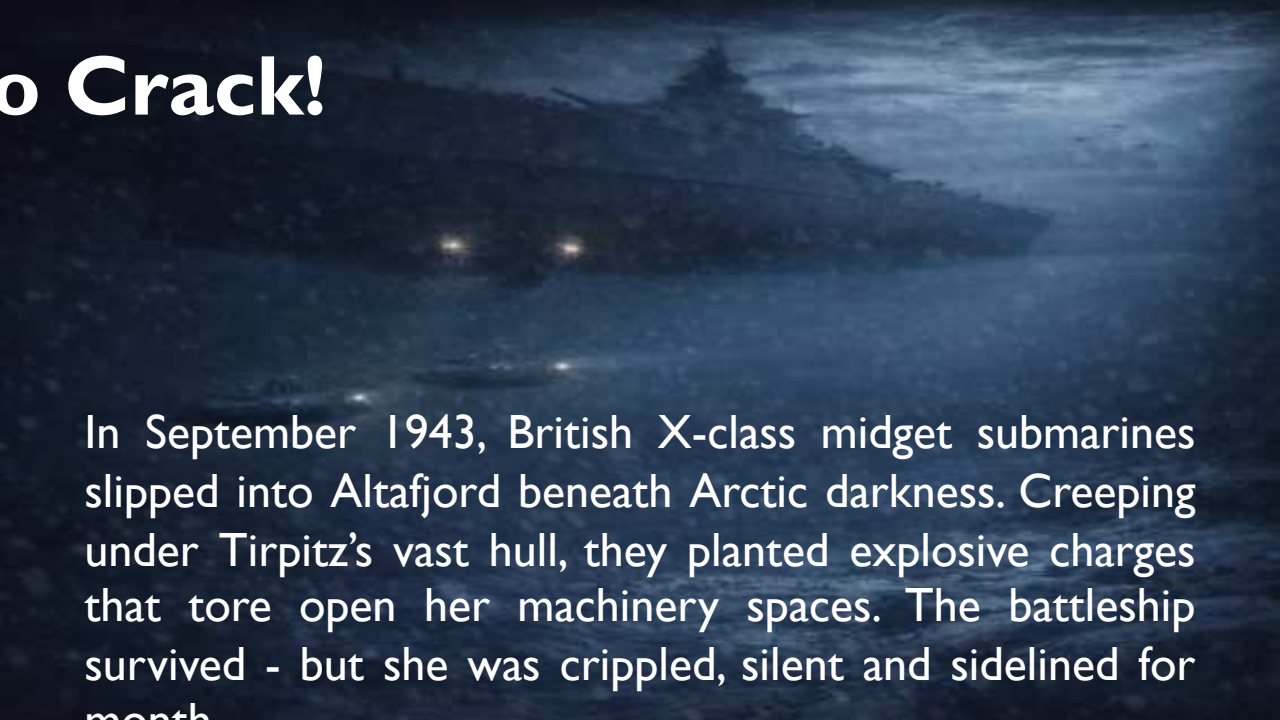
Tirpitz - A Very Tough Nut to Crack!



In 1942, British carrier aircraft struck at Tirpitz in her Norwegian fjord sanctuary. Weather, distance, and heavy defences limited the damage. The attacks achieved little materially - but they signalled that the great battleship would never be left unchallenged



In spring and summer 1944, British carriers returned to the Norwegian coast. Operation Tungsten struck first, followed by Mascot and Goodwood. Bombs fell through Arctic cloud and smoke screens. Tirpitz was hit repeatedly - damaged, shaken, but stubbornly remained afloat!



In September 1943, British X-class midget submarines slipped into Altafjord beneath Arctic darkness. Creeping under Tirpitz's vast hull, they planted explosive charges that tore open her machinery spaces. The battleship survived - but she was crippled, silent and sidelined for month



On 12 November 1944, RAF Lancasters struck with massive Tallboy bombs. Armour split, magazines detonated and Tirpitz rolled over in minutes. More than 900 sailors were trapped inside. The Arctic fjord fell silent; the last great German battleship was gone at last





Stavanger



On 9 April 1940, the Germans launched what is generally regarded as the first successful airborne assault to capture Sola airfield. After seizing Sola, Junkers Ju-52 transport aircraft landed reinforcements almost immediately, allowing Germany to establish air superiority over southern Norway

Passengers arriving in Stavanger by air today land at the same airport that was seized by German paratroopers





Bergen

Was one of the first major coastal cities targeted and occupied

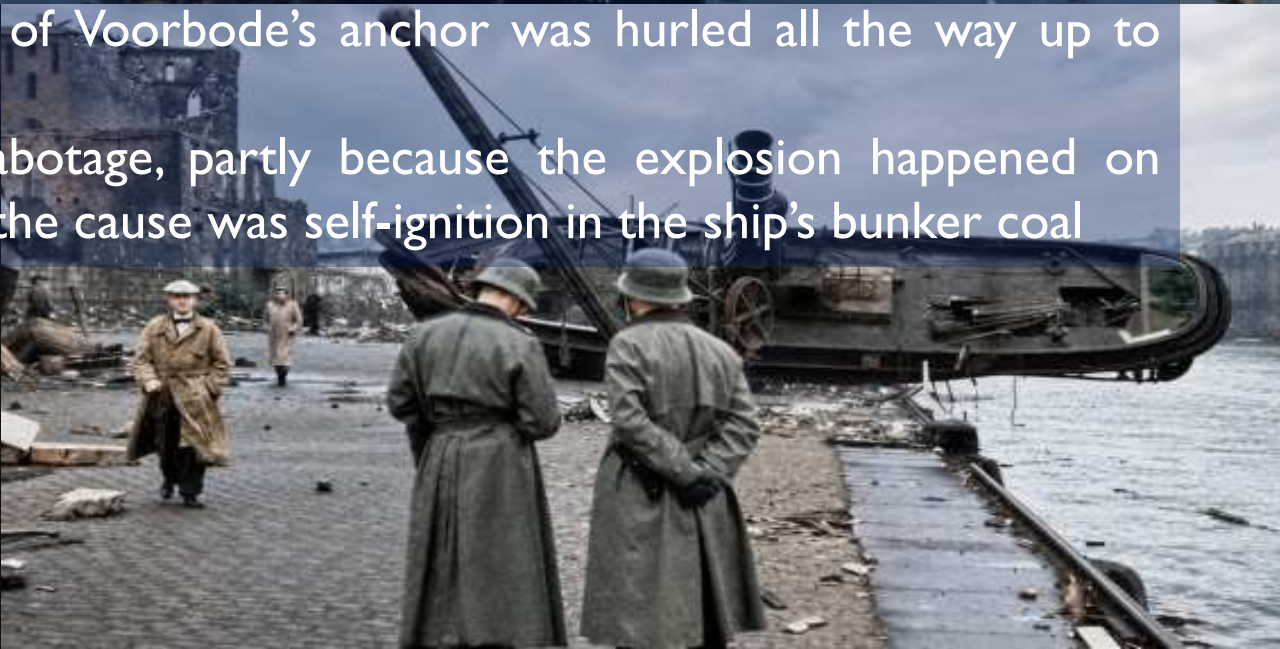
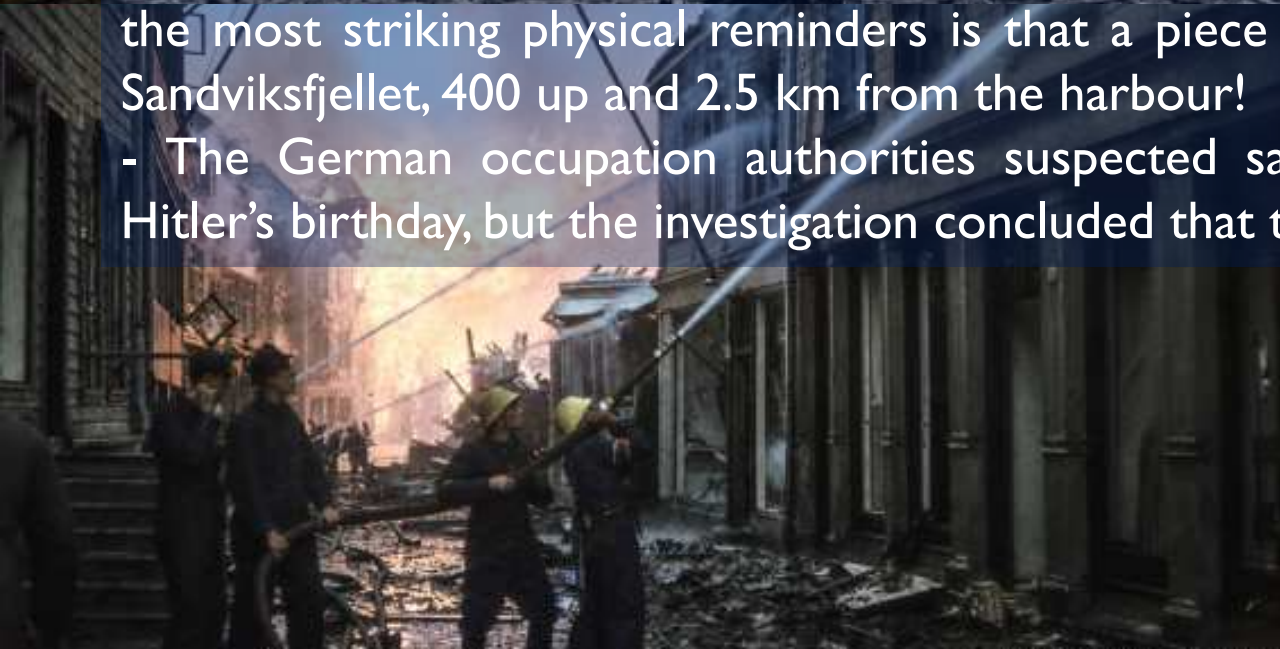
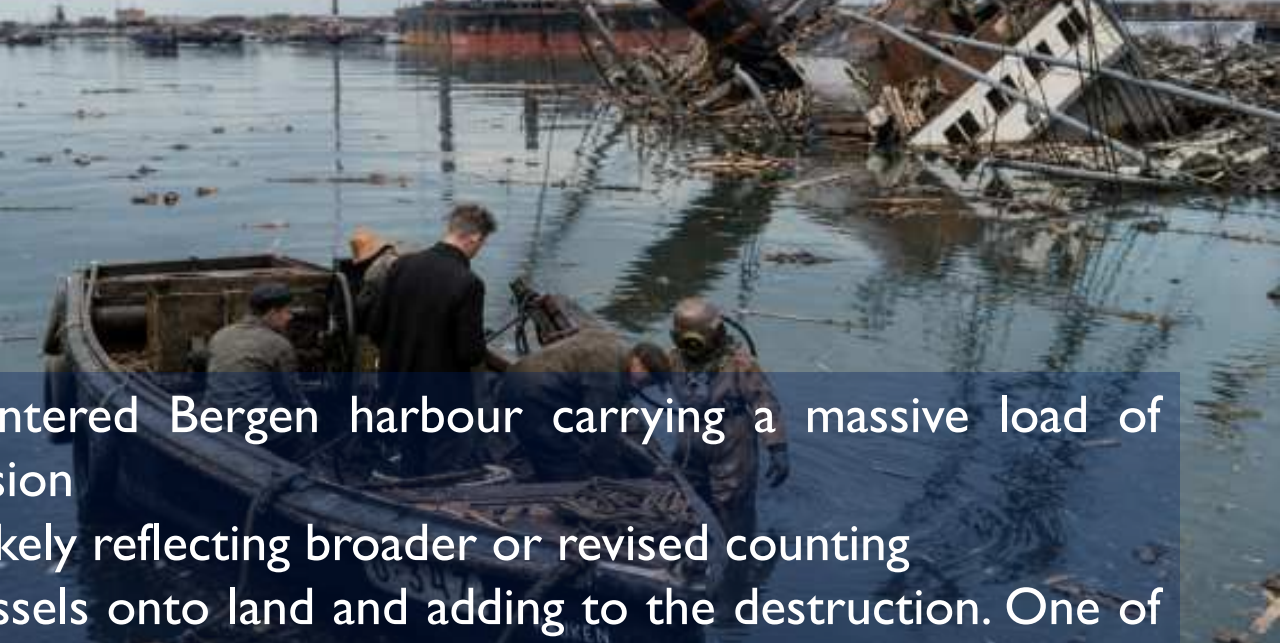


The German light cruiser Königsberg was sunk in Bergen harbour, Norway - damaged by Norwegian coastal batteries during the German invasion on 9 April 1940, on 10 April 1940 British Fleet Air Arm dive bombers from the aircraft carrier HMS ARK ROYAL attacked



The Voorbode Explosion in Bergen - 20 April 1944

- The German-used Dutch vessel ST Voorbode entered Bergen harbour carrying a massive load of explosives. The cargo detonated causing a huge explosion
- Records show 170 dead and around 5,000 injured, likely reflecting broader or revised counting
- The blast created a sea wave in Vågen, throwing vessels onto land and adding to the destruction. One of the most striking physical reminders is that a piece of Voorbode's anchor was hurled all the way up to Sandviksfjellet, 400 up and 2.5 km from the harbour!
- The German occupation authorities suspected sabotage, partly because the explosion happened on Hitler's birthday, but the investigation concluded that the cause was self-ignition in the ship's bunker coal



ST Voorbode's anchor found here



ST Voorbode's position





Became part of the German Defensive Network
Festung Norwegen (Fortress Norway) - a massive
coastal system built to prevent Allied landings





Molde



In April 1940, **Molde** briefly became refuge for King Haakon VII and the Norwegian government. Luftwaffe bombing forced them onward - eventually into exile in Britain





Trondheim - A Perfect Location

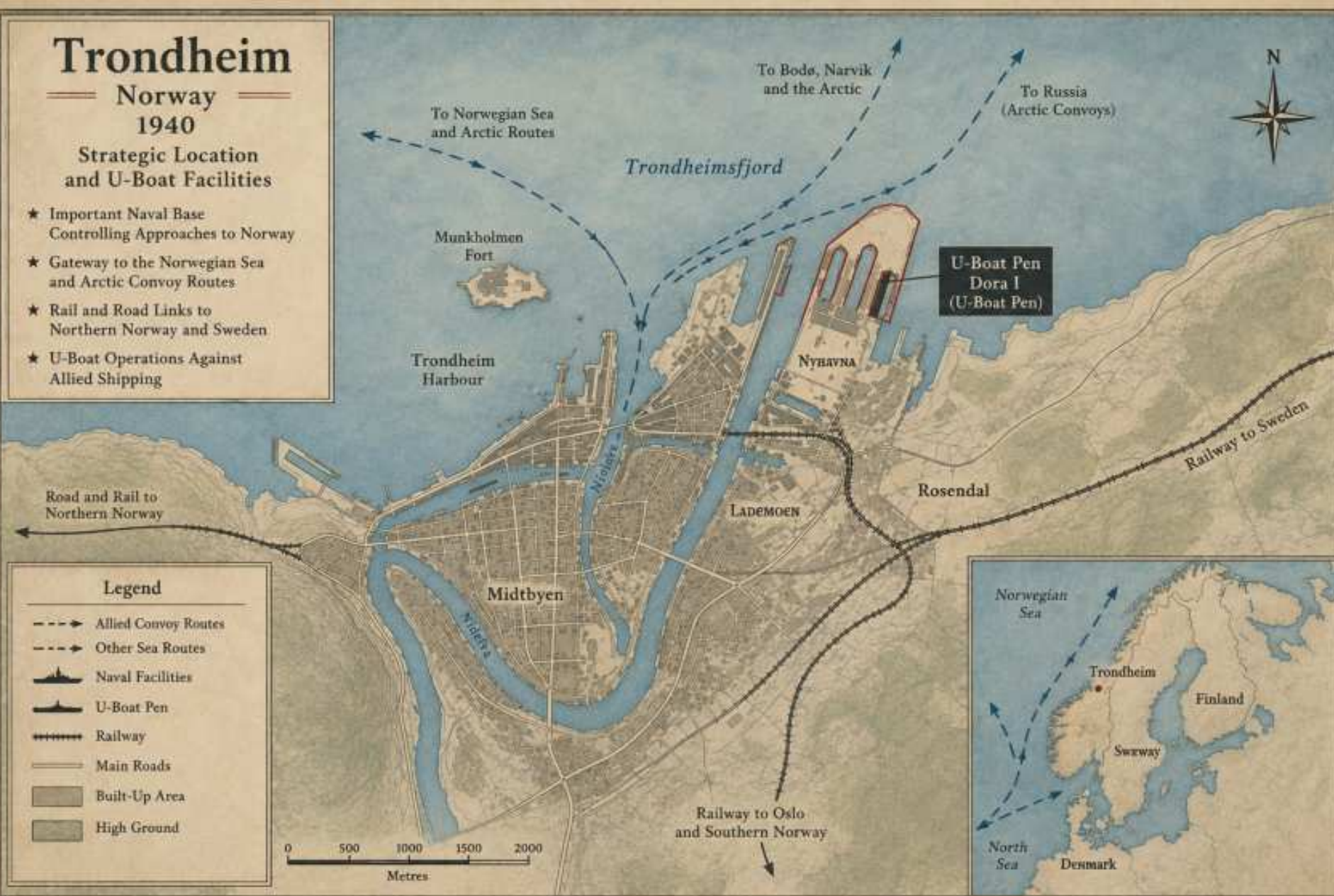
Trondheim

Norway

1940

Strategic Location
and U-Boat Facilities

- ★ Important Naval Base Controlling Approaches to Norway
- ★ Gateway to the Norwegian Sea and Arctic Convoy Routes
- ★ Rail and Road Links to Northern Norway and Sweden
- ★ U-Boat Operations Against Allied Shipping



Trondheim - Submarine Base

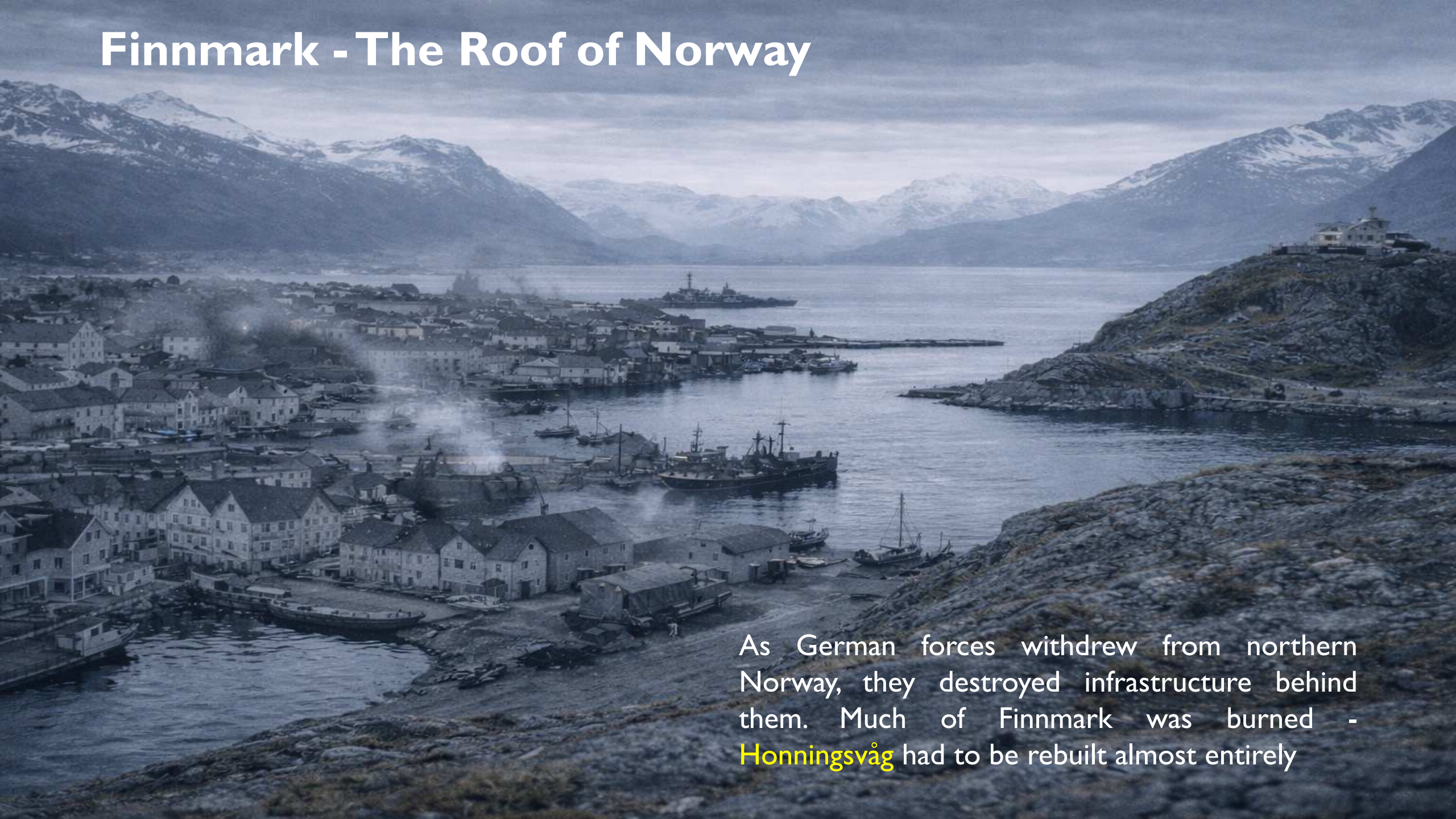


After seizing Trondheim, Germany transformed it into a submarine base. Massive concrete bunkers - Dora I and II - protected U-boats from Allied air attack. From here, submarines sailed into the Atlantic... and north, toward the Arctic convoys





Finnmark - The Roof of Norway



As German forces withdrew from northern Norway, they destroyed infrastructure behind them. Much of Finnmark was burned - **Honningsvåg** had to be rebuilt almost entirely



The Arctic Front

Close to the Soviet border and the Arctic Convoy routes to Murmansk, Kirkenes became a frontline town. It endured over 300 hundred air raids as Arctic warfare raged nearby





The Norwegian Merchant Marine at War

When Norway was occupied in April 1940, much of its merchant fleet was already at sea. Rather than surrender vessels to German control, the fleet was organised under Nortraship, headquartered in London and New York. It became one of the world's largest shipping operations during the war

For crews, the war rarely involved headlines or medals. It involved long crossings, blackout conditions, and the sudden shock of torpedoes. Economic contribution translated directly into strategic value. Fuel delivered meant aircraft flew. Food delivered meant cities endured

Service in convoy meant constant exposure to submarine attacks. Thousands of Norwegian sailors served under Allied control. By 1945, approximately 3,700 Norwegian merchant seamen had died - a high casualty rate for a small nation

And in doing so, it ensured that Norway's role in the war extended far beyond its occupied shores





The Shetland Bus



5

Years of Operation

198

Crossings Made

44

Men Lost

The Shetland Bus was the nickname given to a clandestine special operations link running between the Shetland Islands and German occupied Norway throughout the Second World War



Norway

Kristiansund

Bergen

Telavåg

Stavanger

Lunna Ness

Lerwick

Scalloway

Shetland

Fair Isle



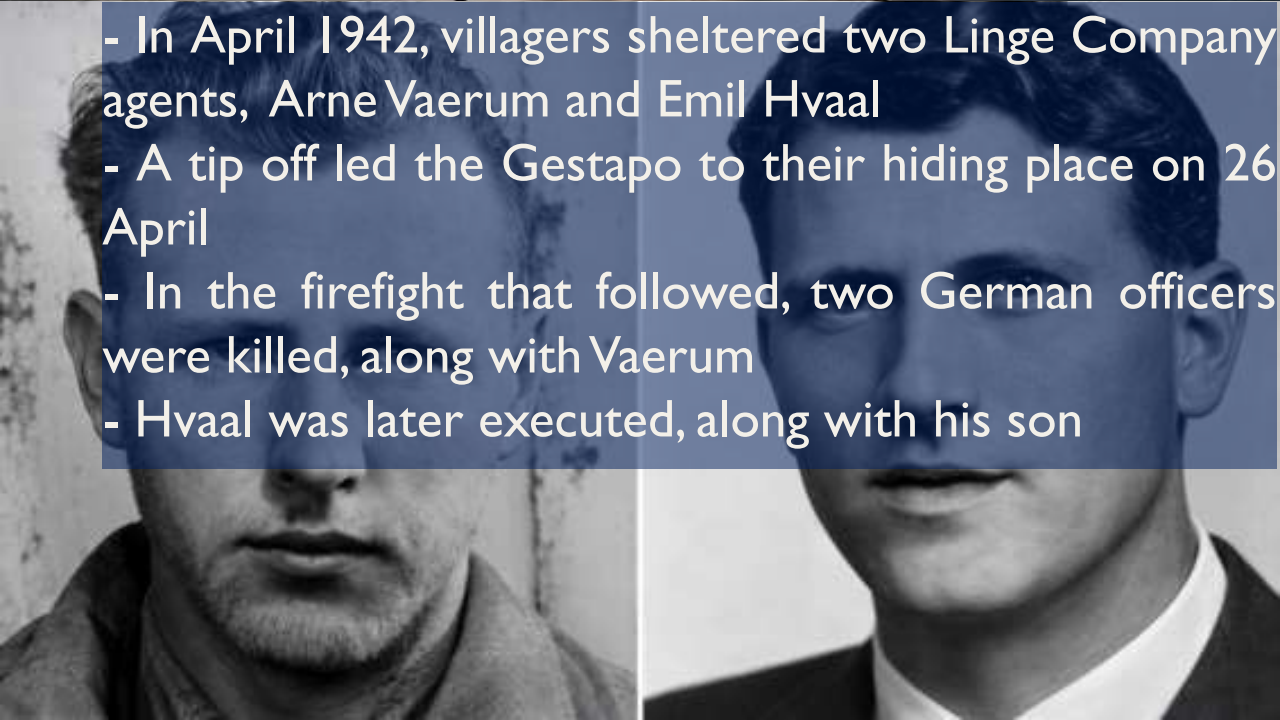
The Telavag Tragedy

West of Bergen, the fishing village of Telavag had quietly served the Shetland Bus since the first months of the occupation, its remote position and trusted community making it an ideal staging point for boats and agents alike

- In April 1942, villagers sheltered two Linge Company agents, Arne Vaerum and Emil Hvaal
- A tip off led the Gestapo to their hiding place on 26 April
- In the firefight that followed, two German officers were killed, along with Vaerum
- Hvaal was later executed, along with his son

An Ordinary Fishing Village

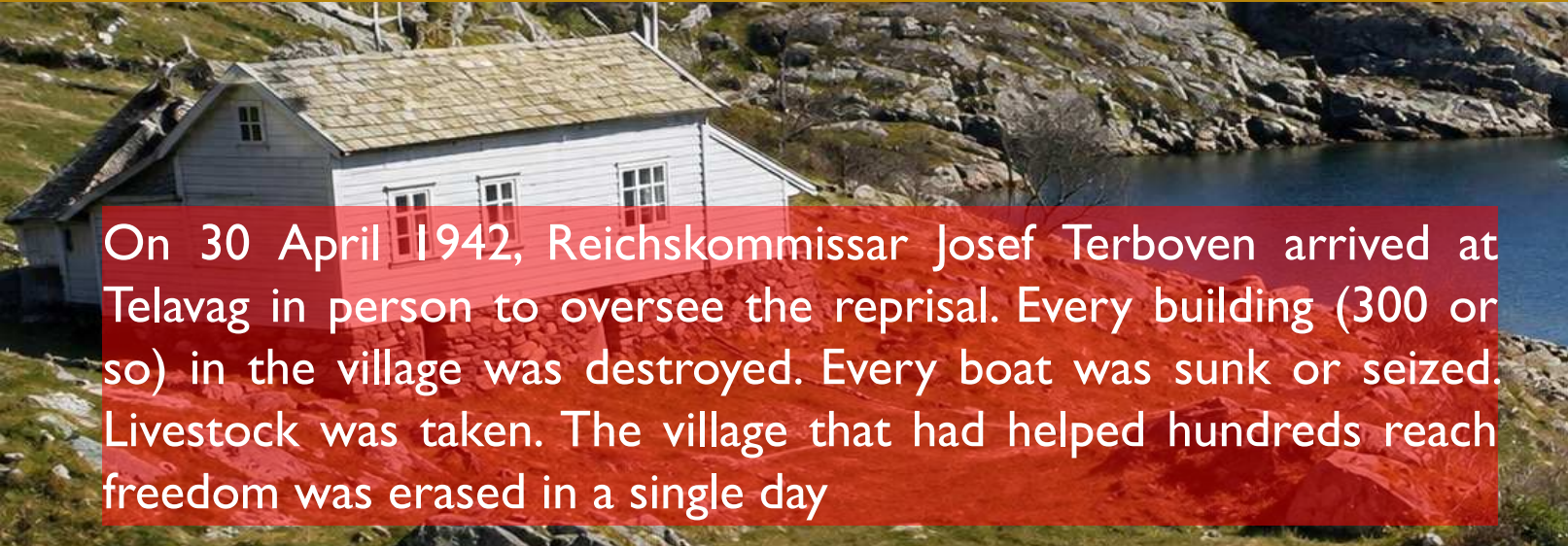
By early 1942, at least 136 people had already escaped to Shetland through Telavag alone, a measure of how much trust the village had earned, and how much it stood to lose





The Telavag Tragedy

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On 30 April 1942, Reichskommissar Josef Terboven arrived at Telavag in person to oversee the reprisal. Every building (300 or so) in the village was destroyed. Every boat was sunk or seized. Livestock was taken. The village that had helped hundreds reach freedom was erased in a single day



72

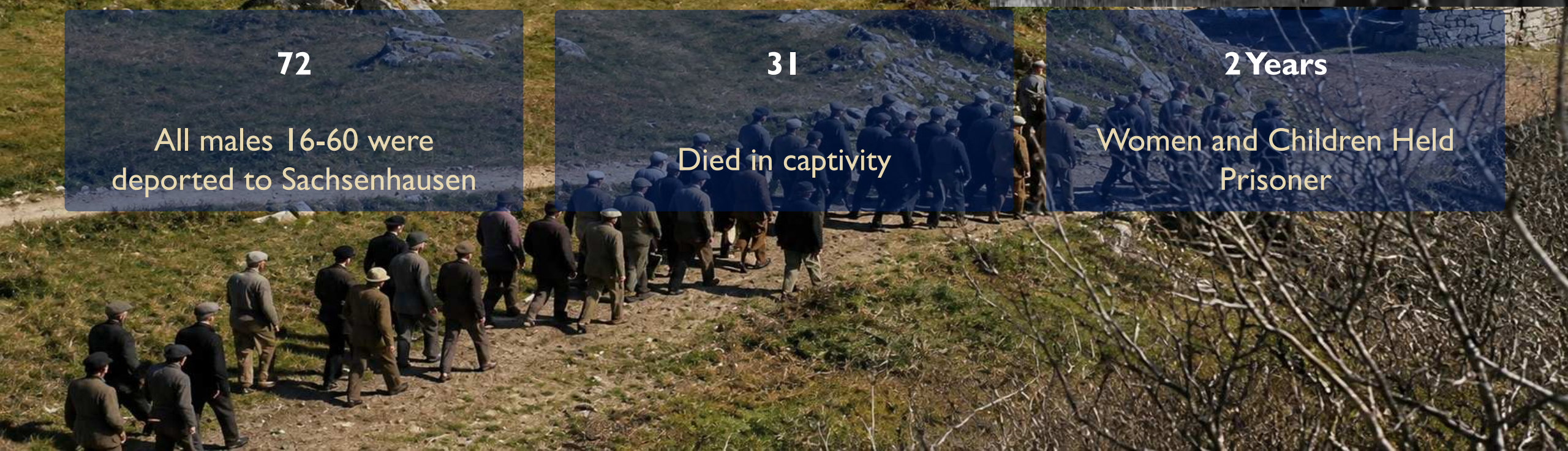
All males 16-60 were
deported to Sachsenhausen

31

Died in captivity

2 Years

Women and Children Held
Prisoner



In the

Whole History

of Submarine Warfare there has

**only ever been one
Underwater Submarine Battle**

... that battle was also
that battle was also

the only time a

Near the Norwegian coast west of Bergen in February 1945, HMS VENTURER tracked the German submarine U-864 while both vessels remained submerged

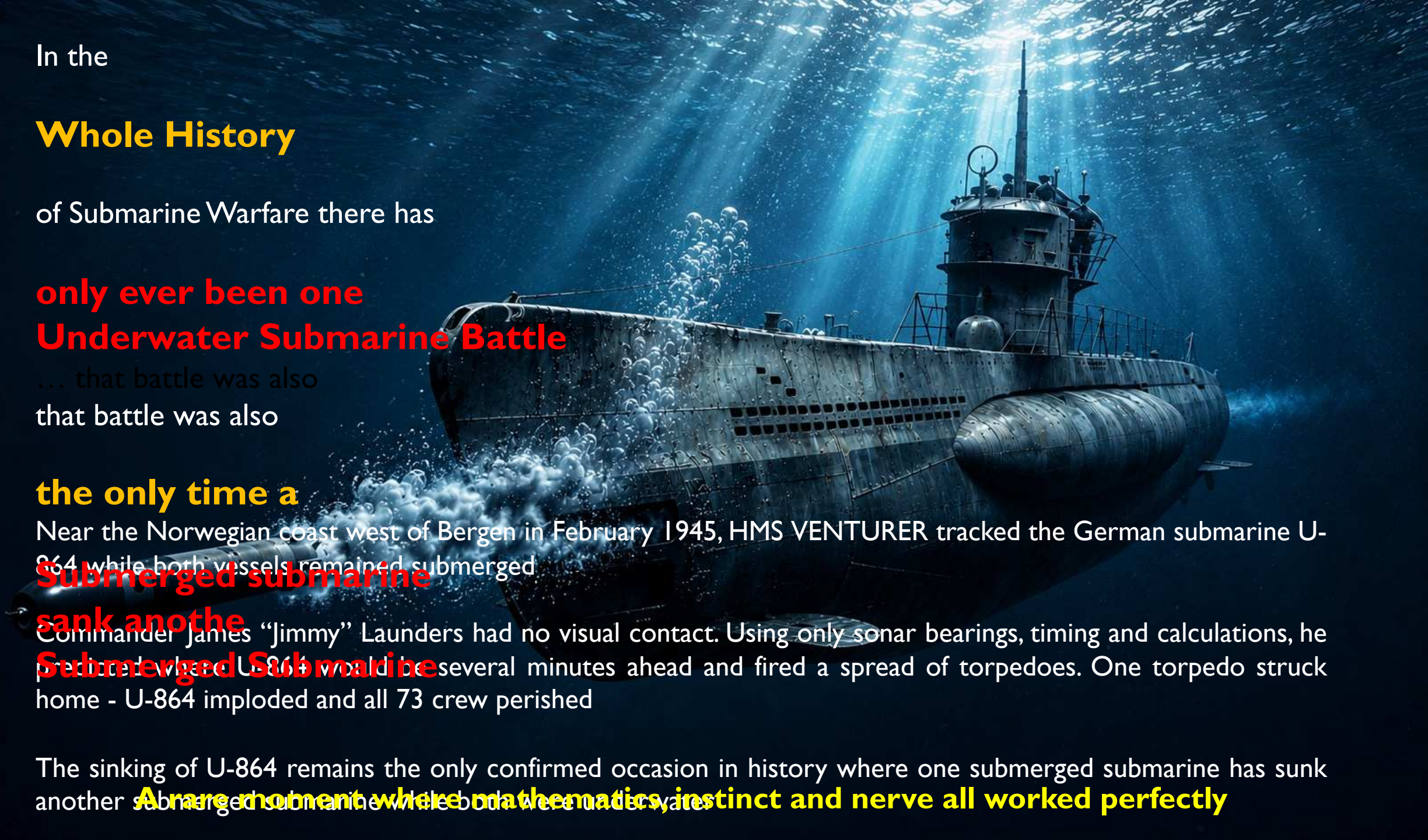
Submerged submarine

sank another

Submerged Submarine

Commander James "Jimmy" Launders had no visual contact. Using only sonar bearings, timing and calculations, he predicted where U-864 would be several minutes ahead and fired a spread of torpedoes. One torpedo struck home - U-864 imploded and all 73 crew perished

The sinking of U-864 remains the only confirmed occasion in history where one submerged submarine has sunk another submerged submarine where mathematics, instinct and nerve all worked perfectly



A rare moment where mathematics, instinct and nerve all worked perfectly



The Toll of the War

The official Norwegian count records **10,262 Norwegian citizens** who died from war-related causes between 9 April 1940 and 8 May 1945. Against Norway's 1940 population of about **3 million**, that is approximately **0.35%** of the population - about 1 in 289 people. This total includes military personnel, merchant seamen, resistance members and political prisoners, civilian victims, and 689 Norwegians killed while serving on Germany's side

Country	Estimated Deaths	Share of Population	Compared with Norway
Norway	10,262	0.35%	
France	~600,000	~1.4%	about 4× higher
United Kingdom	~451,000	~0.9-1.0%	about 2.7× higher
Netherlands	~210,000-250,000	~2.4-2.8%	about 7-8× higher



Norway Today - Energy and Infrastructure

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Norway today sits at the intersection of geography and energy. Offshore platforms draw oil and gas from waters that were once contested by World War 2 .warships Those resources have made Norway one of Europe's most significant energy suppliers. Rather than spend the windfall, it saved it - the Sovereign Wealth Fund now holds assets worth roughly US\$1.5 trillion, making it the largest such Fund in the world

The same coastline that once sheltered Tirpitz now anchors offshore rigs, subsea pipelines, data cables and export routes that help power Europe



Norway Today - Controlling NATO's Northern Flank

Norway sits at the hinge of NATO's northern flank, where the Atlantic meets the Arctic. Its long coastline and proximity to Russia place it on the alliance's front line - but also make it a stabilising force in the High North

As a founding member of NATO, Norway invests heavily in maritime surveillance, undersea awareness and Arctic operations



Norway's contribution is not about size ... it is about access, endurance and credibility ... anchoring NATO's presence where geography still shapes strategy

A Rich Nation by any Measure

The US Debt Burden Per Capita

The US national debt crossed a historic milestone, officially surpassing **\$40 trillion**. Dividing the \$40 trillion debt by the estimated US population of roughly **345.36 million people** results in about **\$116,000 per citizen**

The Norwegian Wealth Fund Windfall

Norway's government-backed Government Pension Fund Global (Oil Fund) has ballooned to a market value to approximately \$2.3 trillion. Because Norway has a small population of just 5.65 million residents, distributing this fortune equally results in a life-changing payout of about **\$407,000 per citizen**



The Last Word to Norway's Prime Minister, Jonas Gahr Støre
Speaking to the BBC at the NATO Heads of State and Government in The Hague, 24-25 June 2025



Geography Does Not Retire

The Same Coastline ... and the Same Strategic Reality



Next Presentation (Sunday at 0900)

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Naval Traditions and Etiquette

Bridging the gap between warships and cruise ships

With
Rear Admiral (Retired) Simon Hardern



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Thank You



... Enjoy Tromsø

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