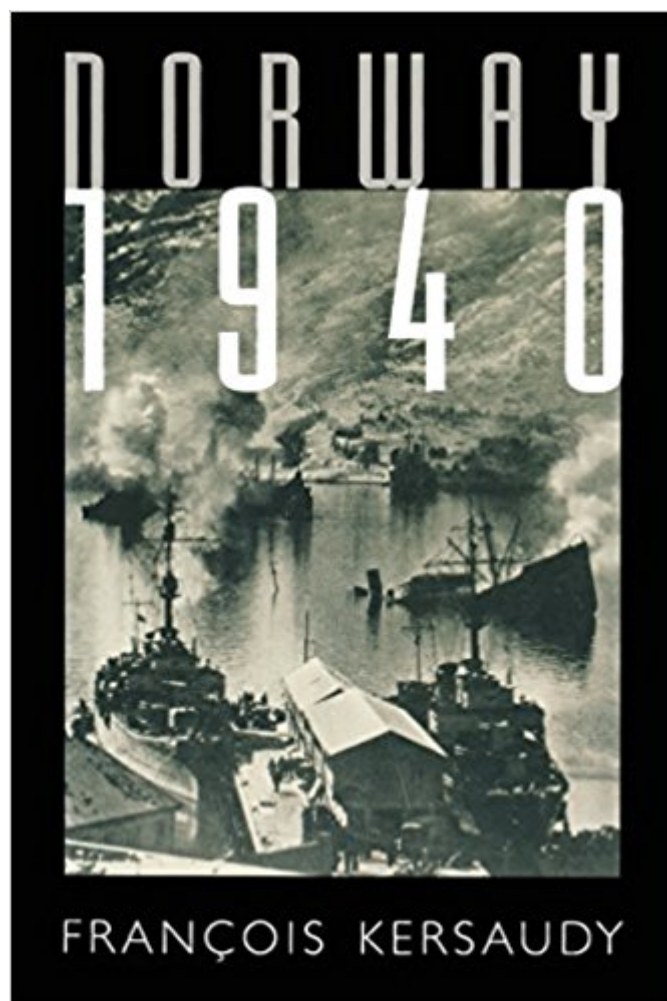


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# Norway 1940 (World War II)



## Synopsis

In the late 1930s, as Europe moved toward war, the peaceful kingdom of Norway found itself strategically vital to the interests of Germany, France, and Great Britain. Though Norway was strictly neutral, in April 1940 Britain and France mined Norwegian territorial waters to prevent supplies from reaching Germany. Immediately, the German Reich invaded the militarily weak Norway. Norway 1940 shows the country fighting valiantly, assisted by the Allies in a two-month campaign that has become a textbook example of confused aims and faulty coordination. François Kersaudy delved deeply into the archives of the nations involved to offer the most balanced account to date. He depicts the glaring political and military errors of the campaign and goes on to consider large questions about its conduct and consequences.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The German attack on April 9, 1940 came as a surprise to the small, unprepared armed forces of Norway. Kersaudy ( De Gaulle ) describes how King Haakon VII, the 70-year-old monarch, rallied the country to resist the invader while the British and French organized an expeditionary force. In London, meanwhile, opposition to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's leadership escalated precipitously after the Germans invaded Belgium and the Netherlands; stepping down, he was replaced by Winston Churchill, who decided that British troops were needed to defend England from an expected cross-Channel invasion. By June 9 the last Allied troops had been withdrawn from their ineffectual beachheads in Norway. What influence did this brief campaign have on subsequent

developments in World War II? For Germany it meant air and naval bases closer to England; for England it meant the emergence of Churchill as war leader. This workmanlike account of one of the war's peripheral campaigns is of limited appeal. Photos. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The Allied campaign in Norway has had its detractors, but none with the satiric style of Kersaudy. Most of what he damns deserves condemnation--the blindness, refusal to pay heed to early warnings, the constant betrayal of the Norwegians, and the unpleasant mission, given to a lowly field commander, of informing the Norwegian commander-in-chief of the British and French withdrawal. After a brief introduction, the book plunges into the German attack. Oslo's occupation was delayed by the sinking of the German cruiser Blucher in Oslofjord. Otherwise, the Germans had no trouble rousting the poorly armed Norwegians or the British, who lacked artillery, anti-aircraft guns, and tanks. The only bright spot in the two-month campaign was provided by the French, who contributed excellent ski troops and Foreign Legionnaires in Narvik. Kersaudy writes well, and the translation is good; the bibliography, however, lacks important works. For large and general collections.- Raymond Lindgren, California State Univ., Long BeachCopyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This paperback edition of Francois Kersaudy's 1987 book "Norway 1940" is a gripping and even emotional account of the fall of Norway. Kersaudy, a French historian, has provided the story from the points of view of the principal British, French, German, and Norwegian participants. The story that emerges is of a military fiasco for the allies, a national catastrophe for the Norwegians, and a costly and ultimately less than useful military conquest for the Germans. In the spring of 1940, Britain and France were engaged in a "phoney war" with Germany along a quiet Western Front. Britain's desire to secure the sea space around the British Isles led inevitably to pressures on Norway's neutrality. It is Kersaudy's thesis that the liberation of British prisoners of war from the German ship *Alta* in Norwegian waters in February 1940 triggered a German invasion in early April. German interest in Norway in fact preceded the *Alta* incident and the well-planned invasion of Norway by Germany in April 1940 preempted a British intervention there by only hours to days. The Norwegians, who had relied on their status as neutrals, were caught flat-footed by the German invasion and thrown back from the principal cities in southern Norway. Their appeals for help were answered by the British and French, but as Kersaudy brings out, in a clumsy and ultimately ineffective manner. The strength of Kersaudy's history is his account of the inability of the British and

French governments to make timely and effective decisions with respect to Norway. This failure contributed to the eventual ouster of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and the rise to power of Winston Churchill. The Norwegians showed remarkable tenacity in the face of defeat. Their scattered and outnumbered forces fought gallantly but could not prevent a five year occupation of Norway by the Germans. As Kersaudy points out, the conquest of Norway was probably not an efficient expenditure of military resources for Germany. Germany never made good its considerable naval losses in the Norwegian campaign, and became committed to a disproportionately large occupation force. Kersaudy is an effective, even gripping writer. The text is supplemented with a nice selection of maps, diagrams, and photographs. This book is highly recommended to the student of the Second World War and to the casual reader looking for a highly readable account of the fall of Norway.

On April 9, 1940, the Germans attacked Norway - two months later, the war in Norway was over. As Kersaudy points out (p.227) "the only substantial - and even decisive - advantage that Great Britain was to draw from [the] ill-fated undertaking was the replacement of Neville Chamberlain by Winston Churchill. Indeed, nothing other than the dismal story of setbacks suffered in Norway could have led to the resignation of Chamberlain before 10 May 1940". Zeroing in on a very small, but strategically important theater of World War II, Kersaudy paints a tragic-comic picture of the conflict in excruciating detail. The valiant Norwegian military forces under General Ruge were hamstrung by their own incompetent politicians, and "allies" (?) who were worse than useless. The British squabbled with the French, and then the British generals and politicians quarreled with each other. New plans were substituted for old plans while the old plans were in the midst of execution. Polish 'mountain troops' who had never seen a mountain were sent to the Narvik theater, as well as French Chasseurs Alpins who were short of skis and snowshoes. Ships were loaded with the wrong supplies, in illogical sequences, and diverted to locations where their contents were not needed. --- None of this should have been too surprising. In the introduction to "Norway 1940", Kersaudy states: "The French... could find in their "Dictionnaire des arts et mÃ©tiers" a rather peculiar map of Scandinavia: Sweden remained nameless, but Norway was called... Sweden! The Germans did little better, since the capital of Norway was nowhere to be seen on their maps... In 1940 the [British] Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, glancing at a map of Scandinavia, was still mistaking the Norwegian border for a railway line." ---- This book is history at its best: detailed, incisive, with context as well as personalities. At times detailing the action on an hour-by-hour basis, it could easily be the basis of a fantastic movie script - for much of the action seems cinematic. "Norway

1940" contains a wealth of very comprehensive campaign maps and well-selected photographs, of military action as well as portraits of 'the players'. (One of the most fascinating candid photos is Norwegian King Haakon and his son Prince Olav running through a snowy field for cover during a German air attack on April 11th!) Take time to read this book - it is well worth it! (P.S. Have a pad and pen close by; keeping track of the players and the action requires more memory than most will be able to muster).

I purchased this book hoping to read about the naval engagements during the Norway campaign, and learn more about the ground battles. Sadly, these were dealt with in passing. The sinking of the German destroyer fleet in Narvik, for example, is barely given a paragraph! Also, this book is overloaded with explanation marks and rather dry and poor humor. On the other hand, it is a good history of the political machinations - which were no less dramatic than the military ones. On all sides other than the German (Norwegian, British, and French) there were ever-changing arguments, strategies, and conflicts ultimately leading to both defeat and replacing Neville Chamberlain. It is a worthwhile book, but would be better off subtitled "The Political Conflict Between the Allies."

I commend the author for writing a book about the little known campaign in Scandinavia in 1940. In this action, the Germans occupied Denmark and Norway. What the author writes about is the limp leadership of Neville Chamberlain in his reaction to the invasion. Churchill who was First Sea Lord was also guilty of poor judgement in how to react. The question was should they invade Narvik or Trondheim, or somewhere else. Churchill showed more leadership, but ultimately Chamberlain never did lead. As the British and French pondered, they frittered away their opportunities to oppose the Germans. The result was a catastrophe. Norway was conquered in short order, and was dominated by Germany for the rest of the war. This is a good read. I am going to disagree with the other reviewers and say that this was only an average read. The middle part of the book was hard going, and the flow of the book was not great. I commend the author on writing about a little known theater of the war.

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