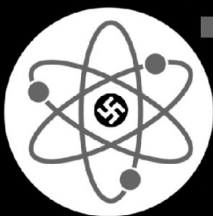


SABOTAGE



THE MISSION TO DESTROY HITLER'S ATOMIC BOMB

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In the dark early hours of April 9, 1940, a fierce wind swept across the decks of the German cruiser *Hipper* and the four destroyers at its stern as they cut into the fjord toward Trondheim, Norway. The ships approached the three forts guarding the entrance to the city, all crews at the ready. A Norwegian patrol signaled for the boats to identify themselves. In English, the *Hipper's* captain returned that they were a British ship with orders to “go towards Trondheim. No unfriendly intentions.” As the patrol shone a spotlight across the water, it was blinded by searchlights from the *Hipper*, which suddenly sped up and blew smoke to hide its whereabouts.

Signals and warning rockets lit up the night. Inside the Norwegian forts, alarms rang and orders were given to fire on the invading ships. But the inexperienced Norwegian soldiers struggled to shoot their guns. By the time they were prepared, the *Hipper* was already steaming past the first fort. At the second fort, the bugler who should have sounded the alarm had fallen asleep at his post. The moment the gunners there opened fire, their searchlights malfunctioned, so they could not see their targets.

At 4:25 A.M., the German force set anchor in Trondheim's harbor. Cutters began bringing hundreds of soldiers from the warships to the shore. The soldiers spread out from the port into the defenseless streets. The Nazi invasion of Norway had begun.



In a large hall at the Norwegian Institute of Technology (NTH), twenty minutes away from Trondheim's harbor, Leif Tronstad gathered his fellow teachers, their students, and a handful of others. Word of the invasion had reached him before the break of day, and while his wife and children slept, he had rushed to the Institute. From the few reports he and others had received, all of Norway looked to be under attack. Most major cities had fallen alongside Trondheim, but the capital, Oslo, was rumored to be holding out.

The group debated what they should do. One among them, a firebrand named Knut Haukelid, who was visiting friends in the city, wanted to fight with whatever weapons they could find. The Germans were invading their country, and they must resist. Others preached caution. They did not know exactly what Hitler intended for Norway, and their small country, with its limited military, stood little chance against German might.

When Tronstad spoke, he held everyone's attention. At thirty-seven years of age, he was the university's youngest full professor, and a favorite in its classrooms. Of medium height, he had blue eyes and ash-blond hair parted neatly on the side, with a light dance of crow's feet around his eyes.

He told those assembled that he would travel to Oslo, where, as a reserve officer in the Army, he had standing orders to go once war broke out. He suggested those with military experience should do the same. As for the others, he said, each man needed to follow his own conscience on what action he should take, but all must remember their country was in desperate need. "Whatever you do," he said, "your actions will be history in a hundred years." With that, he said his goodbyes.

Tronstad had feared this would happen — that Norway would be attacked and its “sleeping government” would leave the country unprepared to mount a defense. Since the day Adolf Hitler had invaded Poland in September 1939, and Britain’s soon-to-be prime minister Winston Churchill had announced, “We are fighting to save the whole world from the pestilence of Nazi tyranny,” it was clear to Tronstad that Norway would not be allowed to maintain the neutral stand it had held in the First World War. The fight between the Allies and the Nazis in mainland Europe had stalled, and the two sides had circled around Norway for months. With its rich natural resources and strategic position in the North Sea, Tronstad’s homeland was too good a prize to leave unclaimed.

As Tronstad hurried home, German soldiers occupied the city around him, marching in columns through the streets. They established machine-gun nests and mortar positions at key spots throughout the city, and called out warnings in German not to resist. Tronstad ignored them. When he reached his two-story house on the city’s outskirts, he told his wife, Bassa, that they were not safe in Trondheim. He would take her and the children to a mountain tourist lodge 100 miles to the south, then he would go to Oslo to join the Army.

Together, they woke up their young children, Sidsel and Leif, and helped them dress and pack. Fifteen minutes later, they piled into their car. As they headed south over a river bridge, two ash-colored bombers flew overhead.

“What kind of plane is that?” Sidsel asked.

“It is a German plane,” Tronstad said, his first explanation of their hurried departure. “I’m afraid the war’s come to our country.”



German police troops march into Oslo in May 1940.