

Avoidable Loss: The Saga of the *Bliicher*

Peter K.H. Mispelkamp

Although the German Kriegsmarine had many unlucky ships, most experts would agree that the hapless *Bliicher* was by far the most unfortunate. This heavy cruiser was the second ship (see figure 1) of the *Admiral Hipper-class* to be completed and was lost during its first operation — the invasion of Norway in April 1940. *Bliichefs* story is all the more poignant because unlike *Admiral GrafSpee*, *Bismarck*, or *Scharnhorst*, this loss was not engineered by a better strategist, the misfortunes of battle, or "ULTRA" intercepts. Indeed, the sinking is directly attributable to a scandalous lack of planning by the German Naval Staff and even poorer execution by the commander, Admiral Oscar Kummetz. Even though its inglorious demise triggered an acrimonious debate between the German army and navy over command of joint operations, naval historians have tended to ignore the story. About the only people who remember *Bliicher* are the inhabitants along the Oslofjord who curse the oil pollution that the wreck occasionally releases into the frigid waters.

Under the Treaty of Versailles the Reichsmarine, the post-1919 German navy, could not even contemplate the construction of heavy cruisers. Instead, its cruisers were limited to a maximum standard displacement of 6000 tons, while signatories to the Washington Naval Agreement were allowed ships with a standard displacement of 10,000 tons and a main armament of 203mm (eight-inch) guns. In 1934 Admiral Erich Raeder, Commander-in-Chief of the Reichsmarine, awarded a development and construction contract to the famous Krupp armaments firm for 203mm guns and turrets.¹ This was somewhat speculative, because there had been no indication that Great Britain, France or the US had any inclination to permit Germany to construct warships larger than those allowed under the treaty. On the other hand, Raeder had taken the measure of Germany's militant new Chancellor, Adolf Hitler, and was certain that the nation was about to embark upon a massive rearmament programme with or without the approval of its former enemies. On 18 June 1935 Jochim von Ribbentrop, in his capacity as Hitler's special envoy, negotiated an Anglo-German Naval Agreement that allowed the recently renamed Kriegsmarine to reach thirty-five percent of the strength of the Royal Navy in all classes of surface warships.² This meant that Germany was now able to build warships to the standard of the Washington Naval Agreement.

In fact, the Reichsmarine had already placed an order in October 1934 with the Deutsche Werke in Kiel for the construction of cruiser "G," the future *Bliicher*? The order for a sistership, cruiser "H" — *Admiral Hipper* — was given to the famous Blohm and Voss

shipyard shortly thereafter. Blohm and Voss was able to start work ahead of schedule and managed to complete *Admiral Hipper* first, which explains why some German publications refer to *Bliicher* as the nameship of the class.⁴ Krupp's Germania Werft received the contract for cruiser "J" — commissioned as *Prim Eugen* — later in 1935. Orders for cruisers "K" and "L" followed in July 1936.

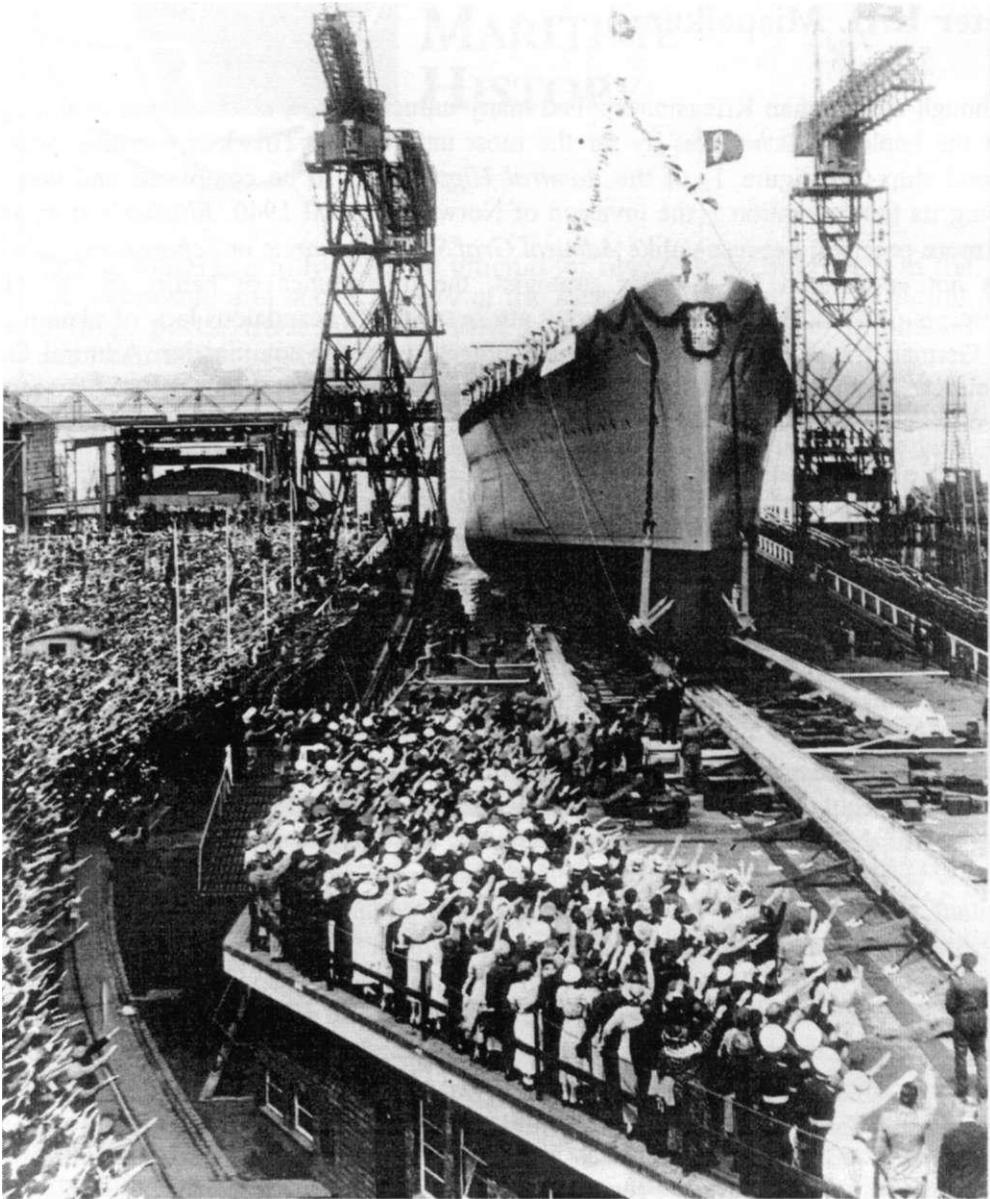
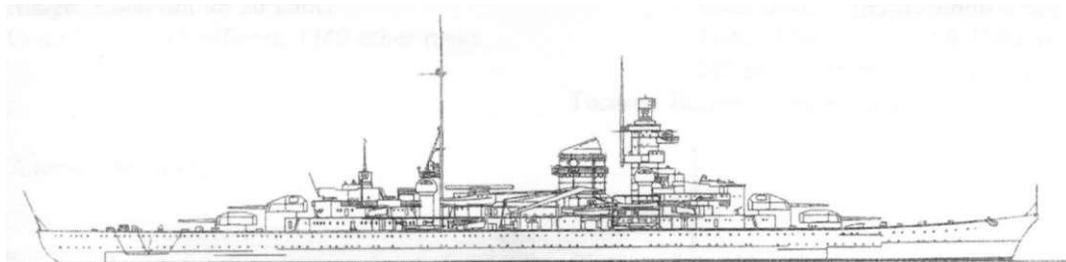


Figure F. The Kriegsmarine's second heavy cruiser is launched, 8 June 1939. Note the straight stem, the coat of arms and the numerous onlookers.

Source: Courtesy of Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BAMA), No. 94188121.

Despite the early date of these orders, the actual design of the ships went through a lengthy gestation period. At one point the designers considered revamping the design to incorporate twelve 150mm (5.9") guns instead of the 203mm weapons originally envisioned.⁵ When the Kriegsmarine placed orders for *Blucher* and *Hipper*, it decided to employ the heavier calibre in the first three ships. The design staff started work on detailed drawings for *Blucher* and *Hipper* in April 1935. When the Anglo-German Naval Agreement removed the last obstacle to construction, the Kriegsmarine officially announced plans on 9 July to lay down three heavy cruisers. At first, it contemplated completing "K" and "L" with twelve 150mm guns to comply with international pacts to halt the further construction of heavy cruisers.⁶ In the event, neither ever saw service. Germany sold the incomplete "L" to the USSR in 1940, and Hitler's subsequent invasion effectively terminated construction. In 1942, the Kriegsmarine contemplated converting "K" to an aircraft carrier, but this project was stillborn.

Deutsche Werke laid down *Blucher* on 15 August 1935 and launched the ship on 8 June 1937 with typical Third Reich fanfare. After the launch, the pace of construction slowed due to some major design changes. By far the most noticeable was the adoption of a curved clipper bow to replace the original straight stem. The Kriegsmarine took possession of *Blucher* on 20 September 1939, shortly after Hitler's attack on Poland ignited another world war. *Blucher's* first and only captain, Kapitän zur Zee Heinrich Woldag, was a veteran of the Imperial German Navy in the First World War. His second in command was Fregattenkapitän Erich Heyemann.



Blücher (1940). *Mi va*

Figure 2: *Blucher*, 1940.

Source: Erich Gröner, *German Warships 1815-1945* (3 vols., London, 1990), I, 66. Reproduced courtesy of Conway Maritime Press.

Like the Imperial Japanese Navy, the Kriegsmarine consistently understated the size of its warships. It thus claimed that *Blucher's* standard displacement was 10,000 tons when in reality it was more 14,000 tons.⁷ Unfortunately, this large displacement did not appreciably increase the ship's hitting or staying powers. As a result, it was at best only the equal of most contemporary foreign designs. Nonetheless, *Blucher* was certainly among the most elegant ships of this type (see figure 2); its long, sleek hull and pronounced "Atlantic" bow conveyed an impression of speed and grace. In appearance, *Blucher* was a cross between *Hipper* and *Prinz Eugen*. The former was the model for *Blucher's* superstructure, while its sharp bow and taller funnel cap reflected the influence of the latter. The main armament was eight 203mm guns, arranged in four twin

superfiring turrets, mounted fore and aft. For the time, *Blucher* carried a very substantial anti-aircraft battery of twelve 105mm (4.1 ") guns and was equipped with four high-angle directors. Table 1 provides a complete summary of its armament and technical details. *Hipper'*?, major flaw was an unreliable powerplant and short range; the limited data available on *Blucher* indicates that it likely had the same problems.

After completion, *Blucher* began what should have been both intensive and extensive trials on the Baltic.⁸ Unfortunately, the winter of 1939-1940 was one of the worst on record, and the newly-commissioned ship and its inexperienced crew had little opportunity to practice (see figure 3). During this period, *Blucher* frequently returned to the dockyard for equipment updates, including the installation of a new metric radar system. A highlight of its limited trials occurred on 23 October 1939, when the crew mustered on deck to honour *U-47*, which had just returned from successfully preying on the Royal Navy's main anchorage at Scapa Flow.⁹ The nadir may have been on 18 January 1940 when *Blucher*, maneuvering into its berth, accidentally bumped the light cruiser *Koln*, damaging the smaller ship's stern. The Kriegsmarine had hoped that *Blucher* would be fully operational by 3 May, but as the severe Baltic winter continued almost unabated, this hope began to appear ever more doubtful. In fact, the log shows only about twenty days at sea before 1 April and suggests that the crew had not reached any degree of proficiency in artillery, damage control, action-stations or engine room drills. Still, this lack of training did not prevent the officers on 7 April from listing the ship as available for "simple tasks."¹⁰ While crew training continued, events in Berlin were to force an early deployment.



Figure 3: Blücher at anchor. The absence of radar and the open bridge on the tower mast indicate that this photo was taken shortly after commissioning. The pronounced clipper bow is clearly evident.

Source: BAMA, No. 134/B4218.

Table 1
Specifications

Construction History:

Builder: Deutsche Werke, Kiel
Laid Down: 15.08.35
Launched: 08.06.37
Completed: 20.09.39

Data:

Displacement: 14,247 tons standard
18,200 tons fully loaded
Measurements:
Length - Waterline: 195.00 metres (639.75ft)
Overall: 205.90 metres (675.75ft)
Beam: 21.30 metres (70ft)
Draught - Standard: 5.83 metres (19ft)
Maximum: 7.74 metres (25.25 ft)

Performance:

Maximum Speed: 32.8 knots @ 133,631 shp
Range: 8,000 nm @ 20 knots
Complement: 42 officers, 1340 other ranks

Armament:

8 x 203mm (8") [4 twin turrets, 140 rpg]
12 x 105mm (4.1") [6 twin mounts, 420 rpg]
12 x 37mm [6 twin mounts, 420 rpg]
8 x 20mm [8 singles, 7,000 rpg]
12 x 531mm (21 ") TT [four triples, 10 reloads]
3 Arado Ar 196A [2 normally carried]

Protection:

Armour - Main Deck: 12-30mm
Armoured Deck: 20-50mm
Main Belt: 50-70mm
Tower Mast: 50-150mm
203 mm Turrets: 70-105mm
Torpedo Bulges: sides & bow

Source: See text.

Apart from some musings about the affinity of the Nordic and Aryan peoples, Hitler had never exhibited any interest in Norway. Yet the Scandinavian nation had attracted the interest of two distinct fringe groups: the Foreign Policy Office of the National Socialist Party and a small group of officers in the Kriegsmarine. The former was headed by the ideologue Alfred Rosenberg, who fervently believed that Nazi dogma should find an echo in contiguous lands. Through his position, Rosenberg met with many "would-be dictators," including Vidkun Quisling, the leader of Norway's domestic fascist movement.¹¹ The small clique of officers interested in Norway were influenced by Vizeadmiral Wolfgang Wegener, who believed that the possession of naval bases in Norway would allow Germany to outflank any British blockade. Once Germany was at war with Britain Wegener's thesis attracted more attention.¹²

Norwegian neutrality was a two-edged sword. In November 1939, Britain and Norway concluded a secret Anglo-Norwegian Shipping Agreement under which the UK chartered seventy percent of Norway's vast merchant fleet for the duration of the war.¹³ Meanwhile, Norwegian neutrality allowed Germany to continue receiving its vital imports of Swedish iron ore via the port of Narvik. The vessels carrying this ore took full

advantage of Norway's neutrality to ignore the Royal Navy, leading to mounting tension with the Allies. On the other hand, from November 1939 several naval incidents strained German-Norwegian relations. On 4 November the Norwegian Navy seized a German prize vessel, *City of Flint*, and returned it to its American crew. Less than two weeks later, the Norwegians temporarily interned *Westerwald*, a German naval auxiliary. Although intense diplomatic pressure secured its release, Admiral Raeder had reason to doubt the advantages of Norwegian neutrality.¹⁴

In this period the Allies struggled with various solutions to the vexing problem of intercepting the ore ships without jeopardizing the Anglo-Norwegian Shipping Agreement. The RN in particular was clamouring to lay a minefield in Norwegian territorial waters under the code name "Operation Wilfred," but this was abandoned when the USSR's invasion of Finland on 30 November 1939 provided an alternative.¹⁵ Allied military leaders quickly realized that any aid to Finland would require the temporary use of ports and bases in Norway and Sweden, which would eliminate German imports of Swedish ore without arousing the ire of the neutrals. Not surprisingly, neither Sweden nor Norway welcomed this proposal. The Allies' last attempt to gain approval for this plan occurred on 25 February 1940.¹⁶ When the Russo-Finnish War ended abruptly on 12 March, it eliminated all hopes of using intervention in this theatre to strike a blow against German ore imports. At this juncture, Operation Wilfred returned to the fore. Its planners foresaw the possibility of a German military response against Norway and proposed that troops be held in readiness for rapid deployment to support the Norwegians. On 3 April, the British cabinet approved Wilfred's implementation for 8 April.

Yet during the winter, events had transpired to change Hitler's views about Norway. On 10 December 1939 Quisling left Norway to try to obtain an audience with the German leader. When the German Foreign Office successfully parried his first attempt, Quisling turned to Rosenberg who, although his influence on Hitler was already ebbing, managed to arrange a meeting with Raeder. Quisling played on Raeder's fears regarding a Norwegian alliance with the Allies, warning him that an Allied occupation of several key Norwegian ports was imminent. His claim fuelled the admiral's growing concern and led him to suggest that Hitler grant Quisling an audience. The two met on 13 December. Quisling clearly made an impression, since on that date the German dictator ordered his armed forces to consider a military response to any Allied initiative in Norway. These plans went under the code name *Studie Nord* and were placed under the direction of General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst.¹⁷

Studie Nord received the far more opaque title of *Fall Weserübung* on 27 January 1940. The name change reflected a shift away from supporting a Norwegian fascist-led uprising to advocating a full-scale German invasion. While planning continued, more naval incidents plagued German-Norwegian relations. On 16 February the RN intercepted and boarded *Altmark*, a German naval auxiliary, in Norwegian waters. At the end of March, the Norwegian government interned the crew of *U-21* after it had grounded off its coast. On 2 April the German Naval Attaché, Korvettenkapitän Richard Schreiber, uncovered the previously-secret Anglo-Norwegian Shipping Agreement.¹⁸ Although this came too late to influence Hitler's decision to invade, it confirmed his belief that Norwegian neutrality would always be problematic for the Third Reich. In the end, Hitler

ordered the invasion because his preparations were complete and he believed that he could catch the Allies off-guard.

On 3 April, the first German support ships left their bases and sailed north. Two days later the forces assigned to *Weserubung* and Wilfred collided. The first protagonists were two destroyers: the British *Glowworm* and the German *Bernd von Armin*. In the ensuing engagement, *Armin* signalled the nearby *Admiral Hipper* for aid. The heavy cruiser soon scored a crucial hit on *Glowworm*; its captain, aware that his ship could not long survive, rammed his larger antagonist. Although this inflicted considerable damage to *Hipper*, the cruiser was still operational.

On the same day, Admiral Oscar Kummetz hoisted his flag aboard the Kriegsmarine's newest heavy cruiser. Apart from *Bliicher*, Kummetz's Group V included the armoured ship *Liitzow*, the obsolete light cruiser *Emden*, three torpedo boats and two flotillas of naval auxiliaries.¹⁹ Kummetz was under orders to bluff his way into the confined waters of the Oslofjord and capture the Norwegian capital. The German plan relied heavily on subterfuge, which greatly restricted Kummetz's freedom of action. He chose *Bliicher* as his flagship because it carried a greater number of quick-firing medium and light guns.²⁰ In the waters of the fjord, these weapons would be essential. Unfortunately, Kummetz's decision to employ *Bliicher* as his flagship deprived him of the counsel of the far more experienced Kapitän Thiele, commander of *Liitzow*.

Apart from a relatively large crew, *Bliicher* also carried over 800 troops and thirty-one tons of supplies.²¹ The magazines still contained a large number of practice ammunition rounds. To avoid compromising security they were not offloaded, and the live rounds were merely placed on top of the duds. Consequently, *Bliicher* did not carry anywhere near its full complement of ammunition. This not only wasted vital space but also exacerbated a more vexing problem: storage of the army's equipment and ammunition. Although every conceivable area of the ship, including virtually unprotected compartments like the aircraft hangar, served as impromptu storage space for this dangerous cargo, it appears that no one voiced concern over the risks. The fear of compromising security also prevented *Bliicher* from being issued with the additional life jackets necessary for the bloated complement, though about 200 inflatable life jackets were loaded for the engineering staff. Furthermore, it appears that army personnel received at best only perfunctory training in safety procedures and lifesaving techniques.

Group V left Swindemunde on 7 April at 0600. During the passage, Kummetz exercised his ships as best he could. Two submarine alarms marred the voyage and the British submarine *Triton* managed to make one attack; after its torpedoes missed, a German torpedo-boat forced the sub to dive. Another British submarine, *Sunfish*, was also nearby. While too far away to engage Kummetz's task force, *Sunfish* was able to report its relative heading. At midnight on 8 April Group V had reached the Norwegian coast and Kummetz ordered his crews to assume action stations. Kummetz and the Field Commander, General von Engelbrecht, along with their staffs and most of Woldag's senior officers, gathered on the bridge. Although *Bliicher's* radar was functioning normally, Woldag deactivated it once the task force began to penetrate Oslofjord because the echoes generated by the surrounding mountains rendered it useless.

Like the planners, Kummetz apparently believed that the Norwegians would not risk a confrontation. He was also seemingly unperturbed by the lack of detailed intelligence on the various Norwegian defenses. After the war, Falkenhorst claimed that his main source of information came from tourist maps, to which he added what little data the various German military attachés had provided.²² Another source of information was the Krupp representative in Norway.²³ On the eve of the invasion, an urgent telegram requesting information on the equipment, status and effectiveness of various Norwegian coastal batteries was sent to this man, whose hastily-written report neglected to mention the battery of three antiquated Krupp 280mm (eleven-inch) guns in Fort Oskarsborg on the island of Kahlomen. The decision to rely on stealth precluded any pre-emptive strikes against the known fortifications and the planners failed to anticipate the consequences of facing an alert defence. In essence, Kummetz was leading his ships into waters with whose dangers he was only barely familiar.

As figure 4 shows, the German task force had to run a long and dangerous gauntlet through the fjord to reach Oslo.²⁴ In all, the Norwegians had nine gun batteries positioned along the fjord, as well as one battery of torpedo tubes and three searchlight groups. The island of Kaholmen was the centrepiece of the Norwegian defenses. Apart from its battery of three 280mm guns, it also possessed a bank of torpedo tubes and a searchlight battery. Although the cannons dated from 1906, the Norwegian army had done an excellent job of training its gunners and maintaining these weapons. Searchlight groups on both shores dominated the southern approach and light anti-aircraft batteries protected both coasts. In addition, the east coast housed three 150mm guns north of Drobak. German intelligence suspected a minefield, but could not pinpoint its location. Moreover, the Royal Norwegian Navy had patrol vessels stationed at the entrance to the fjord.

As Kummetz's force entered the approaches, Schreiber cautiously made his way to the docks outside the capital.²⁵ His orders were to meet and advise General von Engelbrecht, who was aboard *Bliicher*. The General and his staff were under orders to arrest the Norwegian royal family should they offer any resistance and to ensure that the bulk of the Norwegian civil administration remained in place. By 0900, Schreiber realized that something had gone dangerously wrong with the plan and returned to his office. The naval attaché and his staff began to prepare for the worst, securing the grounds of the German embassy and arming the staff against the threat of a Norwegian counterstrike. Later that morning, Schreiber again ventured outside the embassy, this time wearing a civilian coat over his uniform.

As Schreiber correctly suspected, things had gone horribly wrong. Royal Navy submarines had made several sightings and one had sunk a German troopship in Norwegian waters. Under interrogation its survivors claimed they had orders to protect Norway from an Allied invasion. Strangely, the RN chose to ignore this information and concentrated its ships to counter a suspected breakout of German surface raiders into the North Atlantic. Royal Navy warships disembarked the troops held in readiness for any German military reaction to Operation Wilfred, a decision that severely handicapped the initial Allied response to *Weserubung*.

Between December 1939 and April 1940, the Norwegian government had received several warnings of imminent German invasions, the last from its legation in Berlin on 5 April, which led the Foreign Minister to inform the Norwegian military.²⁶ The

Norwegian navy dispatched patrol vessels and the army began to man the coastal defenses and to move artillery into position. The air force went on alert. Operation Wilfred, however, caught the Norwegians off-guard and hindered their initial reaction to *Weserübung*.

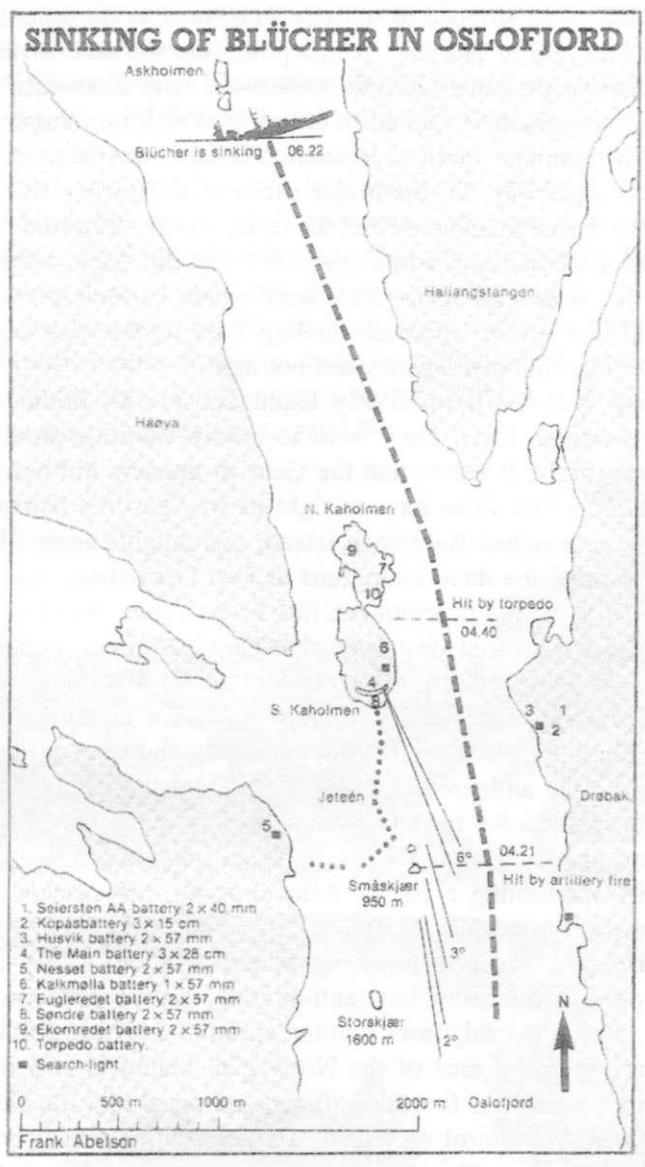


Figure 4: *Blücher's* final run through the Oslofjord.

Source: M.J. Whitley, *German Cruisers of World War II* (London, 1987), 95. Reproduced courtesy of Arms and Armour Press.

As Group V approached the entrance to Oslofjord, *Pol III*, a converted whaler serving as a patrol vessel, sighted and challenged the flotilla.²⁷ Kummertz dispatched *Albatross*, a torpedo boat, to deal with this minor threat. Although the diminutive Norwegian vessel put up a brave fight, *Albatross* quickly overwhelmed it. As the task force penetrated deeper into the fjord, searchlights briefly illuminated *Bliicher* and a few warning shots broke the tranquillity, but a deathly silence quickly descended. Once past these lights, the task force stopped to transfer some men to the smaller ships detailed to attack the naval dockyard at Horten. At this point, the intricate invasion plan began to unravel. Two minesweepers that were to rendezvous with Kummertz's force and lead it through the suspected minefields failed to arrive. Not relishing the prospect of steaming through the fjord in complete darkness, Kummertz delayed the operation briefly. While the troop transfer was underway, all the major officers on *Bliicher's* now-crowded bridge debated the options. Some maintained that the recent events indicated that the Norwegians had no real intention of fighting, while others felt that the ships should be ready to open fire immediately because the Norwegians were aware of their presence. Although the invasion plan did suggest an alternate landing area in the face of strong resistance, Kummertz decided that this contingency did not apply.

As the task force continued slowly, Kummertz severely limited his ships' freedom to engage the Norwegian forts. They were to ignore warning shots, ranging shots, or searchlights. Surprisingly, it seems that the German gunners did not have any targeting information should the task force have to fight its way past the Norwegian defences. At 0440, as Group V approached Kahlomen Island, searchlights again illuminated *Bliicher*. Forty-one minutes later, the three main guns of Fort Oskarsborg opened fire, ending all German hopes of a quick and peaceful run into Oslo. Three 280mm shells slammed into the ill-fated flagship. The first destroyed the main flak-control platform. The second struck the aircraft hangar, igniting a huge sea of flame that engulfed the Ar 196 float plane and destroyed the port no. III 105mm mount. The third damaged the engine telegraphs, jamming the rudder to port. Simultaneously, the 150mm battery at Drobak also entered the fray, scoring an incredible twenty hits from the twenty-five salvos it fired.

These hits left *Bliicher* heavily shaken. As its main armament gunners scrambled to find something at which to shoot, its light and medium anti-aircraft guns fired at anything remotely resembling a target. After ordering his stricken ship to open fire, Woldag rang for full speed ahead. The 150mm hits caused extensive damage to the cruiser's superstructure, severely crippling communications. They also destroyed the torpedo workshop and the secondary anti-aircraft control platform. Woldag ordered counter-steering to keep the ship from running aground on North Kahlomen. As the crew struggled to clear the firing arcs of the Norwegian batteries, two massive underwater explosions rocked *Bliicher*. At first, the officers surmised that the ship had strayed into a minefield, but damage control crews quickly determined that it had been torpedoed. Shortly after 0530, making about fifteen knots, and with a list of 8-12°, the flagship finally cleared the firing arcs of the Norwegian guns. As this point, Kummertz ordered Thiele on *Liitzow* to assume command of the task force.

When *Bliicher* cleared the defences, the Norwegian gunners turned their attention to *Liitzow* and the other ships of the task force. Hits from the fort's main guns quickly disabled the armoured ship's only forward heavy turret. With his ship now devoid of any

credible forward firepower, Thiele ordered the remainder of the task force to retreat. His intention was to land the troops further south and to avoid another confrontation with the Norwegian batteries. He also countermanded all orders for aid from the stricken flagship, fearing that any such attempt would only result in more casualties.

Having cleared the defences, Woldag now concentrated on saving his crippled and burning ship. Even after the engines failed one by one, Woldag remained optimistic, ordering his men to drop the ship's anchors to prevent *Bliicher* from grounding while the engineers attempted to restart the turbines. As the engineers wrestled with this problem, the captain ordered Heyemann to determine the extent of the cruiser's damage. He witnessed a horrifying scene of fires and destruction. The hangar fire spread rapidly and ignited the army's munitions that had been stored nearby. This fire in effect divided the ship into two distinct parts and made it impossible for either to support the other. Forward, the port side below the no. 1 105mm mounting was torn open and smoking heavily. The munitions in the torpedo workshop also added havoc to the almost helpless warship. Damage control teams had little chance of controlling the blazes that burned throughout the ship because most of the fire hoses were riddled with shell splinters. All over the ship, makeshift parties began to dump munitions overboard and to flood the various magazines. Upon hearing Heyemann's report, Woldag ordered all gun crews to fight the fires and to assist in measures to save the ship.

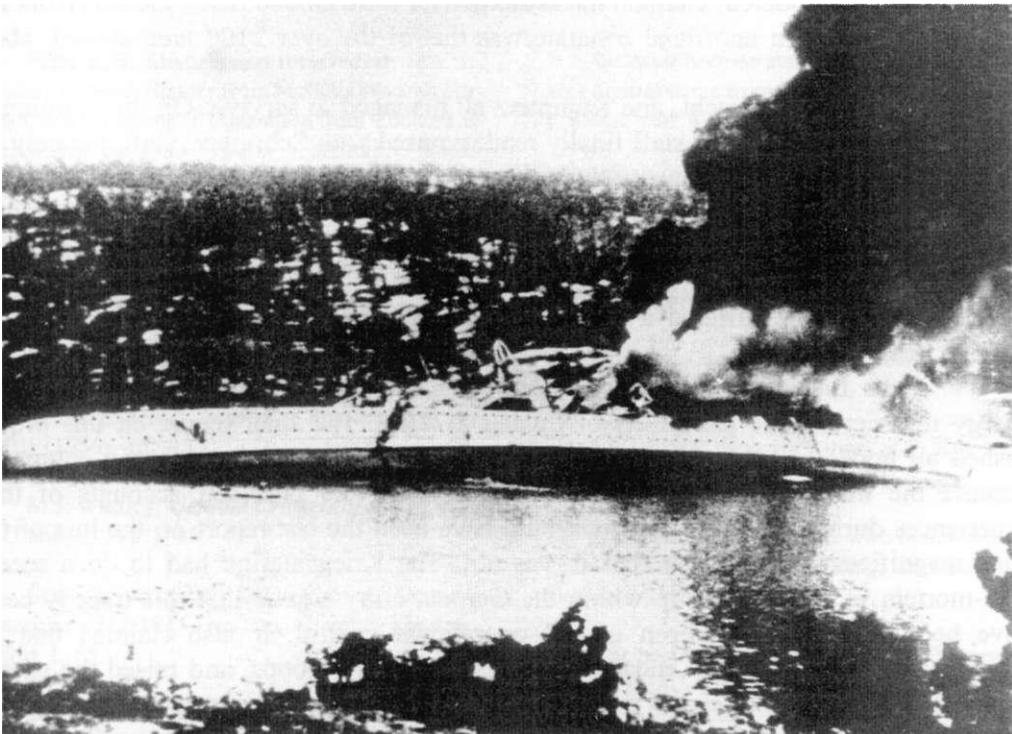


Figure 5: Dramatic news photograph of *Bliicher's* final moments. Flames from the hangar fire and numerous holes in her hull are very obvious.

Even when the ship listed to an alarming 18°, Woldag clung tenaciously to a belief that *Bliicher* could be saved. He changed his mind only after a huge explosion rocked the doomed ship. This last explosion occurred when the flames reached the amidships 105mm magazine. Apparently, it had proved impossible to flood this magazine properly and no one could fight through the inferno to neutralize the endangered munitions. Immediately after this last blow, Woldag ordered his crew to prepare for the worst. The crew lowered the sole serviceable cutter and began to evacuate the wounded. By 0700 *Bliicher's* list reached 45° and Woldag ordered the crew to abandon ship. As the last of the crew struggled to extricate themselves from the wreck, *Bliicher* rolled over and sank at 0723 on the morning of 9 April (see figure 5).

German reports on the evacuation differ greatly. Some indicate a very professional, orderly procedure, while others note signs of panic among both the sailors and soldiers. Many sailors voluntarily offered life jackets to their non-swimming compatriots from the army, while others had no intention of surrendering them. The cutter pulled as many men as possible from the oil- and wreckage-strewn waters, bringing them to the relative safety of the island of Askholmen. On its second trip, the cutter suffered severe damage, forcing the remaining survivors to make their own way to shore. The men from *Bliicher* had to wait for help until the evening of 9 April, when Luftwaffe Ju 87 Stukas, combined with the restored firepower of *Litizow*, finally managed to subdue Oskarsborg. After the fort surrendered, German naval auxiliaries were able to reach the survivors and to evacuate them. An unofficial estimate was that of the over 2100 men aboard, about 1600 were lost.²⁸

Woldag, Engelbrecht, and Kummetz all managed to survive. On the morning of 10 April, the general and his staff finally rendezvoused with Schreiber. Unfortunately for the Germans, the King and most of the Norwegian government had used the delay caused by *Bliicher's* loss to escape from Hitler's grasp. On 16 April, Woldag boarded a cargo plane to return to Germany. It crashed into Oslofjord after takeoff, and Woldag joined his lost crew in their watery grave. Kummetz continued as Flag Officer Cruisers. On New Year's Eve 1943, he suffered a humiliating defeat aboard *Hipper* in the Battle of the Barents Sea.

In the first year of the occupation, the Kriegsmarine expended a great deal of energy to ascertain the possibility of raising *Bliicher*. The final report on this project dashed all hopes of salvaging more than a few light anti-aircraft guns and equipment because the hull was too badly holed.²⁹ Most survivors provided accounts of their experiences during the sinking. This should have been the last report on the loss of this once magnificent man of war, but it was not. The Kriegsmarine had to do a second post-mortem in 1941. A group within the German army argued that this tragedy could have been averted had it been in full operational control. It also claimed that the Kriegsmarine had recklessly endangered the ship and the troops, and raised the spectre of sailors refusing to offer aid to the hapless troops aboard the stricken flagship. To counter this slur, the Kriegsmarine ordered the second investigation. This new series of reports and interviews, like the first, dismissed allegations of poor conduct by *Bliicher's* crew. Careful reading of the army's criticism of the operation clearly shows that it was even less capable of planning and executing a major seaborne landing.³⁰

Yet neither this report nor the army's presentation offers a clear explanation for what happened. It seems nobody wanted to admit that the operation was badly planned and poorly executed. In short, *Bliicher* and its consorts had no business trying to force their way into Oslofjord once the Norwegians were aware of their presence. The lack of accurate information on the strength and location of the Norwegian defences should have prompted a greater degree of caution. There were three separate incidents which should have led Kummertz to question his chances of successfully completing his mission — the first warning shots as the task force entered the fjord; the gallant sacrifice of *Pol III*; and the lengthy period when Norwegian searchlights tracked the flagship. In short, Kummertz allowed himself to be lulled into a false sense of security simply because he chose to believe that the Norwegians would offer no resistance to his force.

The Kriegsmarine's leadership never questioned Kummertz's decision to follow his primary orders. Another overlooked aspect was the ease with which the ship's internal communications were disabled. Nonetheless, the Kriegsmarine did learn the obvious lesson: although the damage to *Bliicher* would have severely tested the mettle of the most experienced crews, it never again sent ill-prepared and poorly-trained surface ships into action. This explains Raeder's determined refusal to allow *Tirpitz* to join *Bismarck* on its ill-fated foray into the Atlantic in May 1941.³¹

NOTES

* Peter K.H. Mispelkamp received an MA in Modern German History from McGill University in 1985, and a diploma in translation from Concordia University in 1994. He is a freelance book reviewer specializing in aviation, military and naval history.

1. D. Paul Schmalenbach, "KM *Prinz Eugen*," *Warship Profile 6* (Windsor, Berks., 1971), 121.
2. For detailed information, see D.C. Watt, "The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935: An Interim Judgement," *Journal of Modern History*, LVIII (1956), 155-175.
3. M.J. Whitley, *German Cruisers of World War II* (London, 1987), 36.
4. See, for example, Erich Gröner, *German Warships 1815-1945* (rev. ed., 3 vols., London, 1990), I, 65.
5. Whitley, *German Cruisers*, 34.
6. For more information on the last two members of the *Hipper-class*, see Seigfried Breyer, "Die Kreuzier 'K' und 'L' der deutschen Kriegsmarine," *Marine Rundschau*, LXIII (1966), 20-28.
7. Unless otherwise stated, all data and performance figures come from Gröner, *German Warships*, I, 65-66; and Whitley, *German Cruisers*, 168.
8. Unless otherwise stated, all information on the *Blücher's* *stn&Xs* comes from United States National Archives (USNA), T-1022, Roll No. 2857, PG 47904-47910 (KTB *Blucher* Collection), "War Diary," 13 November 1939-31 March 1940.
9. Whitley, *German Cruisers*, 98.
10. KTB *Blucher* Collection, "Battle and Loss File," PG 47900, Vol. I, "Report of F. Kpt. Erich Heyemann," 3.
11. Quisling's early contacts with Rosenberg are detailed in H.D. Looock, *Quisling, Rosenberg und Terboven* (Stuttgart, 1970).
12. The best work on the influence of Wegener's ideas is still C.A. Gemzell, *Organization, Conflict and Innovation* (Lund, 1973). Wegener's thesis was recently translated by Holger W. Herwig and published by the United States Naval Institute Press: Wolfgang Wegener, *The Naval Strategy of the World War* (Annapolis, 1989).

13. See N. Ôrvik, "Das English-norwegische Handelsabkommen und die alliierten Interventionspläne in russisch-finnischen Krieg," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, XXXI (1983), 397-413; and Atle Thowsen, "Business Goes to War: The Norwegian Merchant Marine in Allied War Transport," in Patrick Salmon (ed.), *Britain and Norway in the Second World War* (London, 1995), 51-54.
14. For the *City of Flint* incident, see H. Knackstedt, "Der *City of Flint* Fall," *Marine Rundschau*, LVII (1960), 79-98. The *Westerwald* episode is covered in Geoffrey Jones, *Under Three Flags* (London, 1973), 40-43.
15. The early history of Operation Wilfred is covered in Patrick Salmon, "Churchill, the Admiralty, and the Narvik Traffic, September-November 1939," *Scandinavian Journal of History*, IV (1979), 305-326.
16. Winston Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (New York, 1961), 512.
17. *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* (10 vols., Washington, DC, 1946), VI, 885-886.
18. Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich (IZ), KTB MarineattachéNorwegen, 20 November 1939-May 1940, 6-13.
19. The term "armoured ship" was used in the Treaty of Versailles, although some readers may prefer the designations "pocket battleship," "armoured cruiser," or even "heavy cruiser" (a name used by the Germans after February 1940); see the discussion in Siegfried Bryer, *Battleships and Battlecruisers 1905-1970* (New York, 1973), 76-77.
20. KTB *Blucher* Collection, PG 47902, "Report of Frhr. v. Freyberg, Oberleutnant zur See," 2.
21. "Heyemann Report," 6.
22. On Falkenhorst's use of maps, see Peter Fleming, *Operation Sea-Lion* (New York, 1956), 196. See also E.H. Stevens (ed.), *The Trial of Nikolaus Falkenhorst* (London, 1949).
23. William Manchester, *The Arms of Krupp 1587-1968* (New York, 1979), 460.
24. Whitley, *German Cruisers*, 95.
25. IZ, KTB MarineattachéNorwegen, 13-16.
26. Halvdan Koht, *Norway: Neutral and Invaded* (New York, 1941).
27. "Heyemann Report," 1-17. Unless otherwise noted, all material on the *Bliicher's* run through the Oslo gauntlet and its eventual sinking comes from this source.
28. Manchester, *Krupp*, 460. Strangely, this is the only source that gives an estimate of the number of men lost with the *Blucher*.
29. USNA, T-1022, Roll No. 2706, PG 47316, Commanding Admiral Norway, November 1941, 180-181. *Bliicher's* screws were salvaged in 1953; Grôner, *German Warships*, I, 67.
30. See the discussion in Whitley, *German Cruisers*, 97-98.
31. Ludovic Kennedy, *Menace: The Life and Death of the Tirpitz* (London, 1979), 12-13.