



# Attack at Dawn: Reliving the Battle of Narvik in World War II

*Ron Cope*

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On March 1, 1940, Adolf Hitler ordered the invasion of Norway. Having swept across Europe at a terrifying pace, the Nazi assault on Scandinavia was designed to secure the valuable source of iron ore being delivered by rail from Sweden to the Norwegian port of Narvik. To complete the task, Hitler sent ten large, modern destroyers, with 220 Alpine Troops on each. Five smaller British H Class destroyers were sent up the fjord in retaliation by the Allied forces, with little knowledge of what to expect. On April 10, the first battle of Narvik began. Royal Naval Captain, Bernard Warburton-Lee, led his flotilla at midnight into the fjord. They had to navigate the four hour passage undetected, under darkness and in driving snow storms. The harbour — eerily silent on their arrival — quickly erupted into a torpedo attack. Back into the fjord, the destroyers Hardy, Hunter, Hotspur, Havock and Hostile were confronted by five German destroyers, coming from both the front and rear. This resulted in a ferocious sea battle with the loss of Hardy and Hunter and damage to the enemy ships. Those crew members who managed to abandon ship and swim ashore, under bombardment from the Germans, had to endure a ten mile march and pray for safe passage back to Britain in order to survive. Author Ron Cope delivers a comprehensive and gripping account of the Narvik battle, juxtaposing the myriad strategic difficulties encountered by the British Navy, with the vivid and insightful personal accounts of the brave survivors involved, most of whom were under the age of twenty-three. Including first-hand testimony from Cope's own father Cyril, a then twenty-one year old Torpedoman, and documents shared for the first time by the family of Captain Warburton-Lee, Cope presents an arresting account of this crucial British naval victory, as told by the sailors who were there. "Meticulously researched, Attack at Dawn relates the vivid real-life experiences of the British sailors who took part in the extraordinarily bold attack by five British destroyers against superior German forces at Narvik... and the desperate running battle that ensued as they tried to make their escape". John Warburton-Lee, grandson of Captain Bernard Warburton-Lee. V.C.

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