

For sheer daring the British commando descent on St. Nazaire surpasses any similar raid of the war. Irrespective of immediate success or failure, so bold an answer to home demand for offensive action must lift the fighting spirit of the whole British people. It is a feat of gallantry to set beside the historic raid which sealed the port of Zeebrugge for months in the last war.

German and British reports of this battle in the dark are flatly contradictory. Berlin declares the raid a failure. But the German communiqués do not bear this out. The only sizable naval unit they claim to have sunk is the *Campbeltown*, formerly the old American destroyer *Buchanan*. But this was the very ship the British had refitted as an explosive ram to blast the locks of the dock basin. London says she was wedged in clear to the central bridge and blew up there. Some casualties and a hundred or so prisoners would be a cheap price to pay for crippling the Nazis' chief port on the Atlantic and their biggest submarine base.

Such a hazardous venture must have seemed impossible to the Germans. St. Nazaire, with the only dock on the French coast capable of floating the battleship *Tirpitz*, is formidably fortified. It would seem that even on the darkest night a British flotilla could hardly enter the estuary of the Loire without being detected. The British forces managed to steal into the inner harbor itself and landed demolition troops before they were discovered. Prompt enemy reaction was certainly anticipated. The Nazis admit a certain amount of damage. If the *Campbeltown*, loaded with tons of dynamite, exploded at her appointed station, it may have been enormous. Returning commando troops report the defense as panicky. German dismay can only be measured by the consternation which would follow such an enemy raid on Portsmouth or Dover.

These commando assaults, accelerating in number and power as the Spring advances, serve a double purpose. Each has a tactical objective, in this case an extremely important one. But all are part of a larger strategy to pin heavy German concentrations on the west front and prevent them from reinforcing Hitler's coming offensive in Russia. From Norway to Spain they must stand ready to deflect any blow without knowing which may turn into a real invasion. This would strain the military resources of the strongest nation.