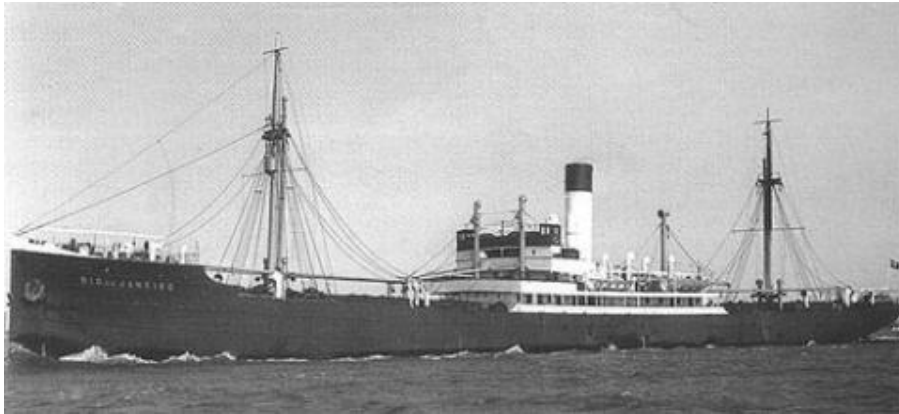




On the 6th of April, 1940, a troop transport ship left the German port of Stettin (now part of Poland and known as Szczecin) at around 3 o'clock in the morning, local time. On board were hundreds of German soldiers and war supplies, including horses.

Their destination was Bergen, Norway.

Why were these men, aboard this ship, traveling to Norway? Because they were part of Hitler's plan to first invade, then to occupy, the Scandinavian country.

Hitler had various reasons for wanting to invade and occupy Norway. Some of those reasons were practical (such as controlling the country's seaports) and some were ideological (such as Hitler's belief that Nordic people would sympathize with Nazi methods and policies).

The German government did not own the vessel, called the *Rio de Janeiro*. Launched in 1914, the Rio was a cargo ship which the *Kriegsmarine* (as Nazi Germany's navy was known between 1935 and 1945) had leased. Steaming toward Bergen, the Rio carried:

- 50 crew members;
- 330 soldiers;
- Six 2 cm FlaK 30 (anti-aircraft guns);



Bundesarchiv, Bild 1011-301-1953-24
Foto: Kurth | August 1944

- Four 10.5 cm FlaK 38 (anti-aircraft guns);



Bundesarchiv, Bild 1011-621-2042-17
Foto: Doege | 1942/1943 ca.

- 73 horses;
- 71 vehicles;

- 292 tons of provisions (including animal feed, fuel and ammunition).

Germany's plan, for the ship, was to have it arrive soon after other German troops had captured Bergen.

Instead ... a Polish submarine, *ORP Orzel*, spotted the *Rio* off the Norwegian port of Lillesand on the morning of April 8 (two days after the cargo ship had left Stettin). Captain Grudzinski, of the Polish Navy, ordered the *Rio* to stop.



Although the *Rio* complied with the “stop” order, it did not comply with the “surrender” order. As a result, the Polish sub torpedoed the German ship, causing her to take-on water.

As the *Rio* began to sink, the *Orzel* fired another torpedo (this time from a submerged position). The second torpedo hit the ammunition (which the ship was carrying as cargo), causing an explosion.

With their ship on fire, surviving crew and soldiers jumped into the sea. Around 180 of them were rescued, by local Norwegians, and were ferried, aboard Norwegian boats, to Lillesand and Kristiansand.

About 200 people did not survive.

Norwegian officials wanted to know why the men, who were wearing German military uniforms, were in a cargo ship off the coast of Norway. They learned the ship was on its way to Bergen.

What the Norwegian officials did *not* learn was that the men were part of Hitler's plan to subjugate their country. They would find-out *that* fact the following day when a Third-Reich *blitzkrieg* (“lightning war”) erupted in Norway.

Credits:

Image of the *Rio de Janeiro*, by an unknown photographer, as she appeared circa 1922. Online via Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.

In-text images:

Photo depicting a 2 cm Flak 30 anti-aircraft gun, online via the German Federal Archives. The particular image depicts German soldiers, with their weapon, in Seine-et-Oise (Northern France) during 1944. Attribution: Bundesarchiv [German Federal Archive], Bild [picture] 101I-301-1953-24 / Kurth / [CC-BY-SA 3.0](#)

Photo depicting 10.5 cm FlaK 38 anti-aircraft guns being manned by German soldiers at a coastal battery, perhaps in France, circa 1942-43. (The German Federal Archives' [description](#) has a [question mark](#) regarding the weapon's specific location in this image.) Attribution: Bundesarchiv [German Federal Archive], Bild [picture] 101I-621-2942-17 / Doege / [CC-BY-SA 3.0](#)

The Polish submarine, ORP Orzel, as she appeared berthed in a British port during 1940. Photo, by the Polish government in Exile Ministry of Information War Photo Service, and released by the Polish Government Press, in 1940. Now part of the Polish National Digital Archive.

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Media Stream



Polish Submarine ORP Orzel

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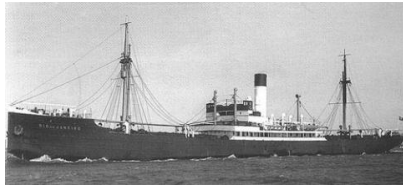
2 cm Flak 30 German Anti-aircraft Gun

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10.5 cm FlaK 38 German Anti-aircraft Gun

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A Warning of War Comes to Norway

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