



While most of the world wondered if there was a “phony war” going on—despite Hitler’s advances in Poland during September and October of 1939—Germany was hard-at-work behind the scenes.

Between the fall of 1939 and the spring of 1940, Hitler and his generals were developing military plans.

Some individuals, like Winston Churchill, did not believe that Germany’s lack of instigating new major land-based hostilities meant that Hitler’s quest for conquest had been satisfied. Germany’s U-boats, after all, were consistently sinking supply ships traveling the North Atlantic to/from Britain.

Churchill referred to the lack of major land operations as the “Twilight War.” The UK’s Ministry of Home Security, meanwhile, issued posters—like this one—warning:

*Hitler will send
no warning -
so always carry
your gas mask.*



It may have been journalists who coined the “phony war” phrase when neither Germany nor the Allies (France, Britain and Poland) engaged in any land operations between October of 1939 and March of 1940. The phrase lost its luster as soon as German troops began their rout of Denmark and Norway in April of 1940.

As it happens, Hitler hadn’t been silent at all during the apparent lull in hostilities.

For one thing, high-level meetings between the Third Reich and a man who would soon be known as a traitor in Norway—Vidkun Quisling—had taken place over several months. Quisling was prepared to betray his country in exchange for a leadership role in what Hitler hoped would become a Nazi-loyal Norway.

In a well-coordinated attack, Hitler’s troops began their invasion of Norway on April 9, 1940. Some of those troops were sent to Oslo. We learn more about the Nazis’ seizure of Oslo from the *Pictorial History of the Second World War*:

The occupation of the Norwegian capital was a masterpiece of treachery. For months Germany had been scheming with a group of Norwegian traitors led by Major Vidkun Quisling. The invasion was brilliantly planned and executed. All strategic points were occupied simultaneously.

The Norwegians, ill-prepared for resistance, were dazed by the speed of the occupation and the paralysis of the machinery of government engineered by Quisling.

The occupation of Oslo was typical, the forts in the fjord were given orders not to fire and the electrically controlled mines were disconnected. Air raid alarms sounded but the Nazi planes dropped leaflets, not bombs.

*The population was further deceived by the arrival of military bands which played steadily for hours. Meanwhile tanks and guns had been poured into the city. (See *Pictorial History of the Second World War, A PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD OF ALL THEATERS OF ACTION CHRONOLOGICALLY ARRANGED*, Volume I, published [in New York, during 1944] by Wm. H. Wise and Co., Inc., at page 70.)*

These photos, which appear on page 70 of the *Pictorial History*, show Oslo during April of 1940:



- German anti-aircraft gunner, and his MG 34, in the docks of Oslo (at the top); and
- German tanks entering the city (at the bottom).

The speed of the fall of Oslo stunned Norwegians.

After what happened to Norway (and, simultaneously, Denmark), no one would ever again believe that events in Europe were part of a "phony war."

As for the people of Oslo—seen, at the top of this page, in a still-shot from a not-to-be-missed clip of [historical footage](#) captured on the 10th of April, 1940—they would experience *Panikkdagen* ("panic days") as they realized their capital city could not defend itself against the might of Hitler's swiftly moving troops.

Credits:

Image, at the top of the page, is a still-shot from historical footage recorded in Oslo, Norway on the 10th of April, 1940. Online via [NRK](#).

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

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Media Stream



British Poster to Carry Gas Mask

During the first months of 1940, Hitler was concentrating his efforts on Poland and Norway. This caused people elsewhere to wonder whether Germany would also become more aggressive toward other nations.

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It proved to be a prophetic warning.

Poster, issued by the UK's Ministry of Home Security, during the early days of World War II.

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Oslo Falls in 1940

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The Fall of Oslo - 1940

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