

Glimpse of anti-aircraft artillery efforts in the defense of neutrality 1939-40

Introduction

As a source for elucidating how the anti-aircraft artillery was organized and worked, I have used the book *9. April*, which, in extracts from letters from soldiers, describes the events leading up to and on the actual day of April 9, 1940. I have omitted the naturally very emotional parts of the accounts.

The Air Force of Southern Jutland

Group	Armament
Esbjerg Group (3rd Battery)	3 pcs. 75 mm anti-aircraft gun 3 pcs. 20 mm machine gun 1 searchlight group
Løgumkloster group	3 pcs. 75 mm anti-aircraft gun 3 pieces. 20 mm machine gun 1 searchlight group 2
The Rødekro group	pcs. 75 mm anti-aircraft gun 3 pcs. 20 mm machine gun (motorized) 1) 1 searchlight group

This shows that a total of eight 75 mm anti-aircraft guns and nine 20 mm machine guns were stationed in Southern Jutland, of which at least three were mounted on trucks.

The Air Force was organized into three groups (batteries), which were named according to their physical location:



Staff/14. Artillery division (Lieutenant Colonel LT Kongstorp) was located in Rødekro.

None of the groups had their own vehicles for the transport of 75 mm anti-aircraft guns and ammunition, whereby movement was only possible with the help of hired vehicles. 2)

It is not mentioned whether fire control devices as well as lighting and listening equipment were moved using military or civilian vehicles.

The time before April 9

The air defense batteries were set up in Southern Jutland in September 1939 with the task of enforcing Danish neutrality and marking Danish sovereignty.

Neutrality was enforced by firing loose warning shots against foreign aircraft that tried to penetrate Danish territory.

The batteries had to be ready to fire at all times - both day and night. This service proved to be enervating and the conditions were not made any better by the fact that the winter of 1939 was unusually severe, at times with temperatures down to minus 30°.

On April 8, the batteries will be prepared to possibly leave their positions 3) - with one hour's notice - and live ammunition will be issued.

In the evening, the batteries are put on alert. At the same time, instructions were given that the searchlights were not to be used if foreign aircraft came during the night!

The events of April 9



The Esbjerg group

At five o'clock alien airplanes are observed approaching from the southwest, heading towards Esbjerg airfield. While the machines are flying over Esbjerg, the battery fires a loose warning shot. Immediately afterwards, it is established that the airplanes are German. When the battery feels threatened, five sharp 75 mm shots are fired - three warning shots and two aimed at the machines.

One of the shots was well in relation to the aeroplanes, and from the battery it is observed that fire broke out from the machine, which then disappeared in the haze during erratic flight. The probability of skirmish in this case does not seem excluded!

After notifying the Jydske Division of the events, the battery is ordered to prod and march to the terrain about St. Ground (north of Vejle). The hired vehicles are requisitioned, and secured by the battery's 20 mm machine guns and recoilless guns are pushed on - first the 75 mm guns, then the machine guns and finally the recoilless guns.

During the provocation, the battery is fired upon by German airplanes and the battery immediately returns fire. During a dive, one of the enemy machines flies straight down towards one of the machine guns. A veritable hail of trailing projectiles apparently goes straight into the body, after which the machine withdraws from the fight and disappears.

The battery is now ordered not to offer resistance to the German troops.

The battery is multiplied in three columns: the battle battery, the ammunition wagons and the train. The battle battery leaves the position first and is secured at the head and tail of the column by 20 mm machine guns. The columns are multiplied by aircraft depth (large distance between the vehicles). During the march towards Vejle, the battery is often flown over by enemy pilots and several times they stop in air shelters. Outside Vejle, the battery picks up and a lieutenant colonel of the infantry informs the battery about the capitulation.

The battery moves on to Grejsdalen, where it goes into aircraft shelter, secured by 20 mm machine guns and recoilless rifles. The battery commander informs the crew about the surrender. The battery then moves, on the command of the department head, to Århus, where they quarter.

The Løgumkloster group

At 04.30 the officer on duty receives a report from the searchlight position that a loud noise from aircraft engines in the direction of the island of Herring has been heard from the listening device.

At 05.15 the battery is flown over by a German fighter at a distance of 2,500 metres. The machine was fired upon 4) with a 75 mm anti-aircraft gun. The shots do not hit, but chase the machine away. The battery commander, awakened by the shots, orders the battery to hold. The guard is not particularly pleased with this order and believes that with the next shot he would have been able to shoot down the machine.



The area is overrun by a large number of German airplanes. The battery feels threatened by a German bomber, which is fired upon by the three 20 mm machine guns. Hits are observed, as it appears that the light trails were extinguished when they hit the rear of the machine. The bomber then disappeared in a dive behind the Vognhøjs plateau. In total, the machine guns fired 128 shots. The next day, the guard talks to a German patrol, who states that the machine subsequently had to make an emergency landing at Skærbæk.

The battery commander commands once more "Hold in!" and reports whether it passed to the departmental staff. From here the order is received to stop the hostilities, as the task of neutrality has been solved.

Around 06.30 the rented vehicles arrive and preparations are made for departure. This could have been completed an hour after the start, but in the meantime the battery has been surrounded by German tanks. The battery is released at noon, but is told that a march north is not to be expected until late in the day, owing to the numerous German columns occupying the roads.

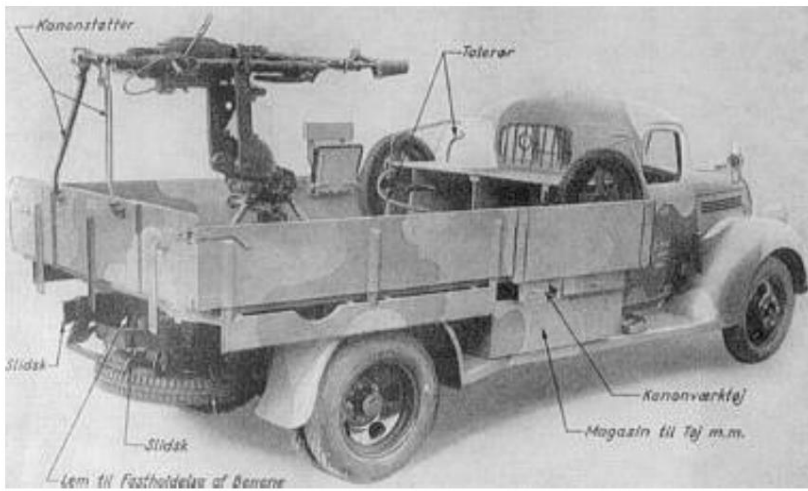
Furthermore, it is mentioned in the reports that the searchlight on the way to Gram was fired upon by a German fighter, which, however, did not hit.

The Rødekro group

In contrast to the other two groups, the Rødekro group did not enter the fight. On the other hand, parts of the battery were given a very different task than the other two groups.

The incidents are generally the same as in the other two groups, but the battery is not attacked. The aviators generally stay on the edge of the battery's field of fire. You report the aircraft activity to the divisional staff and are ordered not to open fire.

When the hired vehicles arrive, command "Prods on!" and the battery starts charging the vehicles.



At the same time, the department commander orders two of the battery's motorized 20 mm machine guns sent forward as armored car blockades.

One gun (with a second lieutenant and 3 privates) was to go into position 1.5 kilometers south of Røde kro, while the other (with a corporal and 3 privates) was ordered into position 4 kilometers southeast of Røde kro.

The positions had to be held to the utmost and could only be left on further orders. Not a pleasant task, especially since you only had light tracks for use against aircraft, and not the armor cartridges needed to effectively solve the task at hand.

Second Lieutenant Christoffersen goes into position on Oksevejen south of Røde kro and has a number of roadblocks set up. A wagon, some harrows placed with the tines up and two telephone poles wrapped in barbed wire are placed on the road; all materials had to be handed over by the owners despite protests.

Lance Corporal Hansen goes into position approximately 1 kilometer north of Aabenraa, but here, apart from the gun carriage itself, there are no roadblock materials.

During the time that the two gun divisions held their positions, no enemy appeared.

At the time the department commander ordered the machine guns into position, German forces were in Aabenraa and Kliplev, and he had not expected to see the units again. To this is added: "The crew had probably not counted on that possibility either, but still I have never seen happier faces than theirs, although they showed that it would possibly apply to their lives."

At 07.00 the battery is ready to depart for Vejle. The wagons could not hold everything, so some loose 75 mm ammunition, cooking utensils, blankets and mouthpieces etc. had to be left behind. The battery heads north but is stopped in Jels Kro by the police. When contacting the chief of police, the officer on duty has the government's decision on capitulation read out. The rest of the march took place along by-roads, as all the main roads were filled with German columns.

Closing

Under the given conditions, it is my opinion that the anti-aircraft gunners also did what they could that day. It is important to remember that the soldiers' task was to mark Danish neutrality and territory, and not to prevent an attack on Denmark.

As far as I can judge, the equipment has been effective and the soldiers' training good. With relatively few shots, they succeeded in adding hits to the attacking airplanes, which partly forced some of the machines away and partly rendered some incapacitated.

Sources

1. *9. April - Portrayed in letters from Danish soldiers* collected and published by Arne Stevns, Steen Hasselbalchs Publisher, 1940.
2. *The Armed Forces of World War II - Uniforms, Insignia and Organization* by Andrew Mollo, Military Press, New York 1987, ISBN 0-517-54478-4.
3. *Gardehusarkasernen on 29 August 1943* by Anders D. Henriksen, Published with the support of the Weapons History Society at Forlaget Devantier, Næstved 1993, ISBN 87-984530-0-9.

The map on page 1 is reproduced from *Kraks Bykort 2 - 21 byer på øerne*, Kraks Forlag, 1975.

Per Finsted

Supplement

An extract from the article *Træk af Luftværnsartilleriet historiet* from *Dansk Artilleritidsskrift*, 5. hefte, October 1982, covering the period 1932-1951, came into my possession after I wrote the paper *Glimt af Luftværnsartilleriet effort in neutrality defense 1939-40*. The article further explains the effort in the defense of neutrality as follows:

Sønderjysk Air Defense Command

On 10 September 1939, the 14th Artillery Division in Aarhus, as the first unit of the army, was ordered to establish neutrality guarding in Jutland, as a "Sønderjysk Luftforsvarskommando" was ordered to be set up, with division chief/14. Artillery department, lieutenant colonel LT Kongstorp as commander.

The command consisted of 3 batteries (air defense groups), of which the 14th Artillery Division fielded the two, while the 10th and 13th Ar Artillery Division provided personnel - and material - for the third. The groups at Esbjerg and Rødekro came from the 14th Artillery Division.

It must therefore also be established that the command's lighting and listening equipment had the organizational vehicles that were necessary for the operation of the equipment - power trucks among other things. This passage is inserted in the text of the paper, which, apart from the present supplement and a few corrected typos, is identical to the 1st edition.

The direct reason for the establishment of the command was an erroneous dropping of bombs over the harbor area of Esbjerg on 4 September 1939, where an English machine accidentally dropped a bomb, causing the loss of human life and the destruction of a residential property.

From the 14th Artillery Division's "Diary" it appears that the groups were flown over 10 times, during which warning shots were fired, loose as well as sharp. In total, 22 loose and 44 sharp shots were fired with the 75 mm anti-aircraft gun L/49 Model 1932.

The Esbjerg group was on 18 March 1940, at 20.27, over flown by a 4-engine machine of unknown nationality. The machine was caught by the searchlight and fired a machine gun volley at the battery.

On 8 and 9 April 1940

It also appears that during 8 April 1940, orders were received to reconnoitre the positions that the batteries were to occupy during mobilization: 1. Battery north of Haderslev, 2. Battery north of Kolding and 3. Battery at Erritsø, covering the Lillebæltsbroen and Fredericia.

When the Rødekro group is stopped in Jels, a police officer announces that the police chief in Toftlund has issued a ban on Danish columns moving further north than to Jels. The police officer is informed that, unfortunately, the department cannot take this ban into account, and the march continues. At 10:00 a.m. in Vejen, the department was ordered by the Jutland Division not to offer resistance and that it should go in

- 1) *On the morning of April 8, 1940, three wagons with mounted "footplates" for the machine guns had arrived at the Rødekro group; these were immediately mounted and set up in the battery position ready to fire.*
- 2) *The letters clearly leave the impression that this printing service was efficiently organized and that the wagons were delivered as soon as they were requisitioned. The biggest disadvantage for the soldiers was that the wagons were all the colors of the rainbow, making the batteries on the march look more like a circus procession than a military column - a sight that civilians did not fail to comment on, while the soldiers themselves tried to ignore the situation.*
- 3) *The plan was for the batteries to move north to enter the position that the Jutland Division wanted to establish in the Vejle Å valley.*
- 4) *The book's two accounts of the Løgumkloster group's efforts diverge in the number of shots from the 75 mm anti-aircraft gun - the battery commander's letter speaks of six shots, while the guard's says three shots.*