

## The Danish Brigade in Sweden 1943-1945 - Pionerkommandoet

### Introduction The

Pionerkommando was established on 10 May 1944, with Captain Dietrich Anselmo Wieth-Knudsen as commander. In 1946, the captain published the article *Pionerkommandoet ved Den danske Brigade* in *Tidsskrift for Ingeniørofficerer* (Source 1), which has formed the basis for my presentation.

Unfortunately, my paper does not contain quite the image material that I would like, as I am missing images of the Pioneer Command's special equipment and vehicles. If anyone has such pictures, I'd love to hear about it.

### The Pioneer Command

Before the command was established, pioneer soldiers and commanders were thought to be placed as professional advisors in the brigade's infantry units, but gradually a picture emerged that this would not be sufficient to solve actual pioneer tasks. Proposals were therefore made to establish a regular pioneer force, either as a platoon attached to each battalion, or as a unified command.

The Pionerkommando was the Brigade's second oldest unit - only the 1st Battalion was older - and was at the same time the unit that was repatriated last - 1 October 1945, as the command was deployed in the control of German mine clearance after the end of the Occupation.

The pioneer command had to be easily mobile and could be quickly deployed in places that were perhaps often far away from it in time and space. In addition, it had to involve a significant amount of material, so that practically all pioneering tasks could be solved or at least begun. It was therefore desirable if the entire force could be fully motorized.

From the start, however, the Brigade only had a limited number of motor vehicles at its disposal and it was therefore decided to make the majority of the personnel bicycle-borne and mainly to use motor vehicles for the transport of material. However, it was so that some material and explosives for the first works had to be carried - in bags - on the bicycles.



*Parts of the Pionerkommando on the quay in Helsingør on 5 May 1945. Sergeant EEE Andreassen is seen in front.*  
From Source 3.

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Organization and equipment

The pioneer command consisted of:

- Chief with command group (28)
- Park platoon (77)
- 4 pioneer platoons, each with platoon leader and platoon strap (9) and 3 groups (10) on bicycles.

The Pioneer Command's strength and vehicles

	Employee							Vehicles			
Chef	1			1		1			1		
command group:											
Deputy Commander	1						1				1e
Officer available	1						1				1e
Command Officer	1					2				2a	
Command Petty Officer				1							
Motor order					4						4f
Sanitation Group:											
Doctor		1									
Undergraduate				1		1				1b	
Canteen soldier					1						
Catering group						2		10		2c	
Park division	2	1	1A	1B		19				19d	
4 pioneer divisions	1	3	4	12	13		4			4e	147
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>10</b>

Explanation for strength overview:	
A	Mechanic
B	Gunsmith a Command group wagon and baggage wagon b Medical wagon
c	Kitchen wagons d
4	tool wagons 4 ammunition wagons 2 bridge wagons 5 mine wagons
	2 flamethrower wagons 1 workshop wagon with trailer 1 spare wagon
and	Motorcycle with sidecar
f	Solo motorcycle

The pioneer divisions' armament and equipment *The pioneer*

groups were armed with: 1 recoilless rifle with accessories, 7 rifles and 2 machine guns (group leader and second in command). The platoon leader and deputy commander of the platoon were also armed with machine guns. Furthermore, it was intended that each group should have had a bazooka<sup>2</sup>, but these failed to arrive.

<sup>1</sup> The Park Division's strength figures include approx. 60 men, who made up the "loading and protection crew", but this force did not reach the Pionerkommando before the departure for Denmark.

<sup>2</sup> These bazookas were purchased in England, but as mentioned did not manage to arrive (for delivery). *Harry Söderman* - the Danish and Norwegian *police forces'* Swedish "mentor" and de facto head of training - mentions in Source 3, page 177, that in 1945 the Danes succeeded in procuring some bazookas and that some shooting training was carried out, against Swedish target equipment and with assistance of Swedish personnel, among other things as security commanders.

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The pioneer group's equipment was transported in two side bags and a luggage bag, all of which were fastened to the luggage carrier. Each bike received a packaging of approx. 20 kg. The material included i.a. clearing and timber tools, mine search and mine clearance equipment and approx. 100 kg of explosives, copious amounts of incendiaries and material for mine traps. Furthermore, in addition to handgun ammunition on the man, extra ammunition and hand grenades were found on the bicycles.

The platoon brought - in addition to extra ammunition - also approx. 50 hand grenades (smoke and tear gas). Additional special equipment - a miner's winch with cable - was carried in the platoon leader's sidecar machine.



Under cover of smoke, an improvised tube charge is placed; in the air to the right of the soldier another smoke grenade can be seen.  
From Source 10.

### The park division

On the tool carts there were tools in 5 soil tool boxes, 2 timber tool boxes and 1 stone tool box and also loosely on the cart: lighting equipment (Petromax lights<sup>3</sup>), concrete drill, chain saw, jack, lifting rods, etc. With the tools from a cart, in addition to approx. 10 carpenters and approx. 10 men for drilling in stone and concrete, set approx. 100 earth workers, approx. 40 men for barbed wire work and approx. 15 clearing workers in action.

Each ammunition wagon carried small arms ammunition (spare), signal ammunition (light), hand grenades (smoke and tear gas) and approx. 1,600 kg of explosives (Trotyl and Nitrolite). In addition, large quantities of incendiaries and other explosive material<sup>4</sup>, which were packed in specially designed boxes. The ammunition etc. was kept in the boxes in which it had been delivered from the Swedish depots.

The two bridge wagons had emergency bridge equipment - partly prepared - for a 15 m 6 t bridge on piles. The material could also be used for roadblocks. In addition, there were battering rams, rope hoists, tripods, etc

A total of 2,000 anti-personnel mines, 300 anti-personnel mines and 200 grenade mines, all of Swedish origin and with igniters and charges, were carried on the two minecarts, as well as mine-searching and mine-clearing equipment (including electric minesweepers). The other mine wagons were spare wagons that had to be loaded with material from Pionerparken, depending on the conditions.

The flame thrower vans had flame throwers<sup>5</sup> (10 in total), nitrogen and acetylene containers, flame oil, spare material and tools for the flame throwers.

The workshop wagon with spurred 2-wheel trailer, on which, among other things, was loaded with a searchlight<sup>6</sup>, lighting caused electrical be equipment (Nife lamps with batteries<sup>7</sup>), cutting and welding apparatus, forge with forging tools, grinding and drilling machine rails and other equipment which was to be used for repairing equipment and wagons.

<sup>3</sup> A Petromax light, or high-beam light, looks similar to a so-called bat light. The fuel is kerosene, which is atomized under pressure.

<sup>4</sup> Source 11 mentions, with reference to the Brigade's training regulations, that they had a Panzerhandmine m/44, but whether it was issued to the infantry and/or included in the Pionerkommando's equipment, I am not aware.

<sup>5</sup> The flamethrower was the Swedish Eldspruta m/41. (Source 4.)

<sup>6</sup> Could be the field light thrower m/44 mentioned in Source 11.

<sup>7</sup> Nife lamps are available in different versions. See e.g. Durham Mining Museum overview of lamp equipment from 1934.

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All wagons were equipped with a heavy steel wire with hooks and hooks at the ends, intended for either roadblock cables or clay for towing cables for damaged vehicles. Furthermore, there was a tow rope with spliced lines at each wagon, which had to be used when it was necessary to get the crew out faster, as half a dozen men at once could be pulled from the wagon with the help of the rope.

As a reserve "pioneer park" for the Pioneer Command's technical equipment, a lot of material, equivalent to approx. 50% of the equipment, in depot in Malmö, in addition to 600 wooden anti-personnel and anti-personnel mines. The mines were engineered and manufactured by the Pionerkommando, when it seemed at the beginning that they would not be able to dispose of Swedish mines.



*Blasting.*  
From Source 6.

### Education

In addition to basic military skills, the main emphasis in the training was placed on the function as combat pioneers, including blasting and mine service.

Bridge building as well as barricade and field work was only practiced to a limited extent, as it was thought that they could rely on the knowledge and experience of the men in permanent command.

Explosive exercises took place in the terrain, as close to explosive charges as was considered safe. Following the Swedish model, familiarization exercises were carried out, whereby commanders and the pioneers afterwards got used - in a small pit - to withstand the explosive effect of charges of up to 10 kg at a distance of 5 m. Captain Wieth Knudsen writes that it was often a long time and that the soldiers did not always feel equally well after the exercises, the effects of which - pressure on the chest, buzzing in the head, etc. - could last for several hours.

Actual field exercises together with the infantry units usually consisted of attacks on field-fortified positions. The attack was carried out under the cover of an extensive smoke screen and with the support of the infantry's own weapons. The pioneers further supported the attack with light mortars<sup>8</sup> and flamethrowers.

At the end of April 1945, an English major - KD Benntt - attended an exercise organized by the Pionerkom command. He then stated that he found the people's training and education good, and that the pioneers were fully on par with English, German and French soldiers, but that they naturally lacked the practical experience that could only be gained in a war.

The mine service, which was the subject of special interest, later benefited the pioneers when the Pioneer Command was responsible for the Jutland part of the control of the German mine clearance in Denmark. Nothing was known yet, but it was expected that all important points might be mined or prepared for detonation.

It caused some difficulty to acquire up-to-date knowledge about German mines - and mining service in general. With the help of, among other things, contact with the Norwegian police unit (of division size) in Sweden, so much information was provided that the Pionerkommando was able to prepare a typewritten booklet of approx. 140 pages, with accompanying 25 plates on German, allied and Swedish mines, minelaying and mine clearance.

In the summer of 1944, the Swedish engineer captain Nils Falk held a short course in mine service (Source 1), just as 5 officers in the spring of 1945 followed a course in blasting and mine service at the *5th military area*<sup>9</sup>

At the end of April 1945, an English mine expert - Major Stanley Holland - is attached to the Pionerkommandoet<sup>10</sup>. He was surprised by the Pioneer Command's knowledge in the area but was satisfied with what he saw. However, he criticized the mine search and demining equipment, which was not modern or good<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> The light mortar (the Swedish *47 mm grenade launcher m/40*) is not mentioned in the previously mentioned inventory of the platoon's armament, but it is conceivable that the pioneer platoons - like the infantry platoons - included a light mortar group.

<sup>9</sup> Corresponds to the later Danish designation "military region".

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**Explosive-trained soldiers at the infantry battalions** In each of the four infantry battalions<sup>12</sup>, a commanding officer and two men per platoon received extended training in blasting duty. The explosives trainees were naturally assigned to the platoon's machine gun groups, where they were ensured a tactical freedom of movement, while securing the machine guns.

Originally, it had been intended that each battalion should independently carry out all tactical blasting, minelaying and mine clearance that could conceivably occur during combat. The battalions were therefore also assigned a pioneer officer. However, with the establishment of the Pionerkommandoet, this arrangement was abolished and was replaced by the specially trained soldiers.

In addition, familiarization exercises (in the style of the pioneers) were part of the regular infantry training. This made the impact from explosions a daily occurrence - a plus that would certainly have become important during real combat actions.



*An explosive charge is advanced.*  
From Source 8.

### Conclusion

Captain Wieth-Knudsen himself assesses the knowledge of the Pioneer Command with regard to the mine service such that it would not have been sufficient to protect the pioneers from heavy losses if they themselves had cleared the German minefields in Denmark. In addition, the knowledge and prerequisites that were available during the education in Sweden were too poor.

Now German prisoners of war, under the leadership of German officers and commanders, were deployed in the clearing of the German minefields in Denmark, an operation that took place from 1945 to 1947, while the Pionerkommandoet was given responsibility for supervision and control. See e.g. two articles by Dan Mouritzen [Minenkommando Dänemark](#) and [German Mine Clearing in Denmark 1945-47](#) as well as [in uniform during the occupation by Knud Ramsgaard](#) (Historical Yearbook for Thisted Museum 1995).

The Pionerkommando was repatriated on 1 October 1945, after which control of the demining passed to Engineer Corps Perne (Source 8).

<sup>10</sup> Major Holland accompanies the Pionerkommando during the subsequent demining service in Denmark. His experiences in Sweden and Denmark are described in a number of articles in *Brigadebladet*, year 1992.

<sup>11</sup> Captain Wieth-Knudsen states, as a comment, that the equipment, which was not of an improvised nature, was made according to the Swedish regulated equipment. The improvised equipment included, among other things, mine strips, which instead of fabric mine strips - which were heavily rationed - were made up of box strips! Paper could of course be used, but was not particularly durable in wet weather and wind.

<sup>12</sup> The infantry battalion consisted of: commander with staff (54) and 3 recoilless companies (165). Each recoilless rifle company (= light infantry company) consisted of: commander with command group (27) and 3 platoons on platoon line (7), 3 recoilless rifle groups (8), machine gun group (8) and 47 mm mortar group (7). (From Source 9.)



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### Sources

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3. *Scandinavian Middle Arrow* by Harry Söderman, Catalog and Magazine Printing, Stockholm 1945.
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5. *The Danish Brigade in Sweden 1943-1945* by KV Nielsen, published by The Danish Brigade Association, 1985, Copenhagen 1985, ISBN 87-981346-4-7.
6. *The Brigade - The Danish Brigade in Sweden 1943-1945* by Knud JV Jespersen, Gyldendal, Copenhagen 1993, ISBN 87-00-14924-1.
7. *The Danish Brigade - Pionerkommandoet* by Niels Erik Frost, four articles in *Underofficeren - Members magazine for Danish Non-Commissioned Officers Association of 1939*, Copenhagen 1946.
8. *Engineer troops - 1880- 1955* by Colonel Niels Maare, Special edition of Journal for Engineer Officers, Copenhagen 1955.
9. *1½ years with the Danish Brigade* by lieutenant colonel PAF Norup (the brigade's chief of staff), *Militær Tidsskrift* 1947, pages 271-308 and 353-406. The Royal Garrison Library's bound volume 1947 also contains the text from Source 1.
10. *The Danish Brigade in Sweden 1943-1945 - 4. Company of 5. Battalion at Mogens Rosenvinge*, published by The Danish Brigade Association, Copenhagen 1995, ISBN 87-90214-11-0.
11. *The Danish Brigade in Sweden 1943-45* by second lieutenant P. Lyng, student at the Army Officers School, class Krogh I, 1976-80.

### Supplementary reading The

clearing of and control of the German mines is further dealt with in a number of articles in *Brigadebladet*, 1992.

The German demining is also dealt with in the book *Under Duress. Demining on the West Coast of Jutland 1945* by Helge Hagemann, Akademisk Forlag, 1998. ISBN 87-500-3550-9. For the record, I will mention that I have not read this book.

See also [The Danish Brigade's Pionerkommando](#), which contains a brief general description of the Pionerkommando and the efforts of the Danish Mine Control.

Per Finsted



*A pioneer monitors German minesweepers. From Source 2.*

The pioneer wears a black band (presumably a shooting bow) on both shoulder pads. Black is the traditional weapon color of the Engineer troops and was thus also worn by the Pionerkommandoet.

Major Stanley Holland mentions that during his stay with the Brigade in Sweden, "...at his own request he wore the Brigade's gray uniform, with the narrow black armband with the golden P on the shoulder." From *Brigadebladet*, No. 2, April 1991.