

The Danish Army on April 9th, 1940, Part 1

Introduction

Information, in English, regarding the Danish resistance to the German invasion on April 9th, 1940 seems to be scarce. I have written the following article, in order to help filling this gap.

The Danish Forces at the border

The Danish forces at the Danish-German border consisted of:

- In Søgaardlejren (Camp Søgaard) (4th Battalion)
 - 1st, 2nd and 3rd Infantry Company (bicyclists), armed with light machineguns and a number of tripods.
 - 4th Company (motorcyclists), armed with 4 x 20mm auto cannon, and 4 x light machineguns in tripods.
 - 1 heavy company (from 2nd Battalion/Fodfolkspionerkommandoet), armed with 6 x 20mm auto cannons, and 5 x light machineguns in tripods.
- In Haderslev (from 3rd Battalion)
 - 1 infantry company, armed with 7 light machineguns and 3 light machineguns in tripods.
 - 1 heavy company, armed with 4 heavy machineguns and 2 medium mortars.
 - 1 anti-tank company (2nd Regiment), armed with 4 x 37mm anti-tank guns and 4 x 20 mm auto cannons.
 - 1 artillery battery (8th Artillery Battalion), with 4 x 75mm field guns.
- In Tønder
 - The NCO School of Fodfolkspionerkommandoet, grouped into a 20 mm auto cannon platoon (with 2 guns and 1 light machinegun), 1 bicycle platoon (with 4 light machineguns), 1 infantry company (Fodfolkspionerkompagni) with 4 platoons (each with 4 light machineguns in tripods).
- In Sønderborg (3rd Battalion)
 - 3 infantry companies
 - The Army NCO School (Sergent- og Oversergentskolen)
- In Southern Jutland
 - 3 anti-aircraft batteries (14th Artillery Battalion), armed with 8 x 75 mm anti-aircraft guns and 9 x 20 mm auto cannons

4th Battalion

The 4th Battalion were heavily engaged in the early hours of April 9th.

Detachments	Cyclist Platoons	Cyclist Sections	20 mm guns (from Motorcycle Company)	LMG (from Motorcycle Company)	20 mm guns (from Anti-tank Company)	LMG (from Anti-tank Company)	Total All rals	Units/4th Battalion
Korskro	1		1	1			115	1st Company
Bredevad	1		1	1				
Gaardeby	1				1	1	130	3rd Company
Perbøl		1						
Oksekær					1	1		
Vilsbæk	1							
Kliplev	1	1						
Lundtoftebjerg	1				2	1	50	2nd Company
Bjærgskov (Battalion reserve)	2		2	2			120	+ HQ
Kværs	2						68	
Hokkerup		2			1	1	34	
Rønshoved		2			1	1	28	
Total	10	6	4	4	6	5	545	

The battalion was grouped into various detachments, as shown in the tables.

The troops went on full alert at 13:30 on April 8th, and were held ready to take up positions in event of a German invasion.

A thorough reconnaissance had been made regarding the positions, but in order not to provoke the Germans, all digging and fortification had however been strictly forbidden.

At 04:17 the alarm was sounded, at the troops left their barracks at 04:35, heading for their positions.



Danish soldiers and a disabled German armoured car at Bredevad.

From Source 2.

German infantry dismounted and attacked on foot, accompanied by 3 armoured cars.

Heavy fighting followed, with dead and wounded on both sides, and a further 2 armoured cars were put out of action.

At 07:15 a large German motorized column marched from Tinglev towards Bredevad, thus preventing the detachment here from retiring. It was consequently disarmed by the Germans.



The *Korskro Detachment* made a halt in Rabsted, which was occupied at 06:45.

From two captured German dispatch riders it was learned that a German armoured unit was marching from Korskro, and that Bredevad had already been captured.

The detachment resumed the march via secondary roads, and learned about the cease-fire when they reached Hellevad (approximately 18 kilometres to the north-east).

At Bredevad Privates Poul Søgaard and Peder Jørgen Andersen were killed, and Sergeant J. Løvgreen, Corporal B.A. Larsen and Privates P. Jespersen, N.E. Bak and C.J. Hansen were wounded.

The Gaardeby, Perbøl, Oksekær, Vilsbæk and Kliplev Detachments



The detachments from 3rd Company drove off from their quarters, situated in Kliplev, and reached their positions before the German troops.

The *Gaardeby Detachment* however was the only one from 3rd Company which saw action.

It arrived at their positions at 04:45 and made a roadblock with various implements from a nearby farm.

Two German armoured cars observed the roadblock (at 05:30) but drove off before the detachment could open fire. In order to avoid being outflanked, the auto cannons were ordered into a new position.

A little later more German armoured cars turned up, and started shelling the gun crew, which desperately were trying to get the gun into its new position. Finally they succeeded, and opened fire on the armoured cars, presumably scoring some hits.

Before further action could take place, the detachment was ordered to evacuate their positions and move to the north.

The Lundtoftebjærg Detachment

The 2 auto cannons and the light machinegun from the anti-tank platoon arrived at their positions in the nick of time, and at 04:50 a column of armoured cars, motorcycles and other vehicles arrived. From improvised positions the auto cannons opened fire, disabling 2 armoured cars. When the enemy motorcyclists dismounted they were fired up from the light machinegun.



Stray bullets started a fire in a farm building. The smoke slowed down the German fire.

Some time after 05:00 the Germans mounted an attack, supported by terrain-going vehicles (type unknown), and the anti-tank platoon withdrew towards Aabenraa.

The bicycle platoon took up positions at the railway bridge, approximately 1.5 kilometres to the north of the anti-tank platoon. Shortly afterwards, the German column continued its advance and reached the platoon. Fire from armoured cars and low flying fighter planes forced the platoon to make a fighting withdrawal. One section was taken prisoner, but the platoon commander and two sections escaped.

From the bicycle platoon Private Karl Gunnar Jørgensen was killed and Private H. Hansen was wounded.

The Kværs Detachment



The 2 platoons from 2nd Company arrived at their position at 05:05 and started digging in, just south of Kværs.

Shortly after, heavy firing was heard from Lundtoftebjerg, and the platoons were attacked by low flying German fighter planes.

No enemy troops were observed before 08:00 when German armoured cars showed up in the rear of the positions. The platoons were disarmed in Kværs.

The Hokkerup and Rønshoved Detachments



The detachments took up their positions at 05:10 and 05:20.

At Hokkerup an improved roadblock was erected in great haste, and at 05:30 German armoured cars and motorcyclists attacked the position. The auto cannon opened fire, thus hitting the first 3 armoured cars in the column.

The German motorcyclists dismounted and attacked. The attack was supported by a 37 mm gun (perhaps a 3.7 cm FLAK 36), which however was quickly dealt with, by two direct hits on the gun, from one of the auto cannons.

The Danish positions were also attacked by low flying fighter planes.

At 06:15 the *Hokkerup Detachment* was surrounded and taken prisoner.

Sergeant C.H. Vous and Private J. Jørgensen were killed; Second-lieutenant A. Olsen and Privates B.I. Jensen and L.O.M.K. Jepsen were wounded.

Before reaching their positions the *Rønshoved Detachment* was attacked by low flying fighter planes. Upon learning that the *Hokkerup Detachment* had surrendered they withdrew towards Sønderborg, arriving at 10:15.

The Bjærgskov Detachment



German Pz I.

From Niemiecka Broń Pancerna 1933-1945.

The Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-colonel S.E. Clausen, and the battalion reserve - 2 bicycle platoons (from 1st and 2nd Company) and a motorcycle platoon (from 4th Company) took up positions at Bjærgskov, around 05:00.

The platoon from 1st Company was positioned along the southern edge of the wood, with the auto cannons and machineguns further to the north. The platoon from 2nd Company was in the northern part of the woods.

At 06:30 enemy armoured cars showed up 300 metres south of the wood. The front sections were ordered to fight their way back towards the auto cannons, which very soon started firing at the armoured cars.

One armoured car drove over one of the auto cannons, and the gunner Private Bjarne Christian Poulsen was killed. One armoured car however, was damaged.

The Danish troops were scattered in the woods during the fighting, and the woods were finally surrounded by German armoured cars and tanks (unknown type, but perhaps a Pz I or Pz II), thus forcing the Danish soldiers to surrender.

Privates M.L. Andersen, J.C. Fredensborg, B. Jørgensen and stretcher-bearer H.Finseth were wounded.

Further developments - at Sdr. Hostrup and Aabenraa

At 05:40 the CO ordered the platoon from 2nd Company towards Stubbæk Skov (4 kilometres south of Aabenraa).

At Sdr. Hostrup the bicycle platoon was attacked by low flying fighter planes; Private Frode Peter Christensen was killed, and Corporal H. Mathiesen and Privates E. Hindsgaul and J.M. Vestergaard were wounded. Having reached their positions, the platoon sustained heavy automatic fire. It seemed likely that the Germans were preparing to attack, and consequently the platoon withdrew, through Aabenraa towards Knivsbjerg.

The anti-tank platoon from the *Lundtoftebjerg Detachment* was ordered to Aabenraa and took up positions in the southern outskirts. Shortly afterwards a column of about 15 enemy vehicles drove up along the Highway 10.



One of the auto cannons in the outskirts of Aabenraa, just before the German column arrived.
From Source 2.

The auto cannons fired at the German vehicles, disabling the leading tank and scoring hits on other vehicles in the column. The Germans fired back, and the motorcycles withdrew under heavy fire towards Knivsbjerg, where they meet with the bicycle platoon.

At Knivsbjerg the CO ordered the platoons towards Haderslev and to take up positions in the northern part of this town. When German tanks later arrived, it was however impossible to fight, due to a large number of civilians crowding around the Danish soldiers. War was still novel to the Danes, and most people were unaware of the actual situation...

In conclusion

[Part 2](#), dealing with the other infantry units in Haderslev, Tønder and Sønderborg.

[Part 3](#), dealing with the German forces involved in the fighting.

Most of the text regarding the various detachments is an abridged translation of Source 1, whereas the tables regarding the composition of 4th Battalion derives from information from various sources, including the 3 mentioned.

For information regarding Danish army uniforms refer to *The Danish Infantry Uniforms and Equipment through-out The Past 200 Years*; for information regarding organization (in wargame format) refer to *The Danish Army 1940*.



Colour illustrations

The colour illustrations of the Danish Army used in this article are drawn by Christian Würgler Hansen and derive from a sheet (A4 format) which came as enclosure with the magazine Chakoten, in the early 1990'ies.

Today, the sheet is sold at The Royal Danish Arsenal Museum in Copenhagen. Further, some of the drawings are available as postcards too.

Text to colour illustrations of Danish soldiers

- 1
Nimbus motorcycle with 20mm M.1933 auto cannon. The soldiers are dressed in the grey M.1915 uniform and greatcoat.
- 2
Bicycle infantryman. Over the grey M.1915 uniform the soldier carries the black M.1910 greatcoat.
- 3
Nimbus motorcycle with 8mm light or heavy machinegun. The driver wears an khaki coloured motorcycle suit.
- 4
Light machinegun team, with black greatcoats M.1910 over the grey M.1915 uniform.
- 5
Kneeling infantrymen, with black greatcoats M.1910 over the grey M.1915 uniform.
- 6
Kneeling officer, in the yellow-brown M.1923 uniform
- 7
A Private, a Captain and a Private in uniforms which could have been worn on April 9th, 1940.

Sources

1. *Den danske Hær IV, 9. april 1940* by Helge Klint og J. Leisner, Sixtus Publications, Copenhagen 1978.
2. *Soldaterne den 9. april 1940* by Kay Søren Nielsen, The Royal Danish Arsenal Museum, Copenhagen 1990, ISBN 87-7233-847-4.
3. *9. April skildret i breve fra danske soldater* edited by Arne Stevns, København 1940.

Further reading

Command and Control of the First Modern Campaign; The German Invasion of Denmark and Norway -April, 1940 by Robert W. Strahan, LtCol USMC