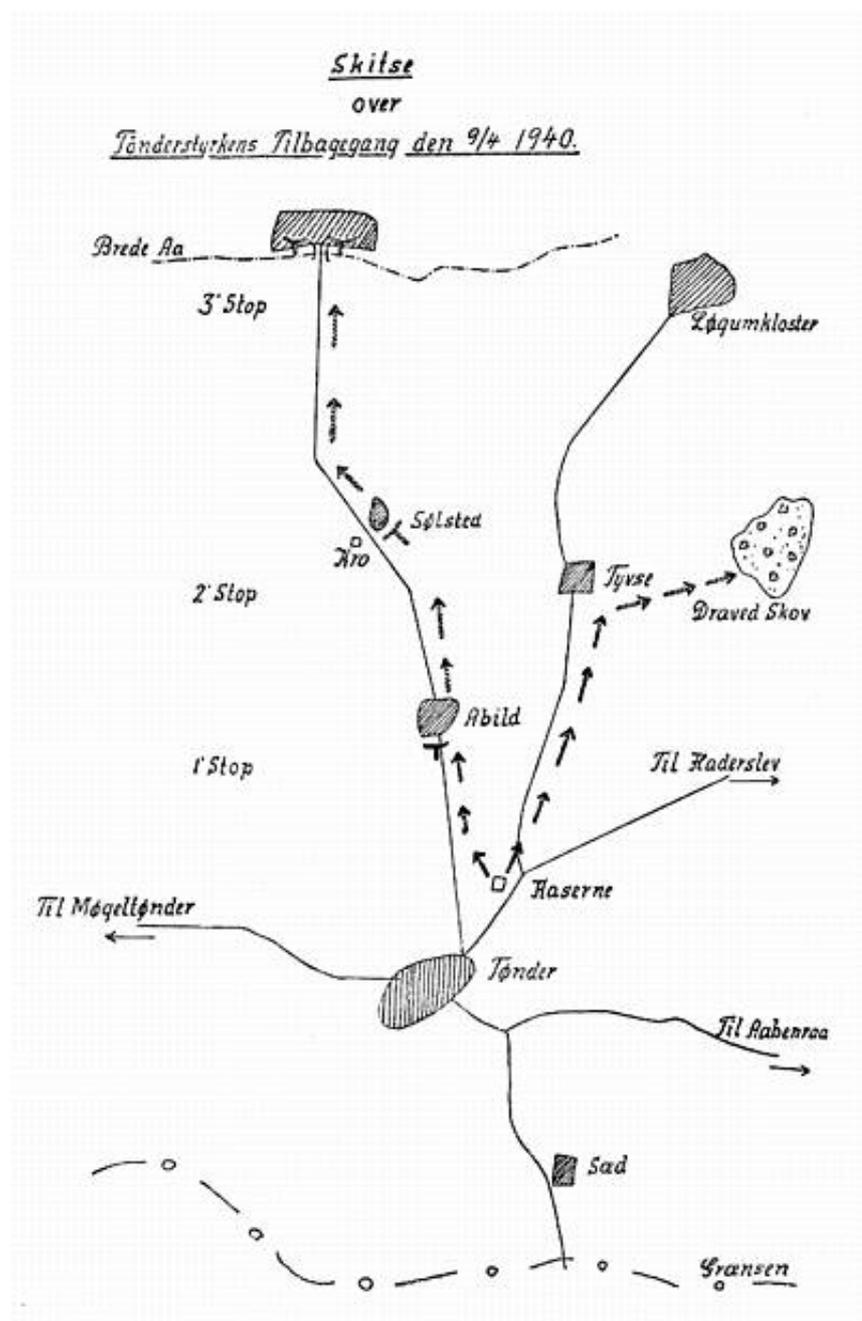


The Danish Army on April 9th, 1940, Part 2

Introduction

This is Part 2 of an article dealing with the fighting in the southern part Jutland in the early hours of April 9th, 1940 where Danish forces resisted the German invasion - to the very best of their ability, but with little consequence as to the German progress.

The units in Tønder



Sketch showing the retreat of the units in Tønder, 9th April, 1940.
From Source 1.

The garrison in Tønder consisted of

The NCO School of Fodfolkspionerkommandoet,
grouped into

- 20 mm auto cannon platoon
(with 2 guns and 1 light machinegun)
- 1 bicycle platoon
(with 4 light machineguns).

4th Company from 1st Fodfolkspionerbataljon
with

- 4 platoons (each with 4 light machineguns in tripods).

Just 10 minutes after the alert at 04:30 the troops were ready to leave the barracks. However, 2 German armoured cars were already at the gates. The troops escaped by a back passage, leading to the north.

The 4th Company headed for Tyvse where it took up a defensive position.

Later, it learned about the Governments decision to cease fire.

Due to the risk of attacks by low flying German fighter planes, the company marched into cover in Draved Skov.



The mobile units

The mobile units of the NCO School made for Bredebro, and made a number of attempts to hold back the Germans during the march.

Improvised road blocks were erected in Abild, covered by 1 auto cannon and 1 bicycle section. Before everything was ready, German armoured cars and motorcyclists turned up. The auto cannon now headed for Bredebro and the bicyclists scattered into the countryside.

A second attempt was made in Sølsted, where a more effective road block was build. The second auto cannon covered the road block, and when the German armoured cars drove up, the one in front was hit and drove into a ditch. The next one was hit too, but it was still able to use its gun.

A number of road blocks were build in Bredebro, and the auto cannon from Abild was put into position to cover the road.



The road block in Sølsted.

From Source 2.

However, shortly after the arrival of the troops from Sølsted, a large German armoured car unit turned up in Bredebro, in the rear of the Danish positions (at about 08:00). After a short fire fight to the south and northeast and further attempts to resist the enemy were futile.

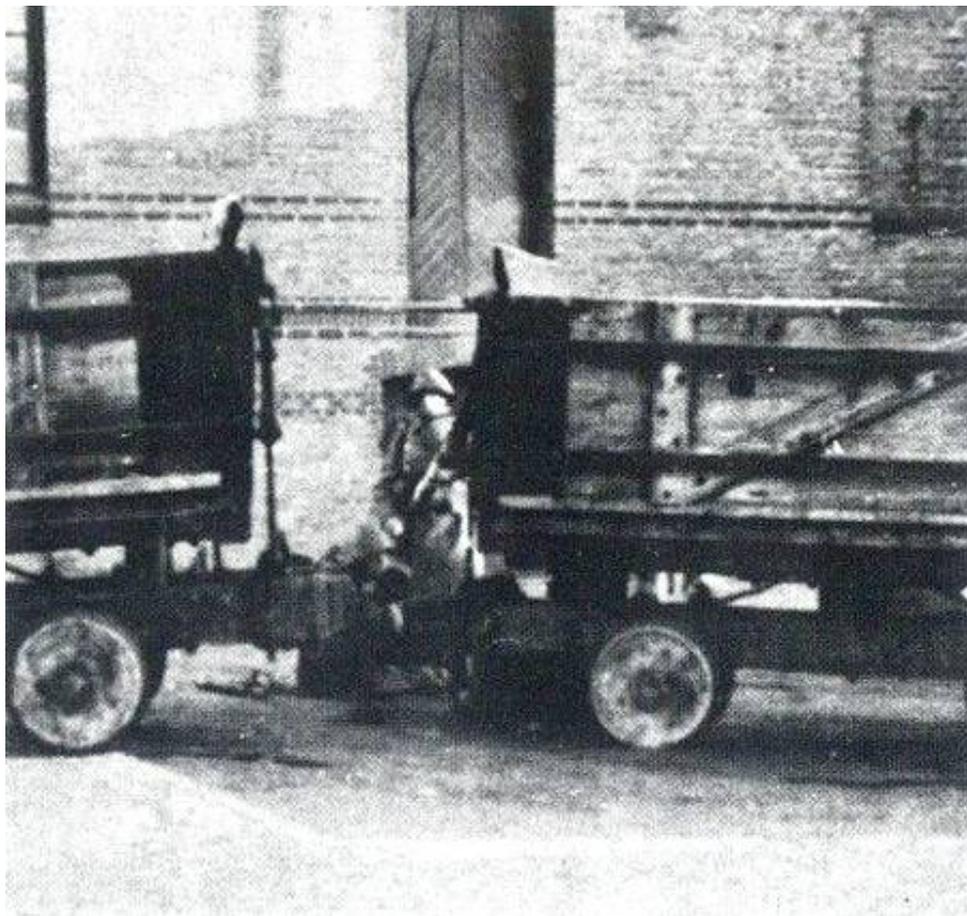
During the retreat, the units from Tønder were constantly treaded by low flying German planes; when the advance was halted in Sølling, the planes attacked the Danish units with bombs and machineguns.

Unlike the other actions on this day, no Danish losses were reported from the Tønder units.

The units in Haderslev

The garrison in Haderslev consisted of units of 3rd Battalion (Lieutenant-colonel H. Elmgren) and various supporting units:

- 4th Company (CO: Captain Otto Olsen), armed with 7 light machineguns and 3 light machineguns in tripods.
- 5th (heavy) Company (CO: Captain P. Bosse), armed with 4 heavy machineguns and 2 medium mortars.
- Regimental Anti-tank Company (2nd Regiment) (CO: Captain E. Nielsen), armed with 4 x 37mm anti-tank guns and 4 x 20 mm auto cannons.
- 1st Battery/8th Artillery Battalion (CO: Captain Kjartan Pedersen), with 4 x 75mm field guns.



*Dumping wagons made into a roadblock, and guarded
by an auto cannon, Haderslev, 9th April 1940.
From Source 2.*

The units (approximately 400 men) were alerted at 04:15. The infantry units took up positions in the southern part of the town, covering the two routes leading to the north. The battery took up positions to the north of the town.

From the 4th Company, a platoon was detached to help making ready the Regimental transport (it joined the company, just before the end of the fighting), and a further 30 men had various guard duties at the Haderslev Barracks.

Thus, only 3 infantry sections and 3 infantry sections, with light machineguns in tripods, did actually participate in the fighting soon to follow.

This small force was soon joined by 5th Company and the Regimental Anti-tank Company.

The two main roads were barred by road blocks, one made from some nearby dumping wagons and two others by timber.



German tanks in Haderslev.

From Dansk Militærhistorie.

(The tank in front is presumably a Pz II, followed by a Pz I.)

At about 07:30 the forces 4th Battalion (See [Part 1](#)), retiring towards the north, moved through the road blocks, soon to be followed by German units, headed by tanks.

The photo was taken just minutes before the tanks encountered the main road block.

Among the heroic deeds performed this morning was the action of one of the anti-tank guns from 5th Company.

In order to get the best, and longest, field of fire, it was positioned on a street corner, against a white wall, and without any cover. The gun was commanded by Cornet Frode Vesterby, with a crew of four men.



A classic photo from April 9th, 1940

The 37mm anti-tank in Haderslev.

From Source 2.

At 07:50 the German tanks drove up against the anti-tank gun, which promptly fired at the leading tanks.

The German tanks took up position side by side and fired upon the gun. The gun fired 3 times, scoring 3

hits - 2 hits on the tanks, and 1 in the tracks on one of the tanks.

The fire from the tanks killed Cornet Frode Vesterby and Private Hans Christian Hansen (gunner). The rest of the crew - Privates Bertel Lygum, Berthelsen, I. Bonde Christensen and Georg P. Hansen - were all wounded.

Soon after, a German tank smashed the gun.

2 auto cannons and 1 light machinegun at the road block (made by dumping wagons) now opened fire on the Germans.



*After the battle - The 37mm anti-tank gun in Haderslev.
From Dansk Militærhistorie.*

(Please follow the link to see photos of the scenery today and of the gun which is on display at The Royal Danish Arsenal Museum, in Copenhagen.)

At 08:00 the order to cease fire was received by the units in action, and while the garrison commander - Colonel A. Hartz, (Commanding Officer of 2nd Regiment) - negotiated the practical terms with a German general (probably the commander of the German 170th Division) - the German forces cleared the road block and headed for the Barracks.

The units at the Barracks resisted the tanks and armoured cars with small arms fire (anti-tank bullets however), halting the Germans only for a short while. At 08:15 the order to cease fire reached the units at the Barracks, and the fighting in Haderslev was over.

Further to the dead and wounded mentioned above, Privates Oluf Arthur Hansen and Niels Møller Schmidt were killed (one manned one of the auto cannons at the road block and the other was on air scouting duty at the Barracks; he was killed by a stray bullet from a tank). Corporal Erik Krogh and Private R. Christensen (at the road block) were wounded.

The Field Battery



*A 75mm Field Gun M.1902, from 1st Battery,
8th Artillery Battalion, April 1940. From Source 5.*

The 1st Battery of 3rd Artillery Battalion was garrisoned in Haderslev. The battery was motorized and armed with 4 x 75mm field guns. The Battery Commander was Captain Kjartan Pedersen.

At 04:30 the battery was ordered into position to the south of Haderslev.

However, due to the infantry forces already there, this was impossible.

Consequently the battery received orders to take up position to the north of the town, in order to support the units retreating from Haderslev to the north. The battery went quickly into position, and Captain Petersen set up his observation post south of the battery positions, and began calculation data for supporting the units in Haderslev. However, due to heavy mist in the area, observation was impossible.

Captain Petersen began to reconnoitre positions from where the guns were able to support the withdrawal. While doing so, his liaison officer at the infantry battalion informed him about the cease fire.

Thus, being prevented from performing his supporting task, he then ordered the battery to retire to the north, in order to join the Danish forces at Vejle Å (the main defensive position planned by Jydske Division). At 09:30 he joined the rest of the 8th Artillery Battalion (i.e. Battalion HQ and 3rd Battery), situated in the town Højen (some 70 kilometres to the north).

Postscript



The garrison in Sønderborg did not take part in the fighting on April 9th, 1940.

The anti-aircraft batteries in Southern Jutland

Two of the anti-aircraft batteries stationed in Southern Jutland engaged attacking aircrafts. In Esbjerg a 75mm anti-aircraft gun scored a hit in one plane and at Løgumkloster a 20mm auto cannon scored a probable hit.

The third battery, in Rødekro, was not involved in any fighting, but send out two patrols of mobile anti-aircraft guns, to cover their retreat to the north.

For pictures of Danish anti-aircraft artillery in 1940, please refer to the following articles (in Danish only):

Luftværnsartilleriets indsats i neutralitetsforsvaret 1939-40

Dansk luftværnsartilleri 1940, Del 1

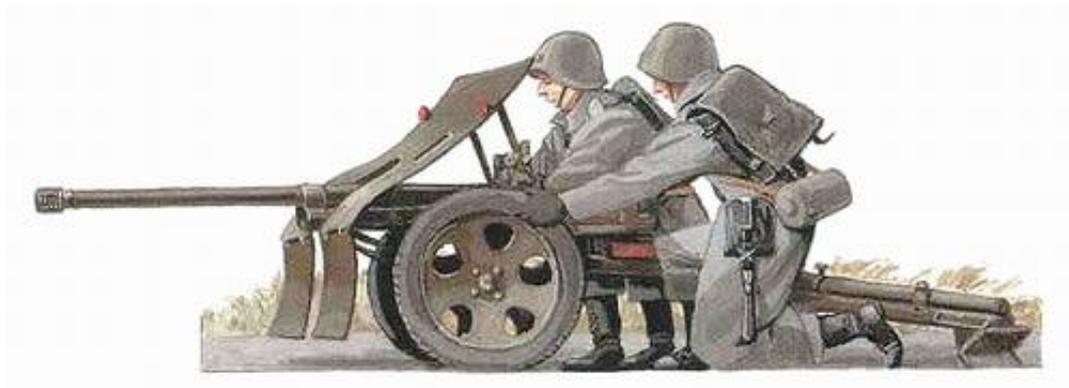
Dansk luftværnsartilleri 1940, Del 2

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, Copenhagen 1940.
4. *Feltartilleriet i Aarhus 1881-1969* by P.E. Niemann, Zac Publication, Copenhagen 1981, ISBN 87-7348-047-9.
5. *Årets største begivenheder i billeder - det bedste fra "Den danske Kamp" 1940-1943* af Carl Næsh-Hendriksen, International Billedreportage A/S, Bogforlaget Dana, Fruens Bøge.

Per Finsted



Text to colour illustrations of Danish soldiers

- 1 Infantryman, with black M.1910 greatcoat over the grey M.1915 uniform.
- 2 Infantryman, in the grey M.1915 uniform.
- 3 A 37mm anti-tank gun. The crew is in the grey M.1915 uniform.