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Mine Detection Dogs in Denmark

Danish Mine- and Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD)-Technicians (DANMINAR A/S), a company based in Denmark, provides various types of training for dogs in locating such things as bombs, drugs, mines and more. This article outlines their history and progress in the field of detection dogs.

by Mikael Borch Madsen,
Manager, DANMINAR Dog
Section

Why on Earth Does a Danish Company Start Training Mine Detection Dogs (MDDs)?

That is a question that most people probably will ask themselves, thinking there is not a landmine problem in Denmark. Actually, there is. Denmark still has several active minefields, which were laid out by German troops during World War II. Most of these minefields are located along the Danish west coast and were laid to prevent the British and American forces from invading Danish territory. Though it is no longer a *big* problem—and though most Danes do not even know about these minefields—these minefields have to be cleared at some time, due to the Ottawa Treaty. It has not yet been planned or discussed by the Danish government, and that is certainly not the reason why DANMINAR started out training MDDs.

DANMINAR A/S is a Danish company performing mine clearance, EOD and improvised explosive device (IED) clearance around the world. DANMINAR provides non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with expertise, capacity, training and equipment to perform these jobs—and of course the question about supporting the same organisations with proper MDDs and explosive detection dogs (EDDs) popped up from time to time.

The dog training started out in the autumn of 1999. DANMINAR spent a

lot of time travelling around the world visiting different NGOs and private companies who use or train MDDs. Unfortunately, they had very little success, due to the fact that this business is very commercial and nobody wants to give away their expertise. Everybody treated us with secrecy and would not tell us how to get started. Well, it was worth trying, and everybody showed us how good they were at getting the dogs to work. Still, we did see something; we got an idea of what this is all about, and we were given a lot of different Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) from various places around the world.

As a result, we decided to start from scratch. We also concluded that we would open our minds, erasing old patterns and traditions from our minds and looking separately at our goal: "Find the mines!"

With our experience from training EDDs within the Danish Police Force, we were capable of setting up a dog training program. We had several middle goals:

- Produce a Mine Rescue Team (MRT) for the Danish army to use in

international operations

- Produce MDDs for work with NGOs

- Build up a Danish MDD capacity to support all NGOs and armies

- Build up a Dog Section in the company with:

- MRTs

- MDDs

- EDDs (for sale and for use in our own operational teams in the security business)

- Drug detection dogs (DDD; for sale and for use in our own operational teams in the security business)

- Mercury detection dogs (for sale and for use in our own operational teams in the environmental business)

- Other special dogs on request

We wanted to be able to assist our customers with MDD teams consisting of one dog handler and at least two different types of MDDs: one search dog, which is capable of searching boxes on a long leash, and one special MDD, which searches straight ahead of the dog handler on a short leash. Beside these two types of MDDs, we train free search dogs, which are capable of searching boxes without a leash or with a flexible leash. These free search dogs are capable of searching at a relatively high



■ EDD at work.



■ MDD box type, long speed and are mostly used as quality assurance (QA) dogs after manual or mechanical mine clearance.

leash. speed and are mostly used as quality assurance (QA) dogs after manual or mechanical mine clearance.

DANMINAR does not believe in selling fully trained MDDs to NGOs or other organisations that will then hand over the dogs to local dog handlers. DANMINAR will support the customers with a full package, containing both a well-trained dog handler and at least two high-performance MDDs. These teams can be rented for periods from six months to however long the customer needs. DANMINAR takes care of everything concerning the MDD teams, such as insurance, transportation, housing, car, kennel, etc., and the customer only needs to consider if he gets the job done at the right price. We even send down substitutes if the handler gets sick, has to go on a long leave or needs some rest and relaxation, etc.

This method makes it easier for an NGO to calculate the costs of having MDD teams on hand. The NGO does not have to consider what to do with the dog teams in wintertime or during other conditions in which the dogs cannot be used for a short or long period. The NGO does not have to take care of retraining old dogs or training new dogs, and they have no problems with dogs getting ill or injured during the working period, since DANMINAR simply replaces such a dog as soon as possible.

Have We Achieved Our Goals With the MDDs?

Yes, but we had to change our course in the middle of our schedule. The requests for box-type MDDs were increasing, and we have now established the necessary level to make us ready for international operations. On the way, with our open minds, we also had to admit that doing things only one way is not the way to tackle problems. One dog was capable of receiving one set of training programmes, but another dog would not receive the same programmes. This meant that we had to have several training programmes for different types of dogs, different sexes, different breeds and so on. The senior dog training adviser had to be able to detect the right way for each individual dog at an early stage, but also be able to adjust to another programme if the first chosen seemed to be wrong.

We must say that we have had great success with this concept, and it seems that it will bring good results in the future. Which training is the best is always open to debate, and we welcome anyone to come and participate in our training programmes, if just to benefit the quality of MDD work worldwide.

Within the special detection dog community (MDDs, EDDs, DDDs, etc.), there is also debate on contamination of explosives from other explosives, vapour penetration of different materials, the need

for live mines in training and much more. Anyone is more than welcome to come to our facility and have a look at how we train our dogs, keep our explosives, consider contamination problems, etc. We train our EDDs on all commercial and homemade explosives known to man except for CL-14 and special military sheet explosives.

Another part of the MDD concept is that DANMINAR brings in the dog handlers from the Scandinavian Armed Forces and Police Force. All of our MDD handlers are fully educated in mine clearance, and they all have several years of experience working in foreign countries with MDDs. This assures the customers that the teams actually operate on a highly professional level, making things much easier because the MDD handlers are acquainted with the special way of life, working for a long period away from home, often under very poor conditions. It takes a special breed to be able to work out of a tent camp in the bushes somewhere on the African continent for three to four months without any possibility of having frequent contact with your loved ones.

Have We Achieved All the Goals We Started Out With?

Not all of them, but we have come a long way, and we have established our dog facility to an acceptable level. This facility

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is called DANMINAR Dog Training Centre and is located in Denmark, approximately 50 km west of Copenhagen. At the training centre, six people are working to train MDDs, explosive and weapon detection dogs and DDDs. We train approximately 15 MDDs, five to eight EDDs and four DDDs per year. The EDDs and DDDs are mostly used by DANMINAR's own search teams, which operate all over the world at security jobs, etc. But EDDs and DDDs are also sold as fully trained dogs with the training of dog handlers to governmental organisations all over the

world. In total, we now have more than 20 fully trained dogs of different types, all ready to go to work or to be sold.

At DANMINAR, we still consider ourselves beginners in this business, and we do welcome any information or help that we can get. We do believe that this business is too important and dangerous to let commercial issues get in the way of developing better and safer ways to free the world of the landmine problem. Even if we (the dog training companies and organisations) do share all the jobs in the world, we still cannot manage to solve the problem within the next 100 years.

So folks, lets cooperate! ■

**All photos courtesy of the author.*

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