

The real story about the "Destruction specialist group"

Blowing up two German ships at the shipyard.

The resistance movement in Frederikshavn confronted the Germans very early in the occupation. If you wanted there was plenty to start with as Frederikshavn was among the most important military key points in Denmark. The harbour was the main object for the Germans both as a naval base and point for embarking and disembarking German troops and materiel for Norway. Furthermore they were interested in the efficient shipyard.

Like elsewhere in Denmark the resistance had a small beginning – illegal flyers and leaflets and obstructing the Germans. Later they started sabotaging which increased in both volume and violence. In Frederikshavn, however, the resistance tried to find a balance, and there was a special reason for this.

The big German activity in the town, the substantial German maritime traffic in and out of the harbour made the town very suitable for intelligence. By observing and reporting about the activities of the German navy, transit of troops and equipment and in addition get information from fishermen and the maritime pilots the resistance provided an excellent opportunity to keep the allied informed. If they had control of the German activities, the resistance was also able to sail illegal people and shot-down pilots to Sweden through the small harbours in Strandby and Sæby.

Intelligence service and escape routes became the main objects of the local resistance. They knew, however, that the Germans focused on illegal activity and if the pattern in Frederikshavn differed too much from other places, they might become suspicious. Therefore, they had to perform sabotage now and then, but not too much, as they did not want the Germans to increase the presence of the Gestapo.

The local resistance had no problems in finding the right people for the sabotage they wanted. The problem was more to control the leader in "Destruction specialist group", Poul Jacobsen, a.k.a. "Lange Poul".

Poul Jacobsen was a communist and had very early made illegal contacts in Denmark. He was already experienced in the use of explosives and weapons when in 1943 he formed the group with among others Børge Fedders and Svend Nielsen a.k.a. "Basse". Both were part of the resistance movement. The group, which also included other members, performed a number of sabotage acts in Frederikshavn and its neighbourhood in the years 1943 to 1945.

Here we focus on two sabotage acts that both took place at Frederikshavn Shipyard in 1944. In both cases, the aim was to damage German ships to such a degree, that they were delayed in departing.

The sabotage act on August 9, 1944

The German marine vessel "Netzleger II" had been docked at Frederikshavn Shipyard for some weeks, and as the work was almost completed the group decided that now was the time to strike. The plan was to place a bomb at the bottom of the ship that would prolong its stay at the shipyard and prevent the next German vessel from entering the dock.

"Lange Poul" decided on blowing a hole in the bottom of the ship – between the engine room and the storage room. However, this was not an easy task as the Germans had placed guards around the ship both on top of the dock and in the dock itself.

Initially "Lange Poul" smuggled a magnet mine, a so-called "tortoise", into the shipyard hidden in a toolbox. He had noticed that when the last dockworkers left the dock at 16.50 the German marines also left the dock. The workers and the guards usually left the dock by the stairs at the front of the dock. Therefore, it was possible at quitting time to use the stairs by the dock door at the end of the dock towards the basin.

"Basse" first of all had to take the tool box to the dock door at 16.20 and then had to cover "Lange Poul" who was going down into the dock with the tool box. 20 minutes later the two men met and when they could see the last German guards, entering the staircase at the front of the dock "Lange Poul" fetched the toolbox and both ran down the stairs. "Lange Poul" soon got under the ship while "Basse" covered him. He placed the magnet mine and wrung the wing nuts so the glass ampoules broke and the acid started to work. The bomb would then detonate after approx. 5 hours. Then they ran to the stairs at the front of the dock and slowly went up while trying to get their heart rate down. At the top of the stairs, they met the last German guard who looked at them surprised but said nothing. The task was completed and the two men left the shipyard.

At 21.30, the magnet mine detonated causing a big hole in the bottom of the ship. The Germans at once sealed the whole shipyard and started an investigation. They soon realised that it was a sabotage act by means of a magnet mine and once again, they increased surveillance and guarding the shipyard.

This was not the first time that "The destruction specialist group" were active in the shipyard, and it was not the last time either.

The sabotage act on December 10, 1944

The German steamer "Kap Guim" had been in the repair dock for some time in order to have its boilers repaired. Pressure had now been regained and the steamer was soon to leave the shipyard. "Lange Poul", Børge and "Basse" decided to blow up the boilers.

At the painting company, Hassing "Lange Poul" found a large paint box that he filled with explosives. On its top, he disguised its dangerous contents with bolts and nuts. In order to detonate the explosives he got hold of a 2-hour time pencil as he thought that the heat in the boiler would accelerate the detonation with half an hour. This was time enough to ensure that the three men would get away from the shipyard

Once again, the group chose the time around quitting time for the action, both to avoid there were dockworkers on the ship, but also to ensure their own safety. 10 minutes before a whistle blew the signal for quitting time the group took action. Again, "Lange Poul" carried the bomb and "Basse" should cover him at the door to the boiler room. Børge were placed on the gratings at the top of the engine room. When he was boarding the ship "Lange Poul" accidentally met Børge's father. He noticed the bolts on top of the paint box and said he needed a couple and wanted to take them but "Lange Poul" refused and went on.

Luckily, when "Lange Poul" reached the boiler room it was empty. He squeezed the pen and removed the safety pin, opened into the furnace ash box and pushed the paint box as far in as he could. Just when he closed the door to the ash box, a stoker came in. The stoker complained about "Lange Poul's" presence and demanded an explanation but "Lange Poul" gave him an idle chit-chat and moved up through the engine room. At the top Børge stood with his gun out, he had seen the stoker. "We were really lucky, everything is ok so let's get ashore", said "Lange Poul". "It was damn hot in the furnace ash box so it may explode anytime", he said as they went down the gangway.

In less than half an hour, at 16.10, the bomb exploded. The stoker they had met was slightly scalded but survived.

Two days later the Germans took complete control of both Frederikshavn Shipyard and Aalborg Shipyard and for the rest of the German occupation the shipyards worked under strict conditions.

“The destruction specialist group” never returned to the shipyard but there were plenty of other targets in the town. A good example of the group’s audacity was that on the same evening, only an hour and a half after having completed the mentioned boiler sabotage they sabotaged a German installation only 50 meters from the entrance to the shipyard.