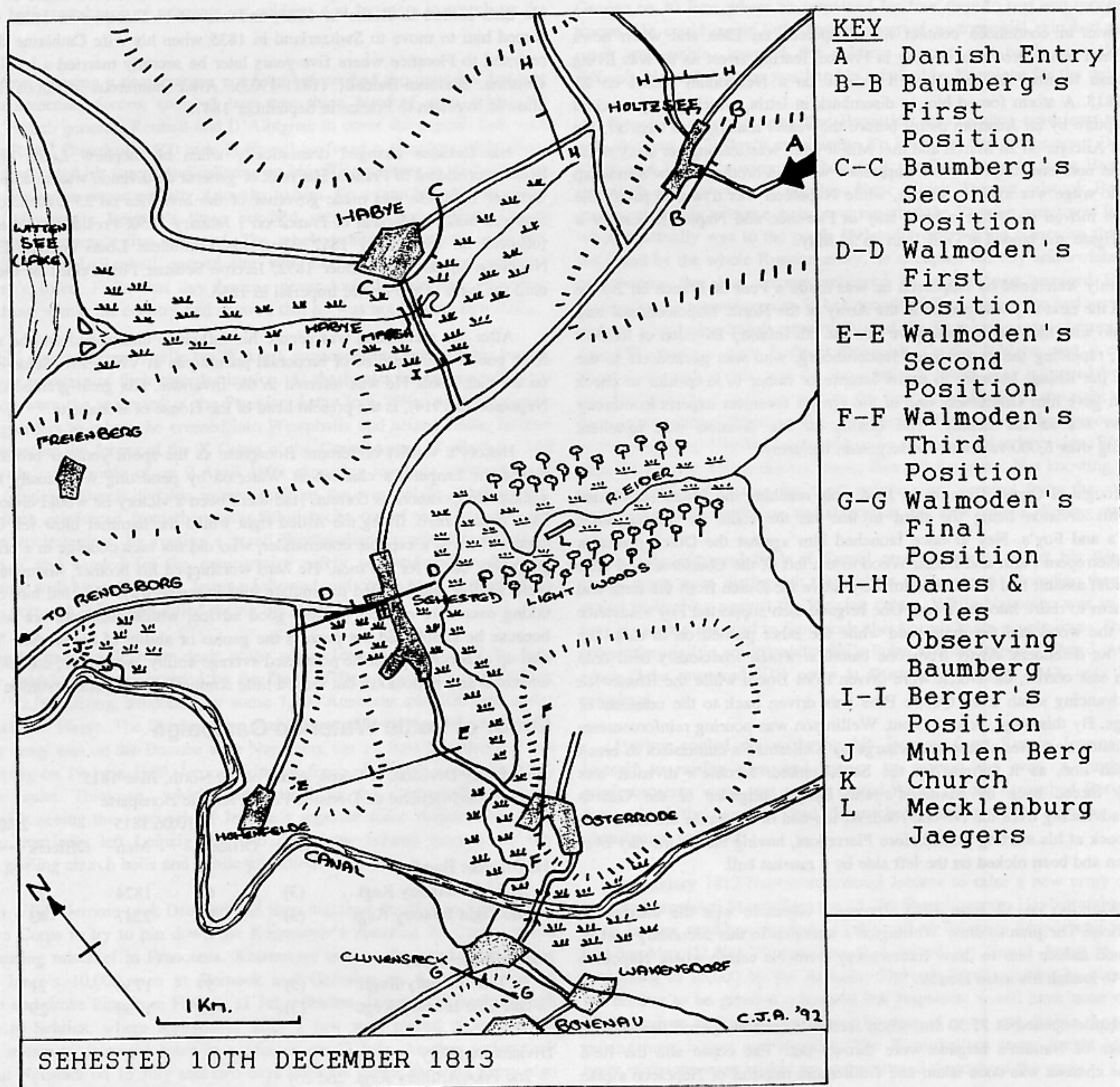


SEHESTED, 10th DECEMBER 1813

by Colin Allen



BACKGROUND

The Danish army is one of the "Cinderellas" of the Napoleonic Wars. Their contribution is little known, especially their service around Hamburg in late 1813. Hopefully this article will go some way to altering this state of affairs.

Denmark first became involved in the wars after the British attempt to impound the Danish fleet in 1807. Until this time the Danes had favoured an alliance with Britain, but they resisted gallantly, if hopelessly. The Crown Prince Frederik refused to accept an imposed alliance with Britain but was forced to surrender and the Danish fleet was captured. These events drove the Danes into Napoleon's welcoming arms. The old King, Christian VII, died in 1808 and the Crown Prince succeeded as Frederik VI.

He managed to keep his army out of harm's way until 1812 when the

Emperor, looking round for extra troops to add to the Grand Armee prior to the attack on Russia, requested that a Danish contingent be mobilised. Somehow Frederik managed to persuade Napoleon that Denmark could best help by providing a contingent, known as the "Mobile Army Division", for rear area security duties in the Duchy of Holstein.

After the debacle of Russia, Denmark declared its neutrality in the spring of 1813; the country was bankrupt and desperate to return to a peace time economy. There was, however, one major obstacle in the path of this laudable intention - the Danish held territory of Norway. Sweden had long had its eye on this particular piece of land and, under Crown Prince Bernadotte, was determined to take it. Denmark's main defence had always been its alliance with Russia, a country which had good reason to fear a resurgence of Swedish expansionism, but which was now allied to her and had agreed to back her claims on Norway.

Frederik attempted to negotiate with Russia, Austria and Britain but eventually came to the conclusion that he would have to fight to hold on to his Norwegian territory. Consequently, on May 16th 1813, he declared for Napoleon and undertook to provide a small corps of 11000 infantry, 2100 cavalry and 40 guns, made up of the units of the "Mobile Army Division" and some reinforcements, under the command of the King's brother in law, Prince Frederik of Hessen. This formation was sent to join Marshal Davout's 13th Corps in Northern Germany and was designated the "Auxiliary Corps". In the autumn campaign the Danes fought with some distinction against Walmoden's polyglot army. When the news of Leipzig reached him, Davout retreated back into Hamburg to begin his epic defence of that city, not surrendering until after Napoleon's abdication. The Danes, however, were ordered to fall back to defend Holstein.

The retreating column, including a convoy of some 500 wagons, was on the march to Rendsborg on December 10th, on a road which passed through the bottleneck of Sehested, when an enemy force was discovered in the village of Holzsee.

THE DANISH ARMY

The Danish army of 1813, which had been almost totally raw at the beginning of the campaign and, as contemporary letters show, shocked by its first taste of war and the French method of living off the land, had matured into an efficient fighting force, helped by the fact that its troops were drilled to a far higher standard than most of the conscript armies of that year. Morale had improved massively since the summer, when there had been problems due to the large numbers of personnel of German descent and, hence, pro German sentiment in the corps. However, Frederik of Hessen had proved to be an excellent leader of men and the problems had now been overcome.

The Danish tactical system was based on the French but the high level of training allowed a flexibility that was unknown in the French army of the period.

The infantry could attack in lines, columns or a swarm of skirmishers. The attack column was formed one company wide and four or five companies deep with a screen formed by a musketeer company if it was the first battalion or the Jaeger company in one of the other battalions. When attacking in a skirmisher swarm attention was paid to closely supporting the open order troops with a formed unit. It would seem, however, that the musketeers, although theoretically capable of fighting in skirmish order, were not particularly adept at it. In defence the Danish infantry fought in line, delivering battalion or platoon volleys.

The cavalry was, for 1813, of superb quality despite initial problems with the Funen Light Dragoons, which were solved by weeding out several of the less competent officers. The artillery was the weak point of the corps, consisting of a mixture of French 6 pounders and Danish 3 pounders, the latter being heavy and unwieldy pieces. The batteries were, in theory, of ten guns but most were now down to eight. Although the artillery generally performed creditably it was not capable of forming "Grand Batteries" in the French manner. So much for the Danes, let us now take a look at the troops who were to oppose them in this small but hard fought action.

WALMODEN'S CORPS

Walmoden's corps was part of Bernadotte's Army of the North and, in many ways, reflected the new idea of German nationalism which had arisen during the years of French domination.

Its troops came from many different states, some of which had only recently turned against their former master, Napoleon. The best troops were probably those of the Russo-German Legion, formed by the Russians from German prisoners of war and deserters from the Grand Armee.

The few KGL men present were also of a high standard but, unfortunately, their main contribution to the corps, the 3rd Hussar regiment, was absent on the day of battle. Hanoverian troops made up a fairly large part of the force but were generally rather raw and poorly trained.

The Mecklenburgers had only recently come over to the Allied side, as had the Anhalt-Dessau contingent, but at least they contained a hard core of men who had seen extensive service under the French.



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14	Stormtrooper - walking firing gun	46	Bossk
15	Stormtrooper - firing gun left	47	Bobba Fett
16	Stormtrooper - kneeling gun (relaxed)	48	IG88
17	Stormtrooper - kneeling firing gun	49	Garindan
18	Stormtrooper - running	50	Wee Quay
19	Stormtrooper - walking left	51	Tusken Raider
20	Stormtrooper - Tatooine	52	Ren Gar
21	Stormtrooper - big gun (rest)	53	Lando in armour
22	Stormtrooper - fire left	54	Nikto
23	Stormtrooper - big gun (firing)	55	Ithorian
24	Stormtrooper - gun lowered	56	Kerry
25	Stormtrooper - firing pistol	57	Muftak
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ORDERS OF BATTLE

DANISH FORCE: Prince Frederik of Hessen
ADVANCED GUARD: General de Division Lallemand
2nd Battalion Schleswig Jaeger Corps
1st & 2nd Battalions Holstein Sharpshooter Corps
1st Battalion 3rd (Jutland) Infantry Regiment
Holstein Heavy Cavalry Regiment (4 squadrons)
17th Polish Lancer Regiment (2 squadrons)
6pdr Foot Battery von Gerstenberg (8 guns)

MAIN BODY:

1st Brigade: General Graf Schulenburg
1st & 4th Battalions Oldenburg Infantry Regiment
3 Companies 2nd Battalion Oldenburg Infantry Regiment
3rd & 4th Battalions Holstein Infantry Regiment
2nd & 6th Squadrons Danish Hussar Regiment
3pdr Foot Battery von Gonner (8 guns)
6pdr Foot Battery Koye (8 guns)

2nd Brigade: Oberst von Abercron

1st & 2nd Battalions Funen Infantry Regiment
1st & 2nd Battalions Schleswig Infantry Regiment
Funen Dragoon Regiment (3 squadrons)
6pdr Foot Battery Friis (10 guns)

THE CONVOY

c.500 Wagons
1st Battalion Queen's Infantry Regiment
2 Companies 2nd Battalion Oldenburg Infantry Regiment
Funen Dragoon Regiment (1 squadron)
All this adding up to about 9000 men.

WALMODEN'S CORPS: Count Walmoden

ARENTSCHILD'S DIVISION

1st Brigade: Major von Ratzmer
1st Battalion Russo-German Legion (910)
2nd Battalion Russo-German Legion (760)
5th Battalion Russo-German Legion (834)

2nd Brigade: ????????

6th Battalion Russo-German Legion (808)
7th Battalion Russo-German Legion (643)

LYON'S DIVISION

Line Brigade: LT. Colonel Halkett
Hanoverian Lauenburg Battalion (638)
Hanoverian Langrehr Battalion (638)
Hanoverian Bennigsen Battalion (638)
Anhalt-Dessau Battalion (600)
KGL Light Detachment (150)
Hanoverian Jaeger Company (40)

FROM VEGESACK'S DIVISION

Advanced Guard: Oberst Graf von Osten-Sacken
Mecklenburg Foot Jaegers (375)

Cavalry Brigade: ????????

1st Russo-German Hussar Regiment (487)
Bremen-Verden Hussar Regiment (300)
Mecklenburg Mounted Jaegers (384)

ARTILLERY

1st Russo-German Horse Battery (6 guns)
2nd Russo-German Horse Battery (6 guns)
Hanoverian Foot Battery (4 guns)
KGL Horse Battery-one section (2 guns)

DORNBERG'S DIVISION

2nd Brigade: Major Baumbach
3rd Battalion Russo-German Legion
4th Battalion Russo-German Legion
Hanoverian Feldjagerkorps von Kielmannsegge
Giving a total of about 10500 men.

THE BATTLE

As the head of the Danish column approached the village of Holzsee an enemy force could be seen occupying it. Lallemand's Advanced Guard deployed into battle formation and the long convoy halted to allow them to clear the enemy from the village. However, Major Baumberg, commanding the force holding Holzsee, had no intention of taking on an entire corps with only three battalions so he slowly withdrew to a position to the north of the Habye Marsh, facing southeast. Frederik dispatched the two battalions of the Holstein Regiment, the battalion of the Queen's Regiment and a hussar squadron to keep an eye on him. At the same time he also sent two squadrons of the Holstein Cavalry Regiment and the Poles to cover the area to the north and east of Holzsee.

Baumberg's slow withdrawal had given time for Walmoden to bring up the rest of his troops from Sehested but, as the Danish march continued, he allowed himself to be pushed back towards that village. As the Danes passed the southern end of the causeway leading through the marsh a detachment under Major Berger was left to prevent Baumberg from descending on the rear of the convoy. This was just in time as, within a few minutes, Baumberg's force attempted to storm the causeway. The task was virtually impossible as they could only form up in a column eight men wide and the attack was beaten off with such heavy losses that Baumberg was effectively out of the action. The units left to keep an eye on him north of the marsh were now joined by the four squadrons of cavalry from Holzsee and, as a consequence of this disastrous attack, these units were free to begin moving towards the Sehested road and the rear of the convoy.

Walmoden had now reached Sehested where he turned to face the Danes, forming up at the north end of the long, straggling village, just south of the point where the Rendsborg road takes a sharp right turn, with his left just to the north of the marsh which runs along the western side of the village and his right on the river Eider. The Mecklenburg Jaeger battalion was sent across the river in the direction of Holzsee to see if it could harass the convoy with long range musketry. Seeing their enemy taking up this position the Danes once again halted and prepared for battle. The 1st and 4th battalions of the Oldenburg Regiment formed column and, supported by the fire of Gonner's and Koye's batteries, assaulted the village, screened by a musketeer company of the 1st battalion and the Jaeger company of the 4th.

The 6th and 7th battalions of the Russo-German Legion were bundled out of the houses north of the church but immediately counter attacked and, supported by the 5th battalion, threw the Danes back to their original position. Frederik now decided to launch a better prepared attack and ordered the light battalions of the advanced guard into skirmish order and they, supported by the 1st battalion of the Jutland Regiment formed in line, and followed up by Schulenberg's brigade, were instructed to renew the attack.

The attack went in with Frederik himself at its head and completely cleared the village of Allied troops. The victorious Danes formed line along the southern edge of the village and a detachment under Major Bie, consisting of the 1st battalion of the Funen Infantry Regiment and the Friis battery, was sent to cover the ground between Sehested and Hohenfelde, across which the Allied left wing had retreated. Walmoden now ordered the village to be retaken and the 5th and 6th battalions of the Legion, along with the Anhalt-Dessau battalion, supported by the guns of the KGL and the Hanoverian battery, returned to the fray, attacking in battalion columns.

The leading column, that of the 5th battalion of the Legion, was charged by the Funen Dragoon Regiment and, despite a gallant attempt, was unable to form square in time and was ridden down. The survivors were taken prisoner as were the crews of the two KGL guns and one Hanoverian gun. The other two battalions broke and routed back to their own lines whilst the captured artillery pieces were dragged back into the Danish lines. The Allies now withdrew some 500 metres down the Osterode road and took up a new position with their left resting on Hohenfelde and their right on the Eider. On their left a fierce firefight had developed between the 1st and 2nd battalions of the Russo-German Legion and Bie's force, the outnumbered Danes getting the worst of it. Now, his men having run out of ammunition, Bie was forced back about halfway to the Rendsborg road, along which the convoy was now passing. Fortunately for the Danes, the units that had been observing Baumbach's troops north of the Habye Marsh now arrived and pushed the Allied left wing back to its main body.

In a desperate attempt to break the Danish line Walmoden ordered the

Mecklenburg Mounted Jaegers to charge the enemy on the southern edge of Sehested. They were received by well controlled volleys from the 2nd battalion of the Funen Regiment and the 1st battalion of the Schleswig Regiment and were destroyed as a useful fighting force.

Realising that he could no longer hope to hold his position Walmoden ordered a retreat over the Eider to a position on the low heights around Osterode. Frederik ordered the Holstein Cavalry Regiment forward to try and convert this retreat into a rout but their attack was beaten off by overwhelming firepower and they fell back to the north bank.

The Danes took up a position on the north bank of the Eider and began an artillery bombardment of Walmoden's position as well as keeping a wary eye on the rest of Vegesack's division, which had just arrived and was now occupying a position between Wakendorf and Bovenau to the west of the canal. Under heavy bombardment, Walmoden now began to withdraw across the Cluvsensieck bridge, taking up a defensive position facing back across the canal.

Bernadotte had now arrived on the scene and, after a short discussion with Walmoden and Vegesack, sent a messenger to Frederik suggesting a twenty four hour cease-fire in order to collect the wounded and bury the dead. The Danish convoy was now moving down the Rendsborg road so Frederik agreed. The Danish troops marched after the convoy, a rear guard being left on the Muhlen Berg to prevent any attempt at a pursuit. So ended the battle of Sehested. The Danes had achieved their objective of clearing the road for their convoy whilst the Allies had received a severe drubbing.

CASUALTIES

The Danish casualties are tabulated below:

	OFFICERS	MEN
DEAD	--	56
WOUNDED	14	222
WOUNDED		
PRISONERS	1	13
UNWOUNDED		
PRISONERS	2	15
TOTAL	17	306

Walmoden's casualties were not recorded but the Danes estimated them as being at least three times their own in addition to 24 officers and 600 other ranks taken prisoner.

AFTERMATH

Frederik's little army reached Rendsborg without further incident and prepared to defend it against all comers. The King, however, realising that his cause was lost, now sought peace and a treaty was signed with the Allies in January 1814. As a reward for its contribution to the Allied war effort and as a punishment for Denmark siding with France, Sweden received the long sought after territory of Norway.

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