

Cachets of German Army Troops and the German Imperial Navy in the Ottoman Empire and Caucasus during World War I Part 2: Pioneer Units

by Horst Borlinghaus, Arno Schmolke, and Walter Stegmüller¹

Copyright © 2021/2025

When one thinks of the activities of pioneers, the construction and destruction of bridges during advance and retreat comes to mind first. However, the First World War consisted mainly of gruelling trench warfare and the pioneers' focus shifted to directly supporting the infantry in the trenches. Hence a brief summary of the pioneers' tasks:

Bridge construction was carried out by the bridge trains. They were provided with pontoons and beams for the base structure and beams and planks for the superstructure. In trench warfare, the infantry was supported by mine launchers of various calibres (see the light 7.58 cm mine launcher in the illustration on the Sinai Peninsula, *fig. 1*).

The searchlight units² were used for apron lighting, and high-voltage formations were used to generate electricity. These were used to power the barbed wire obstacles, pump out flooded trench systems, supply searchlight and intelligence units, etc. Flamethrowers were available for close combat. There were two engineer regiments for gas warfare.

German Troops in Turkey: Pioneers

Pioneer Company 205
Pioneer Section 701
Mine Thrower Section 350
Mine Thrower Section 351
Mine Thrower Section 352
Mine Thrower Squad 701
Mine Thrower Squad 702
Mine Thrower Squad 702
Ammunition Column for Mine Throwers
Pioneer Training Command Maltepe
Engineer Construction Command
Water Supply Section Syria

Corps Bridge Train 63
Corps Bridge Train 64
German Pioneer Command Gallipoli
German Pioneer Command Constantinople
German Engineer Command
Pioneer Replacement Section Pasha II
Pioneer and Close Combat Equipment Depot
(near Aleppo) for Pasha II
Pioneer Pool Army Group F
Pioneer transit Pool Rajak
Mine Thrower Battalion 1
Pioneer staff officer (Jıldırım)

Contrary to what is stated in some publications, the Bohrsonder-Kommandos (special drilling sections) were assigned to the railway formations (tunnel construction, Baghdad Railway) or to the rear formations (Bohrsonder-Kommando 1 and 2). These will be dealt with in later parts in the relevant context.

In some cases, the designations for the pioneer units may also refer to Turkish units with German embedded personnel. This is particularly the case when German units were redeployed and the equipment, including some rank soldiers, was taken over by the Turkish army.

¹ First published in Rundbrief <Arge Deutsche Feldpost 1914/18>, no. 220, 2021, pp. 49–55.
Translated by Tobias Zywiets.

² Anti-aircraft searchlights belonged to the air force (Flak-Scheinwerfer der Luftwaffe).

The cancellations shown below are not only letter cancellations, but also form cancellations and private cancellations. However, the latter were also tolerated as letter cancellations. The designations on the letter cancellations do not always correspond to the budgeted (official) names.



Fig. 1: Pioneers of Minenwerfer-Abteilung 351 (Mine Thrower Section 351) in front of their 7.58 cm light mine thrower in the desert of the Sinai Peninsula. The operator crew consisted of 5 to 6 men. The thrower was loaded via the muzzle, the range was 1050 m, the projectile rate was 6 shots per minute, the projectile weight was 4.6 kg and was effective through fragments.³

Adresse _____ Constantinopel
 Deutsches Pion. Kdo. d. Marine Postbüro
 Berlin C. II.

Fig. 2: Formular cachet: Deutsches Pion.-Kdo. d. Marine Postbüro Berlin C. II.
 (Deutsches Pionier-Kommando durch Marine Postbüro Berlin C. II. = German Pioneer Command
 via Navy Post Office Berlin C. II.)

San. Unteroffz. P. Weiss
 Minenwerfertrupp 702
 Deutsche Feldpost 663.

Fig. 3: Private cachet.

³ Courtesy of Dedecke Familienchronik.

Minenwerfer (Mine Throwers)

Minenwerfer-Abteilung 350, 351 and 352 (Mine Thrower Section 350, 351, 352)

These three sections were set up in mid-1916 at the Jüterbog military training area under the code name "Pascha".



Fig. 4: Minenwerferschule (Mine Thrower School) and location of the Minenwerfer Ersatz-Bataillon 1 (Mine Thrower Replacement Battalion 1) at Markendorf, Jüterbog military training area. Location of the Mine Thrower Sections 305, 351 and 352.



MINENWERFER-ABTEILUNG 350
(Mine Thrower Section 350)



MINENWERFER-ABTEILUNG 351
(Mine Thrower Section 351)



MINENWERFER-ABTEILUNG 352
(Mine Thrower Section 352)



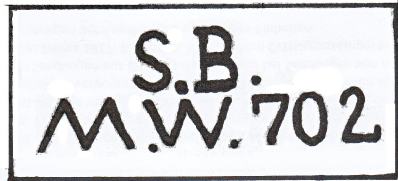

Minenwerfer-Abteilung 351

Minenwerfer-Abteilung 351
(Mine Thrower Section 351)

As early as June 1916 the units were transferred to Palestine to take part in the Suez Canal campaign. As this operation ended in a retreat with heavy losses, there was no longer any need for the presence of the mine throwers and they were transported to the Macedonian front in December 1916. On 4th January the units were renamed Gebirgs-Minenwerfer Komp. 176 G (Mountain Mine Thrower Company 176 G). In the Prilep area, it was integrated into the front on the Greek border as part of Army Group Below. In late summer 1918, it was transported to the Caucasus and thus back into the area of the Militärmission.

Asienkorps Pascha-II-Verbände – Pioniere (Asia Corps Pasha II Units – Pioneers)
Minenwerfer Trupps 701, 702, 703 (Mine Thrower Squads 701, 702, 703)


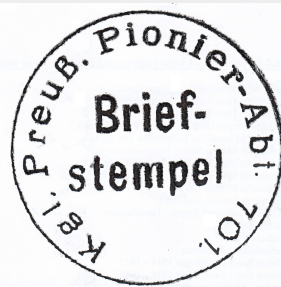
The Mine Thrower Squads 701, 702, and 703 were part of the three infantry battalions 701, 702, and 703.⁴

Unit	Unit	a) Formation b) in Turkey
Minen - Werfer - Trupp 701 (Mine Thrower Squad 701)		a) 17.07.1917 b) from Autumn 1917 to end-of-war.
		a) 17.07.1917 b) from Autumn 1917 to end-of-war.
Minen - Werfer - Trupp 702 (Mine Thrower Squad 702)	M. W. Trupp 702 (Mine Thrower Squad 702)	
	San. Unteroffz. P. Weiss Minenwerfertrupp 702 Deutsche Feldpost 663. Privatstempel des San. Unteroffz. P. Weiss, Minenwerfertrupp 702 (Pivate cachet of Medical non-commissioned officer P. Weiss, Mine Thrower Squad 702)	
M.W.702 (Mine Thrower Squad 702)		
		a) 17.07.1917 from Autumn 1917 to end-of-war.
M. W. Trupp 703 (Mine Thrower Squad 703)		

⁴ Wartime organisation, i.e. not temporarily subordinate.

2. Asienkorps Pascha II-Verbände – Pioniere (2nd Asia Corps Pasha II Units – Pioneers)

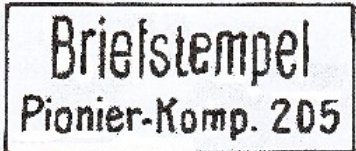

Pionier-Abteilung 701 (Pioneer Section 701)

Unit	Unit	a) Formation b) in Turkey
 <p>KGL. PREUSS. PIONIER-ABTEILUNG 701 (Royal Prussian Pioneer Section 701)</p>	 <p>Kgl. Preuß. Pionier-Abt. 701. (Royal Prussian Pioneer Section 701)</p>	<p>a) 17.07.1917 b) from Autumn 1917 to end-of-war</p>
<p>Mun Kraftw. Kol. für Minenwerfer (Ammunition Lorry Column for Mine Throwers)</p>		

Pionier-Ersatz-Abteilung Pascha II Pioneer Replacement Section Pasha II)


Unit	a) Formation b) in Turkey
 <p>Pionier-Ers.-Abteilung Deutsche Feldpost 663 (Pioneer Replacement Section German Field Post 663)</p>	<p>a) 19.10.1917 b) from Autumn 1917 to end-of-war</p>

Asienkorps (Verstärkung Pascha-II-Verbände) – Pioniere (Asia Corps: Reinforcement Pasha II Units) – Pioneers


Unit	Unit	a) Formation b) in Turkey
 <p>Pionier-Komp. 205 (Pioneer Company 205)</p>	 <p>Königl. Preuss. Pionier-Kompagnie No. 205</p>	<p>a) 12.05.1915 b) from Spring 1918 to end-of-war</p>

3. Other Pioneer Units in Turkey

Korpsbrücken-Train 63, 64 (Corps Bridge Train 63, 64)

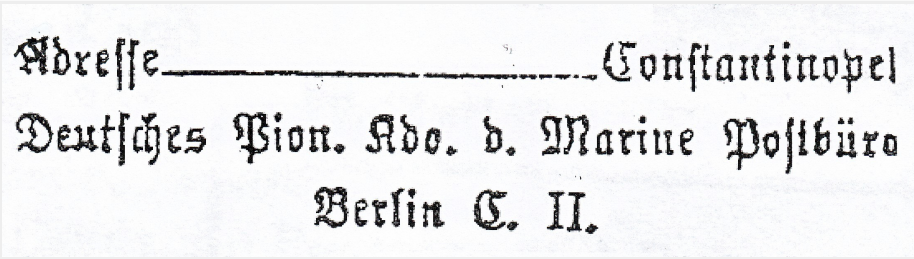
Unit	Unit	a) Formation b) in Turkey
Kgl. Preuss. Korps-Brücken-Train 63 (Royal Prussian Corps Bridge Train 63)		a) 15.01.1916 b) from July 1916 Transferred to Turkey 17.10.1916
	Korps-Brücken-Train 64 Korps-Brücken-Train 64 (Corps Bridge Train 64)	a) 15.01.1916 b) from July 1916 to end-of-war
Kgl. Preuss. Korps-Brücken-Train 64 (Royal Prussian Corps Bridge Train 64)		

Deutsches Pionier-Kommando (German Pioneer Command)⁵

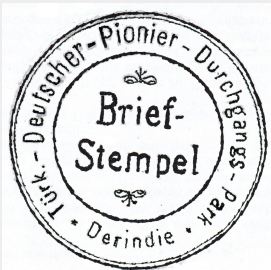
Unit	Unit	a) Formation b) in Turkey
		a) – b) June 1916 to October 1916 in Baghdad, from November 1916 in Aleppo.
DEUTSCHES PIONIER KOMMANDO (German Pioneer Command)		

⁵ Presumably not a budgeted unit.

**Deutsches Pionier-Kommando durch Marine Postbüro Berlin C. II.
(German Pioneer Command via Naval Post Office Berlin C. II)**

Unit	a) Formation b) in Turkey
 <p>Adresse _____ Constantinopel / Deutsches Pion. Kdo. d. Marine Postbüro Berlin C. II. (German Pioneer Command via Naval Post Office Berlin C. II)</p>	<p>a) – b) 1917 in Constantinople</p>

**Türkisch-Deutscher-Pionier Durchgangs-Park Derindie
(Turkish-German Pioneer Transit Park Derindie)⁶**

Unit	a) Formation b) in Turkey
 <p>Türk.-Deutscher-Pionier Durchgangs-Park * Derindie * (Turkish-German Pioneer Transit Park Derindie)</p>	<p>a) – b) --</p>

Sources and Literature

- *Feldpostübersicht Ausgabe A (Stäbe) Nr. 251*, issued 4.09.1918
- *Feldpostübersicht Ausgabe B (Truppen) Nr. 253*, issued 18.09.1918
- *Feldpostübersicht Ausgabe A (Stäbe) Nr. 259*, issued 30.10.1918
- *Feldpostübersicht Ausgabe B (Truppen) Nr. 254*, issued 30.10.1918
- *253. Verzeichnis der nicht beim Feldheer befindlichen Stäbe und Truppen*, 18.09.1918 (as of 17.09.1918)
- *Übersicht über die Behörden und Truppen in der Kriegsformation*. Reichsdruckerei, Berlin 1918
- *Der Weltkrieg um Ehre und Recht. Band 6: Die Organisation der Kriegsführung, 1. Teil*. Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1921, pp. 174–196.

Appeal

This series of articles can only be successful if there are supporters. I am sure that some collections contain hitherto unknown cancellations from Turkey.

My problem is that some of my cancellations are not in a condition to be reproduced. Hence the request for usable copies of the cancellations not shown here.

A scan to nezual@t-online.de is requested.

Corrections are also welcome.

⁶ Presumably not a budgeted unit.