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SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

# LAND OF MINE

**Directed and Written by Martin Zandvliet**

*Official Selection*

2016 Sundance Film Festival  
2015 Toronto International Film Festival

101 Minutes

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## CAST

Sgt. Rasmussen	ROLAND MØLLER
Captain Ebbe	MIKKEL BOE FØLSGAARD
Sebastian Schumann	LOUIS HOFMANN
Helmut Morbach	JOEL BASMAN
Ernst Lessner	EMIL BELTON
Werner Lessner	OSKAR BELTON

## FILMMAKERS

**Written and directed by**  
Martin Zandvliet

**Director of Photography**  
Camilla Hjelm Knudsen, DFF

**Production Designer**  
Gitte Malling

**Casting Director**  
Simone Bär

**Editors**  
Per Sandholt  
Molly Malene Stensgaard

**Composer**  
Sune Martin

**Sound Designer**  
Rasmus Winther Jensen

**Re-recording Mixer**  
Lars Ginzel

**Production Sound Mixer**  
Johannes Elling Dam

**Costume Designer**  
Stefanie Bieker

**Hair and Make-up Designer**

Barbara Kreuzer

**Producer**

Mikael Chr. Rieks

Malte Grunert

**Line Producer**

Louise Birk Petersen

**Post Producer**

Mette Høst Hansen

**Executive Producers**

Henrik Zein

Torben Majgaard

Lena Haugaard

Oliver Simon

Daniel Baur

Stefan Kapelari

Silke Wilfinger

Associate Producer

Klaus Dohle

## LOGLINE

As World War Two comes to an end, a group of German POWs, boys rather than men, are captured by the Danish army and forced to engage in a deadly task – to defuse and clear land mines from the Danish coastline. With little or no training, the boys soon discover that the war is far from over. Inspired by real events, *Land of Mine* exposes the untold story of one tragic moment in post-war history.

## SYNOPSIS

Few films detail the immediate aftermath of conflict and occupation from the Second World War. After six years of war and terror the lines between right and wrong had been eradicated. *Land of Mine*, the new film from Danish writer/director Martin Zandvliet, exposes the previously hidden story of Denmark's darkest hour. In the days following the surrender of Nazi Germany in May 1945, German POWs held in Denmark were put to work by the Allied Forces. With minimal or no training in defusing explosives, they were sent to remove in excess of two million of their own landmines from the Danish west coast. During this process, more than half of them were killed or severely wounded. Zandvliet sheds light on this historical tragedy as the entry point to a story that involves love, hate, revenge and reconciliation.

The young German POWs Sebastian, Helmut, Ludwig, twins Ernst and Werner, and Wilhelm have confusion, fear and defeat in their eyes. Scornful of the Germans for their five-year occupation of his country, and with the intent on punishing what is left of the Nazi regime, the bullish Sergeant Rasmussen (Roland Møller) marches his squad out on the dunes each day to prod for mines. This seemingly endless task quickly becomes carnage; and even Rasmussen grows conflicted in his feelings and intent toward his young prisoners.

*Land of Mine* is about the aftermath of war; but more so, about humanity. Zandvliet finds equally compelling material for his tale of comradeship, survival, and unexpected friendships. It questions the existence of the inherent evil that could exist in us all. But is it ever possible to show sympathy for those who represented the Nazi terror?

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

My intention was to reveal a story based on a historical subject matter that is rather shameful for Denmark. Most historians have so far avoided the subject, perhaps understandably so.

I was not assigning blame or pointing fingers; it was interesting to make a movie that doesn't always look at the Germans like monsters. It's the story of a military truck filled with young German boys, who were sacrificed in the aftermath of the Second World War. However, in the end, it is really a movie about humans. It takes you on a journey from hate to forgiveness. My intention was to create a relevant story and let the audience experience the power of fear, hope, dreams, friendships and the struggle for survival through this handful of characters.

The British offer of German POWs for demining operations placed the Danish government in a political dilemma. Declining the offer would have been a very unpopular decision both in the eyes of the Danish public and the surrounding allied nations. Denmark as a nation still had a somewhat blemished reputation following the war. And the British were the unspoiled heroes – the liberators of Denmark. Nevertheless, by going along with forcing young German POWs to demine the Danish coastline, it could be argued that Denmark committed a war crime.

I wanted this realistic drama to be set in an idyllic, beautiful universe distraught by rough concrete bunkers and daily mine detonations. The summer, the sand, the dunes, the warm weather and the water were a constant reminder of the idyllic life that once was, and the life that would once more rise out of the ashes. Along with the thousands of mines, explosions, death and sorrow, these elements hold us in the clutch of the aftermath of war.

Working with my wife, cinematographer Camilla Hjelm Knudsen, we were heavily influenced by the look of films from the 60s. It was about creating the right mix of poetry and darkness. The setting needed to be as beautiful as possible to cope with the horror you are also watching unfold on screen.

Most of the film takes place in daylight in contrast to the darkness shown through our characters. I am inspired by people such as David and Albert Maysles. The way the Maysles brothers filmed their subjects was so vulnerable and sensuous that you could not help feeling the presence of their characters. It is a beautiful and rare thing when that happens. Intellectual analysis never kicks in. This only happens when you are fully engaged with the human beings you are watching and in the feeling of the scene.

The idea was to create a sense of life. Not that I wanted the camera to draw attention to itself, but I did want the audience to constantly be able to follow the actors. Characters have always interested me more than plot.

We were lucky enough to have amazing casting directors who helped us avoid an 'actors look'. We cast all the boys for all the roles - no one knew which role they got and were selected for. I chose the ones that I felt were the most natural for the roles. These boys were new actors, amateurs if you will. The nice thing about that is you can model and mould them to what you

need, craft their performance to what you are looking for. This was even the case for the male lead role as it was Roland's first leading role in a film.

A general consensus exists among filmmakers that people have to be beautiful, in a sense where beauty means having no flaws. But I have always thought that each human being is most interesting, when you can see the human being's history. It is okay to know somebody's angst, see his scars and feel his demons. I was not looking to simply display a lot of ugliness, but I do think that the ugliness tells us more about who we are as human beings than anything else.

It is a very humane film that not only explores the beauty of darkness, but also tries to find out who these German boys were. We share their hopes and pray for their continued survival through this nightmare. We must believe that they once more can become human beings even though we disapprove of the violent regime of which they were a part. In a way we ask the question – "Is it even possible to show sympathy for individuals who represent the terror of the Nazi regime?"

They say that a great drama largely depends on the magnitude of the bad guy. As far as I am concerned, it is therefore the man who forces them to their deaths who is the true representative of the film and of the hate. Along with the boys, we therefore follow their keeper, the sergeant Carl. For Carl, the monsters transform into human beings.

For me, *Land of Mine* tells a human story, which is a largely unknown to the majority of Danes. It has been kept out of sight; conveniently forgotten; repressed. It is a film about revenge and forgiveness, about a group of boys forced to do penance on behalf of an entire nation.

## RESEARCH BEHIND THE FILM

The Geneva Convention of 1929 forbids forcing Prisoners of War to carry out hard labor or dangerous work. However, there is evidence that British and Danish commands deliberately changed the wording of the text from “prisoners of war” to “voluntarily surrendered enemy personnel” in order to sidestep the rules of the convention. Many of the German soldiers ordered to defuse more than two million mines along the Danish coastline were mere boys - only 15-18 years of age.

To this day, the events surrounding the demining of the Danish beaches are considered taboo in not only modern Danish history, but also European post-war history. The five-month demining process claimed more human lives than the entire length of German occupation in Denmark.

The idea of using German prisoners of war to carry out the dangerous demining task came from British command, but was carried out with no objections from the Danish administration. The Danish Brigade was in charge of supervising and handling the operation.

Historical facts:

- From 1942 to 1944 Nazi Germany built the so-called Atlantic Wall in anticipation of an Allied invasion from Great Britain - an extensive system of coastal defense and fortifications along the coast of continental Europe and Scandinavia. Landmines were planted along great swathes of the West Coast of Denmark. There were more landmines per square meter on the Danish west coast than any other location along the entire European coast. Hitler was convinced that the Allied invasion would come via the Danish west coast since it is the shortest route to Berlin.
- After the capitulation of Nazi Germany, the British liberation forces offered the Danish government the opportunity to enlist German POWs to defuse mines along the length of the Danish Western coastline.
- The German POWs were neither educated nor equipped for this task and many belonged to the so-called Volkssturm, a national militia set up by Hitler towards the end of the war to conscript those not already serving for the German forces. Many were very young or old. The youngest were 13 years old.
- To force German POWs to defuse mines was a violation of the 1929 Convention relating to the Treatment of Prisoners of War prior to the amendment to the Geneva Conventions of 1949. By calling the German POWs ‘voluntarily surrendered enemy personnel’ British and Danish commands bypassed the rules of the Convention.
- The work began on Saturday, May, 5 1945 and was completed on Thursday, October 1945.
- According to historian Thomas Tram Pedersen, the exact number of the losses will never be known due to the chaos of the first months of peace. There are discrepancies between

the Danish and German records.

- After the war more than 2,000 German POW's were forced to remove over 1.5 million landmines from the west coast of Denmark.
- The relationship between the German POWs and the local population was poor – the prize for five years of occupation under Nazi rule. There was no proper accommodation provided and food was constantly scarce.
- In 64 countries around the world, there are an estimated 110 million undetonated landmines still lodged in the ground.
- Since 1975, landmines have killed or maimed more than one million people.
- On average, 20 people die every day due to landmine blasts.
- Even with training, mine disposal experts expect that for every 5,000 mines cleared, one worker will be killed and two workers will be injured by accidental explosions.
- The only way to deactivate a landmine is by individual removal at a cost of US\$ 300–1000 per mine according to the United Nations.



## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

“We were focused on two practical paths throughout our development of the entire production framework. We wanted to make sure the film could be realized in a credible fashion, but at the same time, avoid most of the cumbersome production issues of a period film. This was something we took into consideration from the very beginning. Our approach was to use as few locations as possible, thus avoiding the big challenges regarding the historical setting,” explains producer Mikael Rieks.

The producers worked with the Oksbøl camp (NATO) under the Danish armed forces, where the events historically took place. “They were all completely on board and very positive about the project. From the get-go, we had nothing, but fantastic support for the story,” says Mikael Rieks about their collaboration with the Royal Danish Army. In their extensive research of the history of the west coast of Denmark, the location scouts only found a few possible locations – in an area with only few holiday homes and no wildlife preservation. Adding to this challenge was the fact that the beaches on the west coast are littered with old, worn-down German concrete bunkers and ‘pillboxes’, most of which have keeled over or are half submerged under water.

In addition, the producers spoke to several mine-clearing businesses around Europe. The Skallingen peninsula had in recent years undergone a complete sweep for mines. This operation was carried out by a Danish demining company, which proved very helpful in creating replica mines as well as providing a lot of military and technical equipment from the period such as minesweepers, military trucks, and jeeps.

The VFX were a combination of SFX and CGI, which required a great deal of preparation, also on location - explosions and stunts were fully storyboarded to ensure the team made the right choices. The fact that the production was working out of the Oksbøl Camp was an advantage in this regard. Thanks to their access to army experts on explosives and mines, combined with the achievements of visual effects team, stunt coordinators and CGI consultants, *Land of Mine* has a natural and authentic feel.

For a large part of the film, the spoken language is German. This was a challenging aspect relating to many facets of the production. Sound and editing were just two of these aspects. Director Martin Zandvliet took some advanced German lessons every week during pre-production. A vocal coach supervised the dialogue in German, but also the dialects of the boys. “It was important for the story that the boys did not come from the same region in Germany. The differences in dialect/local tongue was especially important for Sebastian and Helmut who incidentally both came from Hamburg but spoke in character very differently because one had a rich family background and the other came from a working class family,” explains German producer Malte Grunert.

The film was shot in six weeks. For most of the shoot, the story was told using a handheld steady camera.

## CAST BIOS

### **Roland Møller – Sgt. Rasmussen**

In just a few years, Roland Møller has become one of Denmark's most versatile talents. The 43-year-old rising star started his career in entertainment as a songwriter for the Danish rapper Jokeren before turning to acting in Tobias Lindholm and Michael Noer's 2010 prison drama *R* - a debut performance that earned Møller a Bodil nomination for Best Supporting Actor. He won in the same category for his performance in Tobias Lindholm's *A Hijacking*. In addition, Møller starred in Michael Noer's *Northwest* and Susanne Bier's *A Second Chance*. Sergeant Carl Leopold Rasmussen is Møller's first performance in a leading role.

### **Mikkel Boe Følsgaard – Captain Ebbe**

Mikkel Følsgaard studied at the National Theatre School, and went on to win the Best Actor Award at the Berlin Film Festival for his portrayal of King Christian VII in Nicolaj Arcel's 2012 Oscar-nominated film *A Royal Affair*. He has since gained acclaim for his role in the TV series *The Legacy*. Additional film credits include Frederikke Aspöck's *Rosita* and Kasper Barfoed's *Summer of 92*.

### **Louis Hofmann – Sebastian Schumann**

18-year-old Louis Hofmann's screen career started in 2009 with his role as Tom Sawyer, in the film of the same name, for which he won the Bunte New Faces Award. In 2015 he won the Bavarian Film Award for Best Newcomer for *Freistatt*, and can next be seen in *Alone in Berlin*, Vincent Perez' adaptation of Hans Fallada's international bestseller.

### **Joel Basman – Helmut Morbach**

Joel Basman started his career in 2004 as a cocky teenager in the weekly Swiss soap opera *Lüthi und Blanc*. In 2007 he played an autistic boy in Tobias Ineichen's *Jimmie*, and won the 2008 Shooting Star Award for his performance as a Russian teenager in *Luftibus* by Dominique de Rivaz. Basman went on to play the part of Bertel in the controversial German mini-series *Generation War*. Earlier this year he won the German Film Award for Best Supporting Actor for his performance in *When We Were Dreaming*.

### **Emil & Oskar Belton – Ernst & Werner Lessner**

*Land of Mine* marks 16 year old twin brothers Emil and Oskar Lessner's debut performances. They auditioned for the roles through casting director Simone Bär's nationwide casting process.

## CREW BIOS

### **Martin Zandvliet – Writer & Director**

Born in 1971 in Fredericia, Denmark, Martin Zandvliet started his film career as an editor, working on documentaries. His first film as a director, *Angels of Brooklyn*, won the Danish Film Award for Best Long Documentary and was selected for various festivals including Toronto and Nyon. Following several shorts as a writer-director, Zandvliet directed his first feature film in 2009, the acclaimed *Applause* starring Paprika Steen, and produced by Mikael Rieks, who also produced *Land of Mine*. His second feature film was *A Funny Man* starring Nikolaj Lie Kaas. Zandvliet will next direct an action film about the Kursk submarine disaster for Luc Besson's EuropaCorp.

### **Mikael Chr. Rieks - Producer**

Mikael Rieks is one of Denmark's most renowned producers. Born in 1969, he was educated at the Copenhagen Film and Media School. He started his producing-career at the Youth and Children department of The Danish Broadcasting Corporation and produced television hits such as *The Power of the Spirits*, *On the Edge of the World* and the Emmy nominated show *FC Nerds*, before switching in 2001 to feature films. While at Nordisk Film Production he produced the acclaimed *Ghosts of Cité Soleil*, *Karla's World* and *Overcoming*. In 2008 Rieks created the film company Koncern Film. One of its first productions was Martin Zandvliet's debut feature film *Applause*, followed by Zandvliet No. 1 box-office Danish hit *A Funny Man*. In 2012 Rieks returned to Nordisk Film with a number of prestigious projects. *Land of Mine* is Rieks and Zandvliet's third film together.

### **Malte Grunert – Producer**

Malte Grunert was born in 1967 in Berlin. After attending law school at the FU in Berlin, he started out in the film industry producing documentaries, before moving into TV drama working for various companies including Bavaria Film and CLT UFA. From 2006 until 2009, Grunert was head of the feature division at Studio Hamburg and went on to found Amusement Park Film in 2009. He has produced and co-produced 11 feature films to date, among them *Perfect Sense*, directed by David Mackenzie and starring Ewan McGregor and Eva Green. He also executive produced Mackenzie's "rock 'n roll romantic comedy" *Tonight you're mine*, filmed entirely on site at the T in the Park Festival. Most recently Grunert produced *A Most Wanted Man*, based on John Le Carré's novel and directed by Anton Corbijn, starring the late Philip Seymour Hoffman, Willem Dafoe and Rachel McAdams. He also co-produced Mike Leigh's *Mr. Turner*, which premiered in competition at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival. His next project is the British/German co-production *Remainder*, video artist Omer Fast's debut based on a novel by Tom McCarthy, starring Tom Sturridge.

### **Camilla Hjelm Knudsen – Cinematographer**

Camilla Hjelm Knudsen was born in 1974 in Denmark. After studying photography at the Danish School of Photography Fatamorgana, and New York's International Center of Photography (ICP), Knudsen studied cinematography at the National Danish Film School. One of her first movies as co-director and cinematographer was *Angels of Brooklyn*, for which she shared the Danish Film Award for Best Long Documentary with Martin Zandvliet, her husband. Her credits include Daniel Espinosa's *Outside Love* and Annette K. Olesen's 2008 *Little Soldier*, for which she won the Best Cinematography Award at the Valladolid International Film Festival. *Land of Mine* is her second collaboration with Martin Zandvliet.

### **Per Sandholt – Film Editor**

*LAND OF MINE* is Per Sandholt's third collaboration with Martin Zandvliet following *Applause* and *A Funny Man*. Sandholt's editing debut was on John Knattrup Jensen's short film *Street* (2003); he helped write and edit Nancy Montuori Stein's short *Stealing Innocence* (2003), and Asger Leth's *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* (2006). His other editing credits include Morten Hartz Kaplers controversial *AFR* (2007), *Go with Peace Jamil* by Omar Shargawis (2008) as well as the documentaries *Armadillo* (2010) and *From Haifa to Nørrebro* (2010).

### **Molly Malene Stensgaard – Film Editor**

Molly Malene Stensgaard was born in Copenhagen, where she graduated in film editing from the Danish Film School. She has worked on almost all of Lars von Trier's projects from the series *The Kingdom*, to *The Idiots*, *Dancer in the Dark*, *Dogville*, *Manderlay*, *The Boss of it all*, *Melancholia* and *Nymphomaniac*. From 2006 to 2010 she was commissioning editor for feature films at The Danish Film Institute, and was a member of the 2007 Berlin Film Festival's Jury.

### **Sune Martin – Film Composer**

Born in 1968, Sune Martin composed the music for two ballets at the Royal Danish Ballet in 2005 and 2006, and wrote the score for a 2007 documentary about David Lynch. Martin is a former member of the band Blue Foundation whose tracks were featured in films including *Miami Vice*, *Twilight* and Martin Zandvliet's *Applause and a Funny Man*.

### **Gitte Malling – Production Design**

Gitte Malling was born in Copenhagen in 1974. She graduated from The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 2006 and has since been working as art director and production designer on several Danish TV series, short and feature films. Malling debuted as production designer in 2007 on *Outside Love* and has since worked on productions such as *Take the Trash*, *Awakening*, *Love & Rage*. *LAND OF MINE* is Malling's second collaboration with Martin Zandvliet.

### **Stefanie Bieker – Costume Design**

Born 1963 in Cologne, Stefanie Bieker started her career at the Residenz Theatre in Munich. Following a Degree in Costume Design in Hamburg she worked as a costume designer for numerous television and film productions, including the WW2 drama *Lore* by Cate Shortland for which she was nominated for the German Film Award and Australian AACTA Award in 2013.

### **Simone Bär – Casting Germany**

Simone Bär founded the “CastingStudio” in 1990. Her extensive database and great talent for spotting ingenues has made her a much sought after casting agent for German and international productions. Bär was in charge of the German casting of *The Monuments Men*, *The Book Thief*, *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, *The Reader* and *A Most Wanted Man* among others as well as Michael Haneke’s *The White Ribbon* and Christian Petzold’s *Phoenix*. In 2002 Simone Bär received the German Film Award for Casting.

## **COMPANY PROFILES**

### **Nordisk Film Production A/S**

Nordisk Film, established in Denmark in 1906, is the oldest continuously active film studio in the world. Nordisk Film Production A/S is an independent film production company owned by Nordisk Film A/S which produces and co-produces feature films, animation films, short films, television series and TV documentaries for the Scandinavian and international market. Nordisk Film A/S, which is part of the Egmont Group, includes companies and divisions engaged in film distribution, post-production, production, cinemas, interactive and digital development. Across the Nordic region, Nordisk Film, is involved in more than a dozen feature films and TV-drama/-series a year; as well as a number of co-productions with other Nordic and European production companies. Among recent projects are the Oscar-nominated *Kon-Tiki* by Joachim Rønning and Espen Sandberg (2012), *The Team*, the European crime drama television series, *A War*, writer/director Tobias Lindholm’s follow-up to his success *A Hijacking* (2014), Michael Noer’s *Key, House, Mirror* (2015), and writer/director Martin Zandvliet’s international and domestic BO success *Land of Mine*.

### **Amusement Park Film**

Amusement Park Film was founded in 2009 by Malte Grunert and has offices in Berlin and Hamburg. Since its foundation Amusement Park produced nine feature films, including *A Most Wanted Man*, directed by Anton Corbijn (*Control*, *The American*), starring Philip Seymour Hoffman (*Capote*, *The Master*), Rachel McAdams (*Sherlock Holmes*) and Willem Dafoe (*Antichrist*) and *Perfect Sense*, directed by David Mackenzie, starring Ewan McGregor and Eva Green. In addition Amusement Park co-produced Mike Leigh’s *Mr Turner*. The current development slate includes new projects from directors David Mackenzie (*Hallam Foe*) and

Lone Scherfig (*One Day*), writers Purvis & Wade (*Skyfall*, *Spectre*) as well as international TV drama formats.

### **K5 International**

K5 International is a one-stop shop for producers. Film veterans Oliver Simon and Daniel Baur founded the dynamic and growing worldwide sales, financing and production company, which has the unique capability to green light feature films in collaboration with K5 Media Capital and K5 Film. This recently enabled K5 International to sell and co-finance the Bruce Willis sci-fi action film *Vice* produced by Emmett/Furla/Oasis Films.

The first film K5 International acquired was *The Visitor*, which earned Richard Jenkins an Oscar® Nomination for Best Actor. Among many titles on its slate are *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, directed by Mira Nair, starring Kate Hudson and Kiefer Sutherland; *Night Train to Lisbon* directed by Bille August with Jeremy Irons, Mélanie Laurent, Charlotte Rampling, Bruno Ganz and Christopher Lee; and *Get Low*, starring Robert Duvall, Bill Murray and Sissy Spacek. K5's most recent addition is Neil LaBute's *Dirty Weekend*, starring Matthew Broderick and Alice Eve.

K5 International also has a large catalogue of non-fiction feature films, including the Oscar® nominated *Cutie and The Boxer*; Sundance Audience Award winner *Buck*, and the acclaimed Harry Belafonte documentary *Sing Your Song*.