

The Germans declared Fort Stalin secured around 0700hrs, although some bunkers held out until 1500hrs. The assault had cost the 16th Infantry Regiment 32 killed, 136 wounded and two missing – about half the infantry committed. Virtually all the German infantry officers involved in the attack were casualties and the regimental adjutant was sent in to organize the defence on Stalin. Most of the Soviet garrison was dead, with only 20 captured. Although I/16th Infantry Regiment had only 91 combat-effective men left on the objective, Petrov made no attempt to recover Fort Stalin, which would prove to be a grave error.

## LOSSES MOUNT ON BOTH SIDES, 14–16 JUNE

With Fort Stalin captured and the centre of the Soviet defence in the northern area nearly broken, Hansen decided to switch focus and eliminate the threat to his left flank. While Fort Maxim Gorky I's 305mm guns had played little role in the current battle, the Soviet 95th Rifle Division had been particularly aggressive in counterattacking the flank of the 132nd Infantry Division on Haccius Ridge. Von Manstein was forced to reinforce the 132nd first with the 213th Infantry Regiment and then with two battalions of the 97th Infantry Regiment from the idle 46th Infantry Division at Kerch. One flaw in von Manstein's plan was that only a weak German covering force was left to hold the 3km front from the sea to the town of Belbek, which meant that the 95th Rifle Division in this sector was free to use its reserve battalions for counterattacks.

On 14 June, the 132nd Infantry Division attacked with two battalions of the 437th Infantry Regiment and succeeded in advancing about 300m south of Haccius Ridge. The next day, the 132nd attacked with five battalions and advanced to within 900m of Bastion I. Counterattacks by the 95th Rifle Division continued but were much weaker. On 16 June, the 132nd Infantry Division, now with eight infantry battalions on line, consolidated its hold on the area of the anti-tank ditch west of Haccius Ridge while an ad hoc force of pioneers and *Panzerjäger* began to clear out the Belbek River Valley. During this period of 14–17 June, LIV Corps focused on pulverizing the Soviet forces in Defensive Sector IV, while the 50th Infantry and the 4th Romanian Mountain Divisions slowly pushed the 25th and 345th Rifle Divisions back toward the Martynovski Ravine.

Petrov had few reserves to spare, but two battalions of the 7th Naval Infantry Brigade were sent to reinforce the 345th Rifle Division on 11 June. The 79th Naval Infantry Brigade was still in the line but had been reduced to only 35 per cent strength. By the time that Fort Stalin fell, the 345th Rifle Division's three rifle regiments defending the area between Forts Volga and Siberia were down to about 400 infantry each. The Soviet line was still relatively strong in Defensive Sector III, but Defensive Sector IV was on the verge of collapse. Blocking the way to Fort Maxim Gorky I were three battalions of the 95th Rifle Division and two battalions of the 7th Naval Infantry Brigade, a total of only 1,000 troops.

In the south, Fretter-Pico's offensive continued to expand the dent made in the Soviet lines on 13 June, with the 72nd and 170th Infantry Divisions advancing west another 1,300m on 14–15 June. On 16–17 June, Novikov finally decided to abandon the hotly contested Rose Hill and pulled his forces back toward the town of Kadykovka, north of Balaklava. Slowly, the Soviet

outer defences gave way and the 386th and 388th Rifle Divisions were forced back toward the Sapun Ridge. On 18 June, the German 72nd Reconnaissance Battalion under Major Karl Baake slipped through a gap in the Soviet lines and seized a hill known as the Eagle's Perch, which was on the southern approaches to the Sapun Ridge. Between 18 and 20 June, the Romanian 1st Mountain Division was finally able to seize North Nose, Sugar Loaf and the Denkmal Bridge, thereby clearing XXX Corps' right flank. Between 14 and 20 June, XXX Corps had suffered another 2,646 casualties and advanced 3km through the centre of the Soviet outer defences, destroying much of the 388th Rifle Division in the process. XXX Corps had captured about 1,100 prisoners in this period, but few heavy weapons. On 15 June, a battery of four Soviet 82mm mortars were captured along with 1,500 mortar bombs – a clear indication that the forward Soviet units were not running short of ammunition even after two weeks of battle. Furthermore, the Soviets still had a firm grip upon the coast at Balaklava and the Germans had not yet even reached the main defensive belt on Sapun Ridge.

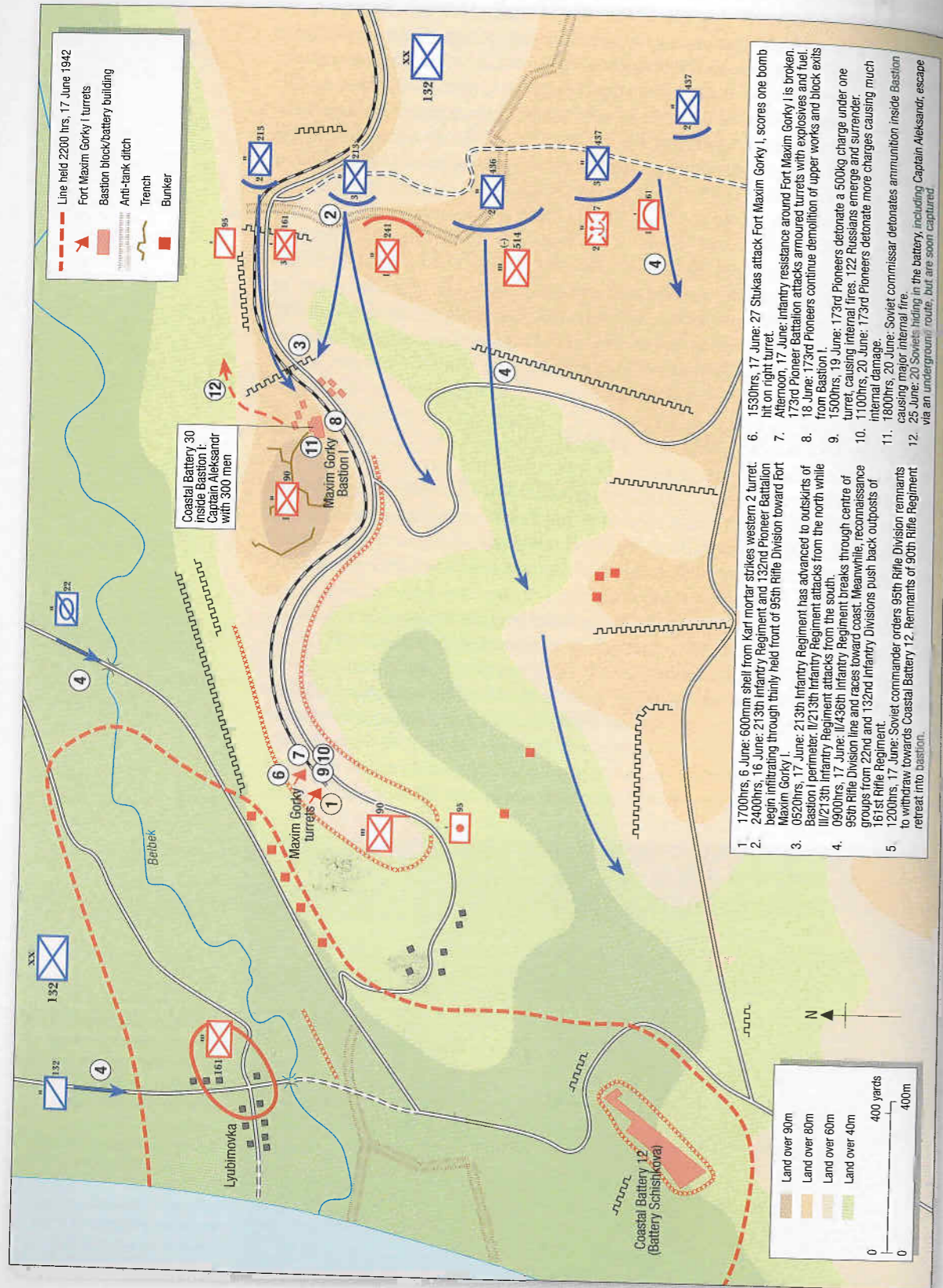
## BREAKTHROUGH, 17 JUNE

Around 0500hrs on 17 June, Hansen unleashed a full-scale assault by the reinforced 132nd Infantry Division against the 95th Rifle Division's thin defensive line around Fort Maxim Gorky I, while the 22nd and 24th Infantry Divisions advanced to smash through the centre of the Soviet defences around the train station. Part of the 24th Infantry Division had been brought over from the corps' left flank and inserted between the 132nd and 22nd Infantry Divisions; the infusion of new strength in this area allowed a major thrust toward Fort Molotov and the town of Bartenyevka. The 132nd Infantry Division also conducted a reinforced probe with its reconnaissance battalion on the coast toward the town of Lyubimovka and caught the thinned-out Soviet 161st Rifle Regiment by surprise. A massive artillery and continuous air attack barrage preceded all the attacks, which finally took its toll on Soviet morale. Hit along its entire front simultaneously, the 95th Rifle Division



A German pioneer team attacking a Soviet position with a Flammenwerfer 41 flamethrower. Each pioneer battalion in LIV Corps had 10–12 flamethrowers, and they were particularly effective at driving Soviet troops out of underground bunkers. The Flammenwerfer 41 weighed 22kg and it had enough fuel for ten seconds of use; it had a maximum range of 30m. (HITM Photo Research)

# The fight for Fort Maxim Gorky I, 17-25 June 1942



collapsed and by 0520hrs German infantry had achieved a breakthrough south of Fort Maxim Gorky I. The survivors of the 95th Rifle Division fell back along the coast to form a perimeter around Lyubimovka and Coastal Battery 12 – Fort Maxim Gorky I was left to its fate.

German infantry from the 436th and 437th Infantry Regiments were already behind Fort Maxim Gorky I by 0900hrs but it was not until the afternoon that any real effort to dealing with the fort. An attack by 27 Stukas at 1630hrs scored a direct hit on the western turret and the guns were now out of ammunition and silent. About 300 Soviet naval gunners and infantry stragglers from the 95th Rifle Division were holding out in Bastion I and the turret block, which were connected by an underground 600m-long tunnel. The 173rd Pioneer Battalion was assigned to dig out the garrison and it proceeded to demolish the turrets, but it could not gain access to the interior of the fort. Now began a three-day effort to reduce the fort, which was not resolved until 20 June.

Meanwhile in the centre, the 22nd and 24th Infantry Divisions had actually begun to move assault groups forward around 0330hrs and quickly penetrated the weak Soviet line around the train station. The 31st Infantry Regiment attacked a Soviet outpost on a hill position known as the Annaberg that blocked the Harbour Road down to Severnaya Bay. For the first time, the Germans used six B IV remote-control demolition vehicles against the trenches and bunkers on the Annaberg, but with unimpressive results. One B IV exploded prematurely, killing its handlers, and two others were disabled in a minefield. Two PzKpff III control tanks were also destroyed by Soviet anti-tank fire. Only two of six B IVs actually reached the Soviet trenches, destroying a couple of timber bunkers. Despite this inauspicious start, the two infantry battalions of the 31st Infantry Regiment soon took the Annaberg and pressed on to take Fort Siberia by surprise, capturing it by 0510hrs. Once dawn broke, the 306th Army Artillery Command massed three *Nebelwerfer* battalions from the 1st Heavy Mortar Regiment to provide the preparation barrage for the 24th Infantry Division and the multiple rocket launchers did great damage to the Soviet forward infantry positions. Von Tettau attacked with the 31st and 102nd Infantry Regiments, supported by two assault gun batteries with 19 StuG IIIs and two Panzer companies from the 300th Panzer Battalion with PzKpff III tanks. The 24th Infantry Division's attack achieved rapid success and overran Fort Tscheka, Fort GPU at 0700hrs, then Fort Molotov at 0745hrs, and soon reached the outskirts of Bartenyevka. On von Tettau's left flank, the 22nd Infantry Division used its position on Fort Stalin and Fort Siberia to put pressure on the Soviet defences in this area and succeeded in capturing Fort Volga by 1930hrs. Von Richthofen's Fliegerkorps



A German pioneer cuts through the Soviet barbed wire under cover of smoke shells. German assault troops had to quickly break through the obstacle belt of wire and mines before the Soviets caught them in their 'kill zone'. (Anne S. K. Brown)



#### GERMAN ASSAULT PIONEERS DEMOLISH COASTAL BATTERY 30 (FORT MAXIM GORKY I), 18 JUNE 1942

In the spring of 1914, the Russian Navy began preparation of a site for a new coastal battery on a ridgeline on the south side of the Belbek River, but World War I interrupted the work. After the end of that war and the subsequent Russian Civil War, the new Communist regime decided to complete the project. Coastal Battery 30 was completed in 1933 and consisted of two twin 305mm gun turrets mounted atop a buried concrete casemate that was connected by a tunnel to a reinforced battery control centre (later dubbed 'Bastion I' by the Germans).

During the siege of Sevastopol, Coastal Battery 30, under the command of Captain Georg Aleksandr, fired 1,238 305mm shells during the fighting in November–December 1941. By the spring of 1942, the gun barrels were worn out and ammunition was scarce, so the battery fired very sparingly in the final months of the siege. Much of the German bombardment that began on 2 June focused on this battery and on 6 June Turret No. 2 was knocked out by a 600mm concrete-piercing shell from one of the Karl mortars. The battery was hit by eight 800mm rounds from 'Dora', as well as numerous 305mm and 240mm rounds and multiple heavy bombs dropped by Stukas. Although the battery was badly damaged, only 40 of its 300-man garrison were killed or wounded by the bombardment. By 17 June, German infantry from Oberst Otto Hitzfeld's 213th Infantry Regiment had seized the area around the battery, trapping 89 men from the battery and about 130 stragglers from other units in the underground casemates. Hitzfeld called upon the

pioneers from the 1st Company, 173rd Pioneer Battalion, to demolish the battery and smoke out the trapped Soviet troops.

This scene depicts the German engineers of the 1st Company, 173rd Pioneer Battalion, attempting to burn out the trapped Soviet garrison from the two gun turrets on the afternoon of 18 June. The area around the turrets is scarred by multiple large shell craters from the German bombardment, including craters from 'Dora' and the Karl mortars (1). Small teams of pioneers move forward using the craters and one team is atop Turret No. 1, attaching two large fuel drums and numerous 30kg satchel charges (2). Meanwhile, a second team is running for cover (3) as the roof of Turret No. 2 explodes in a sheet of flames (4). The pioneers poured gasoline and flammol into the resulting cracks in the 200mm-thick turret roofs and ignited it with flare pistols. Although the explosions caused some internal fires, the Soviet garrison remained inside and the German pioneers could not force their way into the battery. It was not until 1500hrs on 19 June that some 115 Soviets emerged from one of the exits and surrendered, but Captain Aleksandr remained inside with about 100 others. The German pioneers spent another three days attempting to demolish Coastal Battery 30, finally destroying the turrets with 500kg charges. Most of the remaining Soviet garrison surrendered, but Captain Aleksandr and five gunners hid in the underground casemate for several more days and then escaped using an underground draining duct on 24 June. Aleksandr was captured on the morning of 26 June.

Once the North Fort had fallen, Petrov ordered the evacuation of the remaining Soviet troops from the north side of Severnaya Bay, but there were few small boats available and German artillery destroyed those that attempted to make the trip. Instead, most Soviet troops from Defensive Sector IV huddled in the tunnels and caves along the edge of the bay near White Cliff, with their ammunition virtually expended. The 22nd and 24th Infantry Divisions mopped up most of these survivors on 22–23 June. About 800 Soviet wounded waited in buildings near Fort Konstantinovsky, at the north entrance to Severnaya Bay. Fort Konstantinovsky was another relic of the late 19th century and it had been badly damaged by repeated Stuka attacks early in the siege. A group of 74 Soviet naval infantrymen under Captain Yevseyev conducted a last stand in Fort Konstantinovsky until their ammunition was exhausted; 26 were captured by the 24th Infantry Division when the fort fell on the morning of 23 June.

The remnants of Defensive Sector III held a tenuous 4km-long line on the wooded hilltops north of the Martynovski Ravine. Although the 138th Naval Infantry Brigade and the remnants of 2nd Perekop Regiment had a firm defence around the Jewish Nose hill on the east end of the bay, the right flank held by the 25th Rifle Division was virtually dangling in the air, with no good defensive positions. Having finished off Defensive Sector IV, Hansen now moved to put paid to Defensive Sector III. German infantry losses were now severe, with the fighting strength of the three battalions in the 65th Infantry Regiment reduced to about 125 men each, while the 50th Infantry Division's regiments were reduced to about 600 men each. However, the Germans gained an intelligence windfall when two platoon leaders from the 138th Naval Infantry Brigade deserted on 21 June and told the Germans the complete layout of Soviet defences in the area. At 0530hrs on 22 June, the 22nd and 50th Infantry Divisions, as well as a *Kampfgruppe* built around the 132nd Infantry Division's reconnaissance battalion, the 190th Assault Gun Battalion and part of the 72nd Infantry Regiment, 46th Infantry Division, attacked and slowly began pushing the Soviet line back. The Germans employed their favourite tactic, identifying the thinly held boundary between the 25th Rifle Division's 54th and 287th Rifle Regiments, pounding the boundary area with



Soviet naval infantry counterattacking across rocky ground. Note the mix of weapons: the sailor in the foreground is armed with an SVT-40 semi-automatic rifle, the one behind him has a DP light machine gun, while others have Mosin-Nagant bolt action rifles and PPSch-41 sub-machine guns. The Soviets tended to attack in larger groups, often resulting in heavier casualties. (Author's collection)