One of the strongest fortifications defending the Soviet naval base of Sevastopol on the Crimea during the seven-month German siege of the city was Battery No. 30, known to the Germans as Maxim Gorkii I. Its powerful 305mm guns battered by super-heavy artillery and aerial bombardment, it was finally captured in a frontal assault in June 1942. Rebuilt and modernised after the war, the battery is still an active military installation of the Russian army today.

BATTERY MAXIM GORKII I

By Svein Wiiger Olsen

The natural harbour of Sevastopol on the Crimea has been the major operational base of the Russian and Soviet Black Sea Fleet since 1804. Due to its importance, the area was heavily fortified and during the Crimean War of 1854-56 Sevastopol was under siege by the Allied armies for 349 days. In the period between the end of that war and the outbreak of the First World War, the Russians repaired and improved the defences. Among those taken under construction were two heavy coast batteries known as Battery Nos. 25 and 26, each to be armed with four 305mm/52 guns. The construction of the two 305mm batteries began in 1912 but was interrupted by the 1914-18 war and not completed until 1933-34. By then the designation of the batteries had been changed, Battery Nos. 25 and 26 becoming Battery Nos. 35 and 30 respectively. The former lay on the Khersones peninsula some ten kilometres south-west of the city, the latter some five kilometres north of Sevastopol near the Belbek river.

The 305mm batteries were among the most modern coast batteries in the world. Each consisted of two twin-gun turrets which, although primarily designed for coast defence, could traverse 360 degrees and were able to fire on inland targets. The guns were the 305mm/52 pieces designed in 1907 by the Obukovskii Works in Petrograd (St Petersburg), originally intended as the main armament for Russian battleships. (Four similar guns were captured by the Germans in Norway in April 1940 and emplaced as Battery Mirus on Guernsey - see *The War in the Channel Islands Then and Now*.)

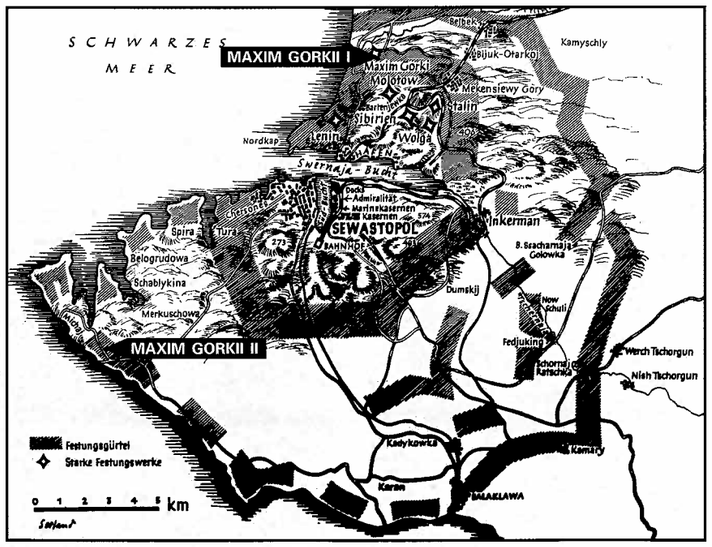
According to Russian sources, the Russian Navy ordered 198 of this type of gun of which 138 — manufactured at two Petrograd gun factories: the Obukovskii (later Putilovski) and the Metallicheskii Works — had been delivered by the time the Revolution took place in 1917. In addition, 36 guns were ordered by the War Council for coast-defence purposes. All but one of these were delivered. During the Soviet period, no new guns were manufactured, only outstanding work on those already begun being completed. In 1921, 14 guns were handed over and a further 29 between 1923 and 1930.

The guns ordered for coast-defence purposes were intended for both single-gun installations and two-gun turrets. Of the 35 delivered, 28 are known to have been deployed as follows:

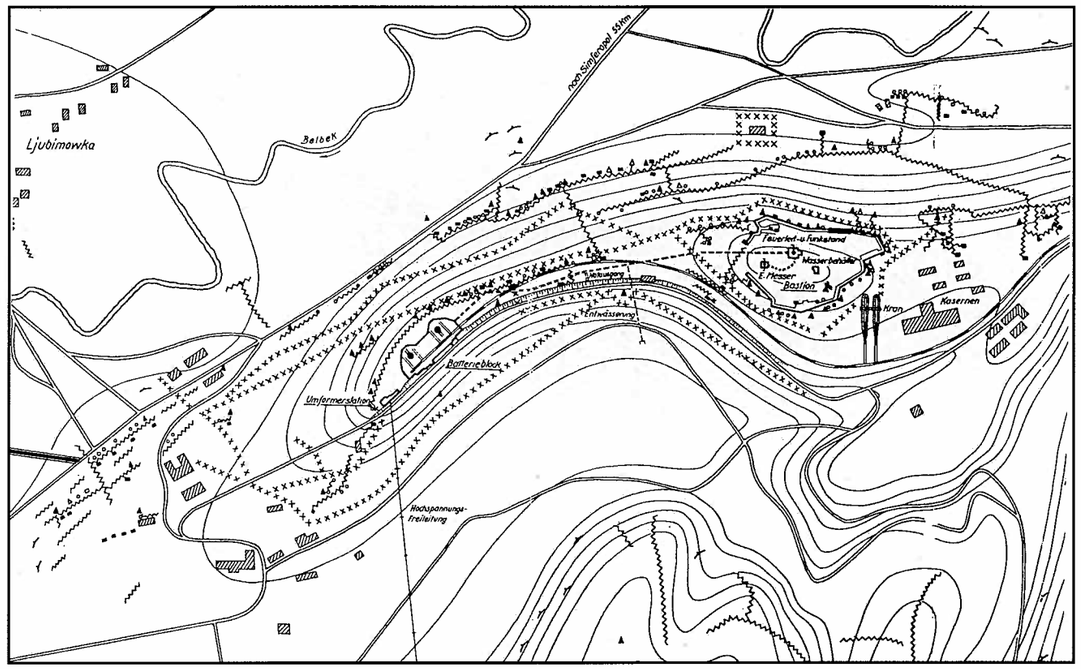
Fortress	*Guns*	*Mountings*	*Completed*
Krasnaya Gorka	4	Single-guns	1913
Krasnaya Gorka	4	Two-gun turrets	1916
Ino	4	Single-guns	1913
Ino	4	Two-gun turrets	1916
Sevastopol	8	Two-gun turrets	1933/34
Ust'-Dvinsk	4	Two-gun turrets	?

During the First World War, 11 additional single-gun mountings were delivered.

Batteries Nos. 30 and 35 both saw their most-important action in the Second World War defending Sevastopol, not against attacks from the sea but against land attack during the eight-month siege of the city by Generaloberst Erich von Manstein's 11. Armee. The Germans had their own code-names for the city's main defences, and they referred to Batteries Nos. 30 and 35 as 'Maxim Gorkii I' and 'Maxim Gorkii II' respectively.



Contemporary German map of Sevastopol, showing the Soviet inner and outer defensive rings and their main fortifications — with the German code-names for them: 'Lenin', 'Stalin', 'Molotow', 'Wolga', 'Siberien' and 'Maxim Gorkii' (i.e Maxim Gorkii I — we have added Maxim Gorkii II, the other 305mm battery defending Sevastopol, located on the Cape Gersones peninsula, south-west of the city). (NIOD)



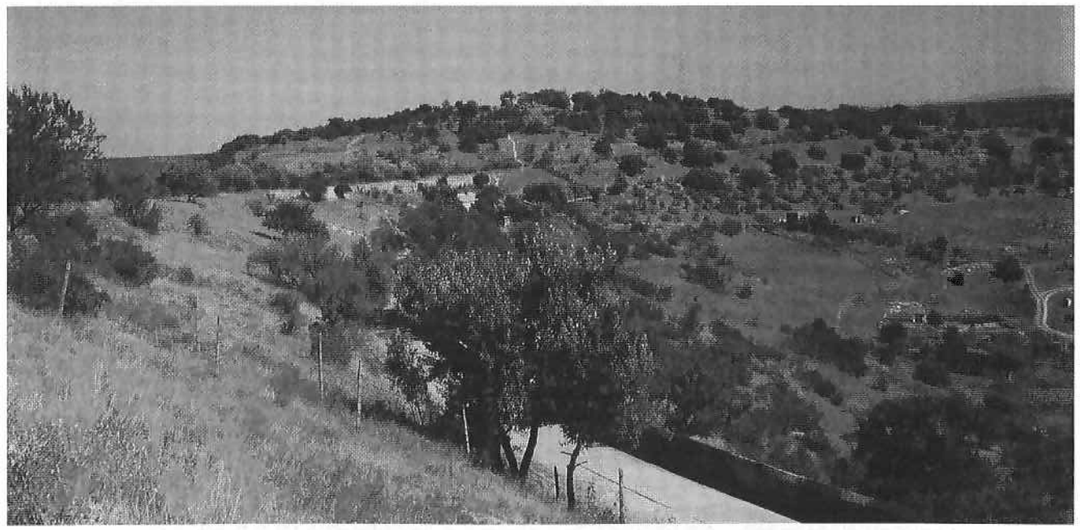
Layout of the Maxim Gorkii I battery. The gun-turret block (Batterieblock) on the left is connected to the fire-control bunker (Feuerleit- und Funkstand), right, by a 600-metre-long underground tunnel (the dotted line). The Germans saw the fire-direction centre as a separate fortification and referred to it as 'The Bastion'. This plan comes from an official German report on foreign fortifications, prepared by the OKW in 1943.

Battery No. 30, commanded by Major Alexander, fired its first mission against the approaching Wehrmacht on October 30, 1941, its long-range guns then and later interfering with the German supply lines through the Belbek valley and the Kamyschly gorge.

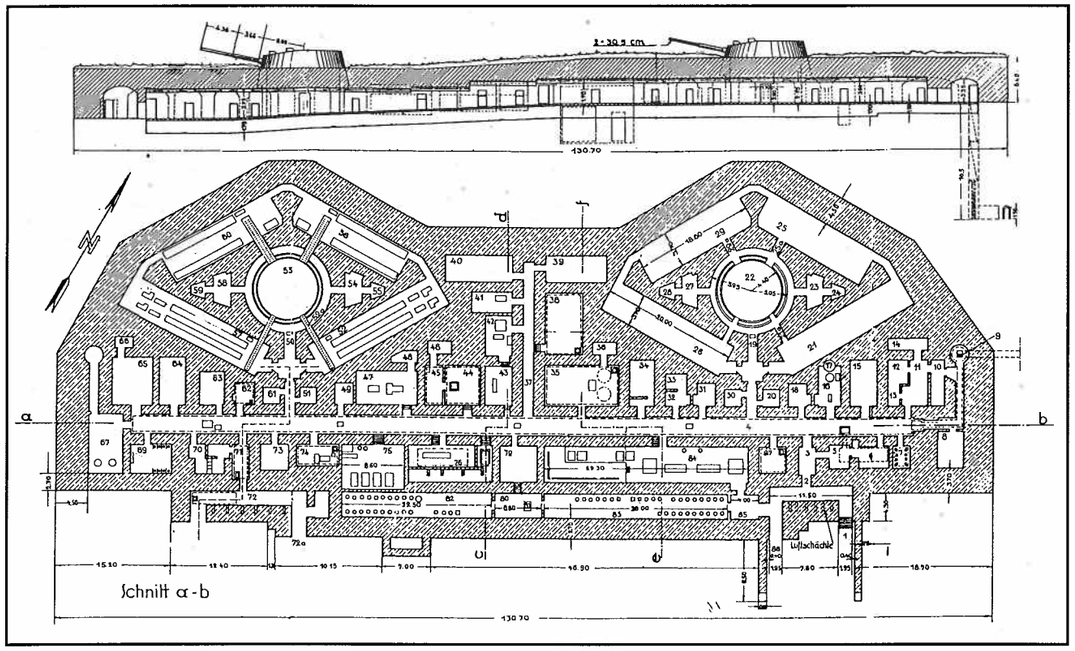
During the first German assault on the city, which lasted from December 17-31, 1941, the battery supported the defence with direct fire, annihilating German troops advancing on the heights across the Belbek valley. The first German attacks on the battery itself occurred on December 29, their first objective being the battery's observation and fire-control bunker 600 metres to the east — a fortification which the Germans called 'the Bastion'. The attack, by Infanterie-Regiment 65 of the 22. Infanterie-Division, failed with heavy losses to the attacker.

With the Soviet amphibious landings in the German rear at Kerch on December 27 and Feodosia on the 29th — a major counter-offensive with which Stalin aimed to recapture the Crimea — the attack on Sevastopol was temporarily called off. Forced to withdraw divisions from Sevastopol to cope with the Soviet counter-strokes further east, the 11. Armee settled down to begin a siege of the encircled city.

The Soviets used the winter respite to improve the city's defences and bring in new troops and supplies. In January 1942, they replaced all four of Battery No. 30's worn-out gun barrels with new ones, each of them having fired some 430-450 shots since 1934, far outlasting the prescribed maximum of 205.



The view today, looking from the turret block to the hill on which lies the Bastion — still the battery's fire-direction centre today. The latter is strictly off limits to visitors, hence no photographs of this heavily embattled position. The embankment of the railway that serviced the turret block can be seen curving towards the camera between the road and the hill.



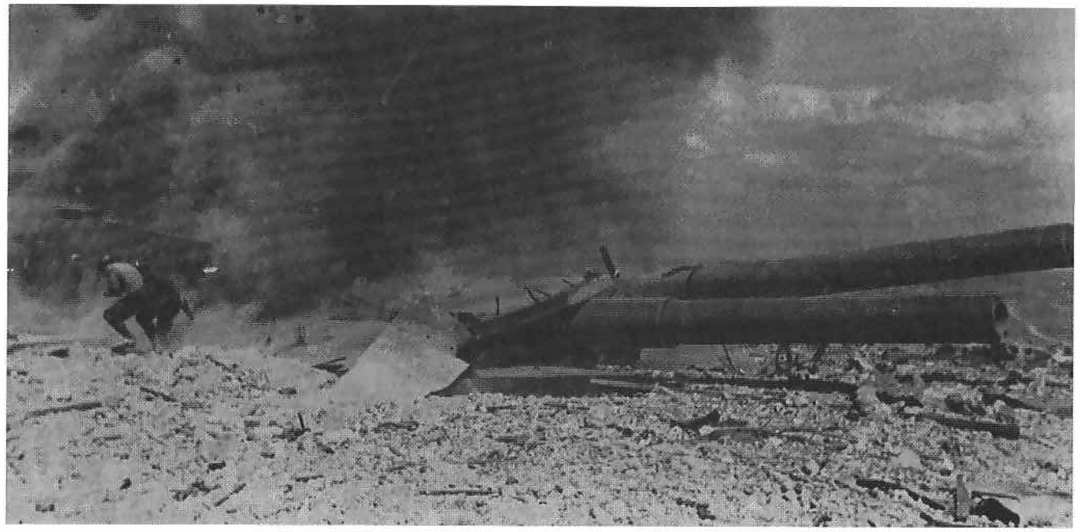
Plan of the gun-turret block. Each turret was surrounded by four ammunition storage rooms. Command post, communication room, generator room, heating, crew billets, kitchen, and other rooms were along a central corridor, at the eastern end of which was an elevator that led down to the tunnel connecting the block with the fire-control bunker. The block's two entrances were in the southern facade. Another plan from the official German pamphlet on foreign fortifications issued in 1943.

The second attack on Sevastopol — Unternehmen 'Storfang' — began on June 2, 1942, with a five-day preparatory shelling by massed artillery. With 1,300 guns along a front line of 35 kilometres, this represented the largest German artillery concentration of the entire war. Among the batteries firing at Maxim Gorkii I were some of the heaviest guns in the world: two 30,5cm M1 mortars, two 60cm Karl self-propelled mortars (named *Thor* and *Odin*) and the 80cm Dora railway gun — the largest-calibre gun ever produced. Between June 6-17, 1942, these beasts hurled a combined total of 750 rounds at the battery. On June 6, one of the Karl mortars scored a hit on the western turret, which knocked out one gun completely and partly disabled the other.

The infantry attack on Sevastopol began on June 7, the main effort being in the north, the sector defended by Battery No. 30, where the only good road and railway line led into the city. The LIV. Armeekorps attacked with four divisions, Maxim Gorkii I and the Bastion being objectives of the 132. Infanterie-Division. Inching forward, the Germans suffered heavy losses against the tenacious Soviet defenders. A first attack on the Bastion by the 132. Division on the 11th was cut to pieces by Soviet flak guns still holding the Belbek valley to the right rear. While the 132. Division battled to secure that flank, Infanterie-Regiment 213 (detached from the 73. Infanterie-Division) took over the Bastion sector.

On the 17th, after several failed attempts, Regiment 213 finally fought its way into the Bastion. While they held the ground, assault engineers of Pionier-Bataillon 132 (with the attached 1. Kompanie of Pionier-Bataillon 173) under Major Roettig proceeded to systematically blow up the position's concrete bunkers, dug-outs, and other fortifications. The Soviets counter-attacked and reoccupied part of the Bastion but, with help from the assault engineers, Regiment 213 managed to drive them out again.

By June 17, 1942, the German attackers had fought their way close enough to the battery block for assault engineers of Pionier-Bataillon 173 to launch the final assault. Here, two of them have crept to within yards of the eastern gun turret. A few hours earlier, a Stuka bomb had hit this turret knocking out both guns. The assault engineers finished the job by throwing in demolition charges to eliminate the defenders inside. (NIOD)



June 18, and the same turret is being 'smoked out'. A spectacular picture taken by German PK photographer Augustin. (NIOD)

Now, the Germans prepared for the final attack on Maxim Gorkii I itself. To pave the way, the turret block was again subjected to heavy shelling, including another five 80cm rounds from Dora, and dive-bombing attacks by some 20 Stukas. One bomb hit the intact eastern turret, putting both its 305mm guns out of action but the battery garrison prepared to fight on with small arms.

At 1430 hours, III. Bataillon of Infanterie-Regiment 132 (reduced to 90 men) and 1. Kompanie of Pionier-Bataillon 173 (a mere 48 men) began the attack on the turret block, setting out from the Bastion. Advancing under strong machine-gun and mortar fire, by 1515 the infantry had reached a position 400 metres from the turrets. Now it was the turn of the assault engineers. Crawling forward from one bomb crater to another, six-man teams under Leutnant Bacherl got close enough to throw in demolition charges and hand-grenades through the gaps in the turrets, eliminating the defenders or driving them deeper inside. With another charge, they disabled the last intact gun in the western turret. All four of the battery's 305mm guns were now silent. Since June 7, they had fired 700 rounds in support of the Soviet defence. German losses on the 17th were heavy: the assault engineers alone had lost seven men killed and 47 wounded.

Although it was now hopelessly cut off and cooped up in the battery's interior, the Soviet garrison refused to surrender. As he did not know the precise layout of the underground installation, the German engineer company commander, Oberleutnant Strobel, judged an attack into the fortress block too risky, so he decided to smoke and burn the defenders out.

Early next day (June 18), his men blew a one-metre gap in the gun platform of the western turret. Next, they poured 300 litres of petrol through the hole, igniting it with a flare. The resulting fire caused a huge explosion inside, probably the gunpowder charges blowing up, which led to thick clouds of smoke billowing up from the turret. Two Russians, completely soot-covered and with grievous burns, emerged from one of the entrances to give themselves up. Under interrogation they said the whole garrison wanted to surrender but was refrained from doing so at gunpoint by political commissars.

Pouring fuel in the other, eastern turret was impossible as open fires were already burning near it, so instead the German engineers lowered drums filled with fuel on to the gun platform and ignited them with demolition charges. The result was unsatisfactory, as the burning fuel did not seep deep enough into the lower rooms and harmlessly burned itself out.

Correctly suspecting that an underground tunnel connected the turret block with the fire-control bunker, the Germans meanwhile closed that escape route by blocking the latter's exit with heavy rocks.

On the 19th, the engineers placed 500kg of explosive six metres below the western gun platform. Its detonation hurled the armoured roof of the turret five metres away, lifted one of the gun barrels from its cradle putting it at a 45-degree angle upwards, and left the entire turret askew. Shortly after, seven Russian soldiers came out to surrender. A little later, as the demolitions continued, a Caucasian who spoke a little German emerged and offered the surrender of part of the garrison. After a promise that they would not be shot, 117 Soviet soldiers, including two lieutenants, came out — all totally blackened, some with serious burn wounds. According to them, some 114 others, including a major, a commissar, several officers, six medical nurses and one child, remained inside — about half of them wounded, half of them dead. According to the prisoners, the wave of detonations had blown open all interior doors although the emergency lighting inside still functioned as did the underground telephone line with headquarters in Sevastopol.

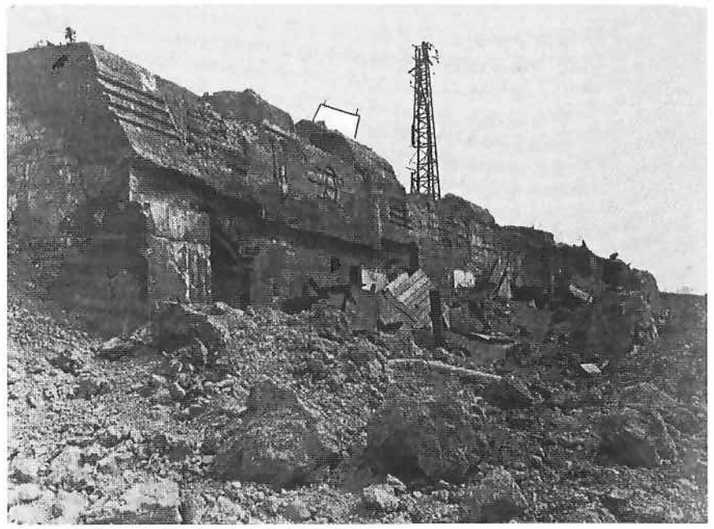
Looking from the shattered lower (western) turret towards the upper (eastern) turret. On June 6, one of the German giant 60cm Karl mortars had scored a direct hit on the western turret, which knocked out one of its guns and partly disabled the other. On June 17, the assault engineers neutralised the second gun by throwing a demolition charge into the turret. The left-hand barrel ended up at a 45-degree angle when the Germans detonated 500kg of explosives underneath the gun platform on the 19th. The landscape around the battery shows the effect of the several days of preparatory bombardment by artillery and Stukas. Picture by PK photographer Rauchvetter. (NIOD)

Next day, the Germans continued their efforts to smoke out the remaining Russians. As the engineers were piling up explosives 13 metres below the gun platforms — 230kg in each turret — and making ready fuel for pouring in the hoped-for gaps, the Russians detonated a 'counter-explosion' from deeper down in the western turret which ignited the fuel and blew up the Germans' own charges there. One engineer officer was killed and three other men injured, two of them fatally. The 230kg of explosive in the eastern turret was ignited as planned, which started a fire and produced much smoke. At 1800 hours, a violent knocking and hammering was heard at the eastern entrance door, but a call to surrender shouted by one of the Russian prisoners was answered with rifle fire.

Early on the 21st, two utterly blackened Russians emerged from the western exit. They declared that the upper storeys of the fortification were still afire; that some 120 soldiers, including the officers, the women and the child had burned to death or been suffocated; and that they had wanted to surrender earlier but been prevented from opening the doors by gun-fire from within.

Fires and smoke continued to billow from the gun turrets and entrance doors all through the 22nd. That evening, Pionier-Bataillon 173 handed over the beleaguered site to 3. Kompanie of Pionier-Bataillon 24. The operation to clean out the battery's interior continued for another few days, the last Russian soldiers not surrendering until the 26th. The battery commander, Captain Alexander, (according to German reports) was found wearing civilian clothes and hiding arms under it and, after a short interrogation, was shot. (According to the official Soviet propaganda version, he was betrayed to the Germans by Tatar collaborators and held imprisoned at Simferopol until 1944, when the Germans executed him just as the Red Army was reconquering the Crimea.)

The battle for Sevastopol continued for another three weeks, the last Soviet units not surrendering until July 12. Battery No. 30's twin battery, No. 35 (Maxim Gorkii II), fought on until July 2, when it was blown up by its crew. The Germans occupied the destroyed site a week later.



Rocks and debris obstruct the entrances to the battery block. With all guns silenced, and their escape route via the tunnel blocked by the Germans, the 230-strong Russian garrison was bottled up inside the fortification. Those wanting to surrender were kept from doing so at gunpoint by political commissars, and it was three days before they came out. By then, half the garrison was dead. Picture by PK photographer Horter. (NIOD)

The gun casemate of Maxim Gorkii I was deeply entrenched in the rock and its concrete walls were several metres thick. Another picture by PK photographer Rauchvetter. (NIOD)

After the battle, the assault engineers look down from the roof of the battery block. This picture was taken by an SS-PK photographer, Gayk. (NIOD)

The fighting over, officers and men inspect the powerful guns of the eastern turret. Picture by PK photographer Roßbach. (NIOD)

Unlike many countries, the Soviet Union did not abandon coast artillery at the end of World War II. In 1948 the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union decided to restore Battery No. 30 and the armament chosen came from a battleship which had lain in store for more than ten years.

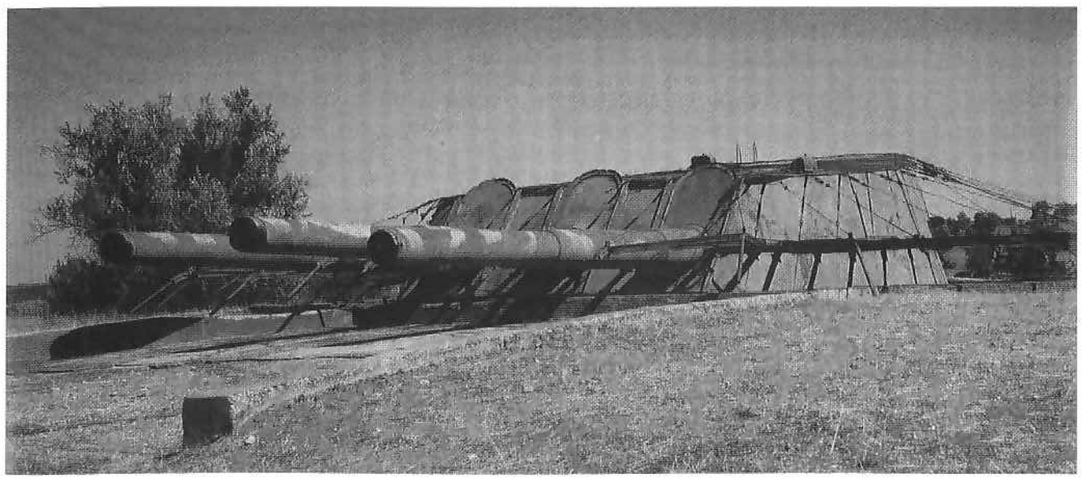
Prior to the 1917 Revolution, the Russians had constructed seven battleships of the Gangut and Imperiatritsa Mariya classes, each armed with 12 305mm/52 guns in four three-gun turrets. One of these battleships, the *Poltava* of the Gangut class, survived the First World War but was mothballed at the Admiralty Yard at Petrograd in late 1918. In May 1919 the vessel (renamed the *Frunze*) was brought back into service when she fired 25 rounds from each gun of two turrets to shell the counter-revolutionary White forces led by Marshal Yudenich.

In November of that year, a fire broke out in a boiler room, burning for 15 hours and damaging the ship so badly that she was found to be not worth repairing. Six years later it was decided to disarm her and the four three-gun turrets were removed and put into storage. Two of them were later installed on Russky Island not far from Vladivostok in Battery No. 981, the first coming into service in 1933 and the second in 1934.

At the end of the Winter War between the Soviet Union and Finland in 1939-40, the Russians occupied the Hangö area in southern Finland, and it was here that they planned to install the two remaining turrets from the *Poltava*. However, the work had not started when the Continuation War between Finland and the Soviet Union broke out in June 1941. Now, after World War II, the two turrets were to be used to rebuild Battery No. 30 at Sevastopol.

The battery was restored between 1950 and 1952 and brought into service in 1954. The new construction consisted of the main battery position where the two turrets were installed and the original fire-control post 600 metres to the east. The basic structure and layout of the main battery block remained the same as the original but the thickness of the concrete was increased to between five and six metres. In addition, the surrounding land was raised and relandscaped so that now the ammunition store is approximately 25 metres below ground compared to the seven metres when the battery was originally constructed. The main battery block, measuring 150 x 350 metres, contains the accommodation and logistics for the crew and all necessary services such as power, communication, workshops, storage and ammunition. Each turret has two shell and two air-conditioned cartridge magazines.

The original Russian nomenclature of the turrets was MB-3-12 but after modernisation in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the installations received the designation MB-3-12FM. The most important change was to increase the elevation from +25 degrees to +40 degrees which obviously improved the range of the guns. The guns in the turrets were manufactured between 1911 and 1917 and the barrels relined between 1940 and 1942. From outside, the turret can be entered through a hatch at the rear and until recently they were covered in camouflage netting.



The eastern turret today, a nice comparison showing the main difference between the 'old' and the 'new' battery: although the type of gun — 305mm/52 M1910-1914 — is still the same, the present-day MB-3-12FM turret mounts three instead of two of them, and allows for a higher gun elevation too. Note the scaffolding for camouflage netting around the turret.

Today, visitors enter the block on the east side. After passing through a gas lock and heavy armoured doors, one reaches the central aisle some 120 metres long. The interior resembles a warship with steel doors painted grey.

The shell stores are impressive with hundreds of live rounds stacked on shelves. These shells are moved by a gravity conveyor to each turret through a secure hatch in the bulkhead. The propellant charges arrive from the opposite side. The shells and the charges are then loaded into the same hoist and raised up to the loading compartment.

The fire-control centre is located east of the main battery with which it is still connected through the 600-metres-long tunnel. When the battery was restored, the fire control was also modernised and gun-laying radar added in 1953.

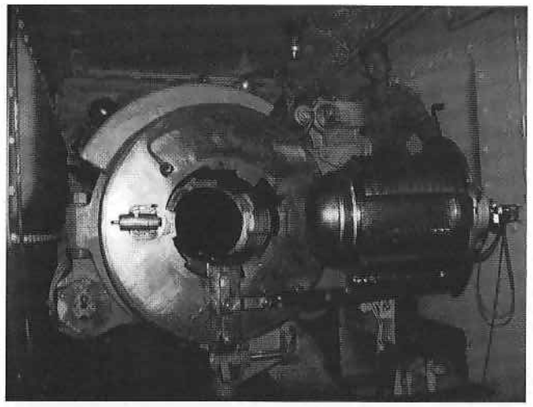
The designation of this battery and of the unit holding it has changed several times: from Battery No. 26 to Battery No. 30; and from the 3rd Battalion of the 346th Coast Defence Missile and Artillery Regiment to the 459th Independent Turret Artillery Battalion of the 951st Coast Defence Regiment.

A small museum has been established in the main battery block commemorating the history of the battery and the siege of Sevastopol in 1942.

When the Ukraine gained its independence from Russia in 1991, Battery Maxim Gorkii I became one of the Russian military installations on foreign soil, still looked after by a Russian care and maintainance crew. However, the Russians and Ukrainians are discussing the future of the battery and the possibility of preserving it permanently as a military museum. (The two three-gun turrets of Battery No. 981 at Vladivostok have been given up but remain in situ.)

Even though Battery Maxim Gorkii I is still a military installation it is now possible for organised groups to visit the battery with special permission from the military authorities.

The entrance to the gun casemate as it is today. Compare with the picture at the top of page 50. The exterior facade looks different because an extra layer of concrete was added in 1950-52 to increase strength. All present-day photos by Svein Wiiger Olsen.



The 305mm/52 gun has a screw-type breech block.

305mm/52 M1910-1914 GUN

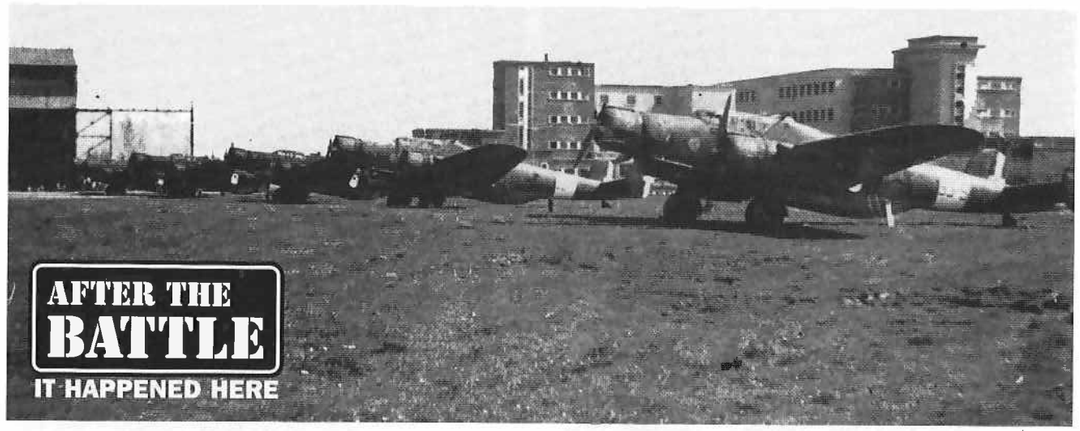
Bore:	305mm
Weight incl. breech mechanism:	51.85 tons
Length overall:	15900mm
Length bore:	15419mm
Length rifling:	12912mm
Length chamber:	2391,5mm
Grooves:	72
Weight projectile:	470,9 kg
Propellant charge:	157 kg
Muzzle velocity:	762 m/s
Breech mechanism:	Screw breech block
Rate of fire per barrel:	1 round in 40 seconds

MB-3-12FM TURRET DATA

Weight:	Approx. 709 tons
Train:	360 degrees
Elevation range:	-3 degrees/+40 degrees
Turret shield face:	203mm
Turret shield side:	150mm
Turret shield roof:	76mm
Turret shield rear:	305mm

Each turret has two shell storage rooms.

The battery museum, mainly dedicated to the 1941-42 battles.

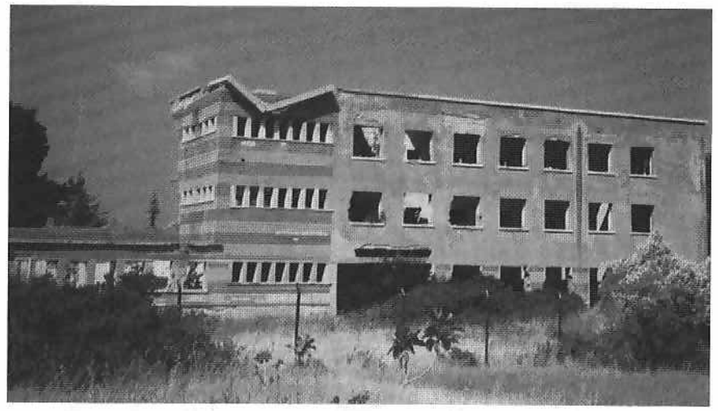


RE-ENACTING OPERATION 'ANGLO'

By Dr Peter Schenk

After the German invasion of Crete in May 1941 and the Axis successes in the North African campaign, British commando raids were ordered to try to reduce Axis air power in the Mediterranean theatre of war. The first such operations against Axis airfields were carried out on June 12, 1942 in order to ease the passage of an important convoy to Malta. The Special Air Service (SAS) destroyed 20 Axis aircraft in Libya and the Special Boat Squadron (SBS) another 29 at Iraklion in Crete. (Lord George Jellicoe was the only one to return from the latter raid.)

The next operation, code-named 'Anglo', had as its targets two airfields on Rhodes which threatened Allied supply lines to North Africa. A party of 12 members of the SBS under the command of Captain R. K. B. Allott left Beirut on board the Greek submarine *Papanikolis* on August 31, and on the night of September 4/5 the party left the submarine in a folding boat and three inflatable rafts and landed on a small stretch of beach near Cape Faraklos, north of Lindos on the eastern side of Rhodes. The boats were hidden and the party spent the rest of the night and the next day in a nearby cave. Two night marches followed but with little progress made due to lack of local knowledge by the Greek guides, Nikolas Savvas and Giorgos Kyrmichalis, and the poor physical condition of the two Greek interpreters. As a result, the party separated for their two targets, Captain Allott with Kyrmichalis and three men of the SBS setting out on the night of September 7/8 on a five-night march to the airfield of Maritsa, while Lieutenant David Sutherland took Savvas, the interpreter, Lieutenant Kalampochidis, and three more SBS men to the nearer airfield of Gadurra/Kalathos. (The second interpreter, Tsouchas, was left behind.)



Top: **Target for the SBS raid in September 1942: Maritsa airfield at the northern end of Rhodes. (Kogiopoulos).** *Below:* **The airfield is now only used as a landing ground for fire-fighting aircraft, the derelict buildings** *(above)* **still bearing their scars of war.**