

## The Battle of Bunker Complex 712

As the first shells from the Chinese artillery began to fall on Bunker Complex 712 near Lesozavodsk, the conscript troops of the 472<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of the 130<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Artillery Division under Major General Ivan Chizkov took their posts. Many troops were off duty in the town (which was only 10km from the border) despite the fact that tensions were high. The first bombardment timed at 06:30 on 2<sup>nd</sup> July included a MRL strike on the barracks of the 472<sup>nd</sup> which inflicted many casualties, including the second in command of the regiment. The posts overlooking the Ussuri River (a tributary of the Amur) reported sightings of Chinese armour and APCs (later confirmed as belonging to the 16<sup>th</sup> Group Army). Artillery locating radar posts based behind the lines did their best to locate Chinese artillery positions as they fired and directed the Divisional BM21 regiment's batteries in a vicious counter-battery duel.



*Illustration 1: Chinese artillery open fire at the start of the battle*

Whilst the artillery duel intensified the commander of the 472<sup>nd</sup> started to use what little transport he had available to rush troops to the bunkers on the border to reinforce the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion there. The commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion Lt Col Pietor Cherenko ordered his men to commandeer taxis and buses. Quickly his men returned with this improvised transport (and in many cases the willing civilian drivers). Rushing to the bunkers he quickly found that the Chinese were starting their assault. Despite the Chinese pre-targeting the positions, many of the bunkers had survived intact (although the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion frequently had to replace the shell shocked troops of the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion who had been manning them). As Type 62 and 63 light tanks of the 48<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division started to cross the Ussuri, the 472<sup>nd</sup> opened fire from their bunkers. The 100mm guns of the T54/55 turrets and the infantry's wire guided missiles easily penetrated the thin armour of the Chinese light tanks and the smoke barrage laid down by the Chinese artillery proved ineffective (mainly due to losses inflicted on the artillery by the Soviet BM21s). Few of the Chinese tanks reached the Soviet bank and those that did were quickly eliminated. By now the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion had arrived in numbers and Major General Chuzkov quickly reorganised the position, withdrawing the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion to form a reserve to plug gaps.



*Illustration 2: 2nd battalion troops arrive during a lull*

At 11:00 a second Chinese barrage occurred, landing heavily on the positions held by the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion. While this was occurring more Chinese tanks attempted to cross the river, this time not just light Type 62 and 63 tanks but also the heavier Type 59s (again from the 48<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division). This time the fight was harder and the Chinese briefly established a small foot-hold on the east bank before a counter attack by the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion tank hunting teams with RPGs and AT5s picked off the surviving tanks.



*Illustration 3: Chinese news footage taken early afternoon*

The 472<sup>nd</sup> continued to receive sporadic artillery fire through the afternoon. The bunkers proved their worth and few casualties were inflicted. It gave Chuzkov chance to assess his situation. Checking with higher command he found that the positions to his sides were doing less well and were now heavily involved with fighting on their side of the river. He was ordered to hold in place.

At 14:00 Major Treskov commanding the rear part was surprised to

find a delegation from the mayor. Expecting the worst he agreed to meet them. Much to his surprise the party had come to offer the services of 200 citizens who were willing to place themselves under military command (all had undergone their conscript training although as one admitted it had been some time ago). Major Treskov agreed instantly and ordering his supply troops to issue them what they could, put them to work helping with the logistics effort. He also took the opportunity to pull together a 13<sup>th</sup> company made up of troops that these volunteers replaced to act as infantry. These he ordered to move forward on foot to join the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion.

At 17:30 the Chinese launched a number of air strikes on the complex. At least three Chinese aircraft were shot down and a further five damaged by the anti-aircraft positions of the 472<sup>nd</sup> but the losses to the 472<sup>nd</sup> were worse. In addition to a number of tank turrets taking direct hits, the command centre of the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion took a direct hit rendering the reserves combat ineffective for a number of hours whilst command was re-established. Napalm was also used against the bunkers resulting in a number of asphyxiated casualties. The 13<sup>th</sup> company was caught on the march and decimated during these strikes.

At 18:30 another smoke barrage warned of the next Chinese attack. This time the attack was supported by Wz9 attack and Mi17 transport helicopters. These made a daring landing to the rear of



*Illustration 4: Chinese airmobile command post reorganising after being dropped*

the bunkers but took over 33% losses on the way in. The 1<sup>st</sup> battalion who's role included mopping these up was still ineffective and the Chinese troops quickly moved towards the rear of the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion's bunkers leaving a small blocking force to delay the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion. As the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion attempted to deal with the more advanced Type 88s of the 69<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division crossing the river (now supported by infantry mounted in Type 90 APCs) they suddenly found Chinese infantry engaging their positions from the rear. Despite a valiant defence, the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion crumbled as bunker after bunker

was destroyed. The 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion was having more success however and the (lighter) attack on it's front was quickly beaten off.

By 21:00 the Chinese now had a foothold on the eastern side of the Ussuri and infantry were inside the northern flank of the complex. A vicious series of battles ensued as Chinese infantry fought corridor by corridor, room by room clearing out the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion. By now the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion had reorganised and absorbing the survivors of the 13<sup>th</sup> company to replace some of its losses, launched an assault on the bridgehead. Despite vicious fighting the light infantry of the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion had little chance against the tanks of the Chinese and by 03:00 the attack had been thrown back with the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion taking heavy losses.

*"I say again fire everything you have at my position, the outside is swarming with Chinese infantry. For the Motherland!"*  
Last transmission from bunker 712-16.  
Recorded at 07:32

Even though the Chinese were now across the river, they could not bring further troops forward without coming under fire from the positions held by the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion. As a result at dawn the exhausted troops of both sides were roused as another attack was made. Now the Chinese threw as much armour as they had available against the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion while simultaneously the surviving airmobile troops attacked south from the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion's bunkers. Unable to withstand the weight of this attack the 3<sup>rd</sup> fought hard. Bunkers became isolated by infiltrators and fought on as long as they could.



*Illustration 5: Chinese tanks attack morning of the 3rd*

In the tunnels underground Soviet troops used directional MON-50 mines to hold corridors. By mid-day the fighting was reduced to isolated bunkers that were quickly silenced. The 472<sup>nd</sup> had ceased to exist as a unit. By 16:00 the Chinese had a bridge across the Ussuri and troops poured across and towards Lesozavodsk. A final defence by the rear party delayed the Chinese briefly but by evening they were inside the town. The last bunker position held by the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion was not cleared until 09:30 the following morning.

The 472<sup>nd</sup>'s losses during the battle are put at 875 killed, 1212 captured or missing (many of them wounded). About 50 troops eventually escaped captured and returned to Soviet lines. No figure of Chinese losses has ever been released but it is believed to be over 3000 killed or missing. The 130<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Artillery Division was awarded the streamer "Lesozavodsk" for the action. Survivors from the other two regiments were used as replacements for other divisions. It was reformed as the 130<sup>th</sup> Guards Motor Rifle Division "Lesozavodsk" in January 1996 (unusually for the Soviet Army it was named as well as numbered). The Division was again destroyed in July 1996 on the Chinese Front. It has not been reformed and again the survivors were sent to other divisions as replacements. Two Heroes of the Soviet Union medals were posthumously awarded for the defence of Complex 712.



*Illustration 6: US journalist Paul Kelvin visiting the positions in 2012*