

= Operation Sana =

Operation Sana ( Bosnian : Operacija Sana ) was a military offensive undertaken by the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina ( Armija Republike Bosne i Hercegovine ? ARBiH ) in western Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Bosnian War . It was launched from the area of Bihać on 13 September 1995 , against the Army of Republika Srpska ( Vojska Republike Srpske ? VRS ) , and involved advances towards Bosanski Petrovac , Sanski Most and Bosanska Krupa . At the same time , the Croatian Army ( Hrvatska vojska ? HV ) and the Croatian Defence Council ( Hrvatsko vijeće obrane ? HVO ) were engaging the VRS in Operation Maestral 2 further to the southeast . After an initial 70 @-@ kilometre ( 43 mi ) advance , VRS reinforcements managed to stop the ARBiH short of Sanski Most and Novi Grad , and reversed some of the ARBiH 's territorial gains in a counterattack . After a part of the ARBiH 5th Corps was threatened with defeat around the town of Ključ , the ARBiH requested assistance from the HV .

The HV and HVO launched Operation Southern Move in response , removing the VRS pressure from Ključ and allowing the 5th Corps , reinforced by the 7th Corps , to resume its advance and capture Sanski Most on 12 October , by which time a comprehensive ceasefire was to come into effect throughout the country . Combat continued for another eight days without significant changes to the frontlines . Fighting did not resume , and the war ended the following month following negotiation and acceptance of the Dayton Agreement .

The operation commenced during a NATO bombing campaign against the VRS , codenamed Operation Deliberate Force , which targeted Bosnian Serb air defences , artillery and storage facilities initially in the area of Sarajevo , but also elsewhere in the country . Operation Sana , alongside concurrent HV and HVO offensives , sparked debate among military analysts as to whether the ground assaults or NATO 's airstrikes were more responsible for ending the Bosnian War . Also in question was to what extent the advances of the ARBiH , HVO and HV were assisted by the airstrikes , and conversely , to what extent they hampered the VRS .

= = Background = =

As the Yugoslav People 's Army ( Jugoslovenska narodna armija ? JNA ) withdrew from Croatia following the acceptance and start of implementation of the Vance plan , its 55 @, @ 000 officers and soldiers born in Bosnia and Herzegovina were transferred to a new Bosnian Serb army , which was later renamed the Army of Republika Srpska ( Vojska Republike Srpske ? VRS ) . This re @-@ organisation followed the declaration of the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina on 9 January 1992 , ahead of the referendum on the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina that took place between 29 February and 1 March 1992 . This declaration would later be cited by the Bosnian Serbs as a pretext for the Bosnian War . Bosnian Serbs began fortifying the capital , Sarajevo , and other areas on 1 March 1992 . On the following day , the first fatalities of the war were recorded in Sarajevo and Doboj . In the final days of March , Bosnian Serb forces bombarded Bosanski Brod with artillery , resulting in a cross @-@ border operation by the Croatian Army ( Hrvatska vojska ? HV ) 108th Brigade . On 4 April 1992 , JNA artillery began shelling Sarajevo . There were other examples of the JNA directly supported the VRS , such as during the capture of Zvornik in early April 1992 , when the JNA provided artillery support from Serbia , firing across the Drina River . At the same time , the JNA attempted to defuse the situation and arrange negotiations elsewhere in the country .

The JNA and the VRS in Bosnia and Herzegovina faced the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina ( Armija Republike Bosne i Hercegovine ? ARBiH ) and the Croatian Defence Council ( Hrvatsko vijeće obrane ? HVO ) , reporting to the Bosniak @-@ dominated central government and the Bosnian Croat leadership respectively , as well as the HV , which occasionally supported HVO operations . In late April , the VRS was able to deploy 200 @, @ 000 troops , hundreds of tanks , armoured personnel carriers ( APCs ) and artillery pieces . The HVO and the Croatian Defence Forces ( Hrvatske obrambene snage ? HOS ) could field approximately 25 @, @ 000 soldiers and a handful of heavy weapons , while the ARBiH was largely unprepared with nearly 100 @, @ 000

troops , small arms for less than a half of their number and virtually no heavy weapons . Arming of the various forces was hampered by a United Nations ( UN ) arms embargo introduced in September 1991 . By mid @-@ May 1992 , when those JNA units which had not been transferred to the VRS withdrew from Bosnia and Herzegovina to the newly declared Federal Republic of Yugoslavia , the VRS controlled approximately 60 percent of Bosnia and Herzegovina . The extent of the control was extended to about 70 percent of the country by the end of the year .

= = Prelude = =

By 1995 , the ARBiH and the HVO had developed into better @-@ organised forces employing comparably large numbers of artillery pieces and good defensive fortifications . The VRS was not capable of penetrating their defences even where its forces employed sound military tactics , for instance in the Battle of Ora?je in May and June 1995 . In August 1995 , after the fall of most of the Croatian Serb @-@ controlled areas of Croatia during Operation Storm , the HV shifted its focus to western Bosnia . The shift was motivated by the desire to create a security zone along the Croatian border , establish Croatia as a regional power and gain favours with the West by forcing an end to the Bosnian War . The government of Bosnia and Herzegovina welcomed the move as it contributed to their goal of securing western Bosnia , as well as the largest Bosnian Serb @-@ held city , Banja Luka .

In the final days of August 1995 , NATO launched an air campaign targeting the VRS , codenamed Operation Deliberate Force . It was launched in response to the second Markale massacre of 28 August , which came on the heels of the Srebrenica massacre . Airstrikes began on 30 August , initially targeting VRS air defences , and striking targets near Sarajevo . The campaign was briefly suspended on 1 September and its scope was expanded to target artillery and storage facilities around the city . The bombing resumed on 5 September , and its scope extended to VRS air defences near Banja Luka by 9 September as NATO had nearly exhausted its list of targets near Sarajevo . On 13 September , the Bosnian Serbs accepted NATO 's demand for the establishment of an exclusion zone around Sarajevo and the campaign ceased .

As the NATO bombing generally targeted VRS around Sarajevo , western Bosnia remained relatively calm following Operation Storm , except for probing attacks launched by the VRS , HVO or ARBiH near Biha? , Drvar and Glamo? . At the time the HV , HVO and ARBiH were planning a joint offensive in the region . The HV and HVO component of the offensive , codenamed Operation Maestral 2 , was launched on 8 September with the aim of capturing the towns of Jajce , ?ipovo and Drvar , while the ARBiH 7th Corps advanced on the right flank of the HV and the HVO towards Donji Vakuf . All four towns had been seized by 14 September , and the 7th Corps began transferring a substantial portion of its troops to the ARBiH 5th Corps in the Biha? area .

= = Order of battle = =

The 15 @, @ 000 @-@ strong ARBiH 5th Corps , commanded by Divisional General Atif Dudakovi? , was assigned the primary objectives , the capture of Bosanska Krupa , Bosanski Petrovac , Klju? and Sanski Most . Dudakovi? divided his eight brigades into two operational groups ( OGs ) . OG ( South ) , which comprised the 501st Mountain , 502nd Mountain , 510th Liberation and 517th Light Brigades , augmented by elements of the 5th Military Police Battalion , was commanded by Dudakovi? himself . OG ( North ) , consisting of the 503rd Mountain , 505th Mountain , 506th Liberation and 511th Mountain Brigades , was commanded his chief of staff , Brigadier Mirsad Selmanovi? . At the commencement of the operation , HV artillery provided fire support to OG South .

The 2nd Krajina Corps , commanded by Major General Radivoje Tomani? , and the 30th Infantry Division of the 1st Krajina Corps , commanded by Major General Momir Zec , were the VRS formations in the area . Tomani? , who set up his headquarters in Drvar , was in overall command in western Bosnia . Tomani? and Zec commanded a combined force of approximately 22 @, @ 000 troops . The need to defend against both ARBiH corps and the combined HV and HVO force meant

that the VRS had only 8 @, @ 000 troops facing the 5th Corps . They were organised in six infantry or light infantry brigades stationed on the Grabe? Plateau and near Bosanska Krupa and Otoka .

= = Timeline = =

= = = First stage = = =

On 13 September , the ARBiH launched its advance , codenamed Sana 95 , from Biha? towards the Sana River . The initial advance was undertaken by OG South and spearheaded by the 502nd Mountain Brigade against VRS positions on the Grabe? Plateau south of the town . As its defences yielded to the ground assault supported by HV artillery fire , the VRS started to retreat south towards Bosanski Petrovac , alongside civilians fleeing the area . The ARBiH pursued the retreating VRS , capturing Kulen Vakuf the next day , and Bosanski Petrovac on 15 September . That same day , the ARBiH linked up with the HV approximately 12 kilometres ( 7 @. @ 5 miles ) southeast of Bosanski Petrovac . The HV had captured Drvar and reached the O?trej Pass , as part of Operation Maestral 2 . Both forces mistook the other for the VRS , leading to a friendly fire incident .

Even though the left flank of the salient created by the ARBiH advance was vulnerable , the VRS could not exploit the opportunity because it had no reserves available in the area . An effort to widen the salient commenced on 15 September , when OG North moved against Bosanska Krupa and Otoka in an assault spearheaded by the 503rd , 505th and 517th brigades . At the same time , OG South regrouped in Bosanski Petrovac in anticipation of reinforcements arriving from the 7th Corps . The regrouping involved the creation of a new formation , OG Centre , consisting of the 502nd , 505th , 506th and 517th brigades , all of which had been previously assigned to the two existing OGs . OG South 's 501st and 510th brigades continued their advance , and captured Klju? on 17 September , having advanced covering 70 kilometres ( 43 miles ) since the start of the operation . On the same day , OG North captured Bosanska Krupa and Otoka , and the 510th Brigade was also transferred to OG Centre . This marked the completion of the first stage of Operation Sana .

OG Centre began its advance towards Sanski Most against the 1st Drvar and 1st , 2nd and 3rd Drina infantry brigades , which were remnants of the VRS units which had pulled out of Drvar at the end of Operation Maestral 2 . OG North moved against Novi Grad as well as towards Sanski Most on the left flank of OG Centre , against opposition from the 1st Novigrad and 11th Krupa brigades and the former Drvar garrison . OG South , stripped of all its units except the 501st Brigade , and the 17th Krajina Mountain Brigade which had been transferred from 7th Corps , was tasked with capturing Mrkonji? Grad on the right flank of OG Centre .

When the ARBiH approached Novi Grad and Sanski Most on 18 ? 19 September , it encountered 14 @, @ 000 additional VRS troops of the Prijedor OG 10 of the 1st Krajina Corps under the command of Colonel Radmilo Zeljaja , supported by 2 @, @ 000 troops that had arrived from Serbia . The latter included the Serb Volunteer Guard ( Srpska dobrovolja?ka garda ? SDG ) , led by ?eljko Ra?natovi? Arkan , and Serbia 's State Security Service Red Berets . The 2nd Corps re @- @ assembled behind the Prijedor OG 10 and Serbian troops . As the ARBiH approached the two towns , the HV launched Operation Una on 18 September , which involved attempts to cross the Una River at several points near Bosanska Dubica , Bosanska Kostajnica and Novi Grad opposite Dvor . The HV managed to establish several small bridgeheads on the right bank of the river , but the operation was called off after two days of fighting due to high casualties brought on by poor planning .

= = = VRS counteroffensive = = =

On 20 ? 22 September , the VRS 5th Kozara and 6th Sanska brigades managed to push OG Centre back approximately six kilometres ( 3 @. @ 7 miles ) , while parts of OG North had to withdraw from some areas they had captured . OG North was able to continue its advance near Novi Grad and towards Ljubija against strong resistance . On 22 September , Colonel General Ratko Mladi? cut short his medical treatment in Belgrade to return to Banja Luka and control the VRS more

directly . The meeting between the top VRS commanders and Mladić produced a request for general mobilisation , establishment of corps @-@ level drumhead court @-@ martials , and a request for the SDG to leave the area ? despite the fact that they had been invited by the Republika Srpska Ministry of the Interior and had been granted authority by Radovan Karadžić , the president of Republika Srpska . Finally , a VRS counteroffensive was ordered to regain the lost territory .

The counteroffensive commenced on the night of 23 / 24 September , with the VRS 65th Protection Regiment , 16th Krajina and 43rd Motorised brigades and SDG troops attacking OG North . Fighting lasted for six days and was personally overseen by Mladić . VRS forces pushed the ARBiH back to Bosanska Krupa and Otoka , but the advance had to be stopped to divert forces to defend Mrkonjić Grad . By 1 October , OG South had pushed the VRS 17th Ključ Brigade back to within three kilometres ( 1 @.@ 9 miles ) of Mrkonjić Grad . The 16th Motorised Brigade was redeployed from Bosanska Krupa to Mrkonjić Grad , under the command of Colonel Milenko Lazić 's OG 2 of the 30th Division . OG 2 , supported by the SDG , the Red Berets , a Bosnian Serb special police brigade , and at least one battalion of the 1st Armoured Brigade , started to drive OG South back north towards Ključ . OG South had only received one additional independent battalion from the 7th Corps as reinforcement . The reinforced VRS 5th Kozara and 6th Sanska infantry brigades ( organised as the Prijedor OG ) moved south from Sanski Most towards Ključ to complete a pincer movement aimed at destroying OG South . The counterattack had gained momentum by 3 October , and the VRS advanced within one kilometre ( 0 @.@ 62 miles ) of Ključ , covering seventeen kilometres ( 11 miles ) in three days . The 16th Motorised Brigade was again redeployed , this time to reinforce VRS positions at Mount Ozren near Doboj . The remaining VRS forces , bolstered by the addition of the 2nd Reconnaissance Sabotage Detachment of the 2nd Corps , continued their attacks against Ključ , but had made only small advances by 8 ? 9 October , as OG South had finally received more reinforcements from the 7th Corps , specifically the 707th and 717th brigades . Since Ključ was still in jeopardy , the ARBiH requested HV and HVO assistance .

= = = Capture of Sanski Most = = =

The HV and HVO agreed to assist the ARBiH , and launched Operation Southern Move to relieve the situation in Ključ . In this operation , the HV and the HVO fielded 11 @,@ 000 ? 12 @,@ 000 troops who captured Mrkonjić Grad from three VRS brigades , thus relieving the pressure on the ARBiH in Ključ . The HV and the HVO then captured the Bošac Hydroelectric Power Station , the last remaining electrical power source available to the Bosnian Serbs in western Bosnia and Herzegovina . On 11 October , the HV and HVO reached a point on Mount Manjača , 25 kilometres ( 16 miles ) south of Banja Luka .

By 9 October , the ARBiH 5th Corps had received approximately 10 @,@ 000 troops as reinforcements , including the ARBiH Guards Brigade , the 17th Krajina Mountain , 717th Mountain , 708th Light , and 712th Mountain brigades , and the 7th Reconnaissance @-@ Sabotage Battalion . The Guards Brigade was used to reinforce OG Centre , which also received the 501st Brigade from OG South , while the latter now comprised five brigades previously subordinated to the 7th Corps .

That day , the 5th Corps launched a fresh attack towards Sanski Most , employing OGs Centre and South to capture the town . The assault , spearheaded by the 502nd and 510th brigades , penetrated VRS defences manned by the 15th Bihać and 17th Ključ Brigades , forcing Zeljaja to withdraw his troops to the town itself to avoid encirclement . On 10 October , elements of the VRS 43rd Motorised and 11th Dubica brigades launched an unsuccessful attempt to halt the ARBiH advance on the outskirts of Sanski Most . The 502nd Brigade , the Guards Brigade and the 5th Military Police Battalion subsequently captured the town .

Despite the fact that a ceasefire was scheduled to come into force throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina on 12 October , OG Centre continued its advance northeast of Sanski Most , engaging the bulk of the VRS 43rd Motorised Brigade in a series of clashes . This fighting resulted in little change to the territory held by either side by 20 October , when fighting died down .

= = Aftermath = =

Operation Sana , as well as Operation Maestral 2 , were crucial in applying pressure on the VRS in the final weeks of the Bosnian War . A Central Intelligence Agency analysis comparing the effect that Operation Deliberate Force and Operations Sana and Maestral 2 had on the VRS noted that the NATO campaign did not degrade the combat capability of the VRS as much as was initially assumed , because the airstrikes were never primarily directed at field @-@ deployed units , rather they targeted the command and control infrastructure of the Bosnian Serb military . The analysis concluded that , while NATO degraded VRS capabilities , the final offensives by the HV , HVO and the ARBiH had inflicted the most damage . It further noted that those offensives , rather than the NATO bombing , were responsible for bringing the Bosnian Serbs to the negotiating table and ending the war . Author Robert C. Owen argues that the HV , HVO and ARBiH would not have advanced as rapidly as they did had NATO not intervened and hampered VRS defenses , denying it long @-@ range communications .

Operation Sana and Operation Southern Move established the 51 % ? 49 % distribution of territory controlled by the ARBiH and HVO on the one hand and the VRS on the other , as envisaged in plans put forward by the Contact Group . The ARBiH , HVO and HV ultimately consented to the maintenance of the ceasefire of 12 October . According to British historian Marko Attila Hoare , their acquiescence was secured following massive diplomatic pressure from the West , and the alleged threat of US airstrikes against the ARBiH if it breached the ceasefire . The Bosnian War ended with the acceptance of the Dayton Agreement by all sides in November 1995 .

The offensive resulted in 178 dead , 588 wounded and 41 captured ARBiH troops . Bosnian Serb losses were 900 killed and more than 1 @,@ 000 wounded . In September and October , 6 @,@ 500 Bosniak and Croat civilians living in the area of Banja Luka or Prijedor were expelled from their homes by Bosnian Serb forces . At the same time , approximately 2 @,@ 000 non @-@ Serb civilians went missing in the area , and presumed detained in labour camps or killed . Changes of control of territory also allowed access to two mass graves near Sanski Most , believed to contain the bodies of 300 civilians killed by Bosnian Serb forces in April 1992 .

Operation Sana , along with the near @-@ concurrent Operation Maestral 2 , created a large number of refugees from the areas previously controlled by the VRS . Bosnian Serb sources document approximately 40 @,@ 000 refugees in September 1995 , encompassing the entire contemporary Bosnian Serb populations of the towns of Jajce , ?ipovo , Mrkonji? Grad and Donji Vakuf having fled or been evacuated . At the time , the UN spokesman in Sarajevo estimated the number of refugees at 20 @,@ 000 . Fighting in October caused another 30 @,@ 000 ? 40 @,@ 000 refugees to flee from Sanski Most and another 10 @,@ 000 from areas in and around Mrkonji? Grad .