

## = Battle of the Dalmatian Channels =

The Battle of the Dalmatian Channels was a three @-@ day confrontation between three tactical groups of Yugoslav Navy ships and coastal artillery , and a detachment of naval commandos of the Croatian Navy fought on 14 ? 16 November 1991 during the Croatian War of Independence . On 14 November , the commandos torpedoed a Mirna @-@ class patrol boat P? @-@ 176 Mukos close to the island of Bra? in the Split Channel of the Adriatic Sea , prompting a Yugoslav naval bombardment of Bra? and ?olta Island the same day . The drifting Mukos was salvaged by Croatian civilian boats and was beached at Ne?ujam bay .

The next day , a group of Yugoslav Navy vessels deployed to the Split Channel , organised into the Ka?tela tactical group ( TG ) and bombarded the city of Split in retaliation for the loss of Mukos . In return , Croatian coastal artillery engaged the Ka?tela TG . To draw off some of the artillery fire , the Yugoslav Navy deployed another group of vessels from the island of Vis , organised as the Vis TG , south of ?olta where the TG was engaged by more Croatian artillery . The Ka?tela TG retreated east and joined with the Plo?e TG consisting of three minesweepers .

On 16 November , the combined Yugoslav force sailed through the Kor?ula Channel ? a strait separating the islands of Hvar and Kor?ula ? to reach safety at the Yugoslav Navy base at Vis . The warships were then engaged by Croatian coastal artillery deployed on Kor?ula and the Pelje?ac Peninsula , losing two minesweepers to the artillery fire in the process .

The battle marked the last deployment of the Yugoslav Navy into one of the Dalmatian channels , the loosening of the naval blockade of the Croatian coast imposed in September and the largest Croatian Navy operation in the war . The Croatian Navy later towed the grounded Mukos to ?ibenik , repaired the vessel and put her into service as OB @-@ 62 ?olta . During the battle , 22 Yugoslav Navy crewmen , two Croatian gunners and two civilian sailors in Split were killed . Thirty @-@ three Yugoslav officers were charged in relation to the naval bombardment by Croatian authorities .

## = = Background = =

In 1990 , following the electoral defeat of the government of the Socialist Republic of Croatia , ethnic tensions increased . The Yugoslav People 's Army ( Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija ? JNA ) confiscated Croatia 's Territorial Defence Forces ' ( Teritorijalna obrana ? TO ) weapons to minimize resistance . On 17 August , the tensions escalated into an open revolt by Croatian Serbs , centred on the predominantly Serb @-@ populated areas of the Dalmatian hinterland around Knin , and parts of Lika , Kordun , Banovina , and eastern Croatia . This was followed by two unsuccessful attempts by Serbia , supported by Montenegro and Serbia 's provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo , to obtain the Yugoslav Presidency 's approval for a JNA operation to disarm Croatian security forces in January 1991 .

After a bloodless skirmish between Serb insurgents and Croatian special police in March , the JNA , supported by Serbia and its allies , asked the Federal Presidency to give it wartime authorities and to declare a state of emergency . The request was denied on 15 March and the JNA came under the control of Serbian President Slobodan Milo?evi? . Preferring a campaign to expand Serbia rather than to preserve Yugoslavia , Milo?evi? publicly threatened to replace the JNA with a Serbian army and declared that he no longer recognized the authority of the Federal Presidency . By the end of March , the conflict had escalated into the Croatian War of Independence . The JNA intervened ; they increasingly supported the Croatian Serb insurgents and prevented Croatian police from intervening . In early April , the leaders of the Croatian Serb revolt declared their intention to integrate the area under their control , known as SAO Krajina , with Serbia . The Government of Croatia viewed this declaration as an attempt to secede .

In May 1991 , the Croatian government responded by forming the Croatian National Guard ( Zbor narodne garde ? ZNG ) , but its development was hampered by a United Nations ( UN ) arms embargo and the Yugoslav Navy 's blockade of the Adriatic coast , both of which were introduced in September . Following the Battle of the Barracks , the ZNG acquired a significant stock of weapons and ammunition , including 34 Yugoslav Navy vessels moored in ?ibenik . Croatian forces using

naval mines deployed in Ka?tela Bay rendered the Yugoslav Navy base at Lora in Split inaccessible . On 8 October , Croatia declared independence from Yugoslavia , and a month later the Croatian National Guard was renamed the Croatian Army ( Hrvatska vojska ? HV ) . Late 1991 saw the fiercest fighting of the war ; the 1991 Yugoslav campaign in Croatia culminated in the Siege of Dubrovnik and the Battle of Vukovar .

During the first days of November , the Yugoslav Navy stopped the Libertas convoy twice for inspection between the islands of Bra? and Kor?ula as it enforced the blockade . The convoy of 40 small boats led by the ferry Slavija was on its way to resupply Dubrovnik and retrieve refugees from the besieged city . On 11 November , the Maltese @-@ flagged coaster Euroriver , manned by a Croatian crew , was sunk by gunfire off ?olta Island .

= = Order of battle = =

Despite the capture of the Yugoslav Navy vessels in September , Croatia 's coastal defences relied on captured coastal artillery on the mainland and the nearby islands . In central Dalmatia , these included three batteries on the mainland between ?ibenik and Split , 90 @-@ millimetre ( 3 @. @ 5 in ) guns on ?irje Island , a 100 @-@ millimetre ( 3 @. @ 9 in ) battery near Ze?evo and 88 @-@ millimetre ( 3 @. @ 5 in ) guns on Smokvica Island near Primo?ten . Four coastal artillery batteries on islands off Split ? the 88 @-@ millimetre Marin?a Rat on the island of ?olta , the 85 @-@ millimetre ( 3 @. @ 3 in ) Ra?anj battery on the island of Bra? , and the 88 @-@ millimetre battery Ra?nji? and the 85 @-@ millimetre battery Privala on the island of Kor?ula ? were captured . Some the guns captured on ?irje and ?olta were removed and used to set up additional coastal artillery batteries at Ka?juni and Duilovo in Split . Additional batteries were set up in Lovi?te at the tip of the Pelje?ac Peninsula , and in Blace and ?rna Luka on Kor?ula on the coast north of Smokvica and Vela Luka . The battery deployed to ?rna Luka contained 76 @-@ millimetre ( 3 @. @ 0 in ) M1942 ( ZiS @-@ 3 ) guns . A naval commando detachment from the Croatian Navy was deployed to the western Bra? . The coastal artillery was subordinated to the Croatian Navy and commanded by Admiral Sveto Letica .

The Yugoslav Navy deployed three tactical groups ( TGs ) named Ka?tela , Vis and Plo?e off the coast of central Dalmatia from its bases on the islands of Vis and Lastovo . The Ka?tela TG was deployed to the sea off Split and north of the islands of ?olta and Bra? . It consisted of Koni @-@ class frigate VPBR @-@ 31 Split , Kon?ar @-@ class fast attack craft RTOP @-@ 401 Rade Kon?ar and RTOP @-@ 403 Ramiz Sadiku , Osa @-@ class missile boat R? @-@ 306 Nikola Martinovi? , Shershen @-@ class torpedo boats T? @-@ 220 Crvena zvezda and T? @-@ 224 Pionir II and two Mirna @-@ class patrol boats , including P? @-@ 176 Mukos . Ka?tela TG may have also included an additional Osa @-@ class missile boat . The Plo?e TG , deployed to the sea between the mainland and Bra? to the east of the Ka?tela TG , consisted of three minesweepers : ML @-@ 143 I? , ML @-@ 144 Olib and ML @-@ 153 Blitvenica . The Vis TG was deployed off the western tip of the island of Hvar . It consisted of a Kotor @-@ class frigate VPBR @-@ 34 Pula commanded by Captain Ilija Br?i? , one Kon?ar @-@ class fast attack craft , two Osa @-@ missile boats and two Mirna @-@ class patrol craft . The Yugoslav Navy fleet was under overall command of Rear Admiral Nikola Ercegovi? .

= = Timeline = =

= = = 14 November = = =

On 14 November at 5 : 34 p.m. , the Croatian naval commandos attacked Mukos off Bra? using a torpedo fired from the island . Her crew reported an explosion in the bow of the ship and requested assistance from the Ka?tela TG because she started to sink . The Ka?tela TG dispatched Pionir II , which reached Mukos shortly afterwards and had transferred the crew of the damaged vessel by 6 : 10 p.m. Mukos was left to drift towards ?olta with her bow fully submerged and containing the bodies

of three dead crew members . For nearly the entire night , the Ka?tela TG directed gunfire against the Milna and Stomorska areas of ?olta to draw fire from Croatian coastal artillery . However , the coastal artillery deployed in the targeted areas did not return fire . Additional Yugoslav vessels sortied from Vis but returned to their base before the morning without transiting the Split Entrance ? the strait between the islands of Bra? and ?olta . By that time , the naval gunfire also died down . The Plo?e TG remained in their assigned area of patrol .

= = = 15 November = = =

On 15 November at 6 : 42 a.m. , the Ka?tela TG commenced a naval bombardment of targets in Split and on the islands of Bra? and ?olta . The order was issued aboard VPBR @-@ 31 Split and the JNA Maritime Military Sector command and JNA bases in Split were advised of the attack . The JNA based in Split did not join the bombardment . Letica notified the JNA Maritime Military Sector commanding officer Major General Nikola Mladeni? of the attack , but Mladeni? said he could not control the situation because his headquarters was denied a supply of electricity . The European Community Monitor Mission ( ECMM ) was also notified ; they promised to make efforts to stop the bombardment . Shortly after , Letica ordered the coastal artillery to commence fire against the Ka?tela TG . Besides several near @-@ misses , the coastal artillery fire scored a direct hit against VPBR @-@ 31 Split , that was attributed to the Marin?a Rat @-@ based battery on ?olta . Croatian sources said Mladeni? ordered the bombardment in retribution for the loss of Mukos .

In response to the difficult position of the Yugoslav Navy vessels north of ?olta and Bra? , the Vis TG led by Pula sailed north from the island of Vis to draw some of the artillery fire away from the Ka?tela TG . As the ships approached the Split Entrance , they made a radar contact sailing away from Split towards open sea at a high speed . Pula , attempting to enforce the blockade imposed in September , requested the vessel by radio to stop for an inspection . The vessel failed to respond and Pula fired several shots in front of it before Br?i? noticed that it was a hydrofoil carrying an ECMM team and flying the flag of Europe . He abandoned the pursuit and proceeded to ?olta .

The Vis TG came under fire from the coastal artillery when it arrived within 7 to 8 nautical miles ( 13 to 15 kilometres ; 8 @.@ 1 to 9 @.@ 2 miles ) of ?olta . In response to the incoming fire , Pula fired her 76 @-@ millimetre ( 3 @.@ 0 in ) bow @-@ mounted gun against targets on Bra? and ?olta . Croatian sources said that approximately 800 rounds were fired indiscriminately , striking civilian targets , while Br?i? said the TG under his command acted only against artillery located outside residential areas . Pula also fired four salvos of depth charges using her RBU @-@ 6000 rocket launcher while the land was outside its range to draw greater attention from the artillery gunners .

The Ka?tela TG started to withdraw east at approximately 8 : 00 a.m. , fearing the shortest available route to Vis might be mined in the area of Split Entrance . It reached the eastern tip of Bra? by 8 : 30 a.m. At 9 : 28 a.m. , three Yugoslav Air Force J @-@ 21 Jastrebs flew low over Bra? and ?olta ; minutes later , two were reportedly shot down by anti @-@ aircraft artillery . Six Yugoslav jets were sortied against targets on Bra? and ?olta . Following the naval action that morning , Croatian civilian boats from ?olta towed the partially submerged Mukos to Ne?ujam Bay and ran it aground there . In the afternoon , the Ka?tela TG and the Plo?e TG linked up east of the island of Hvar .

= = = 16 November = = =

On 16 November at 11 : 00 a.m. , the Ka?tela and Plo?e TGs started to assemble at the eastern end of the Kor?ula Channel , which separates the islands of Hvar and Kor?ula just north of Cape Lovi?te at the westernmost tip of the Pelje?ac Peninsula . The relatively slow minesweepers I? and Olib , which belonged to the Plo?e TG , were hit in the bow and the engine room respectively , by the 76 @-@ millimetre ( 3 @.@ 0 in ) guns at Lovi?te . To assist the minesweepers , Split turned around to engage the artillery at Cape Lovi?te while the minesweepers sailed north closer to the Hvar shore in increasingly thick fog .

At 3 : 30 p.m. , the Ka?tela TG turned around once more to attack Cape Lovi?te , but were engaged

by nearby coastal artillery located on Korčula . Blitvenica was damaged in the shooting and the entire naval force moved north @-@ west towards Dugi Otok Island . Iž sustained heavy damage and ran aground in Torac Bay off Hvar , and was abandoned . Olib sank between Pelješac and Hvar . Her crew was rescued by the remaining vessels in the group . At 7 : 00 p.m. , the fleet sailed south from Dugi Otok towards the western part of Korčula , seeking shelter as the Sirocco wind strengthened . As the ships approached Korčula , they were fired upon by coastal artillery at Dubrava Luka and Cape Privala , forcing them to turn west towards Vis . The Vis TG did not engage Croatian positions on 16 November .

= = Aftermath = =

The Yugoslav Navy was defeated and its ships did not sail north of the Split Entrance again . The battle was the largest engagement of the Croatian Navy during the war . Two Croatian anti @-@ aircraft gunners were killed in action on the island of Brač . According to Mladenović , the Yugoslav Navy lost 22 seamen ? including three aboard Mukos ? two minesweepers and a patrol craft . The Yugoslav Air Force lost two aircraft but the pilots were rescued by a helicopter that sortied from Vis and picked them up from the sea . Croatian Navy divers later raised Mukos and she was towed to Dubrovnik by a Brodospas @-@ owned tug . She was repaired and turned over to the Croatian Navy as OB @-@ 62 Zolta . Two civilians were killed and nine were wounded in the naval bombardment of Split . The bombardment damaged the Archaeological Museum , Split Municipality Building , Arena Gripe , Public Sanitation Institute , the Technical School , and the ferries Bartol Kašić and Vladimir Nazor , which were moored in the Port of Split . The two civilian fatalities were crew members of Vladimir Nazor .

Croatian authorities charged 33 JNA officers ? including Brkić who was tried in absentia and convicted to 15 years in prison ? for the bombardment of Split , Zolta and Brač . Brkić , who later became a high @-@ ranking officer of the Montenegrin Navy , was arrested in Naples in late 2007 when he travelled to a NATO function . He was not extradited to Croatia . Most of the other charged officers were also tried in absentia . As of 2013 , fifteen officers ? including Brkić ? were convicted , one was acquitted and seventeen cases were ordered by the Supreme Court of Croatia to be retried because of irregularities during previous trials .

In Croatia , the events of 14 and 15 November 1991 are referred to as the Battle of Split ( Bitka za Split ) or the Battle of the Split Channel ( Boj u Splitskom kanalu ) , while the events of 16 November are referred to as the Battle of the Korčula Channel ( Bitka u Korčulanskom kanalu ) . The events spanning all three days of the Battle of the Dalmatian Channels are also referred to as the Battle of the Adriatic ( Bitka za Jadran ) .