

= Operation Whirlwind =

Operation Whirlwind (Croatian : Operacija Vihar) was a failed Croatian Army (HV) offensive in the Banovina region of Croatia , fought from 11 ? 13 December 1991 , during the early stages of the Croatian War of Independence . The offensive employed a single infantry brigade as the main attacking force , supported by a bridging unit and a handful of tanks and armoured personnel carriers . Although the offensive met hardly any resistance in its initial stage , achieving tactical surprise , the operation was poorly planned , supported and executed as a result of limited training and combat experience . The offensive established a short @-@ lived bridgehead , evacuated in panic two days after the operation commenced , under tank and mortar fire from the Yugoslav People 's Army (JNA) deployed north of Glina .

The operation was criticised for its poor planning and execution , insufficient preparation , reconnaissance and training , and inappropriate command and control methods applied by the Sisak Operational Group in charge of the offensive . It also lacked clear objectives . Afterwards , Croatian military authorities investigated the offensive , but found that there was very little written documentation , including written unit @-@ level orders , pertaining to the operation . That led Admiral Davor Domazet @-@ Lo?o to conclude that the offensive was not formally authorised . The formal investigation did not specifically charge anyone with the failures , simply specifying the problems observed instead .

= = Background = =

In 1990 , following the electoral defeat of the government of the Socialist Republic of Croatia , ethnic tensions worsened . The Yugoslav People 's Army (Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija ? JNA) confiscated Croatia 's Territorial Defence (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 , parts of the 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 itself , supported by Serbia and its allies , asked the Federal Presidency to give it wartime authorities and 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? . Milo?evi? , preferring a campaign to expand Serbia rather than to preserve Yugoslavia , 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 the month , the conflict had escalated into the Croatian War of Independence . The JNA stepped in , increasingly supporting the Croatian Serb insurgents , and preventing 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 , 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 introduced in September . On 8 October , Croatia declared independence from Yugoslavia , and a month later the ZNG was renamed the Croatian Army (Hrvatska vojska - HV) . Late 1991 saw the fiercest fighting of the war , as the 1991 Yugoslav campaign in Croatia culminated in the Siege of Dubrovnik , and the Battle of Vukovar . In western Slavonia , the HV managed to push back the JNA at several points , and secure Papuk Mountain in early December in Operation Otkos 10 .

= = Order of battle = =

The principal force committed to the offensive , planned by the HV Sisak Operational Group (OG) ,

was the 102nd Infantry Brigade , attached to the Sisak OG by the Zagreb Operational Zone command , as the single combat unit deployed as a reserve in the Sisak OG area of responsibility (AOR) .

Besides the 102nd Brigade , commanded by Captain Franc Ferenčak , the Zagreb Operational Zone deployed an armoured @-@ mechanised unit , attached directly to the Zagreb Operational Zone , into the Sisak OG AOR . The unit consisted of eight tanks and two armoured personnel carriers .

The Sisak OG assigned the 10th Brigade of the Croatian TO to support the right flank of the 102nd Infantry Brigade . Protection of the left flank was assigned to the 2nd Battalion of the 2nd Guards Brigade , supported by the 2nd Battalion of the 144th Infantry Brigade .

To reinforce the 102nd Infantry Brigade and the independent armoured @-@ mechanised unit , ten soldiers from the Glina Battalion were attached to each battalion of the 10th and 102nd brigades ; two soldiers were assigned to serve as guides for each tank . In addition , the Glina Battalion was tasked with reconnaissance , harassment of JNA 's rear and securing captured infrastructure .

Sisak special police were assigned to support the Glina Battalion , and indirectly the main offensive force . The 36th Engineering @-@ Pontoon Battalion was tasked with the Kupa River crossing by the 102nd Infantry Brigade . The Sisak OG was commanded by Major General Božo Budimir .

The Croatian Serb TO and JNA defences immediately west of the city of Sisak and north of Glina were positioned along the right (southern) bank of the Kupa River , largely consisting of the JNA 592nd and the 622nd Mechanised Brigades . On the opposite bank , the HV 100th Infantry Brigade held positions west of Sisak , flanked by the 145th Infantry Brigade to its right , and the 10th brigade of the Croatian TO further to the west . The planned main axis of the Operation Whirlwind extended across the 592nd Mechanised Brigade AOR , commanded by Colonel Boško Džombić .

= = Timeline = =

The HV 102nd Infantry Brigade arrived at the Sisak OG AOR on 11 December 1992 , and was ordered to undertake the offensive on the same evening , at about 20 : 00 , leaving no time for any preparation or reconnaissance . A reconnaissance ? sabotage detachment of the HV Glina Battalion and the special police force were ferried across the Kupa River on the night of 11 / 12 December , capturing the village of Stankovac and preparing to support the 102nd Infantry Brigade at the river crossing . The 36th Engineering @-@ Pontoon Battalion completed a crossing point in the village of Žitinec by 4 : 00 and the lead elements of the 102nd Infantry Brigade crossed the Kupa River a half @-@ hour later .

The river crossing was unopposed until 08 : 00 , when the defending force launched a mortar attack against the crossing point . Nonetheless , the 1st Battalion of the 102nd Infantry Brigade cleared the river by 09 : 00 that morning and reached Stankovac .

After spending three hours crossing the Kupa River , by 13 : 00 the independent armoured @-@ mechanised unit was headed for Mala Solina , 6 kilometres (3 @.@ 7 miles) to the south . However , the unit was intercepted by JNA armour and forced to turn back to Stankovac . To further complicate the situation for the HV , the 10th Brigade did not even start to move south , while the 2nd Battalion of the 102nd Independent Brigade would not cross Kupa before its commander joined the unit at 16 : 00 .

The 3rd Battalion of the 102nd Infantry Brigade reached the village of Vrateško on the right (southern) bank of the Kupa River , but was unable to join the force south of Kupa . A bridge separating the battalion from the rest of the brigade remained out of HV 's control .

By the evening , the 2nd Battalion was ordered to separate from the main axis of the offensive and protect the right flank of the 1st Battalion of the 102nd Brigade ? performing the task originally assigned to the 10th Brigade of the Croatian TO . At the same time , the 10th Brigade commanding officer was relieved of duty for failure to advance . Regardless , the unit remained inactive . The HV units that managed to cross the river on 12 December surprised the JNA and reported inflicting considerable casualties .

On the night of 12 / 13 December , the air temperature dropped to ? 15 ° C (5 ° F) , and HV troops

sought shelter in Stankovac until the morning ? shrinking the bridgehead held by the 102nd Infantry Brigade . In addition , the 36th Engineering @-@ Platoon Battalion removed engineering equipment from the Kupa crossing , leaving behind only four to six boats . The command post of the 102nd Infantry Brigade remained in Farka?i? , detached from the main offensive force in Stankovac .

On 13 December , at approximately 07 : 00 , the independent HV armoured @-@ mechanised unit advanced northwest along the Kupa , towards Gra?anica . During the advance , one of the tanks was captured and its crew killed after the capture . Nearly simultaneously , the JNA commenced a tank and mortar attack against Stankovac and the river crossing at ?i?inec . The HV armoured @-@ mechanised unit and the 1st Battalion of the 102nd Infantry Brigade panicked , believing the crossing point was lost , and started to fall back to ?i?inec in disarray , sustaining considerable casualties . Since there was no way to transport the remaining HV armour across the Kupa River , the tanks were destroyed by one of the force 's own tanks . That tank was then destroyed with explosives to prevent its capture . As there were too few boats at the river crossing to allow a quick retreat , some of the troops swam across the river , causing several to drown in very cold water . The command post of the brigade fell back to Galdovo , while the troops started to retreat to Zagreb . The entire brigade was back in Zagreb by 15 December .

= = Aftermath = =

While the JNA 's casualties are not known , the HV sustained a loss of 18 killed and 18 wounded , as well as a loss of eight tanks , two armoured personnel carriers and seven boats . The 2 @, @ 011 @-@ strong 102nd Infantry Brigade alone suffered 13 dead . Their names were later inscribed on a memorial plaque in ?i?inec , at the Kupa River crossing point . In the aftermath of the offensive , there were speculations in Croatia that the casualties were much higher , possibly as many as 60 killed and 200 wounded .

A Croatian Serb paramilitary unit , " ?iltovi " , based in Glina , is suspected of killing HV troops taken as prisoners of war during the retreat . In addition , Croatian Serb forces killed 21 civilians in the Jo?evica massacre as retribution for the HV offensive . The killing was investigated by SAO Krajina authorities , which concluded that the killings were in revenge for the deaths of 21 Serb paramilitaries in the village of Gra?enica in Operation Whirlwind . In 2010 , Croatian authorities charged six individuals with war crimes committed in the village of Jo?evica .

The failed offensive was investigated by the HV in 1991 and researched later by retired HV Brigadier Vlado Hodalj . He concluded that the offensive failed because of overall poor planning and preparation , specifically citing the lack of reconnaissance and reserves . Furthermore , Hodalj cited inadequate leadership by the Sisak OG as a cause of the failure , pointing to inaction in respect of the 10th Brigade 's failure to advance and improper employment of the 2nd Guards Brigade in an auxiliary role , protecting the flank of an inexperienced brigade that was committed to the offensive with little , if any , training . Finally , the offensive itself had no clear goal . Croatian Admiral Davor Domazet @-@ Lo?o also criticised the offensive as an unnecessary , purely tactical and politically counterproductive move , likely unauthorised by appropriate authorities .

Hodalj praised the Sisak OG command for managing to keep the operation a secret until it was launched , making sure it would surprise the JNA . The secrecy was reflected in the apparent last @-@ minute rerouting of the 102nd Infantry Brigade to the offensive , although the Zagreb Operational Zone deployed it to Sunja , to the east of Sisak . Still , the Sisak OG failed to prepare detailed river crossing plans , or even issue maps and written brigade @-@ level commands for the crossings ? relying on oral commands instead . Likewise , the troops were not equipped to endure the cold weather in the open , limiting their effectiveness . Hodalj concluded that the offensive exceeded needs and capabilities of the Sisak OG . Even though the 1991 HV investigation concluded that the offensive was prepared for ten days and was approved by Zagreb Operational Zone command , there are no documents pertaining to the preparations other than those issued by the Sisak OG itself . Regardless of the poor preparation of the offensive , the 102nd Infantry Brigade was subject to public criticism in Croatia for fleeing the battlefield in the aftermath of Operation Whirlwind .

