

= Siege of Varaždin Barracks =

The Siege of Varaždin Barracks , also referred to locally as Varaždin 's Days of War (Croatian : Varaždinski dani rata) , was the blockade and capture of the Yugoslav People 's Army (JNA) barracks and other facilities in and around the city of Varaždin during the Croatian War of Independence . The blockade began on 14 September 1991 , quickly escalated into fighting , and ended on 22 September with the surrender of the JNA garrison . It was part of the Battle of the Barracks ? an effort by Croatian armed forces to isolate JNA units based at barracks in Croatia , or capture the barracks to provide arms for Croatia 's nascent army .

The besieging force outnumbered the JNA garrison in Varaždin , which was divided among several barracks , storage depots and other facilities , but the JNA possessed substantially greater firepower . The balance shifted in favour of the Croatian forces after smaller JNA posts were captured in the first few days of the siege , until only one barracks along with the headquarters of the JNA 32nd Corps remained under JNA control . At that point , the commander of the 32nd Corps , Major General Vladimir Trifunović , and the civilian authorities in Varaždin agreed that the remaining JNA forces in the city would surrender , but all those wishing to leave would be permitted to do so , leaving their weapons behind .

The capture of the 32nd Corps ' weapons was the most significant achievement of the Battle of the Barracks , and greatly augmented the capabilities of the Croatian military . After he left Croatia , Trifunović was indicted for war crimes by Croatia , tried in absentia and convicted for the combat deaths of six Croatian soldiers and the wounding of dozens of Croatian citizens before and during the siege . He was also prosecuted by Yugoslav authorities for treason , but subsequently pardoned . In 2013 , he requested a re @-@ trial on his Croatian war crimes conviction .

= = Background = =

In 1990 , ethnic tensions between Serbs and Croats worsened after the electoral defeat of the government of the Socialist Republic of Croatia by the Croatian Democratic Union (Croatian : Hrvatska demokratska zajednica ? HDZ) . The Yugoslav People 's Army (Serbian : Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija ? JNA) confiscated Croatia 's Territorial Defence (Croatian : Teritorijalna obrana ? TO) weapons to minimize resistance . On 17 August , the tensions escalated into an open revolt of the Croatian Serbs , centred on the predominantly Serb @-@ populated areas of the Dalmatian hinterland around Knin (approximately 60 kilometres (37 miles) north @-@ east of Split) , parts of the Lika , Kordun , Banovina and eastern Croatia . In January 1991 , Serbia , supported by Montenegro and Serbia 's provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo , unsuccessfully tried to obtain the Yugoslav Presidency 's approval for a JNA operation to disarm Croatian security forces . The request was denied and a bloodless skirmish between Serb insurgents and Croatian special police in March prompted the JNA itself to ask the Federal Presidency to give it wartime authority and declare a state of emergency . Even though the request was backed by Serbia and its allies , the JNA request was refused on 15 March . Serbian President Slobodan Milošević , preferring a campaign to expand Serbia rather than to preserve Yugoslavia with Croatia as a federal unit , publicly threatened to replace the JNA with a Serbian army and declared that he no longer recognized the authority of the federal Presidency . The threat caused the JNA to abandon plans to preserve Yugoslavia in favour of expansion of Serbia as the JNA came under Milošević 's control . By the end of March , the conflict had escalated with the first fatalities . In early April , leaders of the Serb revolt in Croatia declared their intention to amalgamate the areas under their control with Serbia . These were viewed by the Government of Croatia as breakaway regions .

At the beginning of 1991 , Croatia had no regular army . To bolster its defence , Croatia doubled its police numbers to about 20 @, @ 000 . The most effective part of the Croatian police force was 3 @, @ 000 @-@ strong special police comprising twelve battalions organised along military lines . There were also 9 @, @ 000 ? 10 @, @ 000 regionally organised reserve police in 16 battalions and 10 companies , but they lacked weapons . In response to the deteriorating situation , the Croatian government established the Croatian National Guard (Croatian : Zbor narodne garde ? ZNG) in

May by expanding the special police battalions into four all @-@ professional guards brigades . Under Ministry of Defence control and commanded by retired JNA General Martin ?pegelj , the four guards brigades comprised approximately 8 @,@ 000 troops . The reserve police , also expanded to 40 @,@ 000 , was attached to the ZNG and reorganised into 19 brigades and 14 independent battalions . The guards brigades were the only units of the ZNG that were fully equipped with small arms ; throughout the ZNG there was a lack of heavier weapons and there was poor command and control structure above the brigade level . The shortage of heavy weapons was so severe that the ZNG resorted to using World War II weapons taken from museums and film studios . At the time , the Croatian weapon stockpile consisted of 30 @,@ 000 small arms purchased abroad and 15 @,@ 000 previously owned by the police . To replace the personnel lost to the guards brigades , a new 10 @,@ 000 @-@ strong special police was established .

= = Prelude = =

The views of the Croatian leadership on how to deal with the JNA 's role in the Croatian Serb revolt gradually evolved between January and September 1991 . Croatian President Franjo Tu?man 's initial plan was to win European Community (EC) and United States support ; so he dismissed advice to seize JNA barracks and storage facilities in the country . This course of action was first advocated by ?pegelj in late 1990 ; he again urged Tu?man to act while the JNA fought Slovenia 's TO in the Ten @-@ Day War in June ? July 1991 . ?pegelj 's calls were echoed by ?ime ?odan , who succeeded ?pegelj as Defence Minister in July . ?pegelj remained in command of the ZNG .

Tu?man 's initial stance was based on his belief that Croatia could not win a war against the JNA . The ZNG was therefore limited to defensive operations , even though the actions of the JNA appeared to be coordinated with Croatian Serb forces . This impression was reinforced by buffer zones established by the JNA after fighting between Croatian Serb militia and the ZNG . The JNA often intervened after the ZNG had lost territory , leaving the Croatian Serbs in control of areas they had captured before the JNA stepped in . The JNA provided some weapons to the Croatian Serbs , although most of their weaponry was sourced from Serbia 's TO and the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs .

In July 1991 , ?pegelj and ?odan 's advice was supported by a number of Croatian Parliament members . In response , Tu?man dismissed ?odan the same month he was appointed Defence Minister , and ?pegelj resigned his command of the ZNG on 3 August . The deteriorating situation in eastern Croatia , including the JNA expulsion of ZNG troops from Baranja , intermittent fighting around Osijek , Vukovar and Vinkovci , increasing losses and the growing conviction that the JNA were actively supporting the Croatian Serb revolt , forced Tu?man to act . On 22 August , he issued an ultimatum to the federal Yugoslav authorities demanding the withdrawal of the JNA to its barracks by the end of the month . The ultimatum stated that if the JNA failed to comply , Croatia would consider it an army of occupation and take corresponding action . On 1 September , the EC proposed a ceasefire and a peace conference was accepted by the Yugoslav Presidency and by Tu?man , despite his earlier ultimatum . The conference started on 7 September , but only four days later , the Croatian member and chair of the presidency , Stjepan Mesi? , ordered the JNA to return to its barracks within 48 hours . This order was motivated by Tu?man 's concern that the conference would drag on while the ZNG lost territory . Even though the order was opposed by other members of the presidency , it gave Croatia justification to openly confront the JNA .

Prime Minister Franjo Greguri? advised Tu?man to implement ?pegelj 's plan . According to General Anton Tus , Tu?man ordered the ZNG to capture JNA barracks on 12 September , but rescinded the order the next day . The order was reinstated on 14 September after Tus pleaded with Tu?man to re @-@ authorize action , arguing that the ZNG was running out of time . The same day , the ZNG and the Croatian police blockaded and cut utilities to all JNA facilities it had access to , beginning the Battle of the Barracks . This action comprised blockades of 33 large JNA garrisons in Croatia , and numerous smaller facilities , including border posts , and weapons and ammunition storage depots .

= = Order of battle = =

Varaždin was the garrison of the JNA 32nd Corps commanded by Major General Vladimir Trifunović . In addition to the Corps headquarters there were several other JNA facilities in and around the city . The most substantial of these were located in Varaždin itself : the Kalnički partizani barracks where Colonel Berislav Popov 's 32nd Mechanised Brigade was based , and the Jalkovečki ratve barracks of the 32nd Mixed Artillery Regiment , commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Vladimir Davidović . The Corps ' area of responsibility extended beyond Varaždin and its immediate surroundings , where further significant combat units were based . The most significant among them were the 32nd Engineer Regiment in Čakovec , the 411th Mixed Antitank Artillery Regiment based in Križevci , the 73rd Motorised Brigade headquartered in Koprivnica , the 265th Mechanised Brigade based in Bjelovar , and the 288th Mixed Antitank Artillery Brigade in Virovitica . In Varaždin itself , the JNA units included approximately 1 @, @ 000 troops , making the JNA garrison of Varaždin the second largest in Croatia . Despite this , the JNA did not have sufficient number of troops in the area to secure all its facilities .

Croatian forces in and around Varaždin and nearby Čakovec consisted of 640 ZNG troops (including 60 who had been deployed from Zagreb) , 100 police , 300 People 's Protection (Narodna zaštita) troops and several hundred armed civilians . The ZNG troops were subordinated to the 104th Brigade and to the 5th Battalion of the 1st Guards Brigade : but were lightly armed . Besides small arms , they had only 17 mortars , two 9M14 Malyutka anti @-@ tank guided missile systems , two 12 @. @ 7 @-@ millimetre (0 @. @ 50 in) anti @-@ aircraft machine guns and four armoured personnel carriers . Initially , command of Croatian forces in the city was not unified and Colonel ?elimir ?karec of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia only had a coordination role .

= = Timeline = =

= = = First hostilities = = =

A blockade of the JNA facilities in and around Varaždin was ordered on 13 September 1991 , which took effect the next day when utilities and access to the barracks were cut . In response , the Corps command informed Croatian forces that they could no longer guarantee peace unless utilities were restored and JNA military vehicles were allowed to move freely . On 15 September , the Corps began preparing for the demolition of all minor military facilities which could not be defended . At the same time , negotiations began between the Corps command and civilian authorities in Varaždin . At 15 : 30 , the Yugoslav Air Force attacked the Varaždin Airfield . The strike was intended to disrupt flights of Antonov An @-@ 2 agricultural aircraft converted to carry 1 @. @ 5 tonnes (1 @. @ 5 long tons ; 1 @. @ 7 short tons) of cargo : transporting weapons from the Hungarian town of Nagykanizsa . The attacking force comprised two planes sorted from ?eljava Air Base , which broke the sound barrier above Varaždin to produce a sonic boom and bombed the airfield . One bomb destroyed an An @-@ 2 on the ground and damaged the runway , while the second landed in a nearby field .

Between 16 : 50 and 17 : 07 , there was an exchange of small arms fire between the JNA troops in the Corps headquarters and a nearby police checkpoint , and at 17 : 35 a mortar attack was launched by the 32nd Mechanised Brigade . The mortar fire targeted the police station and surrounding buildings , and an electrical substation in the nearby village of Nedeljanec . The civilian authorities in Varaždin promptly notified the European Community Monitoring Mission of damage to the city . By 16 September , the JNA artillery bombardment of the city had extended to various street intersections and approaches to the Drava bridge on the Varaždin : Čakovec road . The latter was counter @-@ battery fire , targeting ZNG mortars which fired approximately 150 bombs against the JNA during the entire operation . By the end of 16 September , 42 JNA officers and soldiers had deserted from the 32nd Mechanised Brigade . The JNA ordered its border guards posted along the

Hungarian border from Žakovec to Ludbreg to lay land mines around their facilities , then cross into Hungary and surrender to that country 's authorities .

= = = Peak of the fighting = = =

On 17 September , the commander of the 104th Brigade , Colonel Ivan Ruklić , took command of all Croatian forces in Varaždin . The Yugoslav Air Force attacked an airfield in Žakovec , mimicking the strike carried out in Varaždin a few days earlier . That evening , the heaviest fighting of the siege erupted in Varaždin , and the 104th Brigade reported it was uncertain how long it would be able to maintain the blockades . Croatian forces received additional weapons that day , after the JNA garrisons in Žakovec , Križevci and Virovitica surrendered to the ZNG . In Varaždin itself , corps @-@ level units of the JNA 32nd Corps based at the 15 @.@ maj barracks also surrendered to the ZNG that day . The following day , fighting intensified again , as Croatian forces captured several minor JNA facilities in Varaždin itself , leaving the Corps headquarters , the Kalnički partizani barracks and the Jalkovečki žrtve barracks as the only JNA @-@ held military bases in the city . In the course of this fighting , the ZNG suffered one fatality and captured nine JNA officers and 30 soldiers .

On 19 September , Croatian forces managed to interdict radio communications between the 32nd Mechanised Brigade artillery and its artillery observers , and set up their own transmitter to direct JNA artillery fire against the Jalkovečki žrtve barracks . This deception was designed to deceive Davidović into thinking that the ZNG had much greater firepower than it did . The plan worked and when ZNG troops entered the barracks compound that day , the 32nd Mixed Artillery Regiment (four officers and 196 soldiers) surrendered . Late in the evening of 19 September , Croatian police and elements of the 3rd Battalion of the 104th Brigade secured the Varaždinbreg weapons storage facility located in the village of Banjčina near Varaždin , after its JNA commander surrendered the facility and its garrison of 60 without resistance . The capture of JNA weapons greatly improved the Croatian position in negotiations when trying to convince JNA commanding officers of the 32nd Corps to surrender .

= = = Surrender of the JNA garrison = = =

The blockade continued for two more days , with continuing clashes between Croatian and JNA troops . On 21 September , the 32nd Corps found itself in a difficult position . It reported that it could not continue to resist as its weapons and ammunition storage facilities had been lost , and all the barracks had been captured except the base of the 32nd Mechanised Brigade . Furthermore , it noted that there was a possibility that the remaining troops might desert en masse . According to Trifunović , he notified Colonel General Života Avramović , his immediate superior and commander of the 5th Military District , of his intention to surrender . Avramović then told Trifunović to do as he saw fit . A Croatian ultimatum was issued early on 22 September , demanding the surrender of JNA troops in the city , and offering its personnel the chance to leave Croatia " honourably " . Trifunović accepted the Croatian terms at 11 : 00 .

= = Aftermath = =

One JNA officer and one non @-@ commissioned officer were killed during the fighting , and 15 JNA troops were wounded . Croatian forces sustained losses of two killed and 24 wounded . Two civilians were also killed . Approximately 1 @, @ 000 JNA officers and soldiers surrendered to the ZNG . The officers and their families living in Varaždin , as well as approximately 450 soldiers who wanted to leave Croatia were transported to Serbia in a convoy comprising twelve buses and several passenger cars . The convoy was provided with a police escort and two representatives of the civilian authorities in Varaždin accompanied the convoy as hostages to guarantee its safe passage . One of the hostages was Radimir Čačić , who became Deputy Prime Minister of Croatia 20 years later .

The ZNG captured 74 T @-@ 55 tanks , approximately ten special @-@ purpose vehicles (such as PT @-@ 76 amphibious light tanks) , armoured recovery vehicles , and armoured vehicle @-@ launched bridges , 48 BVP M @-@ 80 infantry fighting vehicles , 18 self @-@ propelled anti @-@ aircraft weapons , six 2S1 Gvozdika self @-@ propelled howitzers , six M @-@ 63 Plamen and four M @-@ 77 Oganj multiple rocket launchers , eighteen 155 @-@ millimetre (6 @.@ 1 in) and twelve 152 @-@ millimetre (6 @.@ 0 in) guns with towing vehicles , approximately 180 artillery pieces below 100 @-@ millimetre (3 @.@ 9 in) calibre , several batteries of 60 @-@ millimetre (2 @.@ 4 in) , 82 @-@ millimetre (3 @.@ 2 in) and 120 @-@ millimetre (4 @.@ 7 in) mortars , 25 @,@ 000 small arms , 250 vehicles and pieces of engineering equipment , a large stock of communication equipment and several hundred thousand tonnes of ammunition . Some of the weapons had been disabled on Trifunovi? 's orders shortly before the surrender . The captured weapons were distributed to units deployed in eastern Slavonia , Lika and Dalmatia , and were also used to equip new ZNG units .

When the last JNA @-@ held barracks and the 32nd Corps headquarters surrendered , only two major JNA bases remained in the area of responsibility of the Corps ? Bjelovar and Koprivnica . The JNA 's Bjelovar garrison was captured by the ZNG a week later , while its barracks in Koprivnica surrendered a day after that . The capture of the JNA barracks in and around Vara?din , and particularly the storage facilities of the 32nd Corps was very significant for development of Croatian military . The capture of the barracks is celebrated annually in Vara?din , and is locally referred to as " Vara?din 's Days of War " (Vara?dinski dani rata) .

War crimes charges were brought against Trifunovi? in Croatia , where he was indicted for the combat deaths of six Croatian soldiers in and around Vara?din , and the wounding of a further 37 individuals (both soldiers and civilians) . After a trial in absentia , he was found guilty and in 1991 he was sentenced to 15 years in prison . In 1994 , Trifunovi? was charged with treason by Yugoslav authorities for surrendering the entire JNA 32nd Corps to the ZNG . He was convicted and sentenced to 11 years in prison . In early 1996 , he was pardoned and released , and the Yugoslav authorities paid him ? 62 @,@ 000 compensation for spending nearly two years in prison . In 2013 , Trifunovi? formally requested re @-@ trial in Croatia .