

= Dalj massacre =

The Dalj massacre was the killing of 56 or 57 Croats in Dalj , Croatia on 1 August 1991 , during the Croatian War of Independence . In addition to civilian victims , the figure includes 20 Croatian policemen , 15 Croatian National Guard ( Zbor narodne garde ? ZNG ) troops and four civil defencemen who had been defending the police station and water supply building in the village . While some of the policemen and the ZNG troops died in combat , those who surrendered were killed after they became prisoners of war . They tried to fight off an attack by the Croatian Serb SAO Eastern Slavonia , Baranja and Western Syrmia ( SAO SBWS ) Territorial Defence Forces , supported by the Yugoslav People 's Army ( Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija ? JNA ) and the Serb Volunteer Guard paramilitaries . The SAO SBWS was declared an autonomous territory in eastern Croatia following the Battle of Borovo Selo just to the south of Dalj .

After the attack , the non @-@ Serb civilian population in the village and the surrounding area was persecuted . They were forced to flee their homes , as they would have been imprisoned , physically abused or killed if they did not . After the war , the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia ( ICTY ) charged high @-@ ranking SAO SBWS and Serbian officials , including Slobodan Milo?evi? and Goran Had?i? , with war crimes committed in Dalj . The killings were extensively covered by German media leading to forming of a public opinion in support of Croatia . By the end of 1991 , Germany adopted support for diplomatic recognition of Croatia as its policy and duty .

= = Background = =

In 1990 , following the electoral defeat of the government of the Socialist Republic of Croatia , ethnic tensions in the republic worsened . The Yugoslav People 's Army ( Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija ? JNA ) confiscated Croatia 's Territorial Defence ( Teritorijalna obrana ? TO ) weapons to minimize the possibility of resistance following the elections . 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 , parts of the Lika , Kordun , Banovina and eastern Croatia . They established a Serbian National Council in July 1990 to coordinate opposition to Croatian President Franjo Tu?man 's policy of pursuing independence for Croatia . Milan Babi? , a dentist from the southern town of Knin , was elected president . Knin 's police chief , Milan Marti? , established paramilitary militias . The two men eventually became the political and military leaders of the SAO Krajina , a self @-@ declared state incorporating the Serb @-@ inhabited areas of Croatia . In March 1991 , the SAO Krajina authorities backed by the Serbian government started to consolidate control over Serb @-@ populated areas of Croatia . The move resulted in a bloodless skirmish in Pakrac and the first fatalities in the Plitvice Lakes incident . By early May , the conflict also escalated in the region of eastern Slavonia , culminating in the Battle of Borovo Selo , just to the south of the village of Dalj . On 25 ? 26 June , Croatian Serbs in the eastern Slavonia established the SAO Eastern Slavonia , Baranja and Western Syrmia ( SAO SBWS ) , declaring it an autonomous political entity .

In the beginning of 1991 , Croatia had no regular army and in an effort to bolster its defence , it doubled the number of police personnel to about 20 @,@ 000 . The most effective part of the force was the 3 @,@ 000 @-@ strong special police deployed in twelve battalions adopting military organisation . In addition there were 9 @,@ 000 ? 10 @,@ 000 regionally organised reserve police . The reserve police was set up in 16 battalions and 10 companies , but they lacked weapons . By July , the Croatian National Guard ( Zbor narodne garde ? ZNG ) was established , absorbing a part of the special police force reorganised into four professional brigades , and police reserve force of 40 @,@ 000 ZNG troops . The reserve units did not possess sufficient heavy or small arms to arm all of their personnel .

= = Timeline = =

The general area of the villages of Dalj , Erdut and Aljma? was targeted by an artillery bombardment between 3 : 00 a.m. and 4 : 30 a.m. on 1 August 1991 . Croatian sources indicate that the artillery fire was coming from units assigned to the JNA 51st Mechanised Brigade deployed on the left bank of the Danube River , on the territory of Serbia , as well as the Croatian Serb TO . The JNA report on the events prepared for Croatian authorities denies that the JNA artillery took part in the bombardment , and indicates a somewhat later time of the initial fighting , placing it at 4 : 10 a.m. Witness testimony given at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia ( ICTY ) trial of Slobodan Milo?evi? supports the timeline placing the initial combat at 3 : 00 a.m.

After the artillery fire ceased , the Croatian Serb TO , supported by the Serb Volunteer Guard ( SVG ) led by ?eljko Ra?natovi? , began an infantry assault of Dalj , organised in three groups , from its base in Borovo Selo . One of the groups attacked the police station in Dalj , the second assaulted ZNG positions around water supply building in the village , while the third group remained in reserve . The heaviest fighting took place around the Dalj police station defended by the Croatian police and ZNG personnel . At 6 : 20 a.m. , the Croatian police requested assistance from Osijek police administration and the JNA in terminating the TO attack , citing considerable casualties . The JNA decided to intervene and was ordered to Dalj at 6 : 50 a.m. The JNA reported receiving gunfire from the ZNG 1st Company of the 1st Battalion of the 3rd Guards Brigade in Erdut as it moved towards 15 kilometres ( 9 @. @ 3 miles ) of road between Bogojevo and Dalj and returning fire before proceeding to Dalj . Conversely , the ICTY witness of the event claimed the JNA fired against civilian homes in Erdut unprovoked . The JNA units reached the Dalj police station at 9 : 30 a.m.

JNA and Croatian sources disagree on events immediately following arrival of the JNA in Dalj . While the JNA claimed it requested a cessation of the fire only to be refused by the defenders of the police station , Croatian sources claim the JNA demanded the unconditional surrender of the police and the ZNG , and were refused by the Croatian force . Both versions agree that the combat resumed until approximately 10 a.m. , when three tank main gun rounds , fired by the JNA , hit the police station . While the JNA reported there were no Croatian policemen or ZNG troops captured alive , contradicting its own report stating that the Croatian force located outside the police station accepted cessation of hostilities , the Croatian sources claim that those who surrendered were killed after their capture . Overall , 39 were killed in the fighting for the police station in Dalj ? 20 policemen , 15 ZNG troops and four civil defencemen .

The same day , several non @- @ Serb civilians were killed in Dalj . In a subsequent round of negotiations with Croatian authorities , the SAO SBWS representatives reported 56 or 57 Croats were killed in Dalj on 1 August . Twenty @- @ five bodies of the victims , including two civilians , were transferred to ZNG @- @ held Osijek . Post @- @ mortem examinations indicated some of the victims were beaten and then executed .

= = Aftermath = =

The Croat population felt intimidated and forced to leave Dalj , as the events of 1 August marked the beginning of a series of attacks against the Croat civilian population in ethnically mixed areas . The bulk of the refugees travelled to Aljma? , and then were taken by boats and barges along the Drava River to Osijek . Persecution of the non @- @ Serb population of Dalj and other nearby villages started in the immediate aftermath of the attack . The persecution included beatings , arbitrary arrests and war rape . The TO units arrested a number of Croat civilians and imprisoned them in Dalj . On 21 September , eleven prisoners were killed by the TO personnel led by Ra?natovi? , and buried in a mass grave in the village of ?elije . A further 28 civilians held in Dalj detention facility were tortured and killed by the TO and Ra?natovi? on 4 October . The bodies of the victims were then dumped in the Danube River . At least 135 Croat and non @- @ Serb civilians were killed in this region by May 1992 .

After the JNA captured Vukovar , it transferred a large number of the inhabitants of the city to the detention facility in Dalj on 20 November . The transfer occurred on the basis of a request by Goran Had?i? , political leader of the SAO SBWS . Those suspected of involvement in the fighting were interrogated and tortured , and at least 35 were executed .

The SAO Krajina was renamed the Republic of Serbian Krajina ( RSK ) on 19 December , and the SAO SBWS formally joined the RSK on 26 February 1992 . After the merger , Hadži? , who had been appointed president of the SAO SBWS on 25 September 1991 , assumed the role of the president of the RSK . The events of 1 August 1991 were extensively covered by German media at the time , leading to a public outcry over the massacre . Germany subsequently advocated quick recognition of Croatia , as a means to stop further violence . By late 1991 , Germany presented its decision to recognize Croatia as its policy and duty , lobbying the European Economic Community ( EEC ) diplomats . On 19 December , the German government decided to grant diplomatic recognition to Croatia as the first EEC member state to do so .

In 2013 , the Dalj police station was awarded the Order of Nikola ?ubi? Zrinski for heroism . A memorial to the 39 police officers , ZNG troops and civil defencemen killed in Dalj on 1 August 1991 was unveiled at the station on the 22nd anniversary of their death . On 26 November 2013 , a memorial to the killed civilians was completed in Dalj .

= = = War crimes charges by the ICTY = = =

Slobodan Milo?evi? , President of Serbia in 1991 , and Hadži? were charged by the ICTY for war crimes , including ordering of the murder , extermination , deportation and torture of non @-@ Serbs in Dalj through the paramilitaries . Milo?evi? died in 2006 , four years after his ICTY trial started , before a verdict was reached . As of December 2013 the trial of Hadži? is in progress at the ICTY since 2012 , and it is expected to be completed by the end of 2015 .

The ICTY also charged Jovica Stani?i? , head of the State Security Service run by Serbia 's Ministry of Internal Affairs , and Franko Simatovi? , head of the Special Operations Unit of the State Security Service , with war crimes . The charges include complicity in the torture of a group of seven non @-@ Serb civilians , including two arrested in Dalj on 11 November 1991 . Five of those arrested were killed by the SVG paramilitaries in Erdut and buried in a mass grave in the village of ?elije . Stani?i? and Simatovi? were charged with control and training of the SVG . The trial began in 2008 , and resulted in acquittal of the two by the ICTY trial chamber on 30 May 2013 . The ICTY prosecutor appealed the verdict , and the process is pending as of December 2013 .

In 2010 , the commanding officer of the JNA 51st Motorised Brigade , Enes Taso , was charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Dalj in August ? December 1991 . Taso is charged with the deaths of two policemen in the JNA attack on the Dalj police station , nine prisoners of war captured in Dalj , eleven captured in Vukovar , and 90 non @-@ Serb civilians . In May 2012 , Croatian authorities in Osijek started a trial of two Croatian Serbs charged with war crimes against Croatian civilians , including the gang rape of a 20 @-@ year @-@ old woman and forcing her parents and siblings to watch the rape . Both of them were convicted in September 2013 and sentenced to 12 years in prison . In 2013 , the Croatian Veterans ' Affairs Minister stated that Croatian authorities have filed 150 indictments for war crimes committed during the Dalj massacre and war crimes perpetrated in Dalj area during the war .