

## = Battle of Osijek =

The Battle of Osijek ( Croatian : Bitka za Osijek ) was the artillery bombardment of the Croatian city of Osijek by the Yugoslav People 's Army ( JNA ) which took place from August 1991 to June 1992 during the Croatian War of Independence . Shelling peaked in late November and December 1991 , then diminished in 1992 after the Vance plan was accepted by the combatants . Airstrikes and attacks by JNA infantry and armored units against targets in the city accompanied the bombardment , which caused approximately 800 deaths and resulted in a large portion of the city 's population leaving . Croatian sources estimated that 6 @, @ 000 artillery shells were fired against Osijek over the period .

After the JNA captured Vukovar on 18 November 1991 , Osijek was the next target for its campaign in Croatia . The JNA units subordinated to the 12th ( Novi Sad ) Corps , supported by the Serb Volunteer Guard , achieved modest advances in late November and early December , capturing several villages south of Osijek , but the Croatian Army maintained its defensive front and limited the JNA 's advances .

In the aftermath of the Battle of Osijek , Croatian authorities charged thirteen JNA officers with war crimes against civilians , but no arrests have been made to date . Croatian authorities also charged the wartime commander of Osijek 's defence , Branimir Glava? , and five others with war crimes committed in the city in 1991 . The five were convicted and received sentences ranging between eight and ten years , and as of March 2015 , judicial proceedings against Glava? are in progress .

## = = 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 the weapons of Croatia 's Territorial Defence ( Teritorijalna obrana ? TO ) to minimize potential resistance . On 17 August 1990 , the escalating tensions turned into open revolt by the Croatian Serbs . The revolt took place in the predominantly Serb @-@ populated areas of the Dalmatian hinterland around Knin and in parts of the Lika , Kordun , Banovina regions and eastern Croatia . In January 1991 , Serbia , supported by Montenegro and Serbia 's provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo , made two unsuccessful attempts to obtain approval from the Yugoslav Presidency to deploy the JNA to disarm Croatian security forces .

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 grant it wartime powers and declare a state of emergency . The request was denied on 15 March 1991 , and the JNA came under the control of Serbian President Slobodan Milo?evi? in the summer of 1991 as the Yugoslav federation started to fall apart . By the end of the month , the conflict had escalated , resulting in the first fatalities of the war . The JNA then stepped in to support the insurgents and prevent Croatian police from intervening . In early April , leaders of the Serb revolt in Croatia announced their intention to integrate the areas under their control with Serbia . The Government of Croatia considered this an act of secession .

## = = Timeline = =

The JNA intervened directly against Croatia for the first time on 3 July 1991 , driving Croatian forces out of Baranja , north of the city of Osijek , and out of Erdut , Aljma? and Dalj east of Osijek . The advance was followed by intermittent fighting around Osijek , Vukovar and Vinkovci . At several points , JNA positions approached to within several hundred yards of Osijek city limits .

The JNA units near Osijek were subordinated to the 12th ( Novi Sad ) Corps , commanded by Major General Andrija Bior?evi? . In the city itself , the JNA had several barracks which housed the 12th Proletarian Mechanised Brigade and the 12th Mixed Artillery Regiment . The 12th Proletarian Mechanised Brigade contained one of a handful battalions maintained by the JNA at full combat readiness . Osijek was established as their starting point in a planned westward offensive toward

Našice and Bjelovar .

Croatian forces in the area were formally subordinated to the Operational Zone Command in Osijek headed by Colonel Karl Gorinšek . In practice , the city 's defense was overseen by Branimir Glavač , then head of the National Defence Office in Osijek , according to information presented at Glavač trial in the 2000s . Glavač formally became commander of city defenses on 7 December 1991 .

= = = Bombardment of the city = = =

The JNA first attacked Osijek by mortar fire on 31 July 1991 , and heavily bombarded the city 's center on 19 August 1991 . The attacks came from positions north , east and south of Osijek , and were supported by JNA garrisons stationed in Osijek itself . On 7 - 9 September , an inconclusive battle was fought in Tenja , within three kilometres ( 1 @. @ 9 miles ) of the city . The JNA garrisons were besieged by Croatian forces in mid @-@ September . After a barracks in the city centre was captured on 15 September 1991 , the remaining JNA garrison tried to break through the Croatian troops besieging the barracks and , after heavy fighting , reached JNA positions south of Osijek on 17 September 1991 . The intensity of the shelling increased thereafter , peaking through November and December . After a ceasefire was arranged in January 1992 , following the acceptance of the Vance plan , the artillery attacks dropped off and became intermittent , and ceased by June .

During its height , the intensity of the bombardment was reported to reach as high as one shell per minute , and the artillery attacks were compounded by Yugoslav Air Force strikes against the city . According to Croatian sources , a total of 6 @, @ 000 artillery shells were fired against Osijek in the period . Prior to the start of the bombardment , the civilian population of Osijek totaled 104 @, @ 761 city residents and 129 @, @ 792 municipal residents . These numbers were significantly reduced as civilians fled the fighting . It is estimated that only about a third of the population remained in the city by the end of November , with some sources placing the estimate even lower , suggesting that the population of the city was reduced to just 10 @, @ 000 civilians during the most intense periods of the bombardment . Those who remained in Osijek through the fighting generally slept in bomb shelters .

= = = Ground offensive = = =

After JNA captured Vukovar on 18 November , the JNA 12th ( Novi Sad ) Corps , supported by the Serbian Ministry of Interior @-@ trained Serb Volunteer Guard paramilitaries , started to advance west between Vinkovci and Osijek on 20 November . The city of Osijek appeared to be the next target of the JNA , which was later confirmed by General Života Panić , commander of the JNA 1st Military District .

On 21 November 1991 , the JNA captured the villages of Stari Seleč , Novi Seleč and Ernestinovo situated approximately ten kilometres ( 6 @. @ 2 miles ) south of Osijek . Laslovo , five kilometres ( 3 @. @ 1 miles ) south of Ernestinovo , was captured three days later . Those developments threatened Pakovo and pointed to the potential encirclement of Osijek . On 4 December 1991 , the Special Envoy of Secretary @-@ General of the United Nations Cyrus Vance visited Osijek to inspect the damage .

In early December , the JNA made modest advances , capturing Antunovac located six kilometres ( 3 @. @ 7 miles ) south of Osijek on 5 December 1991 . On the same day , an armoured JNA force unsuccessfully attacked positions held by the Croatian 106th Brigade in Rosinjača Forest near Nemetin , approximately two kilometres ( 1 @. @ 2 miles ) east of Osijek . On 6 December , the JNA pushed Croatian troops out from Tenja , followed by a heavy attack against Osijek repulsed by the Croatian Army ( Hrvatska vojska ? HV ) on 7 December . On 11 December , HV personnel entered the frontline village of Paulin Dvor , less than three kilometres ( 1 @. @ 9 miles ) kilometers west of Ernestinovo , and summarily executed 19 civilians ( 18 Serbs and one Hungarian ) . The JNA captured Paulin Dvor five days later , on 16 December , and attacked Osijek once again . The HV managed to contain the attack , though fighting continued south of Osijek until January 1992 .

= = = Operation Devil 's Beam = = =

Advances of the JNA north of Osijek threatened HV control of a narrow bridgehead held across the Drava River skirting the city 's northern edge . By mid @-@ December the bridgehead was reduced to a strip of land opposite Osijek , encompassing suburban settlements of Podravlje and Tvr?avica . In order to remove the threat , the HV launched an offensive codenamed Operation Devil 's Beam ( Croatian : Operacija ?avolja greda ) on 17 ? 18 December . The offensive , involving the 1st Battalion of the 135th Brigade , elements of the special forces Frankopan Battalion and the Osijek @-@ based Orao special police unit , Drava River flotilla , artillery of the 106th Brigade , and personnel of the 4th Beli Manastir Police Station , successfully pushed the JNA north , across Stara Drava oxbow lake located approximately four kilometres ( 2 @.@ 5 miles ) north of Osijek . The JNA also withdrew from the village of Kopa?evo towards Darda and Vardarac , but the HV did not have sufficient resources to exploit the development . The HV lost eight killed in the offensive , but the JNA 's advance towards Osijek from the north was halted .

= = Aftermath = =

By June 1992 , approximately 800 people had been killed by the bombardment . By the end of the Croatian War of Independence in 1995 , a total of 1 @,@ 724 people from Osijek had been killed , including 1 @,@ 327 soldiers and 397 civilians . The city itself suffered great damage during the war , with the bulk of direct damage occurring as a consequence of the 1991 ? 92 bombardment . Direct war damage sustained by the city was estimated at a total of US \$ 1 @.@ 3 billion . The damage was regularly recorded by 400 volunteers during the bombardment .

Although media reported on the bombardment of Osijek , journalists in the city itself felt that it was receiving an unduly low level of media coverage compared to wartime events elsewhere in Croatia . The attacks on Osijek were welcomed by the Pravoslavlje newspaper published by the Serbian Orthodox Church , which appeared to give a blessing to the attack as a part of a " holy war " , setting it in the context of World War II massacres and concentration camps in the Independent State of Croatia .

The JNA withdrew from Croatia in 1992 , but continued to contribute personnel and equipment to the Army of the Republic of Serbian Krajina ( ARSK ) which controlled the areas previously held by the JNA . Although the United Nations Protection Force peacekeepers deployed to the area on the basis of the Vance plan and placed most of the ARSK heavy weapons in storage , Osijek was intermittently bombarded throughout the war ? the last artillery strike occurred in September 1995 . The hostilities ceased in November 1995 through the Erdut Agreement securing restoration of Croatian rule in the region .

In November 2010 , then @-@ Croatian President Ivo Josipovi? officially apologized for the Paulin Dvor massacre , shortly after his Serbian counterpart Boris Tadi? issued a formal apology for the massacre at Vukovar .

= = = War crime trials = = =

In 2008 , Croatian authorities formally charged Colonel Boro Ivanovi? , commanding officer of the JNA 12th Proletarian Mechanised Brigade , and twelve other JNA officers with war crimes against the civilian population . The charges include causing the deaths of 307 civilians in Osijek and surrounding areas , injuries to another 171 civilians , and the destruction of at least 1 @,@ 188 different structures . As of 2013 , all of the indicted officers remain at large in Serbia .

In 2005 , the Osijek District Court convicted former Croatian soldier Nikola Ivankovi? for his involvement in the killings at Paulin Dvor , and sentenced him to 15 years in prison . In 2012 , Enes Viteskovi? was also convicted for his involvement in the atrocity , and given an eleven @-@ year sentence .

After the war , five Croatian fighters were charged and convicted of eleven counts of murder , one of attempted murder , and one of torture of Serb civilians found in the JNA barracks , which

surrendered on 15 September 1991 . They received prison sentences of between five and eight years . Glava? , who was tried alongside them for the same crimes , received a ten @-@ year sentence . Before the conviction became final in 2009 , and to avoid extradition , Glava? fled to Bosnia and Herzegovina , where he had granted citizenship . His sentence was reduced to eight years and became final in 2010 , when he was arrested and imprisoned in Bosnia and Herzegovina . In January 2015 , the conviction was set aside by the Constitutional Court of Croatia , pending a new trial before the Supreme Court of Croatia .