

= Operation Vrbas ' 92 =

Operation Vrbas ' 92 (Serbian : ?????????? ?????? ' 92) was a military offensive undertaken by the Army of Republika Srpska (Vojska Republike Srpske ? VRS) in June ? October 1992 , during the Bosnian War . The goal of the operation was the destruction of a salient around the central Bosnian town of Jajce , which was held by the Croatian Defence Council (Hrvatsko vijeće obrane ? HVO) and the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Armija Republike Bosne i Hercegovine ? ARBiH) . The intensity of fighting varied considerably and involved several major VRS offensive efforts interspersed by relative lulls in fighting . Jajce fell to the VRS on 29 October 1992 , and the town 's capture was followed by the destruction of all its mosques and Roman Catholic churches .

The fighting improved the safety of VRS lines of communication south of the Bosnian Serb capital of Banja Luka , and displaced between 30 @, @ 000 and 40 @, @ 000 people , in what foreign observers called " the largest and most wretched single exodus " of the Bosnian War . The ARBiH and the HVO in Jajce were not only outnumbered and outgunned , but their units were also plagued by inadequate staff work , compounded by lack of coordination between separate command and control structures maintained by the two forces throughout the battle . The defence of Jajce also suffered from worsening Croat ? Bosniak relations and skirmishes between the ARBiH and the HVO along the resupply route to Jajce . Ultimately , the outcome of the battle itself fueled greater Bosniak ? Croat animosities , which eventually led to the Croat ? Bosniak War . The VRS saw the cracking of the ARBiH ? HVO alliance as a very significant outcome of the operation .

= = Background = =

As the Yugoslav People 's Army (Jugoslovenska narodna armija ? JNA) withdrew from Croatia following the acceptance and start of implementation of the Vance plan , its 55 @, @ 000 officers and soldiers born in Bosnia and Herzegovina were transferred to a new Bosnian Serb army , which was later renamed the Army of Republika Srpska (Vojska Republike Srpske ? VRS) . This reorganisation followed the declaration of the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina on 9 January 1992 , ahead of the 29 February ? 1 March 1992 referendum on the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina . This declaration would later be cited by the Bosnian Serbs as a pretext for the Bosnian War . On 4 April , JNA artillery began shelling Sarajevo . At the same time , the JNA and the Bosnian Serb forces clashed with the HVO at the Kupres Plateau , capturing Kupres by 7 April .

The JNA and the VRS in Bosnia and Herzegovina faced the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Armija Republike Bosne i Hercegovine ? ARBiH) and the Croatian Defence Council (Hrvatsko vijeće obrane ? HVO) , reporting to the Bosniak @-@ dominated central government and the Bosnian Croat leadership respectively , as well as the Croatian Army (Hrvatska vojska ? HV) , which occasionally supported HVO operations . In late April , the VRS was able to deploy 200 @, @ 000 troops , hundreds of tanks , armoured personnel carriers (APCs) and artillery pieces . The HVO and the Croatian Defence Forces (Hrvatske obrambene snage ? HOS) could field approximately 25 @, @ 000 soldiers and a handful of heavy weapons , while the ARBiH was largely unprepared with nearly 100 @, @ 000 troops , small arms for less than a half of their number and virtually no heavy weapons . Arming of the various forces was hampered by a UN arms embargo introduced in September 1991 . By mid @-@ May 1992 , when those JNA units which had not been transferred to the VRS withdrew from Bosnia and Herzegovina to the newly declared Federal Republic of Yugoslavia , the VRS controlled approximately 60 percent of Bosnia and Herzegovina .

Even though the Graz agreement , negotiated by Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats aiming to partition Bosnia and Herzegovina in early May , proclaimed cessation of hostilities between the two groups , heavy fighting broke out between the HVO and the VRS in June , in eastern Herzegovina (Operation Jackal) , and in the Sava River basin (Operation Corridor 92) , in the north of Bosnia and Herzegovina .

= = Timeline = =

While the fighting related to Operation Corridor 92 was still in progress , the VRS prepared to attack and destroy a salient around the town of Jajce in central part of Bosnia and Herzegovina , held jointly by the HVO and the ARBiH . The salient threatened Bosnian Serb lines of communication south of VRS @-@ held Banja Luka and contained two hydroelectric power plants critical for electrical supply of Banja Luka region . The salient was held by between 3 @,@ 400 and 5 @,@ 500 HVO and ARBiH troops manning strong fortifications in difficult terrain . The VRS committed 7 @,@ 000 ? 8 @,@ 000 troops of the 30th Infantry Division of the 1st Krajina Corps to the offensive codenamed Operation Vrbas ' 92 . The 30th Division was under command of Colonel Stanislav Gali? , until he was replaced by Colonel Dragan Mar?eti? in early September . The VRS troops included the 1st , 11th and 17th Light Infantry Brigades and 1st Mixed Antitank Artillery Battalion . Besides the numerical superiority , the VRS held a clear advantage in armour , deploying 20 ? 30 tanks and adding 30 ? 50 heavy artillery pieces to the force . Defence of Jajce was organised at municipal crisis headquarters level by mayor Midhat Karad?i? , while the HVO force in Jajce was commanded by Stjepan Bla?evi? .

= = = Initial combat = = =

The Jajce salient was supported via a 40 @-@ kilometre (25 mi) road running through a narrow corridor to the town of Travnik . In July , the VRS attempted to cut the supply corridor and isolate Jajce from Travnik before any effort was made to capture the salient , but the attacks failed to accomplish any significant headway . This prompted the VRS to switch to a gradual advance along three separate axes converging on Jajce directly instead . The move was designed to minimize VRS casualties and allow a systematic elimination of HVO and ARBiH defences around the town . ARBiH @-@ HVO successfully defended Jajce from the VRS , in part thanks to the area 's mountainous surroundings . In the same month , feuding between the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) over political control began and the HVO forcibly disbanded the Bosniak @-@ led war presidency in Jajce in exchange for one that was pro @-@ Croat .

The VRS launched the first major attack along the western approach to Jajce in mid @-@ August . The attack pushed through the town 's defences and the VRS arrived to within two kilometres (1 @.@ 2 miles) of Jajce . After this breakthrough , the frontline stabilised for nearly a month before the VRS made another push towards Jajce . The advance came from the southwest of the town and the defenders were pushed back to within one kilometre (0 @.@ 62 miles) from the town . In order to relieve Jajce , the ARBiH and the HVO launched a joint attack north of Bugojno and Novi Travnik against a flank of the VRS force attacking Jajce , but the offensive failed ? gaining no ground at all and hardly making any impact on the VRS deployments around Jajce . The VRS continued shelling Jajce and started small @-@ scale airstrikes in the area . That led the United Nations (UN) to declare the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina a no @-@ fly zone . A Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) analysis concluded that it is possible that the failure of the ARBiH ? HVO counterattack prompted the HVO to agree on a truce with the VRS on 9 October . Besides a ceasefire , the agreement promised the Bosnian Serbs unrestricted power supply from the hydroelectric power plants in Jajce salient . The agreement was signed by Mate Boban , president of the self @-@ proclaimed Croatian Republic of Herzeg @-@ Bosnia , and Radovan Karad?i? , president of the self @-@ proclaimed Republika Srpska , and the ARBiH took no part .

= = = The final attack = = =

The distrust generated by the separate agreement was compounded by deteriorating relations between the ARBiH and the HVO in the area of nearby town of Prozor , and Novi Travnik in late summer . The strained relations escalated rapidly and led to an armed clash between the two forces in Novi Travnik on 18 October . Low @-@ scale conflicts spread in the region , and the two forces engaged each other along the supply route to Jajce three days later , on 21 October , as a result of an ARBiH roadblock set up the previous day on authority of the " Coordinating Committee for the

Protection of Muslims " rather than the ARBiH command . Just as the roadblock was dismantled , a new skirmish occurred in the town of Vitez the following day . The developments also meant that supply of ammunition for Jajce defenders was unable to move further than Prozor , and prompted the commander of the HVO Central Bosnia Operational Zone Colonel Tihomir Blaškić to consider pulling a part of the HVO troops from Jajce to reopen the Jajce ? Prozor route . Blaškić 's position was weakened by the HVO headquarters since 18 October , when a quarter of heavy weapons at his disposal were removed to ?aplina , ahead of HV 's Operation Vlaštica aimed at Dubrovnik hinterland . The overall poor situation culminated in the Battle of Prozor fought between the HVO and the ARBiH . The battle began on 23 October , just after the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) managed to calm the situation in Vitez and Novi Travnik . End of fighting in and around Prozor was arranged on 26 October , coming into effect two days later .

The VRS seized the opportunity to launch a fresh advance towards Jajce amid ARBiH ? HVO clashes , attacking along three axes towards the town on 25 October . Putting their conflict aside , the HVO and the ARBiH deployed in Jajce fought back for four days before the VRS entered the town on 29 October . As the VRS capture of the town appeared inevitable , the defending force pulled out . Following its capture , Serb radio and television declared Jajce a " liberated town " and a part of " the free Serbian republic " .

= = Aftermath = =

= = = Exodus and destruction of religious sites = = =

After the VRS entered Jajce , the HVO and the ARBiH pulled out from the remainder of the salient towards Travnik . They were joined by the civilian population of Jajce , forming a column of between 30 @, @ 000 and 40 @, @ 000 refugees that stretched 16 kilometres (10 miles) , and among which thousands were vulnerable to VRS sniping and shelling . Foreign observers described this as " the largest and most wretched single exodus " of the Bosnian War . Upon their arrival in Travnik , the refugees were attended to by UNHCR staff assisted by UNPROFOR troops . At least seven died at the Travnik hospital , while about 60 were treated for injuries . Approximately 20 @, @ 000 Bosniak refugees from Jajce were resettled in central Bosnia , providing manpower for several new ARBiH brigades . Croat refugees headed toward Croatia due to rising tensions between Bosniaks and Croats in central Bosnia and overcrowding in Travnik . By November the pre @-@ war population of Jajce had shrunk from 45 @, @ 000 to just several thousand . Bosniaks had previously accounted for 39 percent of the population , Croats 35 percent , and Serbs 19 percent .

In the weeks following its capture , all of the mosques and Roman Catholic churches in Jajce were demolished as retribution for the HVO 's destruction of the town 's only Serbian Orthodox monastery in mid @-@ October . The VRS converted the town 's Franciscan monastery into a prison and its archives , museum collections and artworks were looted ; the monastery church was completely destroyed . By 1992 , all religious buildings in Jajce had been destroyed , save for two mosques whose perilous positioning on a hilltop made them unsuitable for demolition .

= = = Legacy = = =

While the conflict between the HVO and the ARBiH contributed to the weakening defence of Jajce , the military superiority of the VRS was the principal reason behind the town 's capture . Besides the advantage in troop size and firepower , VRS staff work and planning was significantly superior to the organisational efforts of the defenders of Jajce . The principal problem for the defence of Jajce was that the town was defended by two separate command structures , one having authority over ARBiH troops and the other over HVO units .

Humanitarian workers and foreign military observers had suspicions that the Croats deliberately abandoned Jajce , as well as territories lost in Operation Corridor 92 , to the VRS in exchange for the Prevlaka Peninsula south of Dubrovnik . Even though Croatia and several Western diplomats

denied this claim , European Community envoy David Owen urged the UN to impose sanctions against Croatia . The suspicion was fueled by an October 1992 agreement between Croatian President Franjo Tuđman and Yugoslav President Dobrica Ćosić to withdraw the JNA from Prevlaka . However , the JNA withdrawal from Croatian soil had also been a part of the Vance plan , which was accepted by both Croatia and Yugoslavia .

It is unclear who pulled out of Jajce first and it remains a point of " mutual recrimination " . Bosniaks complained that the HVO was to blame for the loss of Jajce since its units were the first to pull out when the VRS entered the town . Conversely , the Bosnian Croat leader , Božo Raić , publicly complained about the conduct of the ARBiH in central Bosnia , blaming extremists among the ARBiH personnel for hindering the resupply of Jajce . His stance was reflected in the Croatian daily Večernji list . The newspaper assumed a confrontational position regarding Bosniaks while maintaining that the Bosniak leadership was not entirely anti-Croat . Croat-Bosniak relations gradually deteriorated , leading to the Croat-Bosniak War in 1993 . In October 1993 , VRS Major General Momir Talić , commander of the 1st Krajina Corps during Operation Vrbas ' 92 , said that the capture of Jajce was the first step in dismantling of the alliance between the Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks . The Croat-Bosniak rift would not be mended before the Washington Agreement signed in March 1994 , but not completely . After the HVO recaptured Jajce in the HV-led Operation Mistral 2 on 13 September 1995 , the town was Croatized , and Bosniak refugees were not allowed to return . By 1998 , most Croat refugees had returned to Jajce , while only 5,000 Bosniaks did so .

The ARBiH and HVO lost 103 soldiers defending Jajce ; a further 492 were wounded and five remain missing . In 2008 , the Prosecutor's Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina indicted two members of the VRS for war crimes committed against Bosniaks in September 1992 , citing the killing of 23 Bosniak civilians and wounding of a number of others . In 2010 , the Prosecutor's Office began an investigation against seven members of the ARBiH , HVO , and HOS on suspicion that they committed war crimes between 27 May and 29 October 1992 against 35 Serb civilians , including the murder of at least 15 .