

= Armed Boats Squadron Dubrovnik =

The Armed Boats Squadron Dubrovnik (Croatian : Odred naoružanih brodova Dubrovnik) was a volunteer unit of the Croatian Navy that ran the naval blockade during the siege of Dubrovnik which formed part of the Croatian War of Independence in 1991 ? 1992 . It consisted of 23 vessels , mostly of the runabout type , lightly armed and armoured . The unit was crucial in the defence of Dubrovnik , providing a resupply route for the Dubrovnik population and troops defending the besieged city . Boats assigned to the squadron transported approximately 6 @, @ 000 troops and civilians , about 100 wounded and 2 @, @ 000 tonnes of various cargo . A total of 117 personnel served with the squadron during the siege , suffering two fatalities .

The siege of Dubrovnik and the associated blockade running operations of the squadron took place from September 1991 until May 1992 , during the peak of the fighting in the Croatian War of Independence . The commencement of the siege preceded the declaration of Croatian independence on 8 October 1991 . In early 1992 , the Dubrovnik area saw fierce fighting while combat operations largely ceased elsewhere in Croatia following the Sarajevo Agreement of 2 January 1992 .

Sveti Vlaho , the first vessel of the squadron , sunk in late 1991 , was refloated in 2001 and placed on permanent exhibition in Dubrovnik . In 2006 , the squadron was collectively decorated with the Order of Nikola ?ubi? Zrinski for bravery during the Croatian War of Independence . Surviving squadron members founded a squadron association in 2011 to preserve the heritage of the unit .

= = Background = =

The 1990 revolt of the Croatian Serbs was centred on the predominantly Serb @-@ populated areas of the Dalmatian hinterland around the city of Knin , parts of Lika , Kordun , Banovina regions and in eastern Croatian settlements with significant Serb population , and these areas were subsequently declared by the Serbs as the Republic of Serbian Krajina (RSK) . The RSK declared its intention to integrate politically with Serbia , and this action was viewed by the Government of Croatia as a rebellion . By March 1991 , the conflict had escalated to war ? the Croatian War of Independence . In June 1991 , Croatia declared its independence as Yugoslavia disintegrated . This was followed by a three @-@ month moratorium on the decision , but the decision came into effect on 8 October .

As the Yugoslav People 's Army (JNA) increasingly supported the RSK and the Croatian Police were unable to cope with the situation , the Croatian National Guard (ZNG) was formed in May 1991 . The ZNG was renamed the Croatian Army (HV) in November . The development of the Croatian armed forces was hampered by a United Nations (UN) arms embargo introduced in September . The final months of 1991 saw the fiercest fighting of the war , culminating in the Battle of the barracks , the Siege of Dubrovnik , and the Battle of Vukovar . Even though the Sarajevo Agreement led to a ceasefire in most areas of Croatia , the siege and fighting around Dubrovnik continued until May 1992 .

= = Wartime history = =

The Armed Boats Squadron Dubrovnik was established on 23 September 1991 as a volunteer unit of the Croatian Navy . It served during the Siege of Dubrovnik , and was a key factor in the successful defence of the city . The unit 's first commander was Lieutenant Colonel Aljoša Nikolić .

Upon formation , squadron was tasked with breaching the Dubrovnik naval blockade and maintaining a route that was instrumental to delivery of materiel necessary to successfully defend the city , including food , fuel , medical supplies , arms and ammunition . The squadron also transported reinforcements arriving from other parts of Croatia and evacuated wounded out of Dubrovnik , and was a lifeline for the besieged troops and civilian population . Its operations began on 23 September 1991 , when the runabout Sveti Vlaho (English : Saint Blaise) undertook its first voyage . The squadron consisted of 23 craft of various sizes and 117 volunteers . Craft armaments

were light ? the Sveti Vlaho had 6 @-@ millimetre (0 @.@ 24 in) steel plate armour as a protection and a Bren light machine gun . All the vessels of the squadron were relatively fast , the fastest among them being capable of achieving 55 knots (102 kilometres per hour ; 63 miles per hour) . The squadron typically deployed its craft in pairs or threes , sailing as close as possible to the Yugoslav Navy vessels when passing Kolo?ep island to reach relative safety of the Rijeka Dubrova?ka inlet , in order to utilize blind spots of naval guns . During its existence , the squadron runabouts motored more than 52 @,@ 000 nautical miles (96 @,@ 000 kilometres ; 60 @,@ 000 miles) , and transported approximately 6 @,@ 000 troops and civilians , about 100 wounded and 2 @,@ 000 tonnes of various cargo . The unit suffered two combat fatalities .

At dawn on 31 October 1991 , the squadron sailed out of Dubrovnik to meet the Libertas convoy ? a fleet of civilian vessels , the largest among them being the Jadrolinija shipping line 's Slavija , which was endeavoring to deliver humanitarian aid to the city under siege . The fleet sailed from Rijeka and made several port calls , growing to 29 vessels as it approached Dubrovnik . The convoy , accompanied by the last President of Yugoslavia Stjepan Mesi? and the Prime Minister of Croatia Franjo Greguri? , was stopped and searched by the Yugoslav Navy off the island of Mljet before the squadron linked up with the convoy and escorted it to Dubrovnik . The event marked the first large delivery of aid to the city since the beginning of the siege .

Sveti Vlaho , the first naval vessel to fly the flag of the Republic of Croatia in combat and the first ship of the squadron , was originally an Italian smuggling runabout that was confiscated by the authorities , fitted with armour and used by the squadron in resupply and blockade @-@ running operations . During one of these missions , while sailing back from a trip to Bol on the Croatian island of Bra? , she was chased by a Yugoslav gunboat and driven aground on a beach near Babin Kuk , just 2 miles (3 @.@ 2 kilometres) north of Dubrovnik . Sveti Vlaho was recovered and continued in service until 6 December 1991 , when she was sunk at Gru? by a 9K11 Malyutka anti @-@ tank missile . The unit ceased operations in 1992 as the forces besieging Dubrovnik had been defeated . Sveti Vlaho was the second vessel used by the Croatian Navy , preceded only by a landing craft designated DJB @-@ 103 , which was brought into use eight days earlier . The squadron was disbanded on 29 December 1992 .

= = Postwar decorations and heritage = =

Sveti Vlaho was refloated in 2001 , restored and put on exhibit in Batale Park in Dubrovnik . In May 2006 , the squadron was collectively decorated with the Order of Nikola ?ubi? Zrinski for the bravery of its members during the Croatian War of Independence ; however , no individual decorations were awarded to squadron members , nor were any promoted as a result of their service . On the 15th anniversary of the arrival of the Libertas convoy in besieged Dubrovnik a celebration was held , but no squadron volunteers were invited to attend . On 11 August 2011 , surviving members of the squadron founded the Armed Boat Squadron Association whose objective is to preserve the heritage of the squadron , document its contribution to the Croatian War of Independence , and render assistance to its members and other similar associations in Croatia to preserve and promote the role that Croatian soldiers played in achieving the Republic of Croatia 's independence .