

## = Battle of Borovo Selo =

The Battle of Borovo Selo on 2 May 1991 ( known in Croatia as the Borovo Selo massacre , Croatian : Pokolj u Borovom Selu and in Serbia as the Borovo Selo incident , Serbian : ????????? ? ??????? ????? ) was one of the first armed clashes in the conflict which became known as the Croatian War of Independence . The clash was precipitated by months of rising ethnic tensions and armed combat in Pakrac and at the Plitvice Lakes in March . The immediate cause for the confrontation in the heavily ethnic Serb village of Borovo Selo , just north of Vukovar , was a failed attempt to replace a Yugoslav flag in the village with a Croatian one . The unauthorised effort by four Croatian policemen resulted in the capture of two by a Croatian Serb militia in the village . To retrieve the captives , Croatian authorities deployed additional police , who drove into an ambush . At least twelve Croatian policemen and an unknown number of Serbs were killed in the battle before the Yugoslav People 's Army ( JNA ) intervened and stopped the fighting .

The confrontation resulted in a further deterioration of the overall situation in Croatia , leading Croats and Serbs to accuse each other of overt aggression and of being enemies of their nation . For Croatia , the event was provocative because the bodies of some of the dead Croat policemen killed in the incident were reportedly mutilated . The clash in Borovo Selo eliminated any hopes that the escalating conflict could be defused politically and made the war almost inevitable . The Presidency of Yugoslavia met days after the fighting and authorised the JNA to deploy to the area to prevent further conflict but despite this deployment , skirmishes persisted in the region . After the war , a former Serb irregular was convicted of war crimes for his role in abusing the two captured policemen , and ultimately sentenced to three years in prison . Four others were indicted in absentia but remain at large outside Croatia .

## = = Background = =

In 1990 , following the electoral defeat of the government of the Socialist Republic of Croatia by the Croatian Democratic Union ( Hrvatska demokratska zajednica ? HDZ ) , ethnic tensions between Serbs and Croats worsened . The Yugoslav People 's Army ( Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija ? JNA ) confiscated the weapons of Croatia 's Territorial Defence ( Teritorijalna obrana ? TO ) in order to minimise the possibility of violence following the elections . On 17 August , inter @-@ ethnic tensions escalated into an open revolt of the Croatian Serbs , centred on the predominantly Serb @-@ populated areas of the Dalmatian hinterland around Knin , and parts of Lika , Kordun , Banovina and eastern Croatia . In July 1990 , local Serbs established a Serbian National Council to coordinate opposition to Croatian President Franjo Tu?man 's policy of pursuing Croatian independence from Yugoslavia . Milan Babi? , a dentist from Knin , was elected president of the council , while Knin 's police chief , Milan Marti? , established a number of paramilitary militias . The two men eventually became the political and military leaders of the Serb Autonomous Oblast of Krajina ( SAO Krajina ) , a self @-@ declared state incorporating the Serb @-@ inhabited areas of Croatia . In March 1991 , SAO Krajina authorities , backed by the government of Serbia , began consolidating control over the Serb @-@ populated areas of Croatia , resulting in a bloodless skirmish in Pakrac and the first fatalities in the Plitvice Lakes incident .

At the beginning of 1991 , Croatia had no regular army . In an effort to bolster its defence , it doubled the number of police personnel to about 20 @,@ 000 . The most effective part of the police force was the 3 @,@ 000 @-@ strong special police , which was deployed in twelve military @-@ style battalions . In addition , Croatia had 9 @,@ 000 ? 10 @,@ 000 regionally organised reserve police officers organised in 16 battalions and 10 companies , but they lacked weapons .

## = = Prelude = =

In 1991 , the village of Borovo Selo , situated on the right bank of the Danube opposite Serbia , was a part of the Vukovar municipality . While the city of Vukovar itself had an ethnically mixed population ( 47 @.@ 2 percent Croats and 32 @.@ 2 percent Serbs ) , smaller settlements in the

area were more homogenous . Fourteen were predominantly populated by Croats , ten ( including Borovo Selo ) were inhabited primarily by Serbs , two by Ruthenians and the remaining two were ethnically mixed .

Amid the worsening ethnic tensions , Borovo Selo was barricaded on 1 April , one day after the Plitvice Lakes clash . Two days later , the JNA garrison in Vukovar increased its combat readiness to the maximum level . In early spring , the Croats and Serbs reached an agreement whereby Croatian police would not enter Borovo Selo without explicit consent from local Serb authorities . A political rally was held in Borovo Selo on 14 April , and by the end of the month the situation had become more volatile . Speakers at the rally ? Serbian Radical Party ( Srpska radikalna stranka ? SRS ) leader Vojislav ?e?elj , Serbian National Assembly member Milan Paro?ki and Serbian Minister of Diaspora Stanko Cvijan ? promoted the creation of Greater Serbia , a state which would unite all Serbs within a single country . They all repeated their speeches , together with an open call for dissenting Croats to be killed , a week later in Jagodnjak , north of Osijek . In addition , White Eagles paramilitaries arrived in Borovo Selo in mid @-@ April at the request of Borovo Selo militia commander Vuka?in ?o?ko?anin . The paramilitaries were armed by the Serbian police directly , or the SAO Krajina @-@ aligned local militia under the approval of Serbian officials . By the end of April 1991 , the White Eagles in Borovo Selo were joined by Du?an Silni paramilitaries , who were linked to the Serbian National Renewal party .

In mid @-@ April , three Armbrust rockets were fired from Croatian positions outside Borovo Selo into the village with the specific aim of inflaming ethnic tensions . One of the rockets hit a house and another landed in a field , failing to explode . There were no casualties , but the already tense situation was made worse when the unexploded rocket was shown on Serbian Television as evidence of Croatian aggression against Serbs . The rockets were fired by a group of men including Gojko ?u?ak , a high @-@ ranking HDZ official who later became Croatia 's Defence Minister . The men were led to the site by Osijek police chief Josip Reihl @-@ Kir , who was later murdered by Croat irregulars . ?u?ak later claimed he had nothing to do with the incident but had been in the area at the time . Croatia 's interior minister Josip Boljkovac said the group included ?u?ak , Branimir Glava? and Vice Vukojevi? .

= = Timeline = =

During the evening of 1 May 1991 , four Croatian policemen entered Borovo Selo in an unauthorised attempt to replace a Yugoslav flag in the village with a Croatian one . The attempt resulted in an armed clash . Two of the policemen were wounded and taken prisoner , and the other two fled after sustaining minor injuries ( one a wounded foot and the other a grazing wound to the head ) . According to the Croatian Ministry of the Interior , the police had been patrolling the Dalj ? Borovo Selo road at the time of the incident . Even though the officers were assigned to the Osijek police administration , the Vinkovci police administration ? which was assigned authority over the Vukovar municipality ? asked the Vukovar police station to contact ?o?ko?anin about the incident . Vukovar police contacted him at 4 : 30 a.m. , but ?o?ko?anin reportedly said he knew nothing . At 9 : 00 a.m. , Vinkovci police chief Josip D?aja telephoned ?o?ko?anin and received the same answer . When Reihl @-@ Kir contacted ?o?ko?anin half an hour later , the latter confirmed the incident and said the police had shot at members of the local population , wounding one . Reihl @-@ Kir failed to secure the release of the two captured officers .

Reihl @-@ Kir and D?aja concluded that a party should be sent to Borovo Selo , and ?o?ko?anin agreed to grant the police safe passage under a white flag . However , when the force of between 20 and 30 policemen entered Borovo Selo under the white flag , they were ambushed by paramilitaries and members of a local militia . Approximately 150 police arrived from Osijek and Vinkovci on buses and were deployed as reinforcements . The force dispatched from Vinkovci entered Borovo Selo and was ambushed , while the reinforcements sent from Osijek via Dalj were stopped at a roadblock north of Borovo Selo and failed to enter the village . A firefight ensued and lasted until 2 : 30 p.m. , when seven JNA armoured personnel carriers ( APCs ) moved into the village from Dalj . Another convoy of APCs deployed by the JNA through Borovo Naselje , just south

of Borovo Selo , was stopped by a crowd of Croat women who refused to let them through .

= = Aftermath = =

At least a dozen Croatian policemen were killed and 21 injured in the ambush . The two captured policemen were ferried across the Danube and transported to Novi Sad , but were released and returned to Osijek by the evening of 2 May . Several Serbs in Borovo Selo were also killed in the fighting , but the exact figure was never officially released . Sources disagree on the number of Serb casualties . The figure ranges from three dead , to 17 militiamen and 20 civilians killed . ?e?elj said only one civilian died in Borovo Selo , while a 22 @-@ strong defending force he led in the battle killed 100 policemen . Residents of Borovo Selo interviewed by reporters said 13 policemen were killed after they took women and children hostage and that the residents defeated the police unassisted , freeing the hostages and sustaining one fatality .

Some of the police killed at Borovo Selo were found to have been mutilated ; their ears were cut , their eyes gouged out and their throats slit . These acts were meant to inflame ethnic hatred . The clash led Tu?man 's advisers to advocate an immediate declaration of independence from Yugoslavia and retaliation against the JNA , which Croats viewed as being pro @-@ Serb . On 3 May , Tu?man opined that Croatia and Serbia were virtually at war , but said he hoped the international community would stop the violence . The outcome of the fighting reinforced the cautious approach of the Croatian leadership towards long @-@ term decisions . According to Croatian historian Davor Marijan , Tu?man 's decision not to retaliate against the JNA was often interpreted at the time as cowardice bordering treason , leading to public criticism and the resignation of General Martin ?pegelj from the post of Defence Minister . Nonetheless , the decision afforded Croatia much @-@ needed time to prepare for war , as Yugoslav Navy Fleet Admiral Branko Mamula later acknowledged . The incident shocked the Croatian public , causing a massive shift in public opinion towards demonization of Serbs , supported by the Croatian media . Serbs were collectively labelled " Chetniks " , " terrorists " and " enemies of Croatia " . Similarly , Serbs referred to Croats as " Usta?e " and " enemies of the Serb people " . Hence , chances for a political settlement to avoid all @-@ out war were greatly reduced . After the clash , war appeared unavoidable .

On 8 ? 9 May , the Presidency of Yugoslavia met to discuss the events in Borovo Selo and a JNA request for military intervention . Presidents of all Yugoslav constituent republics were present at the meeting , where the Croatian leadership accepted the decision to deploy the JNA in crisis areas of Croatia . On 9 May , representatives of the federal and Croatian governments visited Vukovar . The federal representatives also visited Borovo Selo , unlike the Croatian government officials who stated that they " refused to talk to terrorists " . In response to the Borovo Selo clash , the JNA redeployed a part of the 12th Proletarian Mechanised Brigade from Osijek and the 1st Mechanised Battalion of the 453rd Mechanised Brigade based in Sremska Mitrovica to the Vukovar area . At the same time , the 2nd Mechanised Battalion of the 36th Mechanised Brigade was moved from Subotica to Vinkovci . Despite the deployment of the JNA in the area , ethnically motivated skirmishes persisted until the start of the Battle of Vukovar in late August .

= = Memorial controversy and prosecution = = =

During the 1996 ? 98 United Nations administration established pursuant to the Erdut Agreement to restore the area to Croatian control , three Croatian non @-@ governmental organizations erected a memorial on public property at the entrance to Borovo Selo , but the site was quickly vandalised . A new monument was erected in the centre of the village in 2002 , but this was also vandalised soon after completion . A new plaque bearing the names of the 12 Croatian policemen killed in the incident was added to the monument in 2012 , but was also subject to vandalism . Although the vandalism was condemned by local Serb politicians , they complained that the memorial was offensive to the Serb minority and imposed guilt on the entire community because it branded Serb forces at Borovo Selo in 1991 as " Serb terrorists " .

In February 2012 , an Osijek court convicted Milan Marinković of war crimes and sentenced him to 3 ½ years in prison for mistreating the two captured Croatian police officers . In 2014 , Marinković 's sentence was reduced to three years on appeal . Four other men were indicted in relation to the officers ' mistreatment , but all four live outside Croatia , and are not subject to prosecution by the Croatian judiciary .