

= Battle of Vukovar =

The Battle of Vukovar (Croatian : Bitka za Vukovar) , also known as the September War (Rujanski rat) , was an armed conflict fought between the Yugoslav People 's Army (Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija ? JNA) , supported by the Croatian Serb @-@ established Serbian Autonomous Oblast of Krajina (SAO Krajina) , and the Croatian National Guard (Zbor Narodne Garde ? ZNG) , supported by the Croatian Police . The battle was fought to the north and west of the city of Vukovar , Croatia on 16 ? 22 September 1991 , during the Croatian War of Independence . The JNA 's initial orders were to relieve Croatian siege of their barracks in the city and isolate the region of Dalmatia from the rest of Croatia . The JNA 's advance was supported by the Yugoslav Air Force and the Yugoslav Navy .

Fighting stopped following a Croatian counter @-@ attack that pushed the JNA back from the outskirts of Vukovar . Although some ground was lost to the Yugoslavs , especially around the town of Drni? , northeast of Vukovar , the ZNG captured several JNA and Yugoslav Navy facilities in the city , including dozens of navy vessels and several coastal artillery batteries . The captured batteries were used to support defence of the city . The JNA Vukovar garrison was evacuated following an agreement between the Croatian officials and the JNA , except for several comparably small JNA posts in the city which were captured by the ZNG .

The September ? October fighting caused three Croatian military and seven civilian deaths , as well as more than a hundred wounded . JNA bombarded Vukovar , causing damage to numerous structures , including the Cathedral of St. James , a UNESCO World Heritage Site . The New York Times judged the bombardment to be a part of calculated assaults on the heritage of Croatia . Artillery bombardment of the city continued over the following 100 days . The battle is commemorated in Vukovar each year .

= = 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 Croatia 's Territorial Defence weapons to minimize resistance . On 17 August , 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 , largely fueled by recollections of the Serbs of the genocide to which they had been subjected in the Independent State of Croatia during World War II , and their resultant unwillingness to be minorities in an independent Croatia .

After two unsuccessful attempts by Serbia , supported by Montenegro and Serbia 's provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo , to obtain the Yugoslav Presidency 's approval of a JNA operation to disarm Croatian security forces in January 1991 , and 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 give it wartime authorities and declare a state of emergency . The request was denied on 15 March , and the JNA came under control of Serbian President Slobodan Milo?evi? . Milo?evi? , preferring a campaign to expand Serbia rather than preservation of Yugoslavia , publicly threatened to replace the JNA with a Serbian army and declared that he no longer recognized the authority of the federal Presidency . The threat caused the JNA to gradually abandon plans to preserve Yugoslavia in favour of expansion of Serbia . By the end of the month , the conflict had escalated to the first fatalities . The JNA stepped in , supporting the insurgents , and preventing Croatian police from intervening . In early April , leaders of the Serb revolt in Croatia declared their intention of integration of the area under their control , viewed by the Government of Croatia as a breakaway region with Serbia .

In the beginning of 1991 , Croatia had no regular army . In an effort to bolster its defence , Croatia doubled police personnel to about 20 @,@ 000 . The most effective part of the force was 3 @,@ 000 special police , deployed in twelve battalions adopting military unit organization . In addition , there were 9 @,@ 000 ? 10 @,@ 000 regionally organized reserve police . The reserve police were

set up in 16 battalions and 10 companies , but the reserve force lacked weapons . In May , the Croatian government responded by forming the Croatian National Guard (Zbor narodne garde) , but its development was hampered by a United Nations arms embargo introduced in September 1991 .

= = Prelude = =

By late June and throughout July , northern Dalmatia saw daily armed skirmishes but no actual combat . Nonetheless , the increasing intensity of the conflict in the region and elsewhere in Croatia led to the preparation of bomb shelters in Zadar by city officials . Serbian Autonomous Oblast of Krajina (SAO Krajina) authorities called up three Territorial Defence units in the Zadar hinterland on 11 July , one day after another fatal shooting of a Croatian police patrol in the Zadar area , while the JNA 9th (Knin) Corps conscripted the local Serb population in Benkovac to strengthen its ranks by the end of the month . In late July , a paramilitary group , led by Miro Barešić and formally subordinated to the Croatian Ministry of Defence , conducted several sabotages in the Benkovac area . On 1 August , Croatia deployed two battalions of the ZNG 4th Guards Brigade to Krušev near Obrovac . Two days later they engaged in combat against the SAO Krajina Territorial Defence and police forces , marking the first such engagement of the Croatian War of Independence in the region . On 26 August , the JNA 9th (Knin) Corps openly sided with the SAO Krajina forces as they jointly attacked Kijevo , expelling all Croats from the village . Another significant setback for Croatia in the region was JNA capture of the Maslenica Bridge on 11 September . That severed the last overland road link between Dalmatia and the rest of Croatia . On 11 - 13 September , an attack in the area of Skradin cut water and power supply to Žibenik .

On 14 September , the ZNG and the Croatian police blockaded and cut utilities to all JNA facilities located in Croatian @-@ controlled territory , beginning the Battle of the Barracks . The move blockaded 33 large JNA garrisons in Croatia and numerous smaller facilities , including border posts , weapons and ammunition storage depots . The blockade forced the JNA to amend its planned campaign in Croatia to accommodate the new development . The same day , a coastal artillery battery on the Brač Island was captured by Croatian forces , after JNA Senior Sergeant Veljko Baltić , battery commanding officer , switched his allegiance . The battery consisted of twelve Ansaldo 90 / 53 guns which were once armament of the Italian battleship Vittorio Veneto .

= = Order of battle = =

The JNA 's planned campaign included an advance in the Žibenik area by the 9th (Knin) Corps , which was tasked with isolating Dalmatia from the rest of Croatia . As it was fully mobilised and prepared for deployment , the corps began operations against the ZNG on 16 September . Its main axis of attack was directed at Vodice , with supporting advances towards Zadar , Drniš and Sinj . The push was designed to create favourable circumstances to attack Zadar , Žibenik and Split . With support from a corps @-@ level battalion of M @-@ 84 tanks and the SAO Krajina Territorial Defence , the JNA 221st Mechanised Brigade (without its battalion of T @-@ 34 tanks) , was committed to the main axis of the attack . The secondary advance , towards Biograd na Moru on the right flank , was assigned to the 180th Mechanised Brigade , supported by the armoured battalion removed from the 221st Brigade , the 557th Mixed Antitank Artillery Regiment and the SAO Krajina Territorial Defence . Offensive support was provided by the 9th Mixed Artillery Regiment and the 9th Military Police Battalion . The 221st Brigade was commanded by Colonel Borislav Vukić . Elements the 46th Partisan Division , drawn from the 24th (Kragujevac) Corps , also provided support for the corps . The JNA garrison in Žibenik barracks included the 11th Marine Infantry Brigade - one of a handful of units regularly maintained at full combat readiness .

In opposition to the JNA , the ZNG 113th Infantry Brigade , commanded by Milivoj Petković , defended the city of Žibenik together with police forces , under overall control of the Žibenik crisis centre headed by Josip Juras . The 4th Battalion of the 113th Infantry Brigade , commanded by Josip Jukica , as well as the 4th Battalion of the 4th Guards Brigade , commanded by Ivan Zelić ,

defended the Drni? area , 25 kilometres (16 miles) northeast of ?ibenik , supported by a company of police . The 600 @-@ strong 4th Battalion of the 4th Guards Brigade represented the strongest ZNG unit in the area , while the JNA is estimated by Croatian sources to have deployed approximately 1 @, @ 500 troops against Drni? . On 20 September , all Croatian combat troops in Drni? area were subordinated to Luka Vuji? . The western bank of the Krka River and approaches to Vodice were controlled by the 3rd Battalion of the 113th Infantry Brigade . While small arms were sufficient to arm a part of the battalion at a time , the battalion did not have any heavy weapons .

= = Timeline = =

The offensive commenced at 16 : 00 on 16 September . On the left flank , the JNA advanced towards Drni? , capturing the villages of Maljkovo and Kri?ke , and interdicting the Drni? ? Split , east of the Krka River . On the opposite river bank , the JNA advanced towards Vodice and ?ibenik , threatening the city from the west , reaching the western side of the 390 @-@ metre (1 @, @ 280 ft) ?ibenik Bridge on the Adriatic Highway . The advance was so rapid it cut off the 1st Company of the 3rd Battalion of the ZNG 113th Infantry Brigade from the rest of the ZNG force . That day , the ZNG captured a 100 @-@ millimetre (3 @. @ 9 in) coastal artillery battery near village of Ze?evo . By 17 September , the commanding officer of the JNA 9th (Knin) Corps , Major General Vladimir Vukovi? , modified the initial deployment plan , because of strong resistance offered by the ZNG and the Croatian police , relying on populated areas and terrain features to hold back the JNA forces north of Vodice . The changes involved diverting a part of the force to attack Drni? and Sinj directly , while the remainder of the attacking force rested . The Yugoslav Navy started a blockade of ?ibenik and the entire Croatian Adriatic coast .

On the night of 17 / 18 September , the JNA was ordered to trap and destroy the ZNG force in Drni? and the Miljevci Plateau area , while holding positions achieved elsewhere . In the morning , the JNA resumed its offensive towards Vodice , on the right flank of the attack , while the ZNG abandoned Drni? and pulled back to village of Une?i? . On 19 September , the ZNG captured a 88 @-@ millimetre (3 @. @ 5 in) JNA coastal artillery battery on the Smokvica Island and the " Kru??ica " barracks near Rogoznica . Weapons retrieved from the captured barracks , a shipment received from Gospi? following capture of JNA facilities in the town , as well as use of the captured artillery pieces , significantly improved ZNG 's capabilities . The JNA advance south from Drni? was effectively halted that day , following three successful ambush attacks by the ZNG in Une?i? , Pakovo Selo and south of ?itni? .

The JNA orders were changed again on 20 September , when the JNA 9th (Knin) Corps orders were supplanted by the Military @-@ Maritime District order , issued by Vice Admiral Mile Kandi? , for the corps to reorient the JNA force north of Vodice towards ?ibenik and Split . This required crossing the ?ibenik Bridge spanning the Krka River ria . The eastward advance ? with close air support from the Yugoslav Air Force ? failed , and cost the air force four aircraft shot down by the ZNG . On 22 September , a Croatian counter @-@ attack , supported by recently acquired artillery , pushed back the JNA from the bridge by 10 : 00 , extending the ZNG @-@ controlled bridgehead to the area of Ga?elezi , 9 kilometres (5 @. @ 6 miles) to the northwest . Four guns of the ?irje battery were used as anti @-@ tank guns in support of the counter @-@ attack .

On 22 September , the Croatian forces captured the JNA " Kuline " barracks in ?ibenik itself along with the 15 Yugoslav Navy vessels based there . In addition , 19 vessels undergoing various stages of overhaul were captured in the " Velimir ?korpik " shipyard . The ships , comprising approximately a quarter of the Yugoslav Naval assets , included : Vlado ?etkovi? (RTOP @-@ 402) Kon?ar @-@ class fast attack craft (renamed ?ibenik (RTOP @-@ 21) later on) , Velimir ?korpik (R? @-@ 310) Osa @-@ class missile boat , Partizan II (T? @-@ 222) Shershen @-@ class torpedo boat and Biokovo (P? @-@ 171) , Cer (P? @-@ 180) and Durmitor (P? @-@ 181) Mirna @-@ class patrol boats .

On 23 September , the JNA fully secured Drni? and its surroundings . At the same time , it shifted its focus to the Battle of Zadar , away from ?ibenik . The Yugoslav naval blockade was lifted unilaterally the same day . Even though a number of JNA facilities in the city were captured by the

ZNG , several major JNA posts remained in Šibenik . Those included " Rade Končar " barracks housing the 11th Marine Infantry Brigade , " Ante Jonić " barracks , " Minerska " depot where naval mines were stored , " Jamnjak " depot and the " Ražine " artillery battery containing confiscated Croatian Territorial Defence weapons and " Duboka " fuel storage . The " Duboka " depot consisted of three 1 @, @ 410 @, @ 000 @-@ litre (310 @, @ 000 imp gal ; 370 @, @ 000 US gal) storage tanks .

= = Aftermath = =

The JNA was defeated in the battle , subsequently nicknamed the " September War " (Rujanski rat) . Its total losses in the battle were not reported . The ZNG and the Croatian police sustained losses of three killed and 49 wounded troops in the battle . At the same time seven civilians were killed and 64 wounded . JNA artillery continued intermittent bombardment of Šibenik over the following 100 days resulting in further casualties and damage . The damaged structures included the Cathedral of St. James , a UNESCO World Heritage Site . An editorial in The New York Times labeled bombardment of the cathedral as a part of the " calculated assaults " on treasures of Croatia . During the fighting , electrical substations in Bilice and Konjsko were destroyed , disrupting electric power distribution in Dalmatia .

Evacuation of the JNA facilities and surrender of the confiscated Territorial Defence weapons stored in the Šibenik - Split area was agreed on 21 November . Throughout the process , tensions remained high , and the JNA made contingency plans to break through from Knin to Šibenik and Split to relieve the siege of its forces there - codenamed Operation Coast @-@ 91 (Operacija Obala @-@ 91) and Operation Hurricane @-@ 91 (Operacija Orkan @-@ 91) respectively . All of the JNA facilities in Šibenik , along with the confiscated Territorial Defence weapons , were handed over to the Croatian authorities by 10 December .

News coverage of the battle produced television footage of ZNG air defence artillery at Zečevo firing at a Yugoslav Air Force Soko J @-@ 21 Jastreb and scoring a hit on another J @-@ 21 using a guided missile . The footage , ending in shouts claiming that both of the planes were downed , became one of the most significant pieces of material in terms of propaganda and morale in Croatia . Nonetheless , the footage proved controversial , since the first plane is not shown falling to the ground or into the sea , but diving towards the horizon after giving away a puff of smoke - variously interpreted as smoke caused by the plane 's cannon fire or anti @-@ aircraft fire damage . While the first J @-@ 21 downing remains unconfirmed , the second J @-@ 21 , piloted by Croat Valter Jurčević of the 240th Fighter @-@ Bomber Aviation Squadron , was shot down by Neven Livajić using a 9K38 Igla and wreckage of the plane was retrieved .

Another controversy which arose in the aftermath of the battle pertains to the Širje Island coastal artillery battery . Extent of the role played by the battery was disputed between Brigadier General Rahim Ademi , who claimed the bridge was beyond range of the guns , and thirteen ZNG and police officers , who held various posts in Šibenik at the time , who claimed Ademi was wrong in his assessment . After the war , the guns were removed from Širje . As of 2010 two were refurbished in preparation for return to Širje , as museum exhibits .

The battle is commemorated annually in Šibenik each September . There are two documentary films covering Šibenik and its surroundings during the battle : My city will be happy too (I moj ?e grad biti sretan) by Matea ?arić and September War 1991 , Šibenik - Vodice (Rujanski rat 1991 . Šibenik - Vodice) by ?ime Strikoman .