

= Battle of Oražje =

The Battle of Oražje was fought during the Bosnian War , from 5 May to 10 June 1995 , between the Bosnian Serb Army of Republika Srpska (Vojska Republike Srpske ? VRS) and the Bosnian Croat Croatian Defence Council (Hrvatsko vijeće obrane ? HVO) for control of the town of Oražje and its surrounding area on the south bank of the Sava River . The offensive codenamed Operation Flame @-@ 95 (Serbian : Operacija Plamen @-@ 95) and referred to by Croatian sources as Operation Revenge (Croatian : Operacija Osveta) was actually fought with varying intensity , with periods of combat interspersed by lulls lasting two to seven days . The heaviest fighting was reported on 15 May , when the VRS managed to break through a portion of the HVO defences near the village of Vidovice , but the breach was successfully contained and the lost ground was recovered by the HVO .

The HVO , supported by Croatian Army artillery deployed north of the river , managed to withstand the offensive and the front line remained unchanged from the commencement of the battle . This demonstrated the changed balance of power at this stage of the war . At the commencement of the war , the VRS had greater military capabilities than its opponents , particularly in terms of heavy weapons and organisation , but over three years from mid @-@ 1992 its capabilities had been matched by its adversaries .

= = 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 referendum on the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina that took place between 29 February and 1 March 1992 . This declaration would later be cited by the Bosnian Serbs as a pretext for the Bosnian War . Bosnian Serbs began fortifying the capital , Sarajevo , and other areas on 1 March 1992 . On the following day , the first fatalities of the war were recorded in Sarajevo and Doboj . In the final days of March , Bosnian Serb forces bombarded Bosanski Brod with artillery , resulting in a cross @-@ border operation by the Croatian Army (Hrvatska vojska ? HV) 108th Brigade . On 4 April 1992 , JNA artillery began shelling Sarajevo . There were other examples of the JNA directly supported the VRS , such as during the capture of Zvornik in early April 1992 , when the JNA provided artillery support from Serbia , firing across the Drina River . At the same time , the JNA attempted to defuse the situation and arrange negotiations elsewhere in the country .

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 HV , which occasionally supported HVO operations . In late April 1992 , 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 United Nations (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 . The extent of the control was extended to about 70 percent of the country by the end of the year .

A significant portion of the territory controlled by the VRS was located in western Bosnia , including the Bosnian Serb capital of Banja Luka . This portion of Bosnian Serb @-@ held territory was

dependent on resupply from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia using a single road spanning the Bosnian Sava Basin from west to east through Derventa and Brčko . The same road was also used to resupply the Republic of Serbian Krajina (RSK) , the Croatian Serb @-@ controlled areas of Croatia . After the capture of Derventa by the HVO and the HV in May 1992 , the VRS launched Operation Corridor 92 and regained control of the resupply route in late June . By October , it had eliminated all HV or HVO @-@ held pockets along the southern bank of the Sava and the border of Croatia , except a single bridgehead around the town of Oražje . Even though the fighting secured the route for the VRS , the corridor remained mere 3 kilometres (1 @.@ 9 miles) wide at its narrowest point .

= = Prelude = =

The balance of military power in the Bosnian War had started to shift against the VRS in early 1994 , despite its advantages in heavy weapons . In early 1995 , the ARBiH exerted increasing pressure on the VRS , especially in the area of Mount Vlašić . While the HV and the HVO advanced west of Livno (Operation Leap 1) , the VRS launched its own offensive ? Operation Joint Action 95 (Serbian : Operacija Sadejstvo 95) . Operation Joint Action 95 was intended as a war @-@ winning offensive , and was launched south of the Derventa ? Brčko corridor , but was also designed to widen the critical resupply route . Launched on 19 April , the VRS offensive faced determined resistance from the ARBiH and the HVO and had bogged down by the end of the month .

In early May , the HV launched a successful offensive , codenamed Operation Flash , against a RSK @-@ held part of western Slavonia in Croatia . The move caused the VRS to reorient its attention to the Oražje pocket , the only territory outside its control between the Derventa ? Brčko road and the Sava River . The shift of VRS focus to Oražje may have been the result of a desire to retaliate for the defeat suffered by the RSK in western Slavonia , or meant as a quick land @-@ grab before a peace settlement was accepted .

= = Order of battle = =

The VRS earmarked Tactical Group 5 (TG @-@ 5) for the offensive , normally deployed against HVO positions in the Oražje pocket . TG @-@ 5 , commanded by Colonel Dragoslav Ćurkić , normally consisted of approximately 6 @,@ 000 troops drawn from four infantry or light brigades , but for the offensive it received further 2 @,@ 000 reinforcements . Those included elite assault units assigned to the 1st Krajina Corps , elements of the 1st Armoured Brigade and corps @-@ level artillery . Furthermore , Colonel Generals Momir Talić and Ratko Mladić were present to directly supervise the operation .

The Oražje pocket was defended by the 6 @,@ 000 @-@ strong HVO Oražje Corps , consisting of one guards brigade and three Home Guard regiments . Overall command of the corps was held by Staff Brigadier Ćuro Matuzović . The defences lacked depth , and did not exceed 10 kilometres (6 @.@ 2 miles) . To offset this , the HVO had prepared strong forward defences , including trenches and bunkers , built along the 18 km (11 mi) front line . The HVO positions were supported by HV artillery and multiple rocket launchers deployed north of the Sava River , in Croatia .

= = Timeline = =

On 5 May , the 1st Krajina Corps launched its offensive aimed at capturing the Oražje pocket , codenamed Operation Flame @-@ 95 (Serbian : Operacija Plamen @-@ 95) . It is also referred to by Croatian sources as Operation Revenge (Croatian : Operacija Osveta) . The offensive started off with a substantial artillery bombardment and ground assault , directed at Ožtra Luka , at the centre of the front line . According to Croatian sources , the 5 May attack was not coordinated very well and it gave the HVO the chance to bolster its defences . While the fighting was in progress , the VRS artillery bombarded the town of Oražje itself . The attack was quickly defeated , and after this initial setback , the VRS paused for five days .

The offensive resumed on 10 May , when a number of VRS 9K52 Luna @-@ M short @-@ range artillery rockets , commonly known by their NATO designation of " FROG ? 7 " , were fired at HVO positions . The opposing forces blamed each other for the resumption of fighting ? the VRS accused the HVO of bombarding the Derventa ? Br?ko road to interdict traffic , while the HVO accused the VRS of bombarding the town of Ora?je first . During the morning of 10 May , UN observers counted more than 1 @,@ 000 explosions in the area and described the fighting as " intense " , but said that it had lost some momentum by the afternoon . The primary axes of the attacks , directed at the centre and the east of the pocket and aiming towards Ora?je and the village of Vidovice failed to gain ground . The secondary effort on the left flank made some progress towards Grebnice before being beaten back by the HVO . During the fighting , rumours circulated that the Ora?je area would be surrendered in exchange for territory lost to the HV in western Slavonia .

The VRS attacked at least seven more times over the next thirty days , with pauses of two to seven days between each attack . Some lasted for several days , and during each attack UN observers counted from 2 @,@ 000 to 5 @,@ 000 explosions . The most successful attack occurred on 14 ? 15 May , when the VRS nearly reached Vidovice on the southern bank of the Sava River . On that occasion , a combined armour and infantry assault broke through three lines of trenches , with the assistance of strong artillery support including the bombardment of HVO positions with approximately 5 @,@ 000 shells and two 9K52 Luna @-@ M rockets . In the fierce combat to gain control of Vidovice , the VRS was pushed back by the 4th Guards Brigade and the 106th Home Guard Regiment to its start positions . According to Bosnian Serb sources , the HV fired six rockets from its positions in the Posavski Podgajci and Rajevo Selo areas against targets in Br?ko , causing substantial damage but no casualties . Even though the fighting continued , including skirmishes between the VRS and the ARBiH in the area south of Ora?je , its overall intensity had declined by 15 May . On 4 ? 10 June , the HV and the HVO launched Operation Leap 2 against VRS @-@ held positions west of Livno . Even though the operation was not directly linked to the Battle of Ora?je , its planners thought that it might force the VRS to redeploy a portion of its forces in the Ora?je area to shore up its positions near the Livanjsko field . By 10 June , the VRS had called off Operation Flame @-@ 95 and the Battle of Ora?je effectively ended .

= = Aftermath = =

The VRS failure in the battle demonstrated its declining capabilities relative to its adversaries over the preceding three years . The failure was despite the offensive being conducted competently , and applying VRS military doctrine calling for the use of armoured and assault infantry supported by artillery . By 1995 , the VRS was facing well @-@ organised militaries employing a comparable number of artillery pieces and good defensive fortifications . In consequence , the VRS was no longer capable of defeating its opposition by relying heavily on artillery superiority , and it was unwilling to commit its dwindling numbers of infantry to a decisive but risky attack . The battle resulted in no territorial changes , but both belligerents reported dozens of casualties , both military and civilian . Even though the battle was over , intermittent artillery exchanges continued in the area , and as early as 19 June , the VRS bombarded Ora?je again .