

= Battle of Gospi? =

Battle of Gospi? (Croatian : Bitka za Gospi?) was fought in the environs of Gospi? , Croatia , from 29 August until 22 September 1991 during the Croatian War of Independence . The battle pitted the Yugoslav People 's Army (JNA) , stationed in five barracks in the town , and paramilitary elements of the Serbian Guard against the Croatian National Guard (ZNG) , police forces based in Gospi? and police reinforcements from elsewhere in Croatia . Fighting in the eastern districts of Gospi? , controlled by JNA forces with supporting artillery , was largely static but the balance shifted in favor of the Croatian forces following the capture of several JNA depots and barracks on 14 September . The remaining barracks were captured by 20 September leading to the expulsion of the JNA and Serbian Guard forces from the town .

The battle followed escalating ethnic tensions in the Lika region , including attacks on Croatian civilians in Lovinac , an attack on a Croatian police checkpoint in ?uta Lokva , and skirmishes at the Plitvice Lakes and the Ljubovo Pass on the Gospi? ? Plitvi?ka Jezera road . The remainder of 1991 saw further deterioration of the situation in the region , resulting in war crimes against Serbs and Croats in the Gospi? and ?iroka Kula massacres . Fighting in the region remained deadlocked , with little to no territorial gains to either side , until a lasting ceasefire was called with the signing of the Sarajevo Agreement of 2 January 1992 .

= = Background = =

In August 1990 , an insurrection took place in Croatia centred on the predominantly Serb @-@ populated areas of the Dalmatian hinterland around the city of Knin , as well as in parts of the Lika , Kordun , and Banovina regions , and settlements in eastern Croatia with significant Serb populations . These regions became the newly formed SAO Krajina (Serb Autonomous Oblast) . The announcement of SAO Krajina 's intent to integrate with Serbia resulted in the Croatian Government declaring the insurrection a rebellion .

By March 1991 , the conflict had escalated into the Croatian War of Independence and in June 1991 , with the Breakup of Yugoslavia , Croatia declared its independence . The declaration came into effect on 8 October after a three @-@ month moratorium . The SAO Krajina , renamed Republic of Serbian Krajina (RSK) on 19 December , then initiated a campaign of ethnic cleansing against Croatian civilians .

Control of the growing tensions became hampered by increasing support of SAO Krajina being provided by the Yugoslav People 's Army (JNA) . The inability of the Croatian Police to cope with the situation led to the establishment of the Croatian National Guard (ZNG) in May 1991 . However , the development of the ZNG into a military force was hampered by a UN arms embargo , introduced in September , while the military conflict in Croatia continued to escalate ? the Battle of Vukovar started on 26 August .

= = Prelude = =

An already tense situation in the Lika region , following 1 April Plitvice Lakes incident when the first fatalities of the Croatian War of Independence occurred , deteriorated further in June when Croatia reaffirmed its sovereignty through a parliamentary declaration . This was reflected in the rise of violent incidents , setting up of unauthorized road checkpoints and occasional exchanges of small arms fire . On 22 June , three policemen were abducted on the road between Gospi? and SAO Krajina @-@ controlled Gra?ac , and a series of attacks on the Croatian police occurred in various parts of Lika , including Gospi? , on 27 ? 28 June . In July 1991 , the JNA started to openly confront the Croatian police and the ZNG in Lika . On 1 July , Plitvice police station was surrounded by the JNA , and on 6 July , two ZNG troops were killed and another two wounded in a JNA ambush near Gospi? . Further escalation of the fighting was seen at the Ljubovo pass on the Gospi? ? Korenica road , where the JNA and SAO Krajina troops fought and pushed the ZNG back on 28 ? 29 July .

Ethnic violence continued to escalate when Serb paramilitaries abducted and killed five Croatian

civilians from Lovinac in southern Lika on 5 August , and a police checkpoint in ?uta Lokva was attacked . In early August , the JNA moved the 236th Proletarian Motorized Brigade (a brigade in name only , the 236th was actually only a company @-@ sized unit) and a portion of the motorised battalion of the 4th Armoured Brigade , previously deployed to the Ljubovo pass , to Gospi? as reinforcements for its garrison in the town . Other movements in that month include the assault and capture of the Plitvice police station on the 30th by SAO Krajina forces .

With the imminent capture of Plitvice and the withdrawal of the ZNG from Li?ki Osik on 31 August , 8 kilometres (5 @.@ 0 miles) north of Gospi? , the SAO Krajina and the JNA shifted their focus in Lika to Gospi? itself , where Serbs comprised 38 @.@ 4 % of the total population of 12 @,@ 000 .

= = Order of battle = =

The JNA forces consisted of 70 officers and 200 soldiers garrisoned at the Stanko Opsenica barracks and four other smaller JNA facilities in Gospi? . The garrison was supported by 128 Serbian Guard paramilitaries led by ?or?e Bo?ovi? , which deployed to Gospi? from Serbia using JNA transportation , according to an interview with the commanding officer of the southern Lika Territorial Defence in 1991 . Following a reorganization in 1991 , the JNA units based in Gospi? were the 236th Motorized Brigade and the 1st Brigade of the 35th Partisan Division , both subordinated to the Rijeka Corps . Prior to this , the 10th Proletarian Infantry Regiment , a B @-@ class unit required to maintain only 15 % of wartime troop levels , was stationed in Gospi? , but was amalgamated with the 9th Proletarian Infantry Regiment to form the 236th Motorized Brigade . The JNA garrison in Gospi? was formally commanded by Colonel Petar ?avar , however effective command was taken over by his chief of staff , Yugoslav Counterintelligence Service Major Relja Tomi? .

In early September , Croatian forces in Gospi? comprised 427 troops , largely drawn from police forces based in Gospi? , Rijeka and Zabok , volunteers from Gospi? , Zagreb and Senj as well as Croatian Defence Forces troops . The only ZNG unit in Gospi? was the 118th Infantry Brigade , which started to form around the ZNG 58th Independent Battalion on 14 August , but would not be fully assembled until after October . By mid @-@ September , the brigade comprised two battalions ? one with four companies and the other one three . The 118th Infantry Brigade was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Mirko Norac , while the head of the Croatian police in Gospi? was Ivan Dasovi? .

= = Timeline = =

The JNA and the Serb paramilitary force bombarded Gospi? with artillery stationed in the village of Divoselo and JNA Jasikovac Barracks on 29 August 1991 . The intensity of these attacks increased significantly towards mid @-@ September causing significant damage to Gospi? ; one SAO Krajina report of the attack estimated that more than 50 % of structures in the city were damaged .

At the outset of the battle , the JNA and the paramilitaries pushed the Croatian force out of eastern Gospi? . On 5 September , Croatian forces captured JNA Major General Traj?e Krstevski , along with three armoured personnel carriers (APCs) and 32 soldiers , when he attempted to reach JNA barracks that were isolated in the centre of the town but released them the next day following the successful negotiation of a prisoner exchange (POWs) . The Croatian commanders in Gospi? , however , declined a request that the APCs also be returned ? contrary to the instructions of Croatian authorities in Zagreb . Following the capture of Krstevski , the JNA artillery bombardment intensified , averaging 1 @,@ 100 artillery shells per day . Despite the intense bombardment , the second week of the battle was a stalemate , without any changes in lines of control .

The ZNG and Croatian police planned to cut power , water and communications to all JNA facilities in the government @-@ controlled part of Croatia on 14 September . In Gospi? , this action was brought forward to 13 September , the same day that the ZNG captured a JNA storage facility . This provided the Croatian troops with 14 @,@ 000 rifles and a substantial quantity of antitank weapons , more than sufficient for the Croatian forces to match the JNA in the town . The JNA barracks in

Peru?i? and Kani?a Barracks in Gospi? were captured the following day . The bulk of the JNA garrison in Gospi? surrendered on 18 September , following three days of fighting for the Stanko Opsenica Barracks . An infantry attack aiming to support the JNA garrison was successfully repelled by Croatian forces on 16 September in the Divoselo area , where Bo?ovi? was killed . After the city centre became relatively secure , the Croatian forces extended their offensive , capturing the Jasikovac Barracks and relieving two Croatian @-@ held pockets in villages of Ribnik and Bilaj by 20 September . As the JNA surrendered , the Serb forces retreated from the eastern parts of Gospi? to a line 8 kilometres (5 @.@ 0 miles) in front of Medak , as the Croatian forces completed mopping up in Gospi? by 22 September .

= = Aftermath = =

Croatia captured approximately 300 JNA officers and soldiers , who were taken to Rijeka after their capture . They were later exchanged for Croatian POWs captured by the JNA in the Battle of Vukovar and elsewhere in Croatia . A large quantity of small arms and ammunition was captured as well as seven tanks and twelve 120 @-@ millimetre (4 @.@ 7 in) mortars . After the battle , the artillery bombardment of Gospi? continued from positions around Divoselo and Li?ki ?itluk , approximately 5 to 8 kilometres (3 @.@ 1 to 5 @.@ 0 miles) south of Gospi? . Skirmishes in Lika continued until January 1992 as each side sought to improve their positions on the ground , especially around Gospi? and Oto?ac . On 23 September , a Croatian advance to the south was stopped by JNA and SAO Krajina forces , consisting of an infantry battalion and the Krajina Express armored train , which were defending a JNA storage depot in Sveti Rok . The JNA secured the depot and captured Lovinac on 26 September . By the end of September , Croatian defensive positions around Oto?ac were sufficiently reinforced that only minor attacks were launched and primarily near the village of Drenov Klanac . In late October and early December , fighting intensified around Divoselo near Gospi? , but no territory changed hands . The intensity of artillery bombardment of Gospi? peaked on 1 November 1991 , when 3 @, @ 500 artillery shells struck the town . In December , the JNA Knin Corps proposed to the JNA General Staff to advance from Gra?ac in an attempt to capture Gospi? and Oto?ac , but the signing of the Sarajevo Agreement and ceasefire of 2 January 1992 largely halted further fighting , until the commencement of Operation Medak Pocket in September 1993 .

The continuing military confrontation in the region was accompanied by an escalation of ethnic violence , culminating in war crimes against civilians committed by military authorities in Gospi? and the SAO Krajina military in the area around Li?ki Osik in October 1991 . In Gospi? , approximately 50 Serb civilians were taken from the town and killed in the surrounding fields . The individuals responsible for the event , later known as the Gospi? massacre , were prosecuted by the Croatian judiciary . This resulted in the conviction , in 2003 , of Norac and two other defendants to 12 years in prison . The killings in the Li?ki Osik area , known as the ?iroka Kula massacre , resulted in the deaths of 40 civilians , mostly Croats but also some Serbs suspected of supporting Croatia . In 2011 , a court in Belgrade , Serbia , convicted four former SAO Krajina militiamen of killing four Serbs and a Croat in ?iroka Kula .

In 1993 , Croatian authorities charged Marcel Dusper , Tomo ?a?i? , Jovo Kupre?anin , Bogdan Odanovi? , Relja Tomi? , Du?ko Baji? , Dane Drakula , Mi?o Vasi? , Goce Koneski , Slobodan Dotli? , Dragoljub Lazarevi? , Radovan Radenkovi? , Bratislav Milojkovi? , Stevo Milo?evi? and Milo? Bogdanovi? , 15 former JNA officers , posted in Gospi? garrison in 1991 with war crimes against a civilian population . All of the defendants , except Drakula were tried in absentia . Drakula was acquitted , while Dusper , Tomi? and Baji? were convicted and sentenced to 20 years in prison each while the remaining defendants were sentenced to 15 years . The rulings were upheld by the Supreme Court of Croatia in 1994 . Dotli? was arrested on 18 October 2013 after he visited his parents living in Croatia . Prior to his arrest , Dotli? had requested a new trial , but after his arrest the charges against him were changed to armed insurrection but this was later dropped following the General Amnesty Act .