

YUGOSLAV PEOPLE'S ARMY ATTACK ON DUBROVNIK 1991

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ABSTRACT

Based on his studies of archival sources, newspaper sources and literature, the author analyzes the causes, the course and the consequences of the Yugoslav People's Army's attack on the Croatian coastal town of Dubrovnik in autumn 1991. The attempt to conquer Dubrovnik represented the southernmost battleground in the war in Croatia in 1991. The attack on the city, which is located on the World Heritage List of UNESCO, triggered the reaction of the international community. Despite the few and poorly armed defenders, the Yugoslav People's Army failed to take the town.

Keywords: war in Croatia, Dubrovnik 1991, Southern battleground, Yugoslav People's Army – JNA, Yugoslav People's Army's Navy

L'ATTACCO DELL'ARMATA POPOLARE JUGOSLAVA
CONTRO DUBROVNIK NEL 1991*SINTESI*

Sulla base dello studio delle fonti d'archivio, dei giornali e della letteratura l'autore analizza le cause, il decorso e le conseguenze dell'attacco nell'autunno 1991 da parte dell'Armata Popolare Jugoslava contro la città costiera croata di Dubrovnik. Il tentativo di conquistare Dubrovnik rappresentava nel 1991 anche la zona di guerra più a sud della Croazia. L'attacco contro una città inserita nella lista del patrimonio mondiale dell'UNESCO ha scatenato la reazione della comunità internazionale. Nonostante la scarsità degli armamenti e il numero esiguo delle forze di difesa l'Esercito jugoslavo non riuscì a conquistare la città.

Parole chiave: guerra in Croazia, Dubrovnik 1991, campo di battaglia del Sud, Armata Popolare Jugoslava – JNA, Marina dell'Armata Popolare Jugoslava

INTRODUCTION

The geographical position of Dubrovnik county, which is a narrow littoral zone located on the border between Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, as well as its distance from major centres in Croatia, defined the special fate of Dubrovnik during the war in Croatia. The start of Croatian Serb resistance work against the new Croatian government in August 1990, did not directly touch the town, except the indirect damage the town suffered in tourism, but the resistance echoed hard in the immediate hinterland of the city, in eastern Herzegovina and Montenegro. During this period the space of Eastern Herzegovina, specifically the municipalities of Trebinje, Ljubinje, Bileća, Gacko and Nevesinje, which were in the majority populated by Serbs, had the strongest impact on Dubrovnik. Similar was the case of Herzegovina's municipalities of Stolac, Čapljina, Neum and Mostar, where Serbs represented a minority (Raguž, 2003, 38). Serbian documents that deal with the JNA attack on Dubrovnik, which by the end of the war in Croatia the Croatian side confiscated, are scarce, so it would be reasonable to include research documents held by the archives in Belgrade. There are some scientific works about the title theme (Raguž, 2003 and 2004; Marijan, 2002, 2006 and 2008) and also some interesting memoirs (Mesić, 1994; Kesovija, 1994). There is a good display of military operations in the war in Croatia in the semi-official report by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) on the wars in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) (Balkan Battlegrounds, 2002). To a significant extent we used newspapers and magazines, both Slovenian, and Croatian and Serbian, as a source. Working with this type of resource is difficult because the media reports are often biased in favor of a given political situation and editorial policy, which makes it difficult to discover what actually happened. Many renowned authors who are dedicated to the Balkan and Yugoslav history, have pointed out this problem, but it is nevertheless necessary to realize that it would be impossible exploring modern history without using the media as a source.

WHY DUBROVNIK?

The southern battlefield with Dubrovnik, unlike other battlefields in the war in Croatia, had some specificities. In parts of Croatia, where the Serb rebellion and later the war took place, the villages with Serb-majority population (Knin, Borovo Selo), which were located on the territory of Croatia, represented the focal and the starting point of riots. In addition, at the beginning of the war the military facilities of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) played an important role as in these cities as in the surrounding area (Raguž, 2003, 39). In the municipality of Dubrovnik, where the Croatian population of 82.38 per cent represented the absolute majority, there was not a single village with a Serb-majority population. The Serbs in Dubrovnik municipality represented only 8.8 percent of the total population, their highest share being in the village of Zvekovica in Cavtat (14 percent) (Gelo, 1992, 80, 82).¹ Replacement focal point of tension therefore became the village of

1 Globus, 18. 10. 1991: Dubrovnik za četnike zatvoreni grad, 43.

Ivanica, which is located halfway between Trebinje and Dubrovnik, on the border of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, but already in the municipality of Trebinje. The village is located only 10 km from Dubrovnik and has an ideal strategic location from which the entire Župa dubrovačka, Cavtat with archipelago and western Konavle could be controlled. Ivanica became one of the most important bases for the Serbian-Montenegrin attack on Dubrovnik in 1991.² There were also no facilities or polygons of JNA in Dubrovnik, with the exception of a JNA military resort in Kupari, whose role in the attack on Dubrovnik has not yet been clarified, although there is evidence that the members of JNA military intelligence and the staff there had an active role in the preparation and execution of the aggression on Dubrovnik (Raguž, 2003, 39). For these reasons, there were no conditions for the worsening of the situation in the Dubrovnik area, it was necessary to tighten the situation in the immediate hinterland of the city, Herzegovina and Kotor Bay, and then from there on transfer the tensions into Dubrovnik area. Unstable security situation and the atmosphere of fear would have created conditions for an armed aggression, occupation and then the prosecution of the Croatian population and finally the establishment of a parastate »Republic of Dubrovnik«, which would have joined the third Yugoslavia and would have represented a »buffer zone« between Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (ZRJ), for it would have covered the whole territory from Neum to Prevlaka and thus would have been an additional strategic fuse for the peninsula Prevlaka (Raguž, 2003, 39). For the latter, on the cape of which there was JNA's rocket base and their testing ground for weapons, the public first heard in August 1991, when the Yugoslav People's Army announced that Croatian forces attacked the cape in order to conquer it and with the coastal artillery prevent the outlet of JNA's navy from the Gulf of Bay of Kotor. It soon became apparent that the night shooting of JNA's guards in the peninsula was deliberately inflated into a Croatian threat to the Bay of Kotor, in order to excuse an already prepared military operation against Dubrovnik.³

The main bearers of the national and political tensions in Dubrovnik were Serbs and Montenegrins in the city, who for the most part originated from eastern Herzegovina and western Montenegro, from where they moved to Dubrovnik during the economic development of the city in the 60s and 70s of the 20th century. In the second half of the year 1990 they began to actively participate in the propaganda war, the aim of which was to show the Dubrovnik Serbs as threatened and persecuted, in which they got help from the Serbian and Montenegrin media. When in January 1991 they expected an intervention of JNA in Croatia, a part of the Serbian and Montenegrin families withdrew from Dubrovnik to eastern Herzegovina, in summer they permanently left the municipality and in October, they actively participated in the aggression on Dubrovnik (Raguž, 2003, 39). In 1991, statements of Greater Serbia gatherings reached Dubrovnik, which were organized in direct Herzegovina and Montenegro hinterland that »*people of Dubrovnik have never been Croats, but re-Catholicised Serbs*« and »*if Dubrovnik decides for Croatia, this will mean a declaration of war*« (Raguž, 2004, 220–224).

2 Vjesnik, 26. 9. 1991: Crnogorci, sačuvajte obraz, 3.

3 Revija Obramba, oktober 1992: »Južna fronta« – stvarnost ali fikcija?, 6.

OCCUPATION PLAN

To ensure an outlet from the Bay of Boka Kotorska and achieve military dominance in the southern Adriatic, the Yugoslav People's Army generals planned an occupation of eastern Herzegovina and southern Dalmatia and associated islands. They meant to occupy all the territories between Montenegro and the Neretva River with the attached islands in the Adriatic, which they would later connect to the rest of the conquered territory. According to the operational plan of attack the main body of the forces should have focused on the capture of the communication line Trebinje-Ljubovo- Dubrovnik, and the auxiliary forces should have advanced in the direction of Herceg-Novi-Ćilipi-Cavtat-Dubrovnik-Kupari. At the same time, attacks should have taken place in tactical directions Vjetrenica-Slano and Smokovljani-Čepikuće-Ston. By conquering Ston the whole peninsula Plješćanac would have been blocked, its conquest would have created conditions for an attack on the central Dalmatian islands (Ogorec, 1994, 105). In the southern part of Croatia, the part of Dalmatia to the east of the outfall of the Neretva river into the sea, as well as in its hinterland in Herzegovina, the Yugoslav People's Army planned two operational lines of action. Mostar was the starting point of the breakthrough to Split, Trebinje and Herceg-Nova toward Dubrovnik (Kadijević, 1993, 135, 139–140). The task was to be executed by Užice Corps under the command of General Milan Torbica, Titograd Corps, led by Major General Radomir Eremija and military maritime sector Boka under the command of Vice Admiral Miodrag Jokić. From the area of Mostar, together with the 10th Motorised Brigade, were to operate Užice Corps, who would take the Southeast and Western Herzegovina and then progress to Split. At the same time, the Titograd Corps, with the help of 472 motorized brigade from Trebinje, were to attack and occupy the wider area of Dubrovnik.⁴ Combat operations were also supported by the navy under the command of the military and the maritime sector Boka (Raguž, 2004, 187). The flight operation support was offered by parts of the 97th air brigade, the 107th mixed air regiment from Mostar and two squadron of the 172nd fighter-bomber aviation regiment from Titograd (now Podgorica). For a shorter period they also used the squadron of Territorial Defense Montenegro, equipped with the aircraft Kraguj (Dimitrijević, 2009, 311).

The operation of JNA military groups was coordinated by the Operational Group for South Herzegovina and Dalmatia (OG-2) under the command of the highest ranking General Jevrem Cokić, which had its command post in Kifin Selo near Nevesinje since mid-September 1991. The task of the OG-2 was to occupy a wider area of the Adriatic highway from Neum to Prevlaka inclusive. Seven to ten days were provided for the realization of this plan.⁵ Under the command of OG-2 belonged the unit of Titograd Corps, military maritime sector Boka, Territorial Defence of Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina from eastern Herzegovina and also the militia of Montenegro. The task of Montenegrin militia was to protect the »liberated areas«. After the occupation of Dubrovnik, OG-2 was supposed to direct the main body of the forces against Ploče in the Neretva River Valley.

4 HMDCDR-2, škatla 5010, Zapovest za upotrebu snaga VPO, Oper. br. 1, 20. 9. 1991.

5 Narodna armija, 9. 1. 1992: Istina je probila sve barijere, 14–15.

As regards that attacking Dubrovnik became the primary objective of the attack, the seat of OG-2 was transpositioned from the vicinity of Nevesinje to Trebinje, and because General Cokić was wounded at the beginning of occupation of Konavle (Gazelle helicopter in which he was flying was shot down) his place was taken by General Pavle Strugar.⁶ According to the plan of JNA military maritime authorities, OG-2 was supposed to bind Croatian forces to itself in the Neretva valley and thereby secure the attack of Knin Corps on Split (Marijan, 2008, 312). The task of penetration in the direction of Mostar-Split was entrusted to Užice Corps from western Serbia, parts of which came to the area of western and central Herzegovina on September 20. The corps arrived in this area with only a part of its formation units, because some of its units were engaged within the first Proletarian Guard mechanized division, Banja Luka and Knin Corps. The corps made up for the absence of these units by adding parts of Sarajevo and Titograd Corps, and later also parts of the military-maritime sector Boka. Due to poor response to mobilization and thus truncated mass the task of the corps was limited to defending the airport in Mostar and intimidating the non-Serbs in the area (Marijan, 2006, 147).

And so Eastern Herzegovina began to be occupied by JNA units, which consisted of Serbian and Montenegrin mobilized reservists, with the excuse that it was necessary to protect »*Barehanded Serbian people*« from the »*fascist*« Croatian population.⁷ Indeed, more than 80 percent of the Serbian population lived in this area, there were almost no Croats and Muslims were extremely rare. The army's purpose, with its arrival in Chetnik iconography, was to intimidate and banish the rare non-Serb population. In the next phase, General Kadijević personally made the army to withdraw from Mostar, Trebinje and Bileća barracks under the pretext that he wanted to protect the population »*against a drunken horde of Montenegrins*«.⁸ With this move, he executed a regrouping of JNA forces, so that they occupied the starting positions from Montenegro to the Neretva for a march to the southern Dalmatia, including the islands. Thus, the units of Titograd Corps, the 472nd motorized brigade from Trebinje and parts of Užice Corps assigned their posts at the starting positions for the attack against the municipality of Dubrovnik, from the Bay of Kotor to Popov fields in the second half of September. According to the commander of the defense of Dubrovnik, General Nojko Marinović, there were about 5,000 opponents with more than 100 pieces of artillery weapons on the 120 km long battlefield (Raguž, 2004, 219). According to some other estimates, there were supposedly about 12,000 opponents within the range from Mostar to Dubrovnik, who were in the vast majority called up reservists. Compared to this, the Croatian defense was much smaller in number. At the moment when JNA began with their operation, the Croatian forces in the southern battlefield were the weakest and the fewest in number from all the battlefields in the war in Croatia. At the meeting of the Crisis Staff of the municipality of Dubrovnik on Sep-

6 Vjesnik, 7. 10. 1991: U srušenom helikopteru poginuo komandant VPS-a, 3; Borba, 7. 10. 1991: Borbe nadomak Dubrovnika, 3.

7 Revija Obramba, november-december 1991: Se bo vojaško ravnovesje v Sredozemlju zrušilo?, 7; Borba, 24. 9. 1991: Ne prijetei opasnost od JNA i Crne Gore, 7.

8 Revija Obramba, november-december 1991: Se bo vojaško ravnovesje v Sredozemlju zrušilo?, 7.

tember 26, General Marinović presented the state of municipality's defense: »*The core of our armed forces represents one unit of ZNG's permanent composition of Dubrovnik police administration and the police reserve. A total of not even 500 combatants [...] The problem are the weapons. There aren't enough disposable infantry weapons for a quality equipment of existing units, in the whole area there aren't any artillery tubes, except a few cannons and mortars located in Konavle*« (Kriste, 2000, 35–36). Out of 500 of these combatants, about 150 were members of the National Guard Assembly (ZNG) and 300 were members of the Croatian Ministry of the Interior. An independent battalion of Dubrovnik was formed for the defense of the town and later it was reinforced by smaller groups from the operational zone Split (Marijan, 2006, 147; Thomas, Mikulan, 2006, 54).

BATTLE FOR DUBROVNIK

Final preparations for the attack on Dubrovnik area started on September 17, when the Yugoslav People's Army Navy blocked all Croatian ports and thereby Dubrovnik. Tensions in southern Dalmatia increased in the second half of September 1991, when the Croatian inhabitants of individual towns in Bosnia and Herzegovina near the border with Croatia (Čapljina, Lištica) blocked the columns of JNA units that were moving towards the Croatian coast. The first attacks in the area of Konavle and Župe dubrovačke started on September 24, but were only a warm-up and field reconnaissance.⁹ JNA began the general attack on the Dubrovnik area from the area of Popovo polje and Montenegro over Prevlaka on October 1. The attack was directed at Konavle, Župa dubrovačka and the suburban settlement Mokošica. From JNA positions on the border with Montenegro they began to fire upon the Croatian defensive positions in Konavle with cannons and mortars, and from the village of Ivanica they attacked settlements in Župa dubrovačka. Around 10.00 AM a JNA military ship fired upon the main Adriatic road in the town of Slano in Dubrovnik coastal region, and a few other ships occupied the strategically important positions in Cavtat and the islands Koločep and Lokrum in the immediate vicinity of Dubrovnik. Shortly before 12.00 AM, two military aircrafts fired missiles at a television transmitter on Srđ, but they did not hit it.¹⁰ Croatian media reported that the commander of JNA military maritime sector Boka, naval captain Krsto Đurović and his assistant Mihailo Žarković were supposedly replaced and arrested over allegations that they cooperated with the Croatian Ministry of the Interior. This change in command was commented by the President of the National Party of Montenegro dr. Novak Kilibarda, who said that the newly appointed commander began its conquest of Croatian territory from Debeli

9 Večer, 25. 9. 1991: Napad na Vinkovce in Pakrac, 2; Delo, 25. 9. 1991: Bitka za vzhodno Slavoniju, Črnogorske grožnje Dalmaciji, 1; Vjesnik, 25. 9. 1991: Rat se približava Dubrovniku, 3; Borba, 28. 9.–29. 9. 1991: Ustuknule hrvatske snage, 2; Politika, 25. 9. 1991: Provokativni pokreti hrvatskih snaga, 9; Hrvatski vojnik, 15. 7. 1994: Dubrovnik – grad biser u hrvatskoj kruni, 31.

10 Politika, 2. 10. 1991: Bitke od Dubrovnika i Knina do Vukovara, 1; Politika, 3. 10. 1991: Snažna akcija Armije kod Dubrovnika, 1; Vjesnik, 2. 10. 1991: Odašiljač Srđ nije pogođen, 3; Borba, 3. 10. 1991: Tromeda jedinstva u paramparčad, 2; Borba, 3. 10. 1991: Dubrovnik u obruču, 2; Hrvatski vojnik, 15. 7. 1994: Dubrovnik – grad biser u hrvatskoj kruni, 31.

brijeg to Dubec, which is located just five kilometers away from Dubrovnik, and blocked the Dubrovnik territorial waters.¹¹ In fact, Đurović's command of military maritime sector Boka ended a few days later when he was mortally wounded in the Gazelle helicopter which was shot down and crashed in the vicinity of Čilipi. Đurović's Chief of Staff, Croat – captain of the battleship Milišić, was sentenced to six years of rigorous imprisonment for his cooperation with the Croatian side.¹² Montenegrin reservists who came to Rijeka dubrovačka from Trebinje sunk all the ships in the marina of Dubrovnik with missiles and hit a transformer station, thus leaving Dubrovnik without electricity, water or telephone lines.¹³ An attack in the direction of Čepikuće, northwest of Dubrovnik, also started with a delay where the attackers encountered a well-placed ZNG's ambush under the command of Nijaz Batlaka-Daidže and suffered losses, therefore they withdrew.¹⁴ The penetration of the Yugoslav People's Army in the direction of Zavala-Slano began three days after the attack, so that on October 4 JNA tanks occupied Slano, by which Dubrovnik was surrounded and completely cut off from the rest of Croatia.¹⁵ The reason for the relatively rapid fall of this strategically important city, occupied by the 252nd Armored Brigade of JNA from Kraljevo under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Drago Teodorović, were large errors of Croatian defense in demining and defense in the direction of Slano-Zavala (Marijan, 2002, 167). On the same day JNA planes attacked the airport in Čilipi.¹⁶

In Konavle the Croatian defense had to withdraw to a new line of defense Gabrile-Ćilipi-Konovalska brda, Crisis Staff of this area was transferred to Cavtat.¹⁷ By October 5 the Yugoslav People's Army took Prevlaka, October 15 Cavtat and Konavle and October 22 Župa Dubrovačka.¹⁸ On October 5 European observers Martin Berthoud, Vittorio Ghidi and Miroslav Pavelka arrived at the surrounded Dubrovnik from Crikvenica with the ferry Slavija. The ferry also carried some medical supplies, medicines and blood plasma.¹⁹ Mediated by observers of the European Communities, a meeting took place on October 11 between the representatives of the municipality of Dubrovnik and the commander of military maritime sector Boka Vice Admiral Miodrag Jokić on the military ship »Kotor« and they agreed on a cease-fire, but JNA did not comply it.²⁰ It attacked the

11 Vjesnik, 2. 10. 1991: Dubrovnik potresaju detonacije, 3.

12 Narodna armija, 9. 1. 1992: Istina je probila sve barijere, 14–15; Vjesnik, 7. 10. 1991: U srušenom helikopteru poginuo komandant VPS-a, 3; Borba, 7. 10. 1991: Borbe nadomak Dubrovnika, 3; Revija Obramba, november-december 1991: Pomorska bitka za Jugoslaviju, 15.

13 Vjesnik, 3. 10. 1991: Barbari protiv sv. Vlaha, 3.

14 Narodna armija, 16. 4. 1992: Suze na hercegovačkom kamenju, 27; Vjesnik, 5. 10. 1991: Tutnjava među zidinama, 3; Globus, 18. 10. 1991: 12 veličanstvenih u obrani Slanog, 44; Globus, 29. 5. 1992: Moje je ime vojna tajna!, 9–11.

15 Vjesnik, 8. 10. 1991: Dubrovnik granatama na Dubrovnik, 3; Hrvatski vojnik, 15. 7. 1994: Dubrovnik – grad biser u hrvatskoj kruni, 32; Globus, 18. 10. 1991: 12 veličanstvenih u obrani Slanog, 44; Narodna armija, 12. 10. 1991: Đavo s mora još preti, 11.

16 Politika, 6. 10. 1991: Borbe oko Čilipa, 1; Vjesnik, 5. 10. 1991: Bombardiran aerodrom Čilipi, 3.

17 Vjesnik, 6. 10. 1991: Orlandov grad u vatrenom obruču, 3.

18 Politika, 16. 10. 1991: Armija u Cavtatu – struja u Dubrovniku, 9; Večer, 16. 10. 1991: Vojska v Cavtatu, 2; Večer, 23. 10. 1991: Napadena Vukovar in Dubrovnik, 3.

19 Vjesnik, 6. 10. 1991: Orlandov grad u vatrenom obruču, 3; Vjesnik, 7. 10. 1991: U vihoru barbarskog rata, 3.

20 Hrvatski vojnik, 15. 7. 1994: Dubrovnik – grad biser u hrvatskoj kruni, 32.

Bosnian port of Neum by aircraft and occupied Čilipi, from where it took away all the valuable technical equipment to Montenegro.²¹ Accompanying occurrences of JNA progression were forest fires that destroyed the arboretum of Trsteno, founded in 1502, with six centuries old oaks, and were supposedly started deliberately from helicopters.²² When reservists occupied Konavle they destroyed almost everything that got in their way. They looted and then burned down village after village and every single house, including the house of the famous Croatian singer Tereza Kesovija who wrote the following:

'The phosphorus burned down room by room' stated a young soldier. 'Look how the granite on the ground turned into dust' [...] There is a pile of broken dishes and crystal glasses in the corner of the dining room. Glass is everywhere. Southern glass wall, six metres long and three meters high, melted in the extreme heat [...] About what they did for entertainment while resting, tells a message cut into the blackened walls with a knife tip: 'Dear Teresa in memory of a crazy ...,' it said in the bathroom, 'Serb-Chetniks', 'The price you paid for your statement is cheap...'. In Konavle room: 'Greetings from Montenegro' (Kesovija, 1994, 46).

The trucks drove away to Montenegro 420 cows from the livestock farm Grude and seized products of Konavle farmers' hard work, oil, wine, grapes, smoked ham, potatoes, and from Konavle houses televisions, VCRs, refrigerators, furniture and other valuable equipment (Glenny, 1993, 133–134). JNA did not allow its Montenegrin reservists in Cavtat the rampage they indulged in Konavle, so the city was neither looted nor burned down. Hotel Croatia in Cavtat was renamed into hotel Lovćen and its inventory wastaken to Montenegro. Only the ones who came with too small trucks spoke about injustice.²³ Croatian defense against Ivanica was breached on October 25, and so JNA conquered the entire eastern part of the coast of Dubrovnik until November 1.²⁴ In the fighting that followed, the area around Dubrovnik under Croatian control, to which around 35,000 residents from the surrounding occupied territories resorted, shrunk to just 11 km². Merciless siege and attacks on Dubrovnik could therefore start. The main reason for such a rapid fall of Croatia's south into the hands of JNA was the overwhelming superiority of the latter in the number of soldiers and military technology, as well as the extremely poor readiness of the Croatian side to defend this part of Croatia, thus the south battlefield represented one of the most critical ones in the country (Raguž, 2004, 222).

The successful Croatian defense of Čepikuće temporarily prevented the fall of the western coast of Dubrovnik, but the Croatian forces were too weak to retain this position,

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- 21 Večer, 7. 10. 1991: Letala stresala smrtonosne tovore, 2; Vjesnik, 14. 10. 1991: Pljačka umesto pregovora, 3; Borba, 7. 10. 1991: Borbe nadomak Dubrovnika, 3; Narodna armija, 16. 10. 1991: Radovan Popović, I nebo je gorelo, 15.
- 22 Vjesnik, 5. 10. 1991: Tutnjava među zidinama, 3; Globus, 18. 10. 1991: Dubrovnik za četnike zatvoreni grad, 44.
- 23 Mladina, 19. 11. 1991: Zanka obkoljenega mesta, 25.
- 24 Vjesnik, 26. 10. 1991: Žestoke borbe oko Dubrovnika, 1; Vjesnik, 26. 10. 1991: Agresorska vojska četiri kilometra od Dubrovnika, 3.

so reinforcements from other towns in Croatia came to this area, which led to conflicts between the current and the newly appointed commanders. The situation was so chaotic that for a few months no one knew who was superior to whom and what were their competences, which ultimately contributed to a significantly poor defense on the battlefield (Raguž, 2004, 223). On October 22 Croatian forces in the area tried to push JNA out of Slano and thereby unblock Dubrovnik, but the attempt turned into a real massacre due to poor equipment and planning and the inability of the commanding officers. Two days later the unit of Titograd Corps conquered Čepikuće, by that JNA more or less controlled the area of Herzegovina to the Neretva River.²⁵ After a complete blockade of Dubrovnik, JNA tried in various ways to take the city without a fight. In the first half of October it demanded of the Crisis Staff of Dubrovnik capitulation and disarmament of their »paramilitary formations« and at the end of the month General Pavle Strugar openly urged residents to leave the city.²⁶ Since not everyone left the city, he started tiring them out by blocking the arrival of food and their water supply (Marijan, 2006, 149).

The old town of Dubrovnik was attacked with a large-caliber artillery for the first time on October 23. To speed up the pace of the attack and take advantage of the unpreparedness of the Croatian Defence, the Yugoslav People's Army conducted a maritime desant on Kupare on October 24.²⁷ On that day ships fired from their cannons more than 3,000 shells on Dubrovnik battlefield, the breakthrough of JNA was stopped only a few kilometers before Dubrovnik.²⁸ That day Dubrovnik experienced its strongest attack since the beginning of the fighting in the southern battlefield, for it lasted more than 13 hours.²⁹ The Liaison Officer of the military maritime sector Boka, captain of the warships Sofronije Jeremić, did not allow the arrival of the ferry Slavija which would evacuate the sick, injured, disabled, women, children and the elderly from the surrounded city and at least bring some relief to the population.³⁰ After the breakthrough near Dubec JNA penetrated to the very city walls from the east and on October 25 set an ultimatum to the defenders to surrender weapons and demanded their withdrawal, or they will otherwise be forced to take action.³¹ On the same day in Cavtat Dubrovnik, mediated by observers of the European Communities, representatives of municipalities and JNA reached an agreement on a ceasefire, which took effect at 5.00 PM.³² Brigade commander »Veljko Vlahović« Lt. Col. Kostadin Koprivica justified the attack on the city to the reporters in Herceg-Novo by saying:

25 Narodna armija, 4. 12. 1991: Oslobođene i Čepikuće, 18.

26 Politika, 26. 10. 1991: Samo predaja spasava Dubrovnik, 9; Večer, 28. 10. 1991: Ultimat županu, 2; Delo, 28. 10. 1991: Ultimat Dubrovniku, 1.

27 Večer, 25. 10. 1991: Desant na Kupare, 2; Vjesnik, 25. 10. 1991: Okupator ušao u Kupare, 3; Borba, 25. 10. 1991: Kupari osvojeni pomorskim desantom, 3.

28 Politika, 25. 10. 1991: Stari Dubrovnik nije bombardovan, 11.

29 Vjesnik, 26. 10. 1991: Agresorska vojska četiri kilometra od Dubrovnik, 3.

30 Vjesnik, 25. 10. 1991: To Dubrovniku nisu radili ni fašisti, 3; Borba, 24.10.1991: Tek predstoji žestoka bitka, 5.

31 Politika, 27. 10. 1991: Slobodan pogled sa Dupca na Dubrovnik, 9; Vjesnik, 26. 10. 1991: Agresorska vojska četiri kilometra od Dubrovnik, 3; Vjesnik, 28. 10. 1991: Briga za putnike »Slavije«, 3.

32 Nedjeljni Vjesnik, 27. 10. 1991: Zastavu slobode neće zamijeniti bijela zastava, 3.

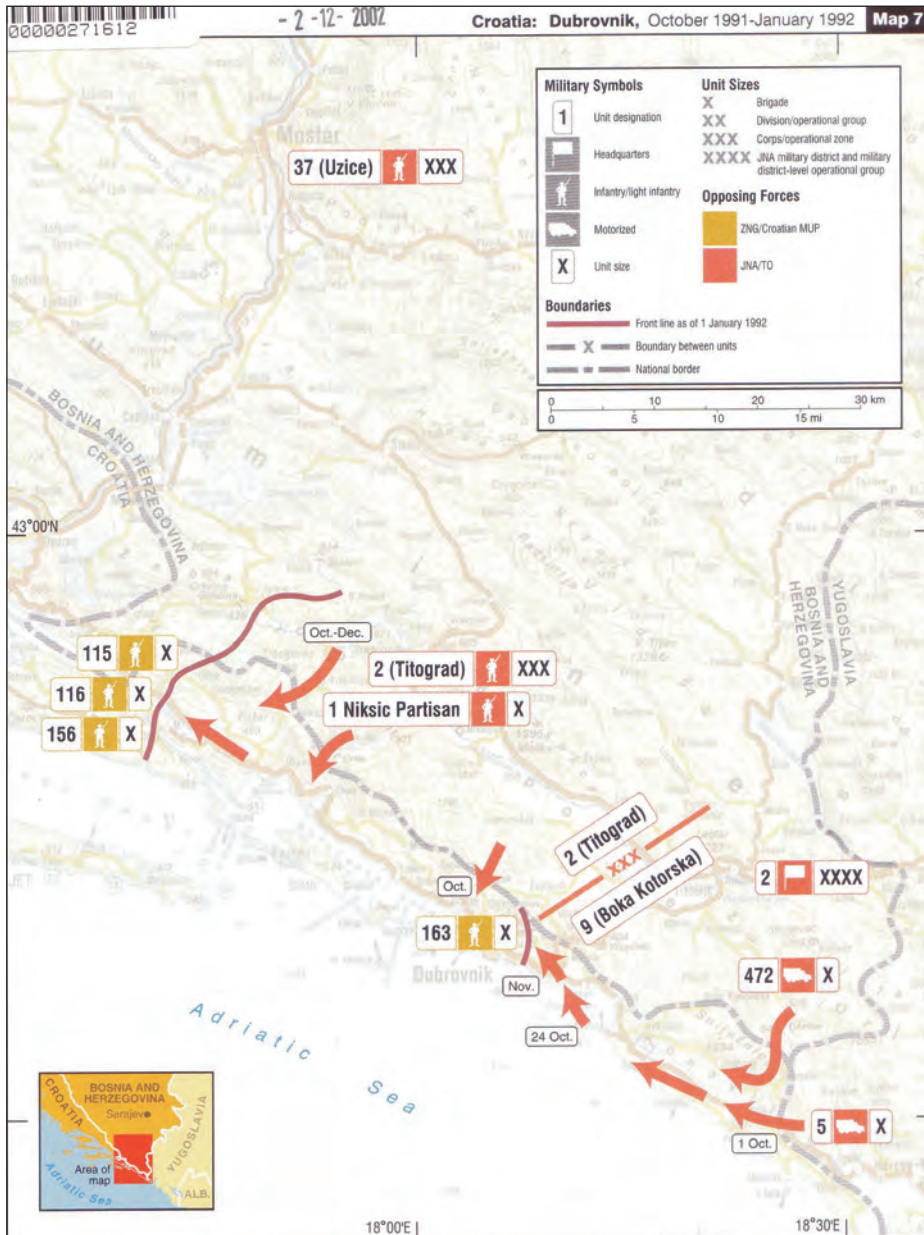


Fig. 1: Dubrovnik battlefield.
 Sl. 1: Dubrovniško bojišče.
 (Balkan Battlegrounds, 2002).



Fig. 2: JNA positions above Dubrovnik.

Sl. 2: Položaji JLA nad Dubrovnikom.

(<https://www.dubrovnik-walking-tours.com>, 18. 2. 2015).

*We are trying in every way not to demolish Dubrovnik as a world cultural heritage. However, we will force Ustasha to surrender, because this is the only way to spare the city. In this case, and if they unblock the barracks, buildings and warehouses which are located in the area of the Neretva River towards Dubrovnik, Trebinje and the towns south of there, it would mean the end of our activities.*³³

After the refusal to surrender JNA continued to vigorously bombard Dubrovnik till half of November, however, the city did not give in. Croatian defense organized successfully so that the front line stabilized at the city's entrance points. On October 28, despite the ceasefire agreement, JNA drew nearer the city to just one kilometer away, when it penetrated to Mokošica on the west side and occupied Petrovo Selo and the hill Žarkovič on the other side, from where it could easily fire upon the old town. As it wanted to provoke citizens who had found themselves in a trap, JNA hung out the Yugoslav flag on the hill of Žarkovica.³⁴ It seemed inevitable for Dubrovnik to fall, although both sides were aware that an infantry storm across the rocky slopes that surrounded the city, would claim a high price (Silber, Little, 1996, 202).

33 Narodna armija, 30. 10. 1991: Novi predlozi, stara odugovlačenja, 6.

34 Večer, 29. 10. 1991: Pred vratu Dubrovnika, 2; Delo, 29. 10. 1991: Vojska na pragu Dubrovnika, ki kljubuje pred očmi sveta, 1; Vjesnik, 29. 10. 1991: Iz Žarkovice i Mokošice okupator na nišanu drži dubrovački Stari grad, 1.

Due to the critical situation in Dubrovnik the president of SFRY Presidency Stipe Mesić invited the owners of small vessels along the Dalmatian coast, to join him in a convoy, which would break through the maritime blockade of the JNA. The convoy called »The Return of Dubrovnik people to Dubrovnik« (Libertas) led by ferry Slavija sailed from Rijeka to Split and on to Dubrovnik.³⁵ The convoy was joined by many Croatian distinguished people, including Mesić, Croatian Prime Minister dr. Franjo Gregurić, the wife of Foreign Minister and Tereza Kesovija (Mesić, 1994, 297–303). Mesić who was then still the president of the SFRY Presidency and the supreme commander of the Yugoslav People's Army said before the departure: »*They can stop us, but I am the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces; if we will be disabled, this will only prove that a military coup was carried out in Yugoslavia.*«³⁶ JNA gunboats stopped the convoy in Mljet channel and ordered them to sail into the Montenegrin port Zelenika in Kotor Bay where they would be inspected and possibly allowed to land in Dubrovnik. Mesić demanded a radio contact with Admiral Stane Brovet, who was deputy defense minister, and told him that his convoy will not be redirected to the Bay of Kotor. After the talk Brovet ordered JNA to search all the vessels anyway and ascertain that there aren't any weapons on them that could be smuggled into Dubrovnik, and in that case let them sail on.³⁷ On October 30 Slavija together with 29 ships and small boats pierced the maritime blockade and anchored in Dubrovnik, a city with about 60,000 people in great distress.³⁸ When the convoy left Dubrovnik, the suffering continued but the international community was now aware of it. The reputation of the Yugoslav People's Army was now blackened, who day after day sent grenades into the booming tourist hotels located alongside Dubrovnik embankment, which forced the life of the city to move into basements. Mortar shells also struck the hotel »Argentinax«, which held headquarters of the observer mission of the European Communities in it.³⁹ JNA fired from their positions on Žarkovič with their artillery upon Croatian positions on Srđ and Bosanka.⁴⁰ The Secretary-General of UNESCO Federico Mayor suggested to all the parties of the conflict to withdraw from the city.⁴¹ The Information Department of the Federal Secretariat for National Defence reported the following:

JNA respected the wealth of Dubrovnik in all the ways and therefore moved out of the city 20 years ago. Dubrovnik was left without an army until the arrival of Croatian paramilitary units that have put up a 'base' in this town for the attack on the army in

35 Vjesnik, 31. 10.–1. 11. 1991: Dubrovački konvoj razoružao silu, 1.

36 Večer, 30. 10. 1991: Bo konvoj prispel do Straduna?, 2.

37 Vjesnik, 31. 10.–1. 11. 1991: Vojne ucjene i prijjetnje konvoju mira, 5; Globus, 8. 11. 1991: Bio sam slijepi putnik na brodu Slavija, 38–40.

38 Večer, 31. 10. 1991: Dovoljenje za pristanek, 5; Delo, 31. 10. 1991: Zelena luč vojske za konvoj, 1; Vjesnik, 31. 10.–1. 11. 1991: Dubrovački konvoj razoružao silu, 1; Vjesnik, 2. 11. 1991: Dubrovnik ostaje bastion slobode, 5; Vjesnik, 2. 11. 1991: Pobjeda napaćenog Grada, 5; Nedjeljni Vjesnik, 3. 11. 1991: Sveti Vlaho u zagrljaju okupatora, 11.

39 Vjesnik, 4. 11. 1991: Paljba po hotelima, 5.

40 Vjesnik, 7. 11. 1991: Sukob na Srđu, 5.

41 Mladina, 19. 11. 1991: Zanka obkoljenega mesta, 25.

*the area, especially in the Bay of Kotor. As the Army wants to 'demilitarize' the city, certain war activities had to follow.*⁴²

In the meantime bombardment of Dubrovnik continued, grenades fell on Gruž, Babin Kuk, Srđ and Stradun. Grenades damaged Sponza Palace, the city bell tower, the Dominican monastery, palace Bošković, Franciscan Monastery, grenades also hit the fort st. Ivan.⁴³ An appeal to Dubrovnik was sent from JNA headquarters in Bay of Kotor on November 7 in which residents were urged to assist in *»a calm and legally recognized disarmament of paramilitary formations and armed political extremists«*, but the leadership of the city refused it.⁴⁴ On November 10 JNA occupied the hill Bosanka and demanded the capitulation of Croatian forces within 24 hours.⁴⁵ The European Community (EC) decided to send a part of their fleet in the waters before Dubrovnik to protect humanitarian action and the evacuation of vulnerable populations, and EC observers organized negotiations between the JNA and the Croatian side in Cavtat. JNA argued that the Croats in Dubrovnik had set fire under piles of tires and then accused the army of bombarding the city. Humanitarian aid started coming to the surrounded city by ships. Thus the Italian military hospital navy ship *»San Marco«* evacuated 782 women, children and elderly people from Dubrovnik to the Italian port of Brindisi on November 19. The next day the French military hospital navy ship *»La Rance«* brought about 100 tonnes food and other most urgent supplies to the city.⁴⁶ At the assembly of the inhabitants in the occupied Cavtat, held in hotel *»Croatia«*, the movement for the Republic of Dubrovnik under the protection of the UN was founded on November 24 in 1991. It was founded by a former county prosecutor Dubrovnik and Dubrovnik Tourist Association President Aleksandar Aco Apolonio with the support of the Yugoslav People's Army and their adherents.⁴⁷

On November 21 JNA occupied Nova Mokošica and Sustjepan in the area of Rijeka Dubrovačka and thus penetrated the western narrower approach to the very center of Dubrovnik.⁴⁸ Following an intervention by the French Minister for Humanitarian Issues Bernard Kouchner, who attended the negotiations between representatives of Dubrovnik and the JNA in Čajkovići, JNA withdrew from both settlements, which were about to become a demilitarized zone.⁴⁹ At negotiations in Kupari at the end of November the Yugoslav People's Army again demanded an unconditional capitulation of Croatian defenders of Dubrovnik. In early December negotiations between the JNA and the municipality

42 Večer, 28. 11. 1991: Je rasporejanje končano?, 2.

43 Nedjeljni Vjesnik, 10. 11. 1991: Vatra i s mora i s kopna, Nedjeljni Vjesnik, 2.

44 Večer, 8. 11. 1991: Znova ultimatum za Dubrovnik, 2.

45 Večer, 11. 11. 1991: Granate na Unescov biser Dubrovnik, 3.

46 Vjesnik, 20. 11. 1991: »Otišli u suzama i žele se vratiti«, 1; Vjesnik, 21. 11. 1991: Grad okružen minskim poljima, 5.

47 See: Globus, 24. 5. 1996: Lažno me optužuju da sam s Aleksandrom Apolonijem osnivao Dubrovačku republiku!, 48–49; Božidar Milošević, Politika, 15. 12. 1991: »Nisam ni knez, ni zaverenik«, 7.

48 Večer, 22. 11. 1991: Negotova usoda vukovarskih ranjenicev, 5; Vjesnik, 22. 11. 1991: Okupirana Nova Mokošica, 5.

49 Vjesnik, 23. 11. 1991: Voda i kruh za oružje, 5; Vjesnik, 23. 12. 1991: »Dubrovnik nas je zaboravio«, 5.

of Dubrovnik continued in Cavtat, where they were mediated by the French Minister for Humanitarian Issues Bernard Kouchner, the personal delegate of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the head of international delegations of UNICEF, Stephan de Mistura.⁵⁰ Except Kouchner and de Mistura, Dubrovnik's side was also taken by the Italian Minister for Immigration, Margharite Boniver.⁵¹

Despite the ceasefire agreement in Cavtat, the JNA tried to take Fort Imperial on Srđ by throwing hundreds of grenades on it in the night between December 5 and December 6. In this attack they destroyed the large white stone cross which represented one of the symbols of Dubrovnik. The Serbian side argued that there were Croatian extremists on Srđ who were constantly attacking JNA positions on Bosanka and Žarkovica which were only about 300 to 400 meters away from Srđ. Because of one of these attacks in the night of December 6 the commander of the nearby JNA units, even though he got no order, decided to take Srđ. When the JNA seized Srđ at about 10.00 AM, the Croatian defense in the city opened intense fire upon them, so that they suffered some losses and began to fire back at the city with small caliber weapons.⁵² Croatian defenders withdrew into the interior of the fortress during the time of the short-term occupation of Srđ where they were well protected against the Croatian defense missiles. Following a demand from the Croatian side the JNA stopped the fire at 11.15 AM but since the bombardment of the city did not stop, JNA unit was ordered to withdraw from Srđ at about 5.00 PM. The JNA fired upon the old town from its artillery positions in Pobrežje, Brgat, Žarkovica, Bosanka and Dubec so intensely, that the sky above the city became black.⁵³

With its incendiary ammunition the JNA tried to destroy the last green oasis in the city, the island Lokrum. In a telephone conversation the Croatian Minister of Maritime Affairs, dr. Davorin Rudolf came to an agreement with the commander of the military and the maritime sector Boka in Kumbor, vice-admiral Miodrag Jokić that the JNA would stop its attack at 11.00 AM but it continued till the afternoon.⁵⁴ The ten hour bombardment damaged the statue of the patron of Dubrovnik St. Vlaho, Franciscan Church and Monastery, the Dominican church and monastery, the Orthodox church, cathedral, mosque, synagogue, Rector's Palace, Sponza Palace and some other cultural attractions.⁵⁵ Nevertheless the negotiations between the Croatian side and the JNA in Cavtat continued the next day.⁵⁶ Three days later the convoy Libertas II set out from Rijeka to Dubrovnik for the second time and was again joined by Stipe Mesić and arrived in Dubrovnik on December 12.⁵⁷ The Serbian-Montenegrin reservists of JNA from the area Zaton-Doli demolished

50 Večer, 2. 12. 1991: Ponoči mir, čez dan eksplozije, 2.

51 Vjesnik, 25. 11. 1991: »Recite nam istinu«, 5.

52 Borba, 9. 12. 1991: Bez oružja – jedino rješenje, 2.

53 Politika, 7. 12. 1991: Bitka oko Dubrovnika, 9; Večer, 7. 12. 1991: Dubrovnik in Osijek tarča najbolj brutalnih napadov, 2; Delo, 7. 12. 1991: Topovi grmijo nad Dubrovnikom, 1; Vjesnik, 7. 12. 1991: Stari grad u plamenu, 1.

54 Vjesnik, 7. 12. 1991: Stari grad u plamenu i dimu, 5.

55 Nedjeljni Vjesnik, 8. 12. 1991: Grad-spomenik u ruševinama i pepelu, 3.

56 Nedjeljni Vjesnik, 8. 12. 1991: Nastavljeni pregovori, 3.

57 Večer, 10. 12. 1991: V oblegano mesto, 5; Nedjeljni Vjesnik, 15. 12. 1991: Na Stradunu suza suzu stiže, 5.

Mali Ston in the south of the peninsula of Pelješac with tank shells on December 14, 1991 although there were no military facilities or Croatian army there.⁵⁸

CONCLUSION

JNA never succeeded to force the defenders of Dubrovnik to surrender. After the November outbreak of destruction the lines of encirclement became half permanent and the battle stabilized as a kind of seemingly infinite standby. The attack on Dubrovnik was undoubtedly one of the biggest mistakes of the Yugoslav People's Army in the war against Croatia, because it showed that the Yugoslav People's Army was fighting for territory, and not for the unblocking their barracks or the protection of endangered Serbian population, which it had always emphasized (Balkan Battlefields 2002, 103). This tactic became evident in the JNA attack on the Croatian village Ravno in eastern Herzegovina at the beginning of October 1991 which was leveled to the ground, its residents were banished and partly also killed. It would be logical, in a military way, for the JNA units of Titograd and Užice Corps to just pierce through western Herzegovina and continue towards Split but because they did not want to leave any »uninspected« territory behind, like in Vukovar, they decided to attack the city. The suffering in Dubrovnik brought fairly large advantages in international relations to Croatia, and the JNA practically dealt itself a powerful political blow, for its military successes came back as a political boomerang (Ogorec 1994, 108; Balkan Battlefields 2002, 103–104).

The real motives why the JNA attacked Dubrovnik are still not completely clear and were probably the result of a secret diplomacy of the then Serbian and Montenegrin political leadership. This thesis is especially advocated by the fact that there were exclusively Montenegrin JNA reservists engaged on the battlefield, from which we can conclude that it was a Serbian offer of Croatian territory to Montenegro. From a military-strategic and political perspective the attack on the globally well known and undefended city was an extremely irrational move. JNA generals and political leadership of Serbia and Montenegro couldn't count on the understanding of the international community in the attack on Dubrovnik, especially since the city was on the World Heritage list of UNESCO (Ogorec 1994, 105). With the exception of the strategic need that the wide hinterland of the future Great Serbia received a favorable port, the attack on Dubrovnik came to its realization also by the long-term indoctrination of Serbian public that the rich renaissance and baroque heritage of this city belongs to Serbian culture.

58 Nedjeljni Vjesnik, 15. 12. 1991: Napad na jug Pelješaca, 1; Nedjeljni Vjesnik, 15. 12. 1991: Crkva je ostala zatvorena, 5.

NAPAD JUGOSLOVANSKE LJUDSKE ARMADE
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POVZETEK

Hrvaško mesto Dubrovnik je zaradi svoje geografske lege doživelo posebno usodo v vojni na Hrvaškem leta 1991. Začetek upora dela hrvaških Srbov proti novi hrvaški oblasti avgusta 1990 se neposredno ni dotaknil mesta, je pa odmeval v njegovem zaledju. Namen članka je analizirati vzroke, potek in posledice srbsko-črnogorskega napada na Dubrovnik jeseni 1991.

V občini Dubrovnik, kjer je hrvaško prebivalstvo predstavljalo absolutno večino, ni bilo niti enega naselja z večinskim srbskim prebivalstvom, saj so Srbi v dubrovniški občini predstavljali manj kot 10 odstotkov skupnega prebivalstva. V Dubrovniku prav tako ni bilo nobenih objektov ali poligonov JLA, ki bi jih morala slednja deblokirati. Ker tako na območju Dubrovnika niso obstajali pogoji za zaostrovanje razmer, je bilo potrebno situacijo zaostri v Hercegovini in Boki Kotorski, ter potem od tam napetosti prenesti na dubrovniško območje. Tako bi bili ustvarjeni pogoji za oboroženo agresijo, nato okupacijo in pregon hrvaškega prebivalstva ter na koncu osnovanje paradržave, ki bi se priključila tretji Jugoslaviji.

JLA je načrtovala zasedbo vzhodne Hercegovine in južne Dalmacije s pripadajočimi otoki, s čimer bi si zagotovila izhod iz zaliva Boke Kotorske in dosegla vojaško prevlado na južnem Jadranu. Vzhodno Hercegovino so tako zasedle srbsko-črnogorske enote JLA in tako prišle na izhodiščne položaje za napad na južno Dalmacijo. Ko je JLA pričela s svojo operacijo, so bile hrvaške sile na južnem bojišču najšibkejše od vseh bojišč v vojni na Hrvaškem.

Napetosti v južni Dalmaciji so se povečale v drugi polovici septembra 1991, splošni napad na dubrovniško območje pa je JLA pričela 1. oktobra. Zaradi uničene transformatorske postaje je Dubrovnik ostal brez elektrike, vode in telefonskih zvez. Do 4. oktobra je JLA popolnoma obkrožila Dubrovnik in ga tako odrezala od ostale Hrvaške. V Konavljah so rezervisti JLA uničili skoraj vse, kar jim je prišlo na pot. Na območje pod hrvaškim nadzorom okoli Dubrovnika se je zatekla množica beguncev, JLA pa je zahtevala predajo mesta. Staro mestno jedro je bilo s topništvom prvič napadeno 23. oktobra, JLA pa je branilcem postavila ultimatum in zahtevala njihov umik. Konec oktobra 1991 je v Dubrovnik priplul konvoj z humanitarno pomočjo, ki mu vojaška mornarica JLA najprej ni dovolila vplutja v mesto. Novembra se je obstreljevanje mesta nadaljevalo, JLA pa se mu je približala na samo en kilometer. Evropska skupnost je v vode pred Dubrovnikom poslala del svoje flote, ki naj bi varovala humanitarne akcije in evakuacijo prebivalcev, njeni opazovalci pa so organizirali pogajanja med JLA in hrvaško stranjo. V začetku decembra je JLA s topniških položajev okoli Dubrovnika močno obstreljevala staro mestno jedro in

poškodovala veliko kulturnih spomenikov. Hrvaški branilcem je mesto uspelo ubraniti, črte obkolitve so postale na pol stalne, bitka pa se je ustalila kot nekakšno neskončno stanje pripravljenosti.

Ključne besede: vojna na Hrvaškem, Dubrovnik, 1991, južno bojišče, JLA, vojaška mornarica JLA

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