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Vukovar, Siege of, 1991

The Siege of Vukovar was one of the first major battles in the Yugoslav Wars of 1991-1995. This Serbian-Croatian battle in the eastern-border Croatian city on the Danube lasted from May 1991 until Croatian forces surrendered on November 18, 1991.

Serbian forces operating as the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) under the Command of General Života Panić (1933-2003) as well as Serbian militia forces made three unsuccessful attempts to capture this heavily fortified city between approximately September 14 and 25, between September 30 and October 27, and between October 29-November 18 before finally capturing Vukovar. Croat forces, under the command of General Mile Dedaković (1951-) were heavily outnumbered. Nevertheless, casualties were heavy on both sides with the Croats suffering nearly 1,500 military casualties, 1,131 civilian fatalities and 2,600 missing civilians, and the Serbs losing 1,180 men. After the fall of the city, Serbian militia units cooperating with the JNA committed war crimes. The most notorious was the massacre of 264 patients at the Vukovar hospital.

The capture of Vukovar proved to be a pyrrhic victory for the Serbs. Along with their high casualties, it forced them to reduce their political and military expectations to more realistic levels. Despite their military loss, the Croats

relatively effective defense of Vukovar strengthened their political will and gave them the time to create a military force capable of defending their country against Serbian aggression. Vukovar also demonstrated Serbian military vulnerabilities and operational deficiencies in areas such as urban operations, degraded Serbia's will to continue fighting the Croats, and gained greater international support and sympathy for the Croats.

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See also: Croat War, 1991-1995; Yugoslav Wars, 1991-1995

Further Reading

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