

# Ordre de Bataille – Battle Plan

In his book, General Janko Bobetko<sup>119</sup> described his visit to the Velebit Mountains and Lika in 1992: “...I visited Velebit and saw two things. Lika and the Lika area were left entirely to Colonel Norac with one slightly reinforced battalion and one incomplete infantry battalion. Heavy weapons had been transported to Rijeka. The demobilization created confusion and left him (Norac) without any armaments.”<sup>120</sup> The General also visited special Croatian Ministry of the Interior police units under General Markač’s command. He, on the wide and impenetrable mountain area, had 400 to 500 experienced men at his disposal that had been stationed there since the late autumn of 1991. In order to fight in Tulove Grede, along the heights and rocks, Mali Alan pass, Vaganj vrh and Visočica<sup>121</sup>, one would have to be an alpine climber. In order to survive the harsh winters, one would have to have the endurance of a highly motivated warrior. Those units clashed with an enemy that knew the mountain terrain well, using their forefathers (Četnik – Partisan) previous war experiences<sup>122</sup>. They were merciless and had the advantage in heavy weaponry, were protected by mine “necklaces” planted in minefields, and had already gained operational and strategic depth in the battle-field. They had occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina/RS territories, and the FR Yugoslavia. With the strategic backup in Republika Srpska and with the Yugoslav Army, they enjoyed the international community’s sympathy. On Visočica, General Bobetko said to Markač: “God himself has put you up here, because if we lose Velebit, we will lose half of Croatia.”<sup>123</sup> The two generals agreed upon reinforcements being sent there, fresh troops, winter clothes, armaments and ammunition. General Bobetko advised Markač “to keep control over some outposts at all costs; this being the guarantor of a future (Medak) operation.”<sup>124</sup> It was necessary to

send reinforcements to this area, having soldiers who had previously fought and were used to that kind of warfare. For the limited action to unblock Gospić and to secure control of the Velebit Mountains, General Bobetko, together with special police units, needed to retain the experienced 9th Mobile Brigade. The valour of that Brigade was well-known following the Maslenica action. There the first attacks on Tulove Grede, Velika and Mala Bobija<sup>125</sup>, and Obrovac<sup>126</sup> had not been successfully executed, so General Bobetko had relieved the acting 9th Mobile Brigade commander of his duties and had appointed Mirko Norac<sup>127</sup> instead. Norac and his "Vukovi"<sup>128</sup> started rolling from Gospić at a moment's notice. They crossed the almost impenetrable terrain, had broken the enemy's defence lines, had come to within arms length of Obrovac and had threatened Gračac. The 9th Mobile Brigade was needed back in Lika and Bobetko ordered it to return.

"From the front defence lines of Lički Osik<sup>129</sup> the enemy has shelled the Gospić - Perušić<sup>130</sup> main road. It was only a question of when our defence lines would break at their weakest link. Gospić was the political and strategic centre of Lika's. To win or



Picture 12: Gospić 10.-11.1991 - Plan of the Croatian military - police operation, autumn 1991.

lose Lika was a *to be or not to be* question for Croatia. Gospić was half encircled. They broke through our defence lines. The remaining population was living in impossible conditions in cellars. As far as their psychological state and patience was concerned - they were at the end of their strength. The aggressor

could cut off the Gospić communication link from the other side (Divoselo) and could commence attacking operations that would put all in an unfavourable position. Since the fall of Gospić would result in Croatia being divided in two. Due to international circumstances and a manpower shortage, no larger action could have been undertaken. But certain measures could have been prepared: first, it was necessary to win the battle for Velebit, prevent further attacks on Gospić, repel enemy forces from their positions, and create a favourable situation in the surrounding Gospić and Gračac areas.<sup>131</sup> General Bobetko assigned the Gospić command HQ to prepare several variations on how to solve these problems. His preconditions were: *“the shortest span of the action’s duration – no longer than four hours in all – and a maximum effect.”*<sup>132</sup> In General Bobetko’s opinion *“Commander Norac and his HQ chief had conscientiously taken and executed that task, together with the special police whose role was as important; for those units together with the 9th Mobile Brigade had to win that battle.”*<sup>133</sup> *“Whoever controls Debela Glava controls Velebit”* – concluded the General and ordered that part of the operation to be carried out by the Croatian Ministry of the Interior special police forces<sup>134</sup>. General Bobetko had, according to his book, *“Personally informed the Commander in Chief”*<sup>135</sup> of such a limited action undertaking. He told the Commander in Chief, *“We have to repel the enemy forces from Gospić and win the battle for Velebit.”* After President Tuđman agreed to it and approved the action’s plan, General Bobetko decided that: *“The majority of the force, the 9th Mobile Guard Brigade (250 men plus two tank platoons), after all preparatory measures, should spearhead a sudden attack and break the enemy lines in Medak, Lički Čitluk, Or(a)nice, in order to encircle the enemy forces in the Divoselo region.”*

His decision formulated in the command: *“After reaching the Cindrino brdo – Rogića most – Kolonište (Kolarište)”*<sup>136</sup> *line, to continue the offensive on the Ključ – Lički Čitluk – Počitelj line in order to reach the Pijevčeva Draga – Drljići – Pavice – Njegovani”*<sup>137</sup> *(Dolovi–Begluk)”*<sup>138</sup> *line, and after that establish defensive positions”*<sup>139</sup> *(thus linking with Croatian Ministry of Interior forces, 550 men strong, deployed on the Međedak – Čitluk line)”*<sup>140</sup>. Special assignment were given to each unit: *“The main forces of the 9th Mobile Brigade – had to attack fiercely using armoured vehicles and infantry, to surprise and to throw the enemy off its defence lines, in order to reach the river Lika. The Ministry of Defense forces were to: mount and take dominant trigonal points on Kamenjuša t.p. 601, Pšeničište t.p. 721, Debela Glava t.p. 762, to engage surrounded enemy forces, not to allow their regrouping and a breakthrough, they were to take the enemy stronghold on 570 metre high Memedovo brdo”*<sup>141</sup> *(take the plateau*

Kamenjuša)<sup>142</sup>, (part of Croatian forces were to be ready to pursue and advance towards s. Papuče, thus preventing the organized withdrawal of the enemy)<sup>143</sup>. "One 111th reserve battalion was deployed in the Klanac – Pazarište area. It was of the utmost importance to take Debela Glava, the enemy's main strategic point. In an organized ambush, special police forces had to take that point to establish an observation post to keep track of the attacks' progression. The consequent military operation was executed following guidelines to the letter. Under the ferocity of the attack, the enemy had to withdraw, and the majority of its forces retreated to Debela Glava. The operation developed in the exact manner it had been planned. The enemy did not have the slightest idea that his tempo and decisions had already been predicted by the plan itself"<sup>144</sup>, (not to allow the enemy regroupment and attempted breakthrough from the encirclement towards Dragaš-Potkonjaci-Jovići-Lički Čitluk, after achieving this objective main forces were to destroy encircled enemy forces).<sup>145</sup>

The Ministry of Interior special police forces task was: "To attack with 500 men the Kruškovača t.p. 616, Lički Čitluk line – after taking the villages of Kugići, Pjevač and reaching the Rogića line; to advance to Pšenište t.p. 721, Debela Glava t.p. 782 and Veliki Bešlinac t.p. 708; to engage enemy forces in the encirclement and prevent the enemy from pulling out in smaller groups over the forested Velebit slopes." General Bobetko, and other military analysts, praised the artillery performance. The skillful artillery achievements could be attributed to two ex-JNA artillery experts – Brigadier Ademi and Major Ceku. "The artillery support was secured from both lines of engagement. The operation was finished in four hours. The entire enemy battalion was dispersed. Some of the enemy soldiers managed to pull out, some surrendered, women and children have been released." The General's claim was confirmed by other sources, including Serbian ones. Therefore Cot and Thornberry's statements, claiming everything that moved was killed, were not true. The UN reported civilians having escaped to Gračac. This was confirmed by Canadian sources as well. Canadian soldier witness reports also confirmed the General's statement about Medak being exposed to a heavy artillery barrage. Medak was an important junction where the Serb HQ was stationed. It has been heavily bombarded. The Serb tank company was there. "The Medak pocket operation had strong political and military effectiveness. What was achieved by it? The battle for Velebit was won. This was a strategic issue."<sup>146</sup> The General also wrote about the necessary experience acquired in that operation by the young Croatian army. He pointed out the armour and infantry manoeuvres and their synchronized actions. Some military experts had had not expected this type of an operation from an army they considered "Balkan." They had precon-

ceived ideas, old prejudices, which made them underestimate the army that successfully and swiftly defeated a theoretically better Serb military force (which was considered to be the fourth strongest European military power). *“We achieved the manoeuvre expertise of armoured forces and infantry. There were some losses. The enemy was militarily overwhelmed and was completely surprised. Exemplary was the tactical use and factors of time, area and targets in which various units synchronized their actions. Great political pressure followed and the President of the Republic forbade our further advancement. We could have continued to Gračac. We could also have eliminated Medak. We had to leave certain areas and concede them to UNPROFOR. These alleged Croatian crimes would have served them (UNPROFOR) as the main accusations to impose sanction on Croatia, or make the aggressor equal to its victim. For me, the Medak Pocket operation was a brilliant one – our objectives had been reached, our losses were minimal.”*<sup>147</sup>

## The Croatian Forces Organization and Deployment

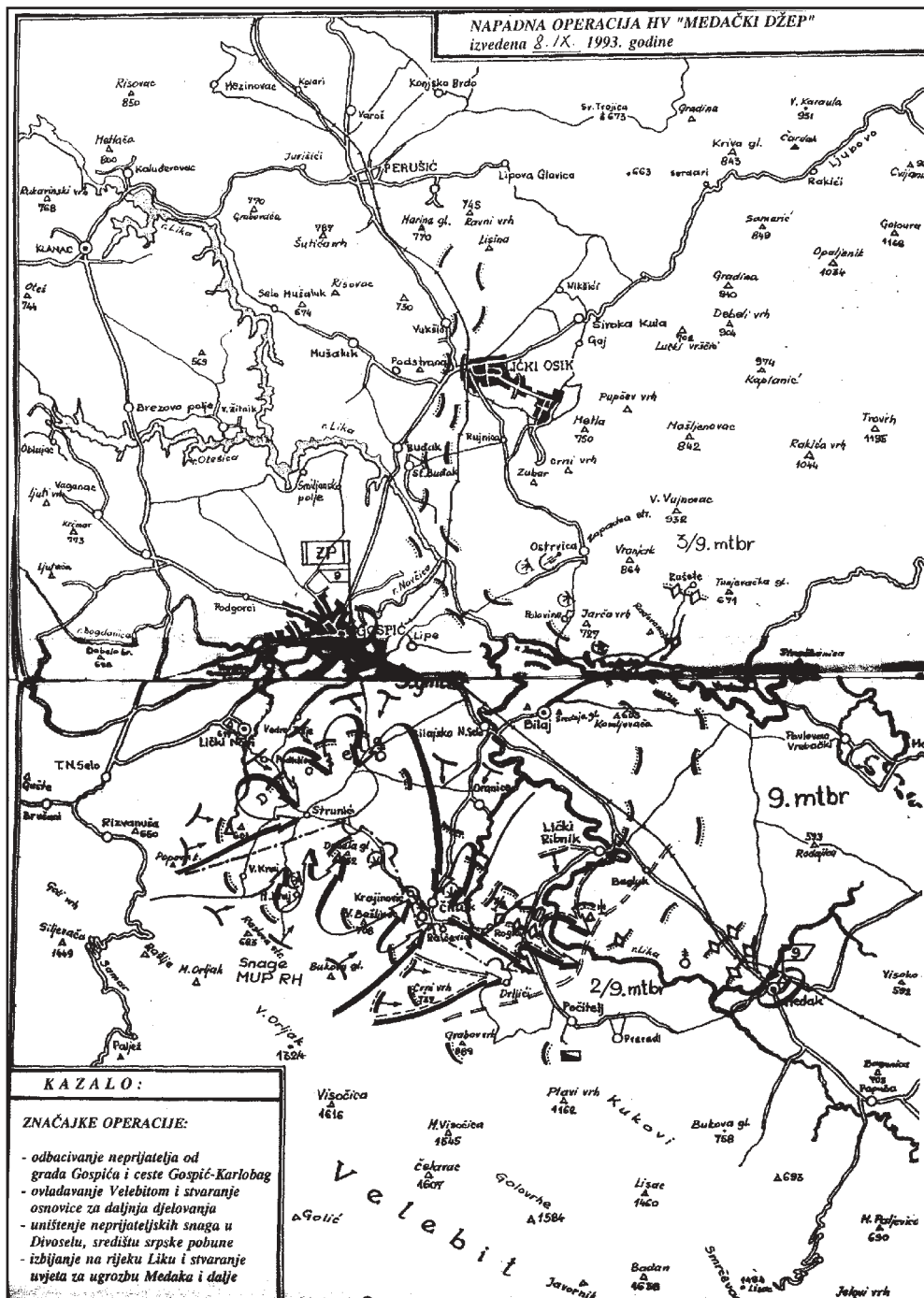
From documents at our disposal we reconstructed the battle plan: On September 7th 1993, under orders from the deputy HQ chief for Gospić, Rahim Ademi, the SECTOR 1 (S-1) was formed.

### Sector 1 Composition

- 9th Mobile Guard Brigade
- Gospić Homeguard Battalion
- Lovinac Homeguard Battalion
- The 111th Brigade Unit (one company strong)
- Croatian police special forces unit (approx. 550 men strong)

### Sector 1 Chain of Command

- Commanding Officer Colonel Mirko Norac
- 2nd in command Major Zvonko Brajković
- Croatian police forces Co-ordinator Colonel Željko Sačić
- Colonel Milan Čanić Assistant Commander for logistics
- Major Frane Tomičić Assistant Commander for political affairs
- Major Stanislav Linić intelligence operative
- Major Agim Ceku Artillery Commander
- Bogdan Čelić, police operations' officer



Picture 13: HV operation "Medak Pocket" - Map published in General Janko Bobetko's book "Sve svoje bitke"

In order to keep track of the fore coming action, on September 9th at 06:00 hours the operational centre at district command post Gospić was established, which functional up until September 18th at 08:00 hours.

## Deployment of Forces (up to the Operation's start)

- Homeguard Brigade Lovinac on Plantaža-Vukelići-Kekići-Krpani-Dubrave-Medovača-Sr.Glava line
- The 9th guard mobile brigade's fifth mechanized company on Kr.Glavi-San-Begluk line
- The 9th guard mobile brigade's fifth mechanized company on Brdo-Dukovci-Jelina line
- Homeguard brigade Gospić on Ornice-Jasikovac-Podklisa line
- Support – anti-tank cannons MT-12
- Reserve: one 9th mobile brigade tank company in Bilaj area
- Main attack force decided to be the 9th guard mobile brigade with addition of 30 percent infantry
- Mobile company had only two platoons, out of two tank companies one was complete
- Missile and cannon division was completed with 70 percent armour, part of its crew mobilized, one 120mm mortar unit added

Anti-tank and rocket cannon division – only 25 percent active duty members, the rest reserve with no prior combat experience; the rest of units partially equipped in armour and personnel

The relation of forces – figure, page 22.



## The Power and Forces Relation

	CROATIAN FORCES	SERB FORCES
Soldiers	850	450 (number includes one territorial defence militia company in Sitnik-Njegovani-Medak area)
Mortars	16	15
Armors for anti-armored battle	11	4
Backup cannons	12	16
Mobile multi-rocket launchers	2	2
Tanks	11	10
APC/Infantry armored vehicles	7	4

## The Forces Assignments

### Croatian Army

The 9th guard mobile brigade: one mobile tank battalion, five tanks strong, and two infantry armoured vehicles, from the Oranice-Štale position spearheaded the Ornice-Čitluk line, after destroying enemy forces in Čitluk and Krajinovići, to consolidate that position. In the next phase they had to take the Miščevići-Pavlice-Drljići-Bobići line, to destroy the enemy in the Uzelac area, to establish defence lines, and to be ready to repel the enemy's counterattack and advance to Počitelj.

The 2nd mobile tank battalion enforced with two tanks and an infantry armoured vehicle would start attacking from the Jasikovci to Jasikovac-Poljari-Ćurini-Potkonjaci line with a mission to destroy enemy forces on the Poljari-Ćurini-Potkonjaci-Dragaši



line. Their next move was to organize the Dukovci defence line and repel any enemy counterattack.

The 3rd mobile tank battalion enforced with two tanks and one infantry armoured vehicle, 60 soldiers strong, from the Gospić homeguard brigade, were to start from the Podklisa-Vedro polje and attack on the Vedro polje-Radakovići-Vujinovići-Strunići-Divoselo line in order to take control over the Radakovići-Vujinovići-Strunići area. Part of its force was to take Kamenjuša, and the other part to take action on the left flank of the 2nd mobile tank battalion. It is a brigade's reserve.

Armoured mobile battalion to engage in the defence of the Mihaljevci-Dukovci-Begluk area in order to repel the possible counterattack from Medak and prevent an enemy surge.

The logistic company was to defend the San-Metinac line, to prevent an enemy surge and counterattack.

Reconnaissance company to infiltrate the Rogići village, to destroy the enemy and to organize a circular defence line in order to close the Počitelj-Lički Čitluk communication and to deter the enemy from counterattacking the 1st mobile tank battalion during the first stages of the action.

The Lovinac homeguard battalion to engage in defensive operations on the Medovača-Dubrave-Krpani-Kekići-Vukelići-Plantaža line to prevent the enemy's attack from the Barlet area, and therefore advert the threat to the left flank of the 9th mobile brigade.

The Gospić homeguard battalion controls the battlefield on the Vedro polje-Popova Kosa line and prevents the enemy's advance towards the city.

111th brigade to engage in the defence of the Srednja glava-Krajnja glava-Ornice-Štale line, to prevent an enemy advancement.

The Gospić commanding area HQ's reconnaissance company to take Memedovo brdo (t.p. 570) the enemy stronghold in Došeni hamlet, to destroy enemy defence lines and to prevent their advancement to Lički Ribnik.

## The Croatian Ministry of the Interior Special Police<sup>148</sup>

Parts of its forces were to take the dominant positions of Pšeničište (t.p. 721), Debela glava (t.p. 782), Veliki Beština (t.p. 708).

### Artillery

- Two 105 millimetre Howitzers;
- The mobile multiple 102 millimetre rocket launcher platoon;

- The 130 millimetre cannon unit;
- Four 120 millimetre mortar platoons.
- Battle deployment:
  - One 105 millimetre Howitzer in the Lipa area;
  - Two 105 millimetre Howitzers in the Jasikovac area;
  - One 130 millimetre cannon unit (three cannons) in Vaganac, one cannon in San;
  - Mobile 122 millimetre rocket launcher platoon in the Kolakovica area;
  - The 1st mortar launcher platoon in the Rosulje area;
  - 2nd mortar launcher platoon in Jasikovac;
  - 3rd mortar launcher platoon in Kolar.
- ARTILLERY PREPARATIONS were to start at 6:00 hours and last 5 minutes with one ammunition round.

#### ARTILLERY TARGETS:

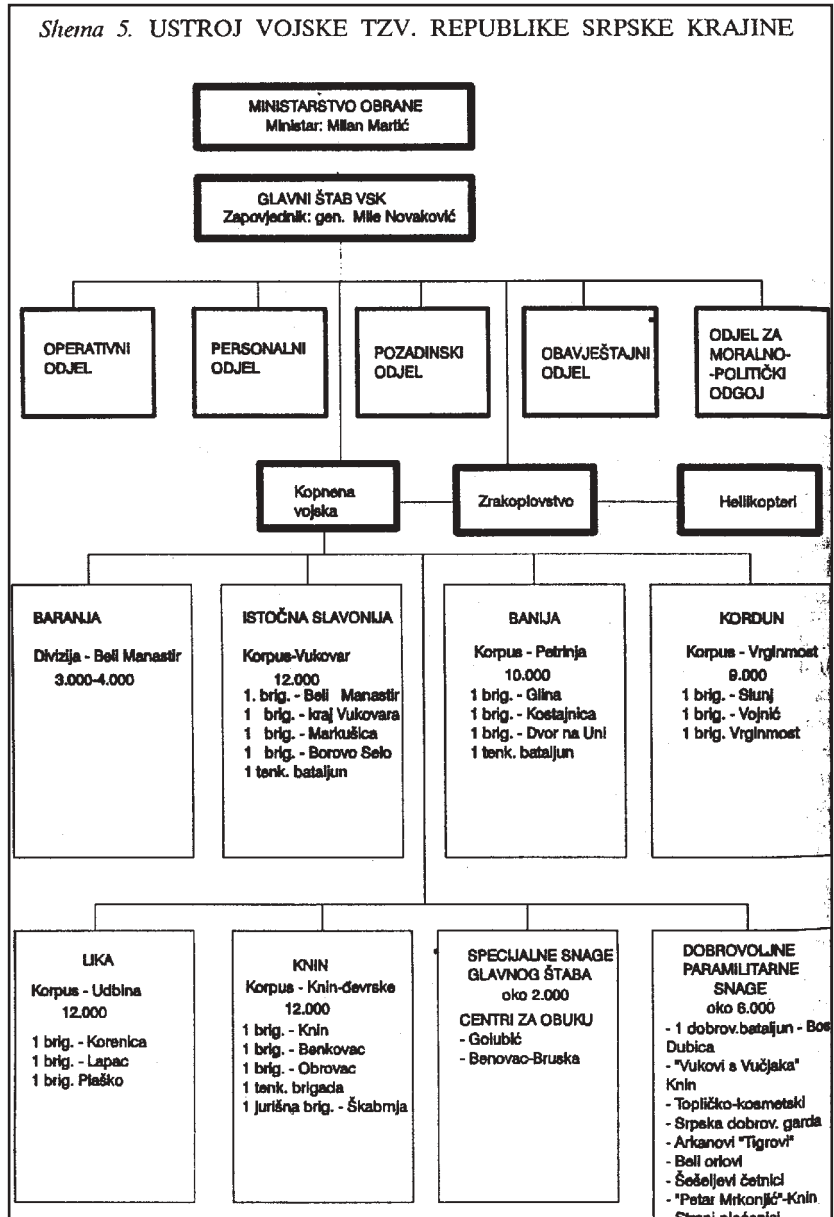
- The s. Raičević centre – 130 millimetre cannon;
- Udbina airfield – 130 millimetre cannon;
- Raičević junction – the mobile multiple rocket launcher platoon;
- The resistance point in s. Budići – 120 millimetre mortar launcher platoon;
- HQ of the 9th mobile brigade in Medak – 130 millimetre cannon;
- Mortar launcher unit in s. Pjevač area – 1 platoon 120 millimetre mortar launchers;
- Mortar launcher unit in s. Jovići – 2nd 120 millimetre mortar launcher platoon.

## The “RSK” Army’s Armament

### The 15th Lika Corps

Formed at the end of 1992 on the so-called 3rd Operative “Lika” group foundations – i.e. JNA that combined the Yugoslav Army and territorial guard militia formations in the Lika area. The Corps task was to defend the central, temporarily occupied Lika region, and to prevent the Croatian Army’s advance on Ogulin-Plaški, Otočac-Vrhovine-Titova Korenica, Lički Osik-Bunić-Titova Korenica, Gospić-Medak-Gračac lines. The 15th Lika corps command post was in Titova Korenica, field command post (HQ) in Udbina, logistic base in Knin, heavy artillery depot in Pađeni and Strmica, and fuel depots in Lička Kaldrma.

# Basic Units



Picture 14: RSK Army formation

- 170th brigade in Plaški;
- 50th brigade in Vrhovine;
- Tactical group "Bunić";
- 9th mobile tank brigade in Gračac;
- Light 103rd brigade in Donji Lapac;
- 105th air force brigade in Udbina;
- Military police battalion;
- 15th battalion for electronic countermeasures, reconnaissance and anti-tank force;

## Serb Forces Strength

- Approximately 7 to 8,000 soldiers strong;
- 60 – 70 tanks;
- 30 – 40 armoured transporters;
- Approximately 60 heavy artillery pieces and other armour.

Light brigades had 1300 – 1500 soldiers, ten tanks, twelve cannons and five APC's. Armoured mobile brigades like the 9th from Gračac and 50th from Vrhovine were 2000 – 2500 soldiers strong, had 26 tanks, 18 cannons and 13 APC's.

Due to the geopolitical situation at the moment, the enemy counted on the 2nd Krajina corps of the Republika Srpska army, the Yugoslav Army's help, and on volunteer reinforcements. In January and February 1993 there was a larger number, approx. 4,300 volunteers present in the "RSK" area.<sup>149</sup>

## Operational "RSK" Army Deployment

- The 9th mobile brigade deployed in the wider Gospić region on Ostrvica-Begluk-Kamena glava line (t.p. 1222) and in Klanac (t.p. 692) – Mali Alan (t.p. 1044) depth, with its HQ in Gračac;
- Two battalions enforced by two tank companies and cannon backup on the Gospić-Medak-Gračac operations-tactical line;
- The 1st battalion (of the 2/9th mobile brigade) with HQ in s. Poljari; to defend the wider Mali Alan area, to secure the forces flanks in Sv. Rok;
- The 2nd battalion – responsibility zone s. Jovići-Lički Čitluk-Bobići, Duliba (t.p. 889) depth, HQ in Raičevići;

- The 3rd battalion – responsibility zone Njegovani in Lički Ribnik-Medak road range (the plantation), was 150 soldiers strong. Reinforcements to the 9th mobile brigade on September 6th 1993 at the area of Divoselo came as two infantry battalions of the 103rd Lapac light infantry brigade. Apart from those forces on September 3rd came members of the reconnaissance commando unit and rear guard unit of the 103rd Lapac light infantry brigade (about 90 men strong)<sup>150</sup>. According to the account of one Serb prisoner on September 9th 1993 here were 200 soldiers stationed in Divoselo. In Čitluk there were 70 locals reinforced by the village of Počitelj;
- In the wider Divoselo-Medak observation posts are able to become resistance points;
- Crni vrh (t.p. 737) controlling the Velebit Mountain slopes;
- Kamenjuša (t.p. 601) controlling the Lički Novi-Podklisa-Vedro Polje area;
- Debela Glavica (t.p. 752) controlling the Ornica area;
- V. Beštinovac (t.p. 708) controlling the area between the Počiteljica and Lika rivers;
- Memedovo Brdo (t.p. 571) controlling the Dukovci-Begluk line;
- S. Vitasi (Sitnik wider area) controlling the foot of the Velebit Mountains;
- T.p. 586 (Northeast of a UN checkpoint on the Lički Ribnik-Medak road) controlling the wider Begluk area towards the Plantation.

#### THE TANK BATTALION DEPLOYMENT:

- The 1st tank platoon in the wider Njegovani area (Lički Ribnik-Počitelj road);
- The 2nd and 3rd tank platoons deployed on the Polje wider area (Ljubojevići-Žuto Brdo in range of Lički Ribnik-Medak road);
- The “Borbena vatrena grupa” (combat firing team) consisted of two 120 millimetre mortar platoons and one 82 millimetre platoon deployed on the Divoselo region; one 120 millimetre mortar platoon on the Donja Glavica area (crew in Jovići);
- One 82 millimetre mortar platoon on Kamenjuša (t.p. 601);
- The 2nd platoon not specifically located, but noticed to operate from V. Kraj region; Praga<sup>151</sup> (2/30 millimetre) noticed engaging from the Donja Glavica region;
- The enemy has strengthened its anti-aircraft guns and anti-aircraft systems.

- CANNONS SUPPORT – one 122 millimetre Howitzer unit on Crno vrelo (t.p. 693) at the foot of Velebit, south of Papuča;
- ANTI-ARMOURED DEFENSE: anti-tank weaponry was part of the 2/9th mobile brigade.
- Russian anti-tank M-42 cannons, 76 millimetre;
- One artillery piece in range of the Lički Ribnik-Medak road (t.p. 586);
- One artillery piece in Rogići (t.p. 567);
- One artillery piece in the Ivankovići hamlet;
- One T-12 100 millimetre anti-tank gun under the Plantation;
- At least ten Russian anti-tank missile system POLK 9 K11 in range of the Lički Ribnik-Medak and Lički Ribnik-Počitelj roads;
- One 120 millimetre multiple rocket launcher type “Plamen” operating from Papuče village.

#### AIR SUPPORT:

- Expected air support from helicopters on the Udbina airfield:
- Four “Gazela” helicopters – light helicopter, French made, built under license in Mostar’s “Soko” factory;
- Two Mi-8 Russian transport helicopters;
- Four “Gazela” helicopters enhanced with “Gama” guided missiles;
- Two “Jastreb” airplanes, light jet fighters, also built in Mostar for the Yugoslav Army Air force.
- THE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM: was mostly operational.
- LOGISTIC SUPPORT: Fresh troops were brought in through the Kruškovac-Medak-Počitelj-Divoselo line.

#### ENGINEER ORGANIZATION:

During the conflict in the control are of the 9th mobile brigade, the enemy fortified himself extremely well, built a large number of mock artillery positions and obstructed the first lines of their defence with minefields.

#### BATTLE READINESS AND MORALE:

The high alert of battle readiness was maintained; in terms of limited fresh troop rotation, this has led to saturation, fatigue and a drop in morale, which has increased the frequency of desertions and ignoring the calls to mobilization. To maintain control of the situation, the Serbian high command manned the advance points with various extremist volunteer and mercenary groups arriving

from Bosnia and Herzegovina and FR Yugoslavia. Around 80 troops from the 103rd light brigade from Donji Lapac were stationed in the wider Divoselo area.

#### SERB ASSESSMENTS OF THE POSSIBLE ATTACK ON THE MEDAK POCKET AND THE SERB KRAJINA ARMY PREPARATIONS

At the beginning of 1993, the Serb Krajina Army's 2nd mobile battalion of the 9th mobile brigade HQ issued an order to defend the Medak Pocket perimeter<sup>152</sup>. The plan for how to defend the area consisted of a persistent defence, stopping the Croatian Army advance at the Medak-Sitnik line. The counterattack was to be executed on the Divoselo-Brušane line. The Serb forces were supposed to rely on "well fortified geographic objects and populated areas". This idea of a defence was possibly one of the reasons why the houses and barns were destroyed during the military operation in September 1993. In June the Serb level of battle readiness was raised because of the fear of a possible Croatian attack. At the end of July 9th mobile brigade HQ issued an order to fortify Divoselo. The dissipation was visible. Higher command reproached the battalion HQ because of its lack of efficiency and its not carrying out orders. Therefore it was ordered that the HQ should ensure that the chain of command is obeyed and to undertake all the necessary measures for the successful defence of the area. More people should be brought in and the defence line should be backed by three 76mm B-1 cannons<sup>153</sup>. The importance that was given to the defence of Divoselo was best illustrated by the constant presence of the commander or the second in command at the 2nd mobile brigade HQ. Also because two-thirds of the soldiers were located at the perimeter. The demands for anti-armour weaponry were constant. It was obvious that the Serbian command was aware of the vulnerability of the "Pocket" and in 1993 tried to enhance and improve the defence positions.



