

THE WAR IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, 1992-1995

Section Seven: Timeline, 1994

Introduction, 1994

The Bosnian Serb Army's failure to exploit the Bosniac-Croat war and knock out the Bosnian Army in 1993 would haunt the Serbs for the remainder of the war. As 1994 began, the Croat-Bosniac war slowed, and US negotiators tacked together a framework peace accord between the two sides—the Washington Agreement, which would be the basis for diplomatic efforts to patch up the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina. But the strategic implication of a newly-improved Bosnian Army able to focus its undivided attention on the Bosnian Serbs was to make 1994 the turning point in the three-and-a-half-year war. The ABiH's victories during the Croat-Bosniac conflict had given the force a new sense of confidence, bolstered by the experience many officers and men had gained in conducting small-scale offensive operations. The Bosniacs had also developed more sophisticated infantry tactics, and the Bosniac-Croat rapprochement allowed the reopening of the arms pipeline through Croatia to the ABiH. Bosnian Army commander Delic exploited these improvements to devise a new strategy that would carry the war to the Serbs. Delic placed his hopes on a war of attrition across the country that would employ small-to-medium sized attacks in an effort to wear down the Serbs and gain back key bits of territory. He believed his larger army could absorb more easily than the VRS the manpower losses this strategy would require. When he put it into effect, the tempo of fighting reached new levels, surpassing those of 1992, as battle raged day after day for villages, mountains, and roads throughout Bosnia.

Delic's new strategy appears to have caught the Serbs off guard. The VRS began the year with a strategic offensive plan designed to knock out the Bosnian Army through a series of operations to seize key portions of territory that would consolidate the “borders” of the Republika Srpska, sever the Tuzla region from central Bosnia, and perhaps even force the capitulation of the Bosnian Government. The ABiH's staunch defense stopped this offensive in its tracks, and then its



HVO offensive: the March 1994 cease-fire between the Croats and Bosniacs allowed both sides to redouble their efforts against the Serbs.

new-found brazenness pushed the Serbs onto the strategic defensive to the extent that they never regained the strategic initiative. The political and military leaders of the Bosnian Serbs were never able to reach agreement on how to end

the war successfully, and the growing Bosniac military capability widened the division between the two groups. These divisions would in time cause a more profound disagreement between Serbian President Milosevic and Bosnian Serb President Karadzic over acceptance of the Western "Contact Group" peace plan, culminating in the imposition of political and economic sanctions on the Republika Srpska by Federal Yugoslavia.

While these political divisions widened, the military capability of the VRS began to decline. The bold strategic offensive of the VRS in January-March 1994 failed to secure any permanent gains, for two years of war had begun to wear on the VRS, and Delic's offensives would degrade it further. Of the offensives launched by the VRS in 1994 only the attack on Gorazde met with more than temporary success. Attacking Bosnian Army trenches and bunkers would at last prove too costly for the manpower-poor VRS.

Nevertheless, for most of the year the VRS retained its ability to strike successfully against isolated ABiH enclaves, such as Gorazde, or against overextended ABiH units conducting offensive operations. And in its defensive operations at Ozren, Treskavica, and Bihac, the VRS was still able to orchestrate professionally a large-scale operation, move hundreds or thousands of troops into position, and then counterattack, skillfully employing its superior weaponry and elite units to regain lost positions. By the end of the year, however, when the VRS was relying on defensive successes to punish the Bosniacs in hopes of ending the conflict, they simply could not afford the heavy manpower losses that the ABiH operations were causing, even if each ABiH attack was defeated. It was clear by then that the Serbs were beginning to lose the war.

The year ended with even more ominous harbingers for the Serbs. In the midst of their successful counteroffensive at Bihac in December 1994, they found themselves once again facing Croatian Army troops as the Zagreb government ordered its forces into the Livno Valley, ostensibly to help the ABiH at Bihac, but more directly to outflank the Krajina Serb Army's defenses around Knin in Croatia. However, it was the VRS that had to come up with most of the troops to hold this vulnerable cross border sector, troops which the trained VRS had difficulty finding. The deployment of Zagreb's elite HV Guards brigades and the victories they began to rack up foreshadowed the decisive turn of events that would come in 1995.

January

The VRS renewed the Battle of Olovo with the addition of Herzegovina Corps reinforcements. Serb troops made initial headway, advancing within 3 km of Olovo, but were ultimately stopped by ABiH defenders.

9-10 January

The ABiH attacked Vitez proper. HVO troops were hard-pressed and difficult urban combat resulted, but the Croats held on to the town.

Mid-January

The ABiH 5th Corps captured Skokovi from Abdic's APWB.

Late January

Bosnian Government pressure on Vitez waned and the Croats counterattacked to gain some breathing room in the enclave.

5 February

The crowded Markale marketplace in downtown Sarajevo was hit by a Serb 120mm mortar round, killing 68 people and arousing international indignation.

6 February-End of February

VRS 2nd Krajina Corps units attacked ABiH 5th Corps positions along the Una River line. After three weeks of seesaw fighting, the battle ended with the 5th Corps in position along its original line.

9 February-20 February

In response to the marketplace shelling, the UN demanded a ceasefire around Sarajevo and threatened intervention. The VRS, originally hesitant, conceded to the UN demands on 17 February when Russia offered to include a battalion of its paratroopers in the UN observer contingent. The VRS then removed its heavy weapons from around Sarajevo—placing half of them in monitored storage sites and redeploying the other half—and withdrew from positions directly overlooking the city. This reduced the amount of shelling and sniper fire in the city, although the city remained functionally under siege, if no longer under direct fire.



16-21 February

A joint APWB-VRS offensive advanced to within 10 km of Cazin and threatened Bihac. The ABiH 5th Corps rallied to defuse the threat.

23 February

Croat and Bosniac negotiators meeting in Zagreb to end the Croat-Bosniac war in Bosnia signed a ceasefire to commence on 25 February

25 February

The ceasefire declared in Zagreb two days prior generally holds. Heavy weapons were pulled back and a tenuous peace descended on the Croat-Bosniac confrontation lines.

1 March

Croat and Government leaders signed the Washington Agreement in Washington, D.C. This formalizes the end of the Croat-Bosniac war in Bosnia

and declared the creation of the “Federation Army,” consisting of the Bosnian Army and the HVO as separate, but cooperating forces. UN peacekeepers were deployed to monitor the implementation of the ceasefire and the Washington Agreement. Their oversight would prove crucial in renewing Croat-Bosniac cooperation and in resolving the numerous violations and disputes of the Washington Agreement that inevitably occurred over the years.

12 March

Commanders of the Croat and Bosnian Military signed the Split Agreement in Split, Croatia. This agreement formalized the military cooperation and structure inherent in the formation of the Federation Army.

16 March-29 March

The new Bosniac-Croat ceasefire allowed the government to once again focus on the Serbs. The Bosnian Army kicked off its spring offensive with an attack by 7th Corps units towards Donji Vankuf. Though they failed to capture the town and VRS forces successfully counterattacked in some instances, the ABiH had advanced their lines by the end of the operation on 29 March.

23 March-Early April

The ABiH 204th Teslic Mountain Brigade attacked Serb forces holding Teslic. They enjoyed initial advances but are stopped 6km east of Teslic town.

Late March-Mid April

ABiH 7th Corps attacked Serb positions on Mt. Vlasic, overlooking Travnik. In an increasingly familiar pattern, ABiH units scored an initial breakthrough and substantial gains, but were unable to hold them in the face of VRS counterattacks.

28 March-End of April

Responding to the ABiH offensives, The VRS targeted the Bosniac Gorazde enclave. “Operation Zvezda (Star) 94” commenced with a day-long artillery shelling. On 29 March, a three-axis assault was launched. As Serb forces made good gains, they offered to stop in exchange for a country-wide cease fire, which would secure much of their territorial gains from 1992. The Bosnian Government rejected this offer. As the attack neared Gorazde town on 10 and 11 April, NATO launched two airstrikes to dissuade further offensive action. In response, the Serbs seized and held



a number of UN peacekeepers, using them as human shields from further airstrikes and resumed the Gorazde assault on 15 April. As the VRS completely encircled the town, the UN redoubled diplomatic efforts to halt the Serb offensive. On 18 April, Radovan Karadzic came to a ceasefire agreement with the UN, although VRS forces continued the fighting until 22 April and ceased attacking only under the threat of expanded NATO airstrikes. In sum, the Serbs failed in both their efforts to achieve a nationwide ceasefire and to eliminate the Gorazde enclave. They were able, however, to severely reduce the size of the enclave and the military threat it posed.

2-6 April

The ABiH 7th Corps renewed the attack towards Donji Vakuf. In spite of modest gains, they failed to take the town.

13-20 April

The VRS East Bosnian Corps conducted a major, but ineffective offensive against ABiH and HVO lines to widen the Posavina Corridor.

Early May-Early June

The ABiH launched major attacks eastward from Kladanj. By 16 May they had advanced to a line stretched between the Sokolina and Bijela Stijena peaks and had captured 32 square kilometers. A 21 May VRS counterattack, preceded by heavy shelling, cut away at some government gains, but continued ABiH pressure ultimately produced a gain of some 15km at its furthest point.

11 May-20 May

The ABiH 2nd Corps conducted an attack on Serb-held Mt. Majavica, site of the critical Stolice radio, television and telephone relay tower. While managing to damage the tower itself, Bosniac forces were unable to occupy the mountain summit.

18 May-28 May

The VRS Sarajevo-Romanija Corps launched an unsuccessful assault on government positions in the Cemerska Planina-Nisici Plateau area.

22 May

ABiH units, with HVO armored support, pushed again towards Tesanj, but failed to advance substantially against determined VRS resistance.

24 May

The ABiH 7th Corps again attacked Mt. Vlasic with the aim of encircling the Serb-held mountain. The VRS prevented this action, but only barely and by expending virtually all of their regional reserves.

27 May

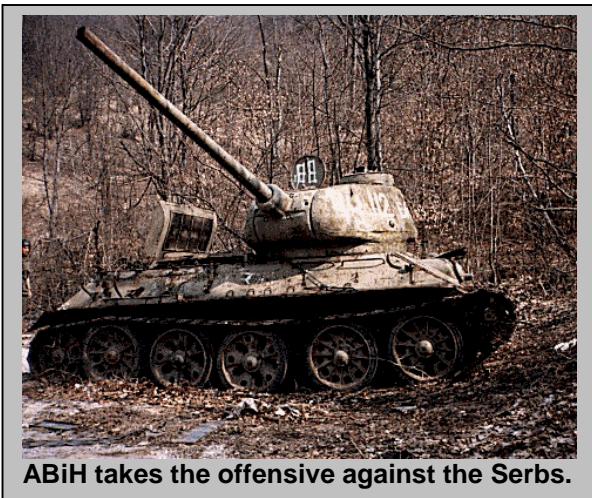
The 2nd Corps attacked up Mt. Majavica again, but failed to make the summit and eventually gave up all territorial gains to Serb counterattacks.

8 June

Based on peace negotiations in Geneva, the warring parties in Bosnia signed a country-wide ceasefire, projected to last four months. It turned out to be largely ineffective, however, and immediately the sides went back to fighting.

11-30 June

Abdic's APWB forces launched another attack on the ABiH 5th Corps. The 5th Corps, however, rapidly turned the tables on Abdic and successfully counter-attacked. They advanced rapidly, capturing 30 kilometers of territory by the 13th and nearly surrounding Pecigrad by the 20th. Abdic, in dire straits, appealed to the Krajina Serb Army (SVK). The SVK deployed troops to the Bosnian border and contributed artillery and tank fire support to Abdic's rebels.



ABiH takes the offensive against the Serbs.

18 June-5 July

The ABiH 2nd and 7th Corps launched an ambitious offensive in the Ozren Mountains. This 14,000-man assault sought to pinch off the Serb-held Ozren salient near Vozuca and open the important road between Tuzla and Zenica. The ABiH came very close to encircling the Serb forces in the salient—at one point the two pincers come within 3km of meeting. However, strong VRS counterattacks on 4-5 July eliminated all of the ABiH gains. This operation was a signal event for the ABiH in that it showed a

new ability to coordinate large forces in geographically separated areas and to penetrate and exploit VRS defenses. In spite of this, VRS superiority in firepower, armor and command and control proved decisive for the defenders. That said, the ABiH was showing increased adroitness in operations.

7-10 July

Dudakovic launched an audacious plan called "Operation Tigar-Sloboda '94." This operation called for 5th Corps elements to confine French peacekeepers and members of the media to the UN base in Bihac. Elements of the 5th Corps then announced they were defecting to Abdic's side, and staged a mock civil war within Bihac against other 5th Corps units. Having convincingly portrayed a pro-Abdic rebellion within the 5th Corps, they then requested and received substantial aid, including weapons and ammunition, from the APWB and the SVK. On 10 July, the true nature of matters was revealed: the rebellion was a hoax. In the

course of this operation many true Abdic supporters revealed themselves within Bihac and were arrested. More importantly, the 5th Corps captured vital stores of weapons and ammunition, conveniently delivered by Abdic's men. This operation proved was a major and cunning triumph for Dudakovic and the 5th Corps and a debilitating blow to the morale of Abdic's troops.

11-15 July

The VRS 2nd Krajina Corps continued operations against the 5th Corps with "Operation Una 94." This was another unsuccessful attempt to occupy the Grabez Plateau and the southern bank of the Una River.

1 August-11 August

The ABiH targeted the Serb salient centered on Brgule, which had posed a threat to Vares. Attacking from HVO-controlled territory, the ABiH virtually eliminated the VRS salient.

3 August

The ABiH launched a successful surprise assault on the towns of Gornja and Donja Brka, along the southern border of the Posavina Corridor. Serb counterattacks and heavy shelling failed to dislodge the government forces.

4 August

Pecigrad fell to 5th Corps forces, providing valuable captured weapons and opening the road to Abdic's capital of Velika Kladusa.

8-12 August

ABiH forces seized tactically important high ground north of Gracanica.

21 August

ABiH 5th Corps troops overran Velika Kladusa, routing APWB forces and sending a stream of Abdic supporters north as refugees to Serb-controlled territory in Croatia. Abdic himself also fled to Croatia to seek help in renewing his now-defunct APWB.

31 August-12 September

Signaling the start of a new VRS offensive against Bihac, the 2nd Krajina Corps launched another effort against the Grabez Plateau, which was halted and called off by 6 September. Meanwhile, as part of "Operation Breza (Birch) '94," the 1st Krajina Corps and SVK units pushed off from Krajina Serb territory in Croatia. Their objectives were the towns of Cazin, Buzim and Otoka, the capture of which would split the Bihac enclave in half. Using strong artillery support, they enjoyed initial success, particularly towards Buzim. However, the 5th Corps was by now masters of the defense and no longer engaged in the rear by Fikret Abdic's rebellion. They halted the Serb offensive and flanked the Serb spearheads. By then infiltrating the Serb lines, they shattered the Serb forces, conclusively

crushing Operation Breza and nearly capturing General Mladic, who personally oversaw the battle.

Early September

Government forces made one last, unsuccessful attempt to take Mt. Vlasic.

11 September-Early October

The ABiH 4th Corps commenced a large offensive from Konjic against the VRS Herzegovina Corps, southwest of Sarajevo. Steady advances through September saw the Bosnian government troops capture Bijela and the important Kiser Hill, south of Konjic. By early October, the ABiH had captured 100 square kilometers of territory and the lines had generally stabilized for the rest of the year. This successful offensive was also notable by virtue of the actions of the HVO 56th Herceg Stjepan Home Defense Regiment. This Croat unit, which initially participated in the ABiH assault attempted to pull itself out of the fight and only rejoined the action after negotiations in Sarajevo between ABiH and HVO officers.

15 September

ABiH 4th Corps units commenced a series of small attacks from Konjic. On 19 September, they launched additional, ultimately ineffectual assaults towards Serb-held Nevesinje.

18-20 September

Within Sarajevo, which had been relatively peaceful through 1994, the ABiH 1st Corps launched an attack on the Sedrenik neighborhood. After fierce fighting and VRS counterattacks, the ABiH claimed minor gains.

Late September-24 October

Violating a UN-negotiated demilitarized zone, ABiH 1st Corps units and Interior Ministry (MUP) Special Police launch an attack from Sarajevo and Mt. Igman against Mt. Bjelasnica and the town of Trnovo. Militarily, the government forces enjoyed some success, but the action was politically very controversial. Using war crimes accusations by the Serbs against the ABiH (which ultimately were proved inaccurate), the UN began forcing the Bosnian Army from Igman and Bjelasnica. Though the ABiH did indeed



pull some troops back, on 18 October they declared their refusal to completely abandon Mt. Igman without assurances that the UN would safeguard traffic across the mountain into Sarajevo. Meanwhile, the VRS Chief of Staff Milovanovic issued a one-week ultimatum on Bosnian Government withdrawals. As tensions mounted and Serb retaliation seemed imminent, Bosnian Army troops got into a firefight with French peacekeepers. Moving quickly to forestall any further crises, the ABiH pulled out of the DMZ.

3 October-November

The ABiH, using units from two separate corps, launched another major push for the Tesanj-Teslic area. Operations Group 7-South attacked from the east of Teslic and enjoyed some success in areas, but was stymied in others. These forces reached the suburbs of Teslic but did not enter the town and were subjected to major VRS counterattacks from 10-11 October. OG-3 North, attacking from the south of the region enjoyed greater success, capturing some 50 square kilometers and advancing at a slow but steady 2-3 kilometers a day. By 17 November, when the offensive was called off, the ABiH had failed to take Teslic, but had captured over 100 kilometers of territory in what it justifiably considered a substantial victory.

4 October-17 October

The VRS Sarajevo-Romanija Corps again attacked the Nisici Plateau and Cemerska Planina in order to protect Serb-held suburbs of Sarajevo. They quickly penetrated ABiH 1st Corps lines and advanced as much as two kilometers in some areas. However, a 14-15 October ABiH counterattack regained key terrain and the situation was reduced to a stalemate.

12 October

More attacks from the 4th Corps, this time from Blagaj, also failed to produce gains.

15 October

The ABiH launched a large, three pronged assault in the northeast of Bosnia. The three axes of attack were aimed at Doboje, Modrica and Obudovac-Pelagicevo, but were not mutually supporting. Two of the assaults enjoyed modest territorial gains, which were consolidated into the government lines, although the push towards Doboje met with heavy resistance and was stymied.

20 October-3 November

Bosnian Army 7th Corps forces launched an attack against the traditionally Croat, but Serb-held town of Kupres, held by the VRS 30th Infantry Division. Their slow advance through the mountainous terrain soon threatened the town, but had not yet captured the town. As the government forces paused near the town, nearby HVO units, including four newly-formed Guards brigades, launched "Operation Cincar." In a swift, pre-planned assault, they captured the now-empty Kupres from the south, under the noses of the ABiH forces. Though the level of actual

cooperation between the two entities' forces was uncertain and the ABiH did not seem happy with the Croats seemingly stealing their prize, this stood out for the restraint shown by the government troops. Since Kupres was historically Croat and the government wanted to preserve the Bosniac-Croat alliance, they let the capture stand.

25 October

The ABiH 5th Corps followed up on recent victories with the ambitious "Operation Grmec-94." Using the element of surprise, the 5th Corps achieved great success, securing the entire Grabez Plateau and capturing a valuable Serb barracks, with munitions stores. By the end of October, the ABiH forces had captured Kulen Vakuf, besieged Bosanska Krupa and held 250 square kilometers of captured territory. At this point, their attack lost its energy, as supply lines were stretched and Dudakovic faced the prospect of defending his dramatically enlarged territory. The Serb leadership responded to the 5th Corps attack with concern over its success and rage over its being launched from Bihac, a designated "UN safe area." They counterattacked, relieving Bosanska Krupa, and planned a new attempt to crush the Bihac enclave, regardless of its "safe area" status.

1 November

VRS forces recaptured Kulen Vakuf.

29 October-6 November

The Bosnian Army 1st Corps shifted the focus of its offensive from Igman and Bjelasnica to further south: Mt. Treskavica and the Sarajevo-Trnovo road with an ultimate goal of Trnovo. In doing so, they conducted attacks within the Bjelasnica demilitarized zone again. They were stopped on 6 November by the VRS.



UN peacekeepers were forced by a limited mandate to stand witness to attacks such as this one.

4-20 November

Following the fall of Kupres, the ABiH 7th Corps turned its attention to Donji Vakuf. On 4 November they captured the towns of Koscani, Kopcici and Urije. They then regrouped and launched an attack, with support from HVO artillery. This attack stalled in Prusac, 7 kilometers south of Donji Vakuf in the face of determined VRS opposition. In final assaults against nearby Koscani, the Federation forces gained no ground and the battle here fell into a stalemate punctuated by bloody, but inconclusive fighting. Though ultimately unsuccessful, this battle marked a new phase of Bosniac-Croat cooperation.

4 November-17 December

The Serb counteroffensive against the ABiH 5th was unleashed. "Operation Stit (Shield) 94" was intended to eliminate the 5th Corps as a military threat and re-install Fikret Abdic as the head of a Serb-allied APWB. It began with an attack up the Bihac-Petrovac Road and another attack on the Grabez Plateau. By 9 November, the VRS was 10 kilometers from Bihac. On 8 November an SVK fighter-bomber violated the NATO no-fly zone by bombing Bihac in support of the offensive.

Meanwhile, on 16 November, the SVK, with JNA troops and a resurrected Abdic force of 5,000, invaded the enclave from Croatia. With an objective of Velika Kladusa, they quickly surrounded the town and a bitter battle developed. Further SVK forces attacked along three axes towards Cazin and Bihac. The drive to Cazin was stopped, but SVK forces crushed defending HVO forces near Bihac and entered the boundaries of the Bihac safe area on 20 November.

By 24 December, the situation was dire for the 5th Corps: SVK/VRS units had advanced to the Bihac outskirts and captured the key Debeljaca Hill. They also threatened the water treatment plant, which they captured on 8 December. However, it appears that Serb General Milovanovic halted the offensive, and 5th Corps defenses held strong in Bihac. With a successful 5th Corps defense of the Grabez, Bosanska Krupa and Cazin, this created the appearance of a failed Serb offensive in spite of impressive gains.

As fighting around Bihac wore down, the contest for Velika Kladusa continued. After a tenacious defense, 5th Corps elements pulled out of the town on 17 December to avoid complete encirclement and annihilation. The end of the year saw the situation settle down with the 5th Corps bloodied, but alive. The VRS, for its part, showed itself still capable of substantial offensives with solid staff support and heavy firepower.

6 November

The ABiH attacked the Sarajevo-Romanija Corps in order to recapture territory lost the previous month and to reduce the remnants of the Serb Brgule salient. This assault reversed much of the VRS gains from the previous month.

8-10 November

The ABiH 2nd Corps again attacked towards Doboje, but gains no ground.

9-13 November

Another ABiH try for Mt. Majeвица captured some important terrain, but fails to capture the Stolice transmitter.

11 November-20 November

The ABiH 4th Corps launched a larger effort towards Nevesinje. After heavy casualties on both sides, the 4th Corps halts the offensive with few gains.

29 November-24 December

In difficult winter weather conditions, the HVO, with substantial HV participation, launched "Operation Zima 94." In a difficult, nearly month-long campaign, the Croat forces advanced up the Livno Valley, clearing it of VRS and SVK troops. By 24 December, the HVO had gained 200 square kilometers of territory and relieved a little of the pressure on the 5th Corps in Bihac. They also set the stage for greater advances in 1995.

14-15 December

The Bosnian Army 1st Corps made one last push Trnovo. After modest gains, they wrapped up the offensive in the Mt. Treskavica region, having captured valuable territory and equipment, but falling short of their goal of Trnovo.

Conclusion, 1994

Although it may not have been evident at the time, 1994 was to prove a turning point in the war. At the beginning of the year the VRS had the initiative, continuing offensives from late in 1993 and pushing the ABiH to the brink of defeat at Gorazde in April. By the end of the year, however, the VRS was clearly on the strategic defensive, barely halting some ABiH and HVO offensives, conceding key towns for the first time in the war, and facing a hemorrhaging loss of territory as the combined HV-HVO offensive drove inexorably up the Livno Valley.

The settlement of the Croat-Bosniac war was crucial to the turning of the military tide against the Serbs. As long as their Croat and Bosniac opponents were engaged against each other, the Bosnian Serbs did not need to take serious action to retain control over almost three-quarters of Bosnia. Once the Croat-Bosniac peace was brokered, the VRS had to actively defend itself against a series of increasingly powerful and sophisticated offensives—and with less and less success. The Bosnian Army's spring offensives in March and April were essentially stopped cold at Mt. Vlasic, Mt. Stolice, Donji Vakuf, and Tesanj-Teslic. But repeated attacks against these same locations were wearing away at the VRS, even if it was not conceding the territory. The Bosnian Serbs were winning the battles and losing the war.

By October and November, the VRS was not even winning all the battles. The ABiH 5th Corps' October attack south of Bihac clearly caught the 2nd Krajina Corps off guard, and the VRS had to scramble to reinforce collapsing units, restore the defense lines, and recapture the lost ground. By November the VRS had lost Kupres - the first major Serb-held town surrendered during the war — and was losing territory southwest of Tesanj, southeast of Konjic, and in the Livno-Glamoc Valley. These losses were not rapid or especially serious as individual cases. Cumulatively, however, they led to the irrefutable conclusion

that the VRS could not sustain its war indefinitely, and that its losses of troops and territory were almost sure to increase.