

a hastily constructed barrier bristling with guns obstructing further travel! This resulted in a frequent and seemingly endless process of negotiating safe passage past one checkpoint after another and another, on a daily basis. I listened to the opinions of hundreds of civilians, often armed to the teeth, and with something to say to me (and by extension, the world) about which they felt passionately and believed completely. It's surprising how quickly you can learn a language when faced with an AK47! (To be honest this was often no more than smiling, nodding and distributing cigarettes.) I was barely aware of Dubrovnik, other than as a destination to which some friends had been on holiday, so when I learned that the war had reached this UNESCO World Heritage Site I was keen to go.

The journey to the City was by ship as the JNA had captured most of the coastal territory except Dubrovnik itself. I travelled with three other photographers on the Liberia which arrived in Dubrovnik to evacuate refugees at the end of November. The weather was glorious, the sea shone like a mirror reflecting the perfect blue of a sunny cloudless sky, you could almost forget about war.

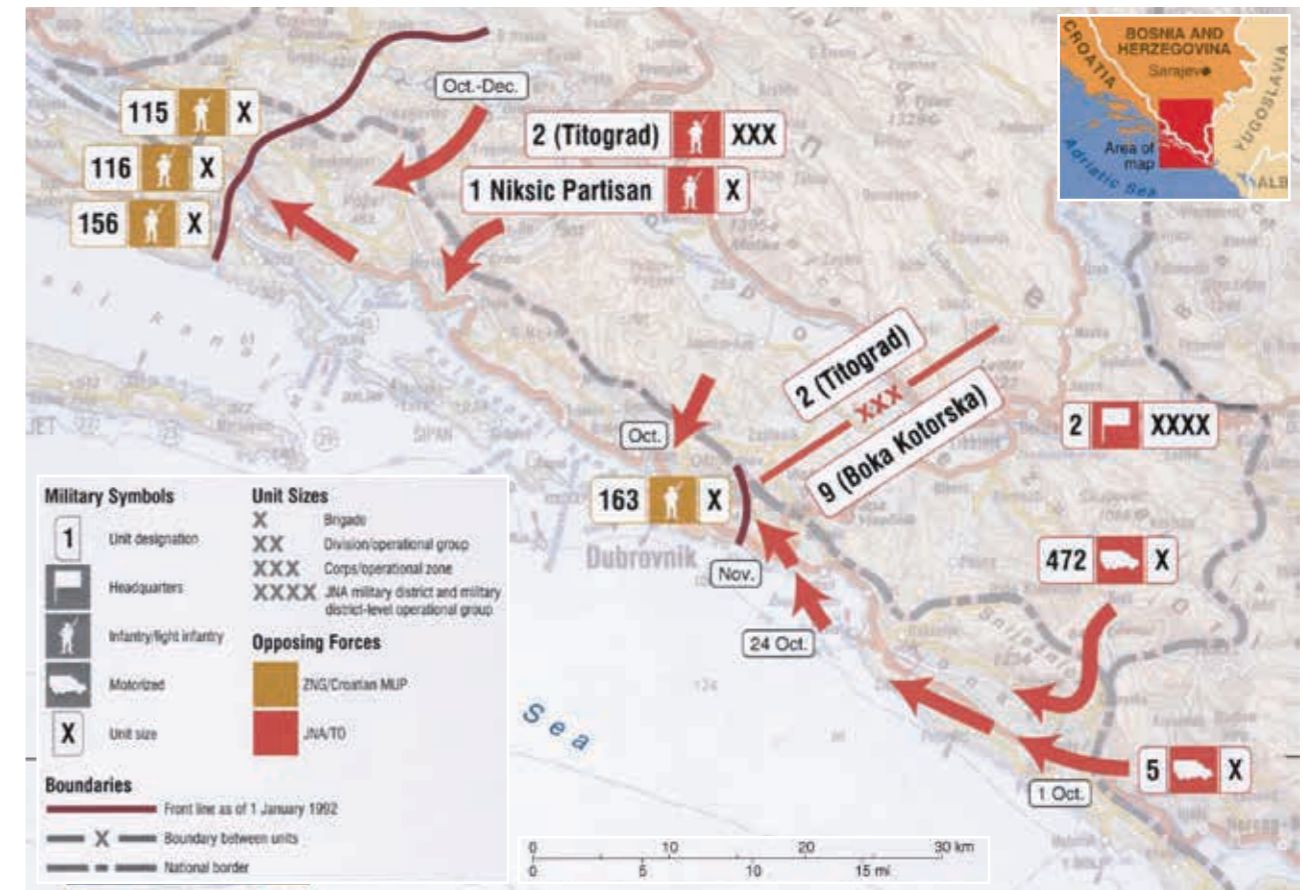
That changed on arrival in Dubrovnik, the fear in the city was palpable. The port area was heavily damaged by artillery bombardment. Water was out, power was intermittent, food was in short supply. The population was swollen by refugees from fighting all along the coast. Air, land and sea bombardments occurred daily forcing people to remain indoors. The populace in the 'Old Town' were the lucky ones. Protected by the city walls and the narrow passages between buildings, they could at least emerge to find food and water. The attackers clearly didn't want to destroy the Old Town, they wanted to occupy it. New town residents suffered the worst, with whole areas pummelled by attacking Serbian forces.

My job working for an international news agency meant I had to transmit photos everyday for dissemination to the wider world. Newspapers love the drama of 'front line' photos; men with guns, babes in arms, tears falling from children's eyes - this is the stuff that front pages are made of, and as a young ambitious photojournalist I had to feed that appetite. I chased the daily 'drama' photos across the entire city, transmitting out pictures of guns, bombs and tears on the ever more unreliable phone lines. Eventually I took and transmitted the most published photo of my career, that of the old town port ablaze as dusk fell over another day of bombardment. Newspapers around the world published it across double pages; this was the visual drama they craved...

...however, during all that time, another type of photograph began to emerge in my work. This type of photo wasn't possible elsewhere because when the war arrived somewhere else the civilian population would evacuate; men with guns would arrive and mothers with children would leave (tears falling, more front pages...). In Dubrovnik you couldn't run away.

I started to photograph the resilience of ordinary men and woman. Children continued to smile despite their fears and troubles. Voices were raised in defence of culture, identity, society. Concerns emerged about more than simple self-preservation. These photographs never made it to the front pages - not enough 'drama' I guess. To be honest, I never even transmitted them. But for me these photographs speak of the strength of the human spirit and a determination not to be bowed down by that, which undervalues what we believe we are.

It's good to see and recognise this, even after the fact. While it's there I'll forever remain an optimist.





After hundreds of years a man looks out from the ramparts of Dubrovnik's old city for an enemy attack. By late October 1991 the JNA (Jugoslav National Army) and Montenegrin forces had captured virtually all of the territory between the Pelješac and Prevlaka peninsulas on the coast of the Adriatic Sea - except for Dubrovnik itself.



Boats burn in the old port and buildings in the background of Dubrovnik's fortified city - the heaviest bombardment of the old city started at 5:48 am on December 6th, Saint Nikolas Day, killing 13 civilians - the heaviest daily loss of civilian life during the siege.



An elderly woman pauses in one of Dubrovnik's narrow streets. Dubrovnik surrounded, outnumbered, no water or electricity for months, food supplies low...under siege.



Young girls collect rainwater for drinking as the JNA cut the city water supply at the beginning of the offensive on the 1st October 1991, the siege of the region lasted until July 1992 after Croatian forces went on the offensive in May 1992.