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Mechanized Platoon and Company Operations in Somalia

October 1993 to March 1994

by

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The use of mechanized forces is vital to the overall success of Support and Stability operations because the mechanized force provides the needed capabilities for overwhelming force protection to insure the successful accomplishment of the mission. As one of the mechanized infantry platoon leaders in Somalia from October 23rd, 1993 to March 31st, 1994, I saw first hand how versatile and useful Bradley-equipped infantry platoons and tank platoons were to the overall accomplishment of all of the missions that were going on in Somalia at the time.

On the 1st of October, 1993, I was the 3rd Platoon Leader of Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion, 15th Infantry (B/3-15 IN), assigned to 2nd Brigade, 24th Infantry Division Mechanized. We, as a battalion, had just assumed Division Ready Force 1 (DRF 1), which meant we had to have one company minus ready to deploy anywhere in the world in 18 hours, with the rest of the battalion ready to deploy in 72 hours. We had just returned from a gunnery exercise, and we had released the company for the weekend. At midnight on the 4th of October, I was awakened by a telephone call from my company commander. He was already at the company and wanted to know who my best seven dismounted soldiers were. I gave him seven names and then asked him what was going on. He told me that we were being alerted and to get to work immediately. I told him I understood, alerted the rest of the platoon, and went to the company.

Once I arrived at the company, I found out that the Rangers were in an intense firefight in Mogadishu, Somalia, and that Charlie Company, the Immediate Ready Company (IRC), had been alerted and was headed to Somalia, with the rest of the battalion following it. We were already operating in our N-Hour Sequence¹, so I briefed my soldiers as they arrived at the company and focused my efforts initially on the soldiers whose names I had given to my company

¹ The N-Hour Sequence is the timed checklist that our unit used to deploy. It details what actions are taken and in what order, to insure a rapid and efficient deployment from FT.Stewart, whether that unit be a company or a division. Our unit had just finished a Corps-evaluated readiness exercise a month prior to this alert, so we were well rehearsed and trained for a normal deployment.

commander. I found out that these soldiers were being reassigned to Charlie company to bring them up to 100 percent strength. I was surprised to find us doing this, as it was not standard operating procedure (SOP), but as we all were to find out, many more changes would be made by the Division Commander, MG Blackwell, before we deployed.

The normal configuration for an IRC is one tank platoon, one infantry platoon, a headquarters element, and a support slice. All of the required vehicles and equipment are kept at the nosedock at Hunter Army Airfield, Savannah, Georgia, to assist the IRC in keeping its eighteen hour deadline. MG Blackwell, however, had ordered that the entire company would deploy as the IRC. This meant that in addition to taking all of the vehicles at the nosedock, it would also take ten of its own Bradleys as well as its support vehicles. This had never been rehearsed before, so we as a battalion began the process of prepping and rail loading vehicles to Hunter Army Airfield for deployment. As it would end up, we would make the time line for movement to Hunter. The Air Force, however, would prove to be the limiting factor, as it scrambled to get enough C-5 Galaxy cargo planes to Hunter to fly the company to Somalia. With Charlie Company underway, we turned our attention to prepping ourselves to follow it.

The rest of the force makeup was rapidly changing from the beginning of the alert to the actual deployment. The battalion had originally filled all of the personnel shortages in Charlie Company, because initially it was the only one going. Once the rest of the battalion was alerted to move, we asked to get our personnel back, but the battalion commander, LTC Wells, ordered that the task organization remain unchanged. This was significant in that we had not only given up personnel, but also weapons and vehicles to Charlie Company to bring it up to 100 percent operational readiness (OR) rate. We were now faced with correcting major deficiencies in some of the vehicles Charlie had left behind as well as going into combat with a less than 50 percent dismount strength in all platoons.

The battalion's task organization changed many times, but it finally sorted out to be three mechanized companies and two tank

companies, commanded by 1-64th Armor Battalion HQ. After Charlie Company's receipt of personnel, only one more change was made. My crew and I was reassigned to 1st Platoon, Alpha Company, where I took over as platoon leader. With that last change in place, TF 1-64 deployed to Somalia on October 23rd, 1993.

I was the senior ranking officer for my company on the first main body lift to land at the Mogadishu International Airport on the 24th of October. It would not be until the 28th of October before our equipment arrived by sea, so we were billeted in an unused warehouse on the airfield that someone quickly dubbed the "Red Roof Inn". The only infantrymen on the first flight were a platoon sized element from my company and a platoon sized element from Delta Company, led by another platoon leader and the Delta Company executive officer (XO). The senior ranking officer of the warehouse was a Major in the Transportation branch, who told us that he had already established security around the warehouse and had a quick reaction force (QRF) on standby, so we should get our men integrated into his plan. We conferred among ourselves and agreed that the security around the warehouse was abysmal, so we went back to the Major and told him that we would take care of the day-to-day running of the security. He readily agreed, so we set about the task of remaking the security plan into something that would actually protect us while we were in the Red Roof Inn.

One of the key things we did not plan for was immediate logistic support to sustain ourselves until our equipment arrived. It was our SOP to pack everything needed for combat on our vehicles and ship them, so we were unprepared to perform basic combat functions until all of our equipment arrived. This deficiency took the form of communications equipment and the means to resupply water. Fortunately, we were able to pool our resources to come up with enough radios to man our guard posts and the command post (CP), but there were still not enough water buffaloes to sustain all of the troops in the Red Roof Inn. The company supply sergeant and I scrounged around the airfield until we ran into an Air Force Mess Sergeant who had a surplus of boxed water that the Air Force Personnel did not like, so he gave it to us to hold us over until we

could work out a more permanent solution. We continued to receive the company into country until the 28th of October when our vehicles and equipment arrived at the seaport. We moved down to the port and began preparing for combat.

We as a task force spent the next four days in the new seaport prepping vehicles and equipment for operations. All the vehicles had to be PMCSed², the commo gear checked and distributed, and the Bradley ammunition loaded into the weapons systems. Initial reconnaissance was also conducted, as well as rehearsals of convoy operations and assembly area procedures. Our first mission was to road march to a tactical assembly area in an abandoned section of buildings about six kilometers north of Mogadishu, where we would get acclimated and perform all of our in-country rehearsals and training. The Joint Task Force (JTF) Commander, MG Ernst, had given us until the 14th of November to train, at which time we were to be ready to accept missions.

Mechanized attacks are a basic METL³ mission, but as a unit we had never trained on an attack under MOUT⁴ conditions, so that became our top priority. From the fire team to the company level, we rehearsed every day for two weeks to become proficient. During this time we worked on basic SOPs and the integration of all of our assets, training frequently in conjunction with light forces from the 10th Mountain Division. We also spent a large amount of our time preparing for a mission that for the first time was assigned to a mechanized unit, that of rescuing a downed air crew from a hostile mob.

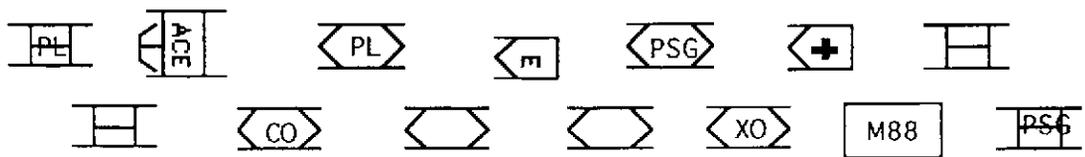
²PMCS - Preventative Maintenance, Checks, and Services. A standard way of checking the operational status of vehicles and equipment, and the way deficiencies are noted and corrected. Every piece of equipment in the Army inventory has written instructions on how to PMCS it.

³METL - Mission Essential Task List. A METL is used by all Army units to define what they need to train on as part of their wartime mission.

⁴MOUT - Military Operations on Urban Terrain. Fighting in built-up, urbanized areas is technically only a condition under which you fight, not a task in and of itself. It is, however, by far the most difficult of conditions to fight under, and needs and deserves special emphasis.

This mission became known as the Downed Aircraft Recovery Team mission, or DART mission. The original tactics for how the mission would be performed were devised by a SGT Frankoviak from Charlie Company, who had had previous CSAR (Combat Search and Rescue) training from a prior tour in the 1st Ranger Battalion. Captain Michael K. Hayslett, the company commander of Alpha Company, myself, and another platoon leader, 2LT Thomas LaFleur, modified the original plan to perform the mission better.

The DART company configuration consisted of one tank platoon, one Bradley platoon, the company commander, the executive officer, an Armored Combat Earthmover (ACE), an engineer squad (M113 equipped), a medical team (M113 equipped), and a recovery team (M88 equipped). The formation of the DART during movement is shown below:



This formation allowed for significant firepower and protection to the front and rear of the formation from the tanks, with the Bradleys giving supporting fires from both the vehicles and the infantrymen when dismounted. Self contained in this team is the ability to get to the aircrew in the form of the tanks, ACE and combat engineers, immediate medical treatment and evacuation from the medics, recovery capability from the M88⁵, security from the tanks, Bradleys, and dismounted soldiers, and command and control from the company commander and the executive officer. If necessary, the DART configuration also allowed the company to fight its way out of a crash site from two opposite directions depending on enemy

⁵The M88 was a critical part of the DART based on the Ranger's action of 3-4 October. One pilot was pinned in the wreckage of a UH-60 and his body could not be removed. The M88's mission was to lift wreckage off of a body or otherwise assist in the recovery of personnel or remains. All of the vehicles in the DART had the capability to recover each other if necessary.

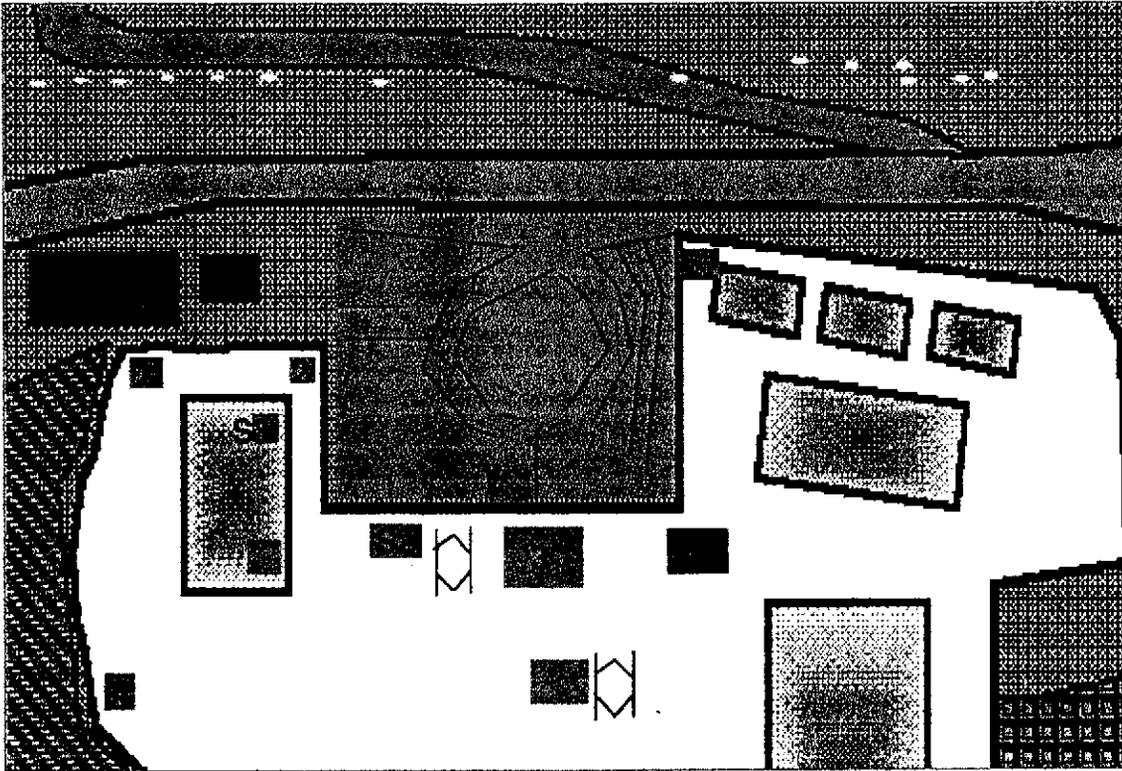
resistance. As this mission included all of the MOUT training tasks we needed to rehearse and was one of the main missions that the JTF assigned us, it was the critical mission we trained on until the mission receipt date on the 14th of November.

The 14th of November marked the day that TF 1-64 AR was now ready to begin continuous missions in support of other US and UN forces in and around Mogadishu. These missions included QRF (in the form of the DART), convoy security, check point operations, main supply route (MSR) security, rear staging area (RSA) security, MEDCAP security, and crowd control (critical during the Muslim holiday of Ramadan). Mission selection was driven from this point throughout our tour in Somalia by the political repercussions that the action on 3-4 October brought out. President Clinton stated that all US forces would be out of Somalia by the 31st of March the following year, so our missions and efforts centered around providing security for the orderly withdrawal of US forces from Somalia. Each mission provided its own challenges, and success was incumbent on small unit leaders due to the dispersion of forces on many of the missions. My squad leaders found themselves in charge of small outposts along the MSR, with only minimal supervision from myself or my platoon sergeant as we made our rounds and swept the MSR in our Bradleys. The fire team leader and the individual soldier also found himself working in direct contact with Somali citizens while performing their duties during RSA defense or MEDCAP security. It is a testament to these individual soldiers and leaders that they were able to maintain control of themselves and their units, especially as pictures of Michael Durant in captivity and of Somalis dragging dead US soldiers through the streets reached us. My company conducted these missions until approximately mid-December, then we moved back to the new seaport of Mogadishu, which we would call home for the remainder of our time in Somalia.

As we moved into the New Port, CPT Hayslett conducted a mission analysis to determine what needed to be done to secure the port. Unlike a conventional defense which would have allowed him to strongpoint the port against all intrusion, we had to let Somali citizens into the port every day to work. All commerce had to be

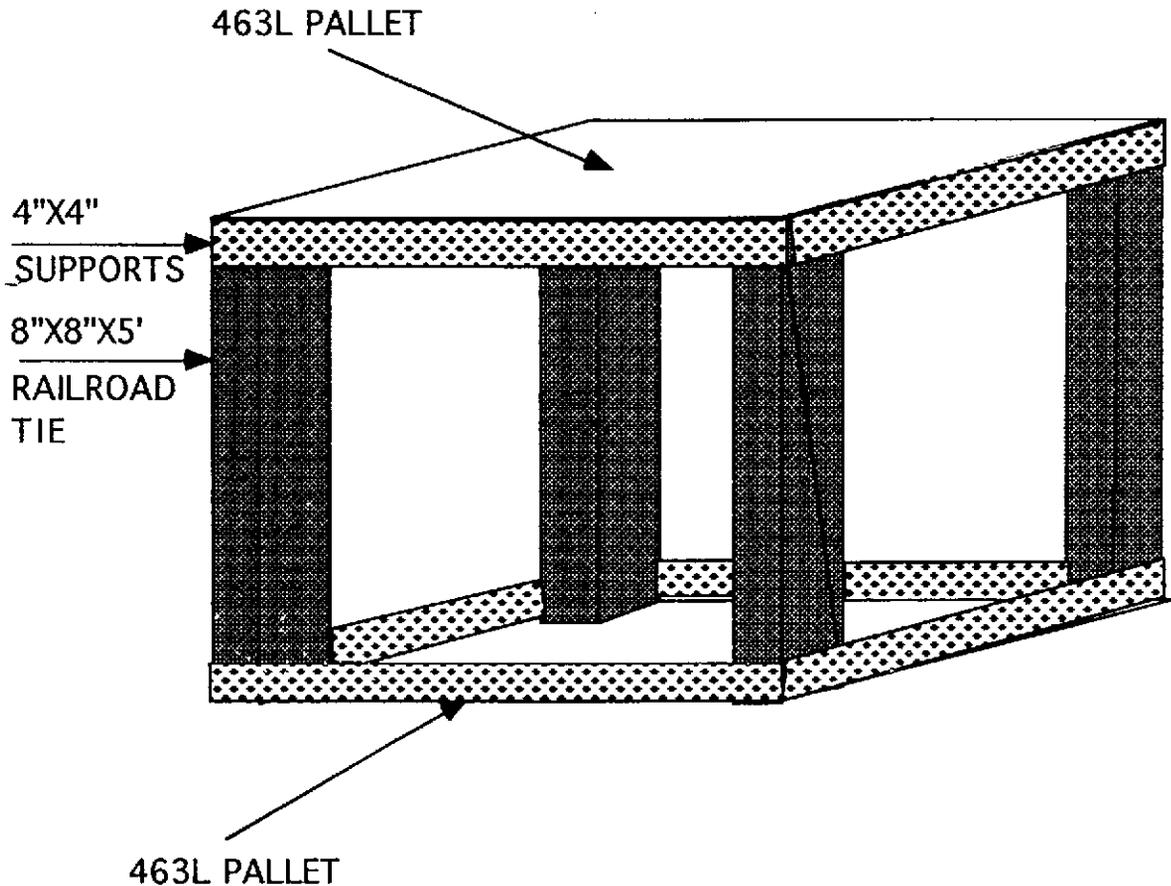
conducted by sea because the airfield was accepting only military and select civilian traffic. Since what little infrastructure remained in Mogadishu would collapse if the seaport was put off limits, we had to insure the safety of all US and UN forces in the port while letting potential enemies inside. Our defense thus became one of perimeter defensive positions manned continuously with mounted and dismounted security patrols being run inside the port at random intervals. All suspicious personnel were detained and brought to the local Somali police or were merely thrown out of the port. An elaborate system of daily personal passes and weapons authorization cards was instituted by the JTF to allow personnel to conduct business inside the port and still protect themselves outside the port. The Rules of Engagement (ROE) were restrictive in that a Somali had to be actually threatening the life of a US or UN soldier before deadly force was authorized. Merely possessing a weapon was legal in the vicinity of the port. The defensive posture of the port was poor upon our arrival, so CPT Hayslett devised a plan, with LT Lafleur's and my platoon carrying it out. I found myself in the role of chief engineer for construction.

FRONT GATE CHECK POINT



This diagram, created by CPT Hayslett upon our return from Somalia, illustrates how we constructed the front gate of the New Port. CPT Hayslett determined that he wanted machine guns in a position able to overwatch day-to-day activities and still be able to orient and range suspected mortar firing positions. He selected Position #3 as that location, which was to have an M60 and a M2 cal. .50 machine gun in it. He also wanted snipers overwatching the front gate, as they could limit collateral damage as well as more easily acquire targets hiding in shadows or in a crowd with their optics. As the Battalion Sniper Employment Officer, it was my job to insure that the snipers could get into a position to do their job. My sniper team leader, SGT Tom O'Hare, and I chose positions that gave him and his teams different views of the front gate so they could adequately cover all areas. Those positions are shown on the diagram as Positions S1, S2, and S3. CPT Hayslett also wanted some manner of protection from vehicular traffic. Keeping the Marine Corps Barracks bombing in the back of our heads, we set about devising a way to

control the entry and departure of vehicles. We came up with a circular driving path broken up by speed bumps that would slow and direct traffic in the manner we chose. With my tasks in hand, I set about developing the bunkers and the vehicle obstacles.



The diagram above shows how I designed and built the fighting positions at the Front Gate. Since we could not dig in, we had to build up, and because we would be there for an extended period of time, all overhead cover had to be supported by wood, since overhead cover resting only on sandbags would shift and give over time. I decided on using 463L Air Force load pallets for the floor and ceiling because I needed something large and flat that would be able to support all of the weight of a sandbagged roof without needing center supports. 8" X 8" railroad ties cut five feet high made up the main load bearing columns, which were held together by a 4" X 4"

wooden skeleton covered in 3/4" plywood. I cut and sized all of the wood pieces together in a covered area, then with the assistance of a 10 ton forklift we lifted the pieces to the roofs of surrounding buildings and assembled the frames. Once the wooden frames were assembled, we sandbagged them in heavily. The standard was 3 to 4 feet of sand in the front, 3 feet on the sides, 2 feet on the rear and top of the bunker, and 2 feet on the floor of the bunker. The sandbags on the floor could not be overlooked, as we had to protect ourselves from Somalis who may have infiltrated the port and who might attempt to get in the buildings under the positions and shoot through the ceilings. This was made even more important because the Somali police, upon whose building we had Position S1, could not always be trusted.

The vehicle obstacle had to be constructed in such a way so that it did not limit our fields of view, it did not offer an enemy any cover, and it would not become an obstacle to our own mechanized forces if we needed to rapidly roll out the front gate. CPT Hayslett and I came up with the idea of using large sections of steel originally designed to make sea retaining walls. These pieces of steel were approximately 15 feet long, 1 1/2 inches thick, and were so heavy they had to be moved into place one at a time with a 10K forklift. The cross-section of the beam resembled a huge S approximately 3 feet wide and 1 1/2 feet high. This alone would be sufficient to stop wheeled vehicle traffic, but I then had the port welder weld engineer pickets to the steel so we could put in triple strand concertina wire. This effectively channelled personnel and vehicle traffic the way we desired, but did not affect our visibility or our ability to move through our own obstacles.

During the construction and improvement of these defensive positions, we were conducting our ongoing mission of defending the port. We had three types of forces that we employed to do this. The first type was the Bradley. The Bradley's role during this defense was that of deterrence. The Somalis feared and respected the Bradley, as they knew their small arms were ineffective against it, and they feared using RPG 7s because of the overwhelming firepower they knew the Bradley possessed.

The mounted crew's task then was to overwatch the crowds of Somalis, their purpose being to remind the Somalis that any uprisings would be dealt with harshly. The dismounted infantry on the ground, the main effort of the defense, had the task of searching all Somalis and their equipment before allowing them inside the port, their purpose being the defense of the port from hostile Somalis⁶. The last, but certainly not least, type of force we had available was the sniper. The sniper teams randomly manned one of the front gate sniper positions (S1, S2, or S3), their task to overwatch the dismounted search element below them, their purpose to warn them of any Somalis trying to attack them or infiltrate by them. They also had the mission of engaging any Somali that threatened the life of a US or UN soldier. While all soldiers had the same mission, I put the snipers in the best position to carry it out, which they did three times on two separate occasions, killing three Somalis.

These were the day-to-day missions my platoon and company performed every day from the middle of December, 1993 to March 31st, 1994. We were fired at, gasoline bombed, targeted for explosives, or otherwise attacked each one of those days in the first three months of 1994. As was usually the case, 24 hours of boredom would be punctuated by 15 minutes of action. This continued until it was finally time for us to withdraw from Somalia.

Throughout the withdrawal of forces from Somalia, we were shuffled from task force to task force. Originally with TF 1-64 AR from FT Stewart, we were attached to TF 2-22 from the 10th Mountain Division as TF 1-64 redeployed. On the 1st of March, 1994, we were then cross-attached to the 3rd of the 6th Battalion Landing

⁶ The following is the normal course of events on a day at the front gate. All vehicular and pedestrian traffic would enter the port from the north. Vehicles would follow the circular driving path to a vehicle inspection point, where all vehicles would be searched for weapons, explosives, or other contraband items. Drivers and passengers would exit the vehicles, present proper identification, and be checked with hand held metal detectors. Pedestrians would follow the lane down the east side of the entrance, pass through a small gate, then show proper identification and be checked with a metal detector before being allowed to proceed. On any given day, the soldiers in my company would check between 100 to 150 vehicles and 1000 to 1200 personnel.

Team (3-6 BLT) from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, USMC. The Marines came ashore to act as our covering force, but the JTF wanted to take no chances, so my platoon, after being prepped for redeployment and cleared through customs, re-manned their original positions alongside Marine Corps AMTRACs until midnight of the 1st of April. At that time, we loaded our Bradleys onto the cargo ship taking them home, ran around the port to our ship and set sail in the dead of night for Mombasa, Kenya, where we would board an airplane bound for the United States.

When I look back on my experience in Mogadishu, I know that a lot of luck as well as training contributed to the fact that I suffered no injuries in my platoon. While we conducted ourselves well in all of our missions, we could have done much better if we had trained at home station on many of the conditions and situations we faced in Somalia. Before this alert, my battalion never trained under MOUT conditions or trained using low intensity conflict situations. The reason for this was that it was not in our METL and the Division Commander thought that we would never be used for such missions. When we were alerted, our soldiers were rushed through a very abbreviated MOUT train-up and live fire. One soldier in my platoon died because of a training accident during this live fire. If we would not have been trying to push so fast through the training, this soldier would be alive today. This means, however, that this type of training must become a regular part of a soldier's training.

From the time I returned to home station in April of 1994 to when I PCSed in February of 1996, no MOUT training was conducted or even planned, despite requests to the contrary. On a larger scale, no training time was devoted to Support and Stability Operations training, even though another company from my battalion deployed to Haiti six months later, and 20,000 troops are now stationed in Bosnia performing many of the same missions we did. My company learned many lessons in Somalia and possessed a great knowledge of those things we could see ourselves being called upon to do in the future. Without being allowed to train on those tasks, though, we slowly lost that knowledge as Somalia veterans began to PCS out of the unit and move on with their careers.

Our company's performance in Somalia validated the idea that mechanized forces are vital to the success of Support and Stability operations. While we were initially sent to fill a Force Protection role, we quickly showed the Army that we had more to offer. With the nature of future conflicts being like those of the recent past and present, the mechanized force has proven that it can play a strong role as a supporting effort to the main effort of all past and future conflicts, the infantryman on the ground.

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