

A Monograph of
Combat Operations in Mogadishu, Somalia
Conducted by Task Force Ranger

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The history of the former nation and people of Somalia is a story of hardship, subjugation and violence. Today it is a land of anarchy and warring factions where the majority of the population live in the most simplistic of agricultural conditions. The cities are devastated ruins, prowled and squabbled over by the rival clans. When drought added to the yoke borne by the peasants of the interior desert regions in 1991-1992, famine took hold of the country. In desperate need of external food sources to survive the Somali people converged on the port cities of the seacoast. These urban centers offered only overcrowding, disease and terror under the tyranny of the Warlords who controlled the ports and pillaged the foreign aid. Death in large numbers was the result, and added to the general abject suffering of the Somali people. It was into this maelstrom of misery that President Bush ordered U.S. forces, along with others from the U.N., on a mission of mercy to secure the ports and most of the interior. The invasion brought temporary stability and facilitated the flow of aid and hope to Somalia. From these beginnings comes this narrative of combat. To understand the extremes and harsh events that follow, the roots of the conflict must be further examined.

The country of Somalia is a crossroads of various political and cultural extremes. Dominating the Horn of Africa and the adjacent sea lanes, its location has caused it to receive the attentions of many Asian and European movements. The flame of Islam brought the Arabs and the Koran to the coastal villages and

the deserts of Somalia. Islam gave the clans a warrior's religion and injected them with a disdain for death. Italian colonization of the coastal region combined with the proximity of the adjacent Sahara desert fostered a dependency on the sea for economic sustenance. This was characterized by the development of fishing villages and seaports, the largest of these being Mogadishu located nearly in the center of the southern coast. In the post-Independence era the Soviets built upon the influences of the seafaring Italians and British. Under President Barre' they brought the fledgling Somali nation into the 20th century by providing it with the beginnings of a petroleum based industrial complex, technical support and, of course, a vast and deadly arsenal. All of these factors have shaped present day Somalia, leaving their mark like ornaments on a facade. However, the enduring basis of the Somali people and their culture has been, and remains, their roots in African tribalism. This is the force which drives the political machinery of Somalia, polarizes its people and characterizes their outlook and attitudes. Tribalism is the fundamental characteristic of Somali culture which has absorbed its external influences and reshaped them into the present.

Present day Somalia is a land of anarchy. It is a place where no official or recognized government is in power. Its people are divided and live along tribal or clan lines. The fall of the government of Siddi Barre' created a vacuum which caused the nation of Somalia to collapse, leaving only the tribal structures with their inherent hatreds and power struggles. In

the ensuing civil war the affluent districts of the cities, with their Mediterranean architecture, were destroyed. The oil industry vanished with the flight of the Soviet advisors leaving the refineries to rust. But most devastating to Somalia was the disintegration of the military and police, allowing the rival clans access to the vast array of modern weapons and ammunition provided by the Soviets. Now powerfully armed, the clans fought increasingly destructive battles in the urban areas of Somalia, mostly centered in Mogadishu. This ensured that no stabilizing force could come from within the country and powerful warlords rose to lead the clans.

When the drought began in the early 1990's and foreign aid arrived, the warring clans were ideally situated in the coastal cities to seize control of the precious material. They pillaged the shipments and terrorized the relief volunteers. The danger to the international workers, coupled with the already critical situation of tens of thousands of refugees faced by imminent death, caused the U.N. to act. Soon the cities, as well as much of the countryside, were secured by an invasion of U.S. Marines and soldiers of the 10th Mountain division as well as those of many foreign nations.

The warring clans melted into the urban sprawl and bided their time waiting to see what would come of the invasion and subsequent nation building efforts. With a limited amount of force, the gunmen were driven from the streets along with their heavily armed civilian trucks, called "Technicals", which were destroyed or hidden away. Eventually the majority of the country

was truly pacified except for Mogadishu where an uneasy peace was enforced by the U.N. troops. The U.N. moved to disarm the clans but their efforts only dented the vast stores of weapons hidden away and possessed by nearly every household and male old enough to carry an AK-47 assault rifle or RPG anti tank rocket launcher. The U.N.'s inability to effectively disarm the urban population, especially in Mogadishu, caused it to finally accept the status quo. It then instituted a system of legal ownership of small arms, allotting one per individual to be carried and requiring a registration card. Large weapons such as machineguns or RPGs were still banned, however. The clans still had not reacted in any organized manner to the presence of the peacekeepers in their midst. This fostered a false conclusion that they had been cowed into submission and the U.N. declared the invasion and pacification phase, dubbed "Operation Restore Hope", successful and at its conclusion. The number of U.S. combat troops was drastically reduced and the security of the majority of Somalia was left to the foreign troops to include the Italians, Pakistanis, Malaysians and Egyptians. In the spring of 1993 the second phase of operations was begun and dubbed United Nations Operations in Somalia (UNOSOM II). It was an effort with the emphasis on forming a coalition of the clans and nation building. Most of the clans saw this as being in their best interests and signed on to support the U.N. efforts, with one notable exception. The exception was the Habr-Gedir clan led by former Somali Army General Mohammed Farrah Aideed. Aideed was initially seen as a possible point man for negotiations in Somalia.

However, Aideed and his clan's political organization; the Somali National Alliance (SNA), had higher aspirations. They desired full power in Somalia especially over their major protagonist in the civil war and Aideed's personal rival, Al-Mahdi, who led the Mahdis.

Aideed and the SNA chose to make their bid for power in the pivotal city of Mogadishu. Aideed refused to join the U.N. sponsored negotiations and triggered a gradual renewal of the civil war. The fighting between the clans continued through the spring and early summer until Aideed decided the time was right to openly oppose the U.N. itself. On June 5 SNA militia men ambushed a routine patrol of Pakistani peacekeepers and killed 24 in a day long battle. The U.N. led by Secretary General Boutros Boutros Gahli passed a resolution calling for the arrest of "those responsible" and held Aideed specifically accountable. This resolution was passed on June 6th, the 49th Anniversary of D-day in Normandy, and proved to reinvigorate U.S. military operations. Cordon and Search Operations were made in addition to direct attacks on Aideed hideouts, to include his downtown Mogadishu home, by AC-130H and Cobra helicopter gunships. All attempts were unsuccessful and only caused Aideed to go underground. In July Aideed upped the ante further, issuing an order for his militia to "kill Americans". The SNA successfully executed these orders on August 10, ambushing a Military Police HMMV. The vehicle was destroyed by a command detonated mine, killing all four passengers. This specific action caused Secretary of Defense Les Aspin to direct the United States

Special Operations Command (SOCOM) to form a Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) for deployment to Somalia. The JSOTF would have the specific mission of capturing Mohammed Farrah Aideed and any other SNA personnel as directed.

The JSOTF was to be formed from a number of special operations units. I was the Fire Support Officer (FSO) for Alpha Company, 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, at the time of the formation of the JSOTF. Third Battalion was to provide one company to the JSOTF and to my disappointment Bravo Company was chosen. However, the FSO for Bravo Company was on emergency leave at the time, so I was chosen to replace him for the mission. Bravo Company deployed to Fort Bragg in mid August to join the other elements of the task force. The combined elements would officially be called Task Force Ranger and consisted of the following:

- An Assault element
- A Security element
- A vehicular ground force
- Organic Aviation assets
- Headquarters element

The Assault element was made up of special operations personnel and would be inserted by helicopter directly on top of the target's location. Once on the ground the Assault element would have the responsibility for the capture and security of targeted personnel referred to as Precious Cargo (PC). The

Assault element would conduct the actual entry and clearing of buildings or vehicles where the PC were located.

Assisting the Assault element in this mission was the Security element. It was made up of two reduced strength Ranger platoons, broken down into four separate elements or "chalks", which would surround the target, landing by FastRope, and form a perimeter of Blocking Positions (BPs). The mission of the Rangers was primarily to prevent any outside interference with the Assault element and secondarily to seal off the target area so no one could escape. The Assault element and the Security element worked together as a team and would collectively be called the Assault Force. Bravo Company would also provide the vehicular ground force made up of a platoon sized element of gunjeep HMMVs, armed with .50 caliber Machine guns, and Mark 19 Automatic Grenade Launchers. Immediately, upon the launch of the Assault Force, the vehicles would race from the airport to the target location and would reinforce the perimeter. If necessary 5 Ton Trucks or cargo HMMVs could be added to the formation to provide insertion and or extraction for the Assault Force. Bravo Company was given the additional responsibility of providing protection for TF Ranger within its compound.

TF Ranger utilized its own organic aviation assets to conduct the mission and they played a multitude of critical roles. These assets consisted of various rotary wing lift (x12) attack (x4) and reconnaissance (x2) aircraft. Once our Intelligence provided us a target, the recon birds would be used to pinpoint the target's location and lead the airborne Assault

Force to the Landing Zone (LZ). This was critical as the LZ was generally right on top of the target among buildings or vehicles in the streets. The lift birds carried the Assault Force to the target, then inserted them, generally by FastRope. After the insertion, the majority of the lift birds would fly a safe distance away and take up an orbit to wait for the call to extract the Assault Force. Some of the helicopters would remain over the target and support the Assault Force on the ground. These helicopters consisted of two birds carrying snipers who would provide precise fires to interdict Somalis approaching the perimeter. The snipers would be assisted in this by the doorgunners of these helicopters. In addition to the sniper birds, four helicopter gunships would provide heavier firepower if needed. A Command and Control bird and one other lift bird carrying a Search and Rescue (SAR) Team would also remain overhead. The SAR team was made up of medical and rescue personnel and was a contingency in case of a downed helicopter.

As the FSO for Bravo Company, I had the responsibility during missions of providing fire support for the Security element on the perimeter. The actual control of fires would, if possible, be done by the Forward Observers (FO) of my Fire Support Team (FIST). I had one FO with each "chalk" or BP around the target providing 360 degree observation. If contact was made at a BP and fire support was needed, the FO located there would contact me and request use of either the sniper birds or the gunships. I also had three FOs with the vehicle platoon and one with the SAR team for a total, including myself, of nine. The

Assault element, inside the target area, would provide its own fire support. As the Rangers would attempt to form as tight a perimeter as possible around the target building, it was understood that we would see the preponderance of action in which fire support could be employed. It was therefore determined that we would receive the priority for its use once we were established upon the ground.

Upon receipt of authorization from the Secretary of Defense, TF Ranger deployed almost immediately and arrived in Mogadishu in late August. The first order of business was to establish a compound to house the personnel and headquarters. This compound was located in a large abandoned hanger on the northwest side of Mogadishu airport. Although it was inside the airport perimeter guarded by Egyptian peacekeepers, the TF was obliged to form its own secure inner perimeter. This perimeter encompassed the hanger and a few other buildings, which were used as a headquarters and tactical operations center (TOC). Later, after a number of mortar attacks, sandbag bays were also built inside the perimeter to protect the smaller helicopters. The compound was located adjacent to the taxiways and main ramp of the airport. This provided an ideal location for, and easy access to, the remainder of the helicopters, which were also eventually protected by sandbagged revetments. In addition to TF Ranger and the Egyptians, the airport was also occupied by the U.N. contingents from Russia, Italy, Rumania, New Zealand and the United States.

In addition to establishing a secure compound, the first

days were used to become oriented to Mogadishu. We received briefings from the 10th Mtn. Div. and what little intelligence they had. We also exchanged liaison officers (LNOs), to include an FSO from 10th Mtn. Div., 1LT John Breen, who briefed us on their procedures and recent events. On one of my first nights in Mogadishu I flew with LT Breen on an aerial patrol that was conducted around the clock by the aviation assets of the 101st, which supported 10th Mtn. Div. These patrols were called "Eyes Over Mogadishu", and were designed to conduct surveillance of the clans and maintain a U.S. presence over the neighborhoods of the city. During my two and one half hour flight I saw little if any activity in the city, despite the tales of nightly attacks on U.N. positions.

Even before TF Ranger arrived in Mogadishu, the intelligence net had been put out. Aideed was to prove an elusive and sophisticated opponent. He had adopted a variety of measures to ensure his safety, to include abandoning his downtown Mogadishu home and staying exclusively with relatives. Never staying in the same spot for more than one or two nights, Aideed varied his pattern, sometimes travelling with a large entourage and sometimes within only one vehicle with a single guard. Wherever Aideed went though, he would be preceded by a security detail who would sweep the area and secure it until his arrival, then maintain an unobtrusive but vigilant guard. Aideed often disguised himself to include dressing as a woman. All of this was done in the crowded urban sprawl of Mogadishu without any uniform display. In addition to these proactive measures, the

homogeneous racial and clan characteristics of the Somalis made their infrastructure extremely difficult and hazardous to penetrate.

In spite of these difficulties there were a number of factors working for TF Ranger. Aideed ruled the Mogadishu neighborhoods both through clan ties and intimidation, ensuring his security but not necessarily his popularity. This was compounded by the generous U.N. reward offered for information on his whereabouts or those of his ranking followers. These factors provided TF Ranger with a consistent number of "hot" reports which eventually resulted in six missions prior to October 3rd, but more often an incessant drill of being "spun up" then "stood down".

Despite the intensive intelligence efforts, the first mission was in response to SNA actions rather than our own efforts. Our first night was marked by a short and ineffective mortar attack with the rounds landing a considerable distance away from the hanger along the beach and runway. The second night the attack was repeated, but this time rounds landed on the TOC building and around the helicopters parked on the apron. Four personnel were slightly wounded and the TF commander, Major General William Garrison, ordered a quick response in order to maintain the initiative and avoid a "bunker complex". We were ordered to strike the number one location of SNA activity taken from the 10th Mtn. Division's target list. This was the Lig Lagato House. The TF took off in the dark early hours of the morning and made a quick insertion at 0309 on and around the

building. Some of the aircraft reported observing light automatic weapons fire aimed in the direction of the aircraft on the way in but none were hit. The mission was conducted without any problems and the force was extracted with great skill by the pilots from a cramped schoolyard. Nine personnel were captured, but turned out to be U.N. workers and Somali guards. As it turned out, the home was owned by the number two man in the SNA; Osman Atto, and rented to the U.N. as an office during the day. The personnel were in the wrong place at the wrong time, and after being turned over to U.N. authorities, were released. Despite the successful execution of the mission, it was reported as "bungled" in the press. This, along with the extensive coverage of our arrival in Mogadishu, was the beginning of a negative relationship between TF Ranger and the press. The results of the mission also caused the commanders of TF Ranger to require positive confirmation of targets before launching any more missions.

Throughout September TF Ranger conducted five more missions. These included the raid on the Old Russian Compound on 6 September; the Jialou House/police station raid on 14 September; the raid on Radio Mogadishu on 17 September; the raid on Osman Atto's garage on 18 September; and the capture of Osman Atto on 21 September. Most of these missions saw very little contact between SNA forces and TF Ranger. The exception to this was the capture of Osman Atto.

Osman Atto was the number two man in the SNA and its chief financier. On 21 September, after an unsuccessful attempt to

capture him at his automotive garage, he was located and captured on the streets of Mogadishu. After the recon birds picked Atto up moving with one guard in a single vehicle, the force was launched in pursuit. Because of the fluid nature of capturing Atto in the open streets only the Assault element was inserted while the Rangers remained in the air ready if needed. The assaulters landed nearly on top of Atto's vehicle causing him to stop and flee into a nearby building. His bodyguard armed with an AK-47, attempted to resist the assaulters and was neutralized by an intentional shot to the leg. This is an illustration of the restraint characteristic of operations up to this point. Inside the building Atto was quickly located and captured. He was immediately extracted from an impromptu LZ atop the building.

At this point the helicopter I was riding in was called in from its holding orbit to replace the sniper bird, which had taken Atto out. This was a prearranged contingency in order to maintain two birds providing support over the target at any one time. From my vantage point above the target building and surrounding neighborhoods I could clearly see the action on the ground. The assaulters were slowly and deliberately collapsing their small perimeter around the building and preparing to extract. The Somalis, for their part, were probing the perimeter in small groups of two and three. Farther out, large mobs could be seen forming, summoned by the SNA's crude but effective alarm system of burning tires in the streets around the target. Although I could see few weapons in the crowds, they were obviously agitated and converging cautiously on the target

building. Both the remaining sniper bird and the gunships were now firing in support of the assaulters as they extracted from the rooftop. I was convinced that if they had remained on the ground much longer they would have required our assistance to extract. As it was, a number of gunmen had been engaged as they probed the perimeter and at least 15 enemy casualties were inflicted by the assaulters and aircraft.

This mission led us to a number of conclusions. The Assault element had remained on the ground just under an hour. Based upon previous missions, we had determined that the SNA could not react effectively if we stuck to about one hour on the ground. This mission confirmed this for us. We also concluded that we could strike anywhere in Mogadishu and complete our mission successfully. I had observed from my position that our aircraft had been under light fire over the target. As it turned out, the Somalis had directed at least 15 RPG rounds and numerous small arms at our helicopters. I rashly believed, based upon enemy proficiency and the capabilities of our pilots and aircraft, that we were relatively impervious to ground fire. I maintained this belief even after the following week when one of the helicopters flying "Eyes over Mogadishu" was brought down by an RPG, killing three Americans.

After the successful capture of Atto we continued our search for Aideed and updated our "most wanted" list of SNA leaders. These included: Omar Salad Elmi, Aideed's principal advisor, and Issa Mohammed Siad. On Sunday, October 3rd, the tenth anniversary of the establishment of 3rd Ranger Battalion,

intelligence confirmed a meeting of these men and a number of other Aideed supporters at a house in downtown Mogadishu, deep in Habir-Gedir territory. The building was near the infamous SNA stronghold of the Bukara Market area and adjacent to the Olympic Hotel.

As had become our practice on Sundays, we were given a break from our incessant training schedule. In spite of this we were still on a constant lookout for an opportunity to strike at Aideed and the SNA leadership, and had been "spun up" and "stood down" twice in the past 24 hours. But now, in the afternoon, we were relaxing at the beach or playing volleyball in the compound. Upon seeing the relaxed state of affairs, I had taken the opportunity to depart from the conventional use of the Portajohns provided for us and had infiltrated the facilities of the nearby trailers our pilots shared with the Russians.

Upon return from my surreptitious constitutional, as seems to be my consistent fate on such occasions, I saw a flurry of activity around the hanger and that I was late for a mission brief in the TOC. Omar Salad Elmi and Issa Siad had been confirmed at a meeting near the Olympic Hotel. Quickly we went over the last minute details for the raid and moved to our birds. As it was late afternoon and this kind of excitement was becoming repetitive without result, I called to my friend LT Lee Ryswyk as I walked out of the hanger: "I'll be back in a minute, so wait for me and we'll go to chow."

A few minutes later, after boarding our helicopters, we were in fact recalled to the TOC. However, the mission was not being

cancelled, only updated. The original targeted location was off by close to a block and a new report had come, just minutes before the launch order was to be given, providing more accurate information. As the TOC refocused its attention to the new building, we made the necessary modifications to our plan and moved back to the birds. Almost immediately upon boarding we launched; the time was about 1530. We took off to the west and flew out over the nearby desert. Gradually we turned back to the east and came in low and fast towards the city.

After only a few minutes in the air the pilots passed back the warning that the target was one minute out. Soon our bird, piloted by Warrant Officers Ray Frank and Mike Durant, began to slowly descend through clouds of dust left by the insertion of the Assault element seconds before. After a long delay of about a minute, in which our pilots had been trying to penetrate the "brownout", our rope was finally cast out. We piled out and descended quickly, what seemed about thirty to thirty five feet.

On every mission sporadic gunfire and muffled explosions could be heard as the Assault element entered and cleared the buildings. This time automatic weapons and concentrated rifle fire could be heard to our north. We had been inserted at the southeast corner of the building and had linked up with the corresponding Ranger BP on the southwest corner. The sounds of battle told us that our comrades on the two northern BPs were in contact. We had landed at about 1540 and quickly established ourselves on the street corners and in the alleyways.

As we observed the burning tires of the alarm system, we

could hear a lot of firing but could not tell if it was directed at our positions. After about ten minutes of this we began to receive direct probes, as individuals or small groups of gunmen, responding to the burning tires, moved towards the target building. They were unaware of our exact location and some walked nonchalantly into our fields of fire, where they were immediately dispatched, much to their surprise.

As they began to get an idea of our locations, the gunmen sniped at us and advanced more cautiously. They also used a familiar tactic of sending unarmed women to verify and literally point out our positions. In addition to this there were a number of civilians who were going about their business at the target building or innocently walked through the area. A woman walked in front of my position as we were engaging a gunman down the street. She had her hands raised in the hope of not being shot, but proceeded very casually. We held our fire in this first hour although their fellow clansmen did not. Another startling technique used by the gunmen was to advance on us while hiding behind women. We tolerated these activities only to a point, then acted in self defense.

As the probes continued my FO at the northeast BP requested use of the sniper birds. At the same time my position was attempting to identify a gunman who was sniping at us. I let my FO control the mission thinking he may be after the same target I was. The sniper bird was unable to identify the gunman but made a number of passes firing its doorguns in the general vicinity. After the first pass I contacted the pilot, Warrant Officer

Clifton Wolcott, and added my target information. On subsequent passes the gunman was not found, so we ended the mission and directed the pilot to reassume his orbit. However, about a minute later the sniper bird reappeared flying south to north in front of our position. Suddenly, the aircraft swung hard to the right and I thought for a moment that the pilot was attempting to get a better position to fire from. I soon realized something was wrong when I observed that the tail rotor had stopped spinning and the aircraft began to spin unsteadily. I could see Wolcott and the copilot, Warrant Officer Donovan Briley, struggling with the controls as the bird disappeared beneath the rooftops about 500 meters to our east. I later found out that the aircraft had come in to take one final look and had been hit by an RPG.

The word was immediately passed that we had a helicopter down. The time was about 1620. At the BP on the northeast corner of the building, 1LT Tom Ditomasso took half of his men and moved to the crash sight. As helicopters circled directly over the crash sight, the SAR team was ordered to FastRope in. As the pilot held the aircraft steady, it was also hit by an RPG while the SAR team was still on the ropes. Holding it fast for a few more seconds he allowed the last of the Rangers to clear the rope then made it back to the airport, crashing on the runway. Before the blades had stopped spinning, the pilot, Warrant Officer Dan Jollatta was out and ran to a spare bird, cranking it up and returning to the fight.

At the target building we had secured the PC and loaded

them, along with some of the Assault Force, onto the 5 Ton trucks and HMMVs of the vehicle platoon. The vehicle platoon had arrived around 1600 and linked up with the Assault Force on the west side of the building. On the insertion, one Ranger, PFC Todd Blackburn, had fallen off the rope (approximately 40 feet) and was badly injured. When the vehicles arrived carrying LTC Danny McKnight, he ordered two gunjeeps and a cargo HMMV to evacuate Blackburn immediately. They crossed in front of the target building and sped south in front of my position towards the airport. Along the way they were ambushed, but managed to fight their way through, losing one of the gunners, SGT Dominic Pilla, killed instantly by a round to the head.

The remainder of the vehicles and the Assault Force were ordered to move to the crash sight and reinforce the SAR team and Rangers already there. As we moved off to the east, followed by the vehicles, I looked at my watch and saw that it was 1630. I thought of how we would have extracted successfully and within our one hour time frame if not for this. I quickly put this out of my mind as the sounds of battle increased, and I worried about the aircrew and my comrades at the crash. My fears were well founded as both the pilots had been killed in the crash. However, their efforts to stabilize the aircraft succeeded in allowing the remainder of the crew and passengers to survive the impact. The Rangers and SAR team which had arrived just seconds before the Somalis, were immediately pinned down and suffered a number of wounded.

As the remainder of the Assault Force continued to move east

we encountered steadily increasing resistance. In addition to the growing volume of fire to our front, we were also pursued, at a distance, by Somali gunmen to our rear. They were slowed in their pursuit by the expeditious use of a LAW rocket by one of the Rangers. We had moved about two blocks east from the target building towards the crash sight when we took a sudden turn to the left or north. The vehicles had been following us up to this point, but were unable to move down the narrow street we were on, so broke off and continued north on a different route.

Prior to making the left, the teams of the Assault element had moved past the headquarters element I was with and were now to my front. As we moved north there was a rise in the road with a barricade on the far side. Suddenly, one of my FOS, who had been at the BP with me, went down with a bullet through his hip. One team of four assaulters was lined up along a wall to my right front. They were suddenly hit by a burst of automatic weapons fire that came down the wall towards them. The lead man, SFC Earl Filmore, was killed instantly and two others in the team were wounded. The survivors quickly jumped into a small alley on their right. The rest of the Assault element stormed into the buildings to my right.

Inside the building to my immediate right was a family of Somalis which included a man, woman, and about three children. An AK-47 was found and quickly rendered inoperable. Around us, the Rangers were moving forward and engaging the Somalis, securing the street corners and returning fire with controlled deliberate bursts. Bullets were hammering the walls around us

and I could hear the frequent zip of rounds overhead. The headquarters element I was with, made up of myself, the CO, (CPT Mike Steele) and two RTOs, had halted in front of the building where the AK had been found. I could see muzzle flashes coming from the sides of the berm to our front and began to engage them. My firing interfered with the CO on the radio so I moved forward about 5 meters to where the assault team had previously been hit. The team leader in the alley, now only about a meter away, warned me about the incoming fire. I joined an M203 gunner from an assault team behind a tree, and the three of us began to engage the berm.

Suddenly, a little burrow came out of a side street toward us pulling a wagon. The M203 gunner yelled, "What's up with this?" and I replied, "Who knows what's in it?". In unspoken agreement we both cut him down before he reached us. With the lessons of our predecessors in Beirut and Vietnam in our minds we were taking no chances.

After engaging the enemy at the berm for another minute or two I realized that if it was bad enough for me to be fighting it was high time for some air support. All this time I had been monitoring my primary radio and had heard nothing. I checked my back up, a hand held FM, and immediately received an urgent request for the gunships from my FO with LT Ditomasso at the crash sight. He reported to me that his element had eight wounded in the street that they could not get to because of the heavy amount of fire they were receiving. I immediately approved his request but was informed that his primary radio was

inoperable. That explained why I had heard nothing on mine. I immediately took his fire mission data and contacted the gunships. I relayed the data to the lead bird flown by Warrant Officers Hal Wade and Randy Jones. The data was "040 and 270 degrees, 100 meters". The FO had actually requested 50 meters, but I added a safety buffer of an additional 50 meters, as I could not see his position to adequately control the strike. His target information told both me and the pilot that he had enemy extremely close and on both sides of him. I passed the word for everyone to get orange VS-17 panels out so the pilots could see us.

The lead gunship courageously exposed himself, making a "dry" pass, without firing, through a hail of enemy fire, to ensure that he could identify friendly positions before he made a firing pass. I informed him that he was correctly oriented and that there were enemies between our separated elements. On his next pass the lead bird fired both automatic weapons and 2.75 inch rockets, which we had not been allowed to use before this. The firepower of the gunships had tremendous effect and I checked with the FO to see if the rounds were on target. He said they were, and I told the lead gunship "Continuous Suppression, Fire for Effect" or in other words, pour it on and keep it coming!

When I turned the gunships loose they hammered the enemy all around the crash sight to our north. I believe this was the decisive point in the battle, as the initial Somali attacks were broken long enough for us to recover our wounded and consolidate our perimeter, linking up our separated elements. In the middle

of the call for fire to the gunships an unfamiliar voice broke into the net. Using the call sign of the helicopter that I had been flying on for the past two months, and which had brought me into the battle that afternoon, the voice said they were down about a mile south of the target building and needed help.

As during the capture of Osman Atto, my helicopter had been recalled from its safe orbit to replace the downed sniper bird. On the way in, it was also hit by an RPG and crashed. This had occurred shortly after the loss of the first bird about 1620. All the elements of the Assault Force and vehicle platoon were desperately fighting around the first crash sight. The second sniper bird had cleared the target area to allow the gunships to come in.

The two snipers aboard, SFC Gary Gordon and MSG Randy Shugart, immediately requested that they be inserted to aid the injured aircrew at the second crash sight. This was initially denied by the Command and Control bird, but realizing there was no other alternative, they were soon permitted to land. They made their way to the second crash sight and gave first aid to the crew. It was at this point that one of them took Durant's survival radio, tuned to the fire support net and sent out the call for help which I received. I passed on the call to the Command and Control ship. I was ordered to inform them that a relief column from the 10th Mtn. Division had been requested and was on the way and to hold on. As I was in the middle of a fire mission, I had to abruptly end the conversation. I had no way of knowing it would be the last thing heard from them alive.

Armed with only with their sniper rifles and the crew's personal weapons, Shugart and Gordon fought to the death, attempting to protect the wounded. The two were soon overrun and killed, as were the wounded. Only Michael Durant survived, and was only saved by the timely intervention of the son of Osman Atto, who happened to be at the scene, and wanted a live prisoner in the hopes of trading for his father. The two doorgunners killed were Sergeants Tom Fields and Bill Cleveland, our comrades for the last two months and among the best. Shugart and Gordon's valiant stand would earn them both the Medal of Honor.

While Shugart and Gordon were fighting to save the crew of my helicopter, our vehicle platoon was fighting its own desperate battle. Unable to find a clear way into the crash sight, the convoy drove through the hostile streets and were met by a maelstrom of gunfire and anti-tank rockets. The Rangers and the few assaulters who had loaded with the PC fought back using the .50 cal's and Mk19s to devastating effect. Their tenacity was not without a price, and as they were continually frustrated by wrong turns and barricades, four Rangers and an assaulter were killed in the gauntlet. Only after running out ammo, losing half their vehicles, and almost every man being wounded, did the platoon return to the airport.

The Assault Force at the crash sight had been given a second or two of breathing space by the gunships and they had used it to great effect. A group of buildings had been secured around the downed helicopter, but the Rangers were still fighting desperately against the Somalis who had now closed with them and

were pressing from all sides. One of the dilemmas of urban warfare is that no matter how many buildings you secure, there will always be a building in close proximity that you have not secured. This allows a brave and disciplined enemy to close with your perimeter. This is precisely what had happened to us by 1730 that afternoon.

I had to remain in the street to direct the initial runs of the gunships. In order to minimize my vulnerability, I had chosen a position placing the rise to our front in between myself and the berm. I had also placed myself inside a rude, little roadside stand made of corrugated steel. Not a minute after I had turned the gunships loose, I felt more than heard two rounds punching through the left side of the shack. As there were a number of Rangers behind me, I tried to call out the verbal friendly recognition signal "Ranger". Before I could get it out the third of the three round burst struck my lower right leg. My leg literally exploded under the impact and was shredded from just below the knee to the ankle. I instantly decided that no matter what the source of the fire, I had to get out of the street and attempted to drag myself towards the building containing the assaulters to my right, now about ten meters away. I was still under fire from the front and was making little progress when a medic from one of the assault teams ran out of the doorway, through the enemy fire and dragged me back inside to safety.

I did not realize at the time but was later told that a Somali gunman had infiltrated the building to my left, popped up from

behind the wall and aimed a burst at the headquarters element, not ten feet in front of him. When the medic ran out to me the gunmen had already dropped back down behind the wall. Other assaulters using an M203 grenade launcher blew a hole in the wall and took out the gunman.

Inside the building the medic stopped the bleeding from my shattered leg and stabilized it. He then gave me a styrette of morphine, as I was in intense pain. The morphine soon took hold and I was placed on an Israeli litter. More casualties flowed in and the Somali family was moved out of the way farther back inside the house.

As the battle raged outside it soon became dark and the gunships fired continually. They fired very close in attempts to root out the enemy, who was still in very close proximity to our perimeter. They were probably most effective engaging squad sized groups of Somalis about a hundred meters away, who were attempting to move forward and attack the perimeter. Extremely susceptible to the attacks of the gunships, whose pilots were using night vision goggles and firing with deadly accuracy, scores of attacking Somalis were killed outside of the perimeter.

The Rangers at the airport were finally joined by the troops from the 10th Mtn. Division and reformed the convoy for another relief attempt. This time the convoy would have the support of Pakistani tanks and Malaysian armored cars. We could hear the slow methodical approach of the convoy as it hammered its way forward with heavy machine guns and grenade launchers. Finally, in the early hours of the morning, we linked up with the relief

column. The Malaysians pulled their Condor armored cars up in front of the building I was in. As it started to get light out, I was loaded in the back along with other wounded Rangers. One of the problems the SAR team had at the crashed helicopter was that the body of Cliff Wolcott had been pinned beneath the wreckage. Now using chains and a HMMV, his body was torn loose and recovered. While this was going on we sat in the armored cars. Now with Wolcott's body freed, we quickly moved to the east side of the city where the Pakistanis were located in the old Soccer Stadium. The wounded were lined on stretchers up and down both sides of the field. The medevac birds flew constantly in and out. By this time I had been hit almost 17 hours ago. I was put on the next available lift and taken to the 46th Med. a MASH type of hospital. I soon began the long series of flights back to the U.S. and ending at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. When the helicopters flew us from the 46th Med to Mogadishu airport, the C-141 we were to fly home in was parked just outside of our compound. There was a large number of wounded, almost all from TF Ranger. Our comrades came out of the compound and told the medics and orderlies they would load us. The commander came to each stretcher and prayed for us, then we were carried aboard the aircraft through a double line of our comrades. The bodies of our comrades from the second crash sight were recovered after a long search about four days later. Michael Durant was returned about ten days later. The day we left from the airport a mortar attack killed one more member of TF Ranger. In all 18 members of TF Ranger were killed and over 85 wounded. The lowest reported

casualty figure for the Somalis was 300 killed and over a thousand wounded. Some of the prisoners captured at the target house were prominent on the most wanted list, to include Siad and Salad Elmi. Two of the prisoners were killed on the convoy by the fire of their fellow clansmen.

After the battle, the Clinton Administration began to negotiate with the SNA. One of the principle desires by the SNA was the end of the manhunt for Aideed and the removal of TF Ranger. In return, Aideed would enter into the peace process. TF Ranger returned to the U.S. at the end of October.