

MOGADISHU, OCTOBER 1993:

PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF A RIFLE COMPANY XO

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When the United States first entered Somalia in December 1992 to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid, combat incidents were rare and, when they did happen, were on a small scale. After turning this mission over to the United Nations force in Somalia (UNISOM II), the United States left approximately 6,000 of its soldiers to ensure that the UN operations could continue without interruption.

The only U.S. combat forces in country were the quick reaction force (QRF), made up of one light infantry battalion, one attack and assault helicopter battalion, and a brigade headquarters. The first to assume the QRF infantry battalion's duties was the 2d Battalion, 87th Infantry, 10th Mountain Division (Light), followed by a sister battalion, the 1st Battalion, 22d Infantry.

In June and July 1993, UNISOM II became more aggressive and, after a Pakistani unit was badly ambushed, decided

to try to disarm the opposing clan factions in Somalia. In July the 1st Battalion, 22d Infantry, conducted several cordon and search operations in Mogadishu and a raid on the Abdi House, which received a lot of news media attention.

On 1 August my unit, the 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry—also of the 10th Division—assumed the QRF mission. I was XO of Company A.

On the first night in our university compound (see map), we were attacked by 60mm mortar fire, and two soldiers from a nearby logistical unit were wounded. This was just a taste of things to come. During August and September, the battalion conducted numerous operations—raids, attacks to clear, cordon and search, convoy security, rescue of downed helicopters—and reinforced other units engaged with Somali guerrillas under the control of General Farah Aideed.

By the end of September, every company had been

involved in several sustained firefights with the enemy and had also taken casualties. Our compound continued to be attacked by mortars, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), and small arms fire at least every four or five days. Although the battalion never sustained any casualties from these attacks on the compound, neighboring units did.

When the UN intensified the hunt for General Aideed in late August, the United States sent a unit of Special Operations Forces specifically equipped to conduct fast raids and prisoner recoveries. The task force, called TF Ranger, consisted of a company of Rangers, a contingent of assault and attack helicopters, and other elements. Our battalion was assigned a liaison from the task force, and our company conducted rehearsals with the Rangers to prepare for contingencies in which our assistance might be needed. The least expected of these contingencies called for us to reinforce TF Ranger in the event it was in danger of being overwhelmed, but that is the one the battalion was called upon to execute on 3-4 October 1993.

For my company, this was a nine-hour battle in which we fought our way in to the surrounded Rangers, evacuated all the casualties, and fought back out the following morning under continuous enemy fire.

During that battle, 18 U.S. soldiers were killed and more than 77 wounded. Two companies (plus) from our battalion and one company-sized element from TF Ranger more than held their own against incredible odds. We were literally surrounded, engaged in a pitched battle at night, in the heart of Aideed's guerrilla stronghold. According to intelligence reports received several days later, more than 300 Somalis were killed that night and another 700 or more wounded.

Before the Battle

From 30 September through 2 October, Company A conducted close quarters battle live fires at an old Soviet military base on the outskirts of Mogadishu. The company's morale was high as a result of an operation a few days earlier in which we conducted a successful pre-dawn raid on a confirmed mortar launching site. During our exfiltration, we became engaged in a 15-minute firefight and successfully withdrew under pressure to a nearby UN compound. Several detainees from that raid provided a wealth of information for future operations. This was one of several combat operations in which the company proved itself under fire. We were confident in our abilities and had no doubt that we would soon see combat action again.

On 2 October we received word to be prepared to move by helicopter from our training site to the Mogadishu airport. A coordinated UN operation was planned in which units from Pakistan, Malaysia, and other nations were to conduct simultaneous missions to retake several previously abandoned checkpoints throughout the city. The battalion expected to be called upon to assist and had made contingency plans to enable it to react quickly. The UN mission was cancelled, however, and we continued our training, returning to the university compound around 1100 on 3 October.

As soon as we arrived at the compound, the company

began recovery procedures. It was standing operating procedure (SOP) to conduct maintenance and redistribute ammunition so we could react quickly if alerted, even when we were not currently the QRC for the battalion. (The QRC normally had up to 30 minutes to roll out of the compound on a quick-reaction mission, although it was often faster than that. The other two rifle companies had up to an hour to be prepared to move, but were often able to do it in 15 minutes.)

I supervised recovery operations and by 1500 was able to lie down for a short nap. Around 1630 I was awakened by one of the company radio telephone operators (RTOs) and was told that Company C had just gone to alert status and was preparing to move out. When my company commander and I went over to the battalion tactical operations center (TOC) to see what was going on, we were told that TF Ranger was in the middle of an operation and might need assistance. It was obvious by the concerned look on the face of our Ranger liaison, listening intently to his radio with a set of headphones, that something was not right.

I suggested to the commander that we grab some chow now, because I had a feeling Company A would also be alerted soon. We had just sat down in the mess hall when a runner from the battalion TOC told everyone that the company was to go to RedCon 1; that is, bring the company to full alert and be prepared to roll out the gate as soon as possible. We left the mess hall and headed back to the company area.

While the company commander went back to the TOC, I supervised the issue of additional ammunition and special equipment in accordance with our rehearsed SOP. (All soldiers in the company normally kept their personal basic loads of ammunition and grenades and received AT4s, LAWs, demolitions, and the like upon going to RedCon 1.) This took 10 or 15 minutes. The first sergeant assembled the platoons and ensured that pre-combat inspections were made, while I went to the TOC to be briefed and to get guidance on how to configure the company for movement and learn what attachments it might receive. Depending on the mission, sometimes we would either walk to an objective or ride on trucks. We would normally receive an engineer squad, a forward medical treatment team (FMTT), a psychological operations (PSY-OPS) team, and a military police platoon if we were the QRC company. Since we were the second company in line this time, I wasn't sure what attachments battalion had in mind.

As I walked over to the TOC, Company C and the battalion tactical command post (TAC) moved out on HMMWVs (high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles) and five-ton trucks. When I linked up with my commander in the TOC, he could tell me only that a helicopter had been shot down and the Rangers might be in trouble. A week earlier, a 10th Mountain Division UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter had been shot down, and Company C had engaged in a two or three-hour firefight to recover the crew and equipment, taking several casualties. The commander just told me to get the company lined up and ready to move.

I assembled the first sergeant and the platoon leaders and passed the information. Then I directed the platoons to take some time to make a more thorough pre-combat inspection

and to request more ammunition or special equipment if they wanted it. I also told them that I thought it looked like we would be going out.

The first sergeant and I reviewed what other tasks we needed to accomplish before the commander returned. We agreed to plus-up our contingency load of ammunition (usually at least one-half extra basic load for the company), which was normally carried on my HMMWV. We then made a company communications check, and I told my communications chief to monitor the battalion command net to find out what was going on. The first sergeant and I then began getting the company HMMWVs and five-ton trucks lined up in the SOP order of movement. By now, we had received as attachments our usual engineer squad and medical treatment team, which included the battalion surgeon.

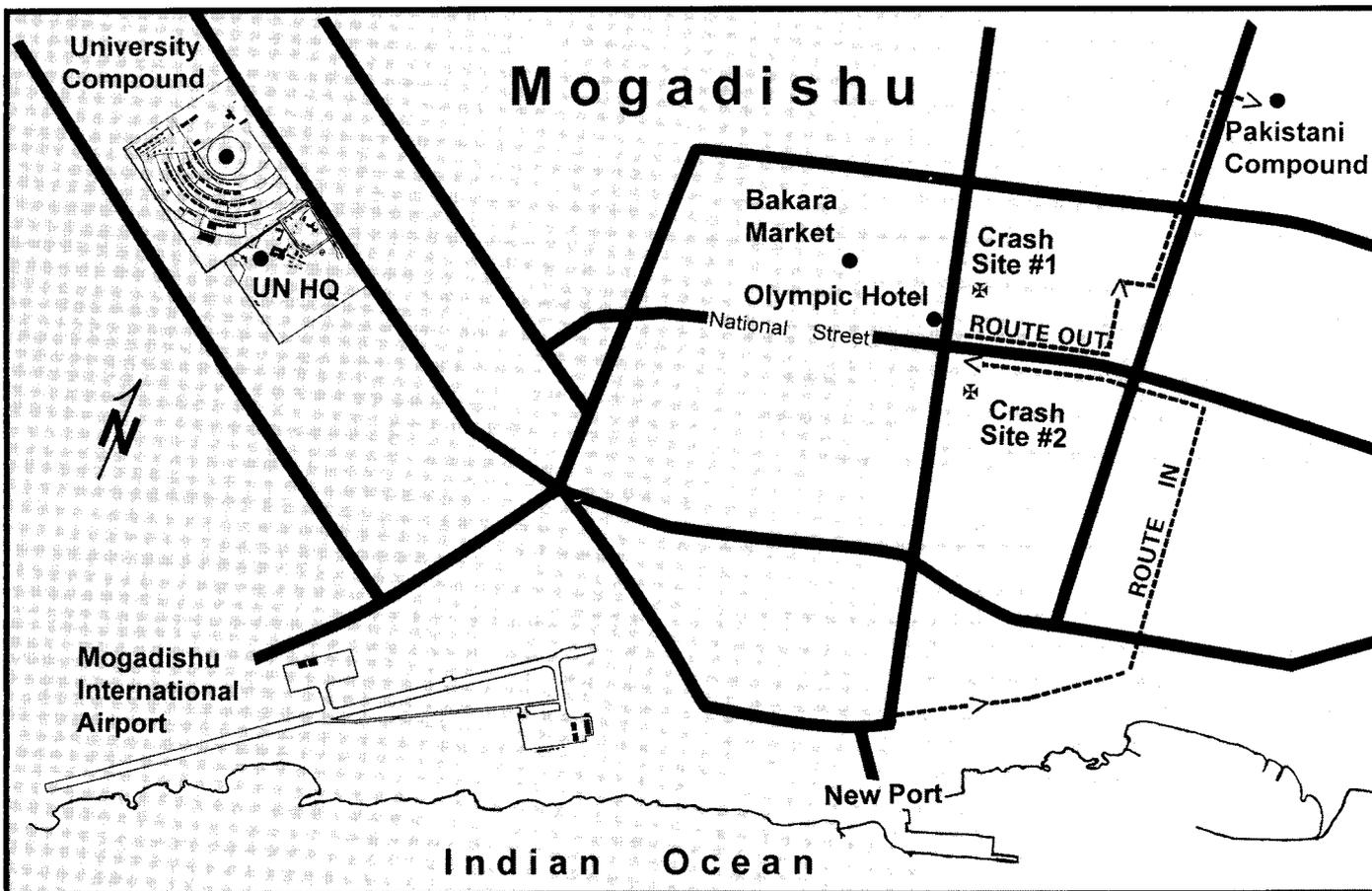
The commander soon joined me where I had the orders group gathered. He briefed essentially the same thing he had told me earlier and said we were going to move the company near the gate entrance to the compound and be prepared to reinforce Company C if needed. By 1700 the company was lined up, and we waited. Like many of our previous QRF missions, we had little information and, once we moved out on a mission, could only recheck our equipment and rely on rehearsed SOPs and battle drills.

It was late afternoon, the sun was beginning to fade, and we could hear heavy small arms and rocket fire in the dis-

tance. On the battalion command net, it soon became apparent that Company C was engaged in a stiff firefight and had sustained several casualties. The battalion TAC, consisting of two HMMWVs, was with Company C, and—judging by what we were hearing on the radio and the tracer rounds and explosions we were seeing in the city—it was obvious that something big was happening. The company commander, listening intently on the radio, tracked the battle on the map, expecting at any moment to be ordered to reinforce Company C.

Company B was also ready to move and standing by in its company area. The battalion scout platoon, the combat trains, and the PSYOPS element were lined up behind our company also preparing to move. It was almost dark. I was concerned about sitting at the gate in the open—the compound had been shelled several times over the previous month by 60mm mortar fire, and I hoped we wouldn't be hit now.

The situation was becoming clearer: Company C had been tasked to link up with the Ranger ground reaction force (GRF) platoon that was attempting to break through to a downed helicopter. The Ranger platoon had been unable to break through after being badly ambushed, losing one or two vehicles and suffering several casualties. Company C had managed to effect a link-up but was now also in heavy contact and taking casualties of its own. Company C was ordered to withdraw to the Mogadishu airport, which was near the



engagement. It was apparent that neither the Ranger GRF platoon nor Company C was going to be able to fight through to the crash site.

We still did not know the full situation of the Rangers on the ground. (By now, in fact, two helicopters had been shot down in the Bakara Market area in the heart of General Aideed's guerrilla enclave. A third helicopter had been hit but had limped back to the airport. A company-size element of TF Ranger was surrounded and fighting for their lives, taking heavy casualties.) When the engaged elements were ordered to withdraw to the airfield, the company commander called for instructions. We were told to stand by, and a minute later to stand down, but to be able to be recalled to move in five minutes. Five minutes later, we heard the battalion commander order his XO to move the rest of the battalion to the airfield as soon as possible and be prepared to conduct further combat operations.

The battalion XO radioed instructions to both remaining rifle companies and support elements, breaking us up by convoy serials 10 minutes apart. Our convoy of about 15 HMMWVs and five-ton trucks moved first, with the battalion scout platoon following. We moved along the main supply route, which was a roundabout way to get to the airfield, but a secure one. It took the company about 45 minutes to get there, driving blacked out with night vision goggles.

When we arrived at the airfield at 2030 hours, the company commander reported to the battalion commander to receive instructions. Company A was lined up behind numerous vehicles from Company C and TF Ranger in what was almost a traffic jam. The company commander returned a minute later and told me a company-sized element of TF Ranger was surrounded in the Bakara Market area, had taken a lot of casualties, and was in danger of being overrun. We were to move behind Company C and the Rangers to the new port and prepare to mount another attack to break through.

Two helicopters had been shot down in the Bakara Market area in the heart of General Aideed's guerrilla enclave, and a company size element of TF Ranger was surrounded and fighting for their lives, taking heavy casualties.

Company A would lead the battalion attack.

Knowing the Rangers' situation, it seemed to take forever to move the two kilometers from the airfield to the new port. After 30 minutes, the task force had moved and was now staged on a large parking lot next to the loading docks. About two dozen white, Malaysian Condor armored personnel carriers (APCs) were lined up waiting for us.

The company commander returned from the attack order and told me to hand out every bit of extra ammunition I had on my truck—essentially doubling everyone's basic load. After about ten minutes, the orders group gathered around the

commander's map, and he briefed the plan in about five minutes under a flashlight.

The Plan

The company was task organized as follows: 1st Platoon had the mortar and fire support squad, a medic, and three APCs; 2d Platoon had the engineer squad, a medic, and three APCs; 3d Platoon had a medic and two APCs. Under company control were the FMTT, with front-line ambulance (FLA) and surgeon; a Pakistani tank platoon (four T-55s) and one company HMMWV.

Enemy Situation. The Somali guerrillas completely controlled all areas outside the UN compounds during the hours of darkness. In the Bakara Market area, Aideed had as many as 2,000 guerrilla fighters and a sympathetic populace as well. They were armed with a mix of Soviet bloc and NATO assault rifles, machineguns, RPG-7s, mines, and demolitions. In past firefights we had been in, the Somali guerrillas had proved to be aggressive and bold, even in the face of tremendous firepower. They were capable of operating in fire team and squad size elements and of coordinating the movement and actions of larger elements. They always seemed to know when we were coming, and on which routes, and built hasty obstacles to try to slow our mounted movement. They were fighting in their own back yard and knew it well.

Friendly Situation. A company-sized element of TF Ranger was surrounded by the enemy on the northern helicopter crash site (crash site #1). They had taken 20 to 25 casualties and were in danger of being overcome. The situation at a southern helicopter crash site (crash site #2) was unknown, and there had been no communications with that site for several hours.

A task force had been put together at the New Port to make the rescue attempt under the command of our battalion commander. It consisted of Companies A and C with Company B in reserve. The battalion antiarmor platoon, the scout platoon, and an attached antiarmor platoon from the 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry of TF 2-14 Infantry; the TF Ranger GRF platoon (six armored HMMWVs); 14 to 16 Malaysian APCs (with drivers and track commanders only); and four Pakistani T-55 tanks. Supporting the task force were 10th Mountain Division Cobras and other attack helicopters.

Mission. Company A was to attack to break through and link up with the besieged Rangers at the northern crash site to recover all American casualties.

Execution. The concept of the operation was simple. The company would ride on the Malaysian APCs, attack mounted as far as possible, and break through to TF Ranger. Once on the crash site, we would load the casualties onto the APCs and fight back out to a secure UN compound. The order of movement to the objective would be tanks, commander, 1st and 3d Platoons, followed by the HMMWV FLA and the rest of the battalion.

The company commander made sure we all understood that we would not come back without all American dead and wounded. As was usual for combat missions, I back-briefed him on the complete plan, order of movement, and contin-

gencies, to make sure I knew what to do if he should become a casualty. He decided to take his HMMWV with its two powerful radios for command and control, despite the fact that he and his RTOs would be more susceptible to enemy fire in it. (This later proved to be a good decision.) I was to move at the rear of the last platoon, in one of the HMMWVs of the attached platoon, so that I could better see to navigate along the attack route.

While the company commander went to make final coordination with the Pakistani tank platoon leader and the Malaysian company commander, I supervised getting the platoons loaded on the APCs. The Malaysian soldiers did not speak English but showed us how the APC weapons and doors worked. Being light infantrymen, none of us were accustomed to riding inside an armored vehicle, but it seemed like the way to go, considering the enemy situation and the importance of moving quickly.

The company was ready to move by 2145. I found the company commander, who seemed to be negotiating with the Pakistani tank commander about the route. Both the Malaysians and the Pakistanis had U.S. liaison officers with them, but neither officer seemed to be able to influence what their units would do. It seemed that the tank commander had been ordered to go only about half-way to the objective, and that did not support the plan. The issue finally seemed to be resolved, however, and we prepared to move out.

It took a few more minutes to get the lead tank platoon to move. A sharp exchange over the radio between the company commander, the battalion commander, and the Pakistani liaison officer eventually did the trick. About 2200 the rescue column began to move north along the designated route toward National Street.

The city was very dark, and the street we were on ran west and then turned north again. For a while it was quiet as our vehicles moved toward National Street. The battalion command net was heavy with traffic, and my RTO kept me informed. The anticipation of enemy contact was agonizing. Every alley and building was a potential Somali ambush position. The lead element of the company made the turn onto National Street and headed west. I made the turn and reported to the company commander.

Suddenly, near the head of the column, red streams of enemy fire erupted from both sides of the street, and the familiar sound of incoming small arms and RPG fire broke the silence. Almost simultaneously, return fire was concentrated on several buildings and alleys. After about two minutes or so, the firing died down and we continued to move. After moving several more blocks, the entire company came under fire. Small arms fire whizzed over my HMMWV, and an RPG round exploded near the vehicle in front of me. Everyone in the column was firing into every building and alley that could be used as an enemy firing point.

I had stepped out of the HMMWV, crouching for cover, trying to monitor the company and battalion nets. The sound of small arms fire mixed with enemy RPG, friendly MK19 automatic grenade launcher, and M203 round explosions was deafening. My RTO yelled that he saw some Somalis and

started firing down an alley. I turned, spotting the running men and also engaged them. They disappeared into the darkness. Not knowing whether we hit them, I returned to the company net and called the company commander to try and get guidance on what he wanted. I recommended that the company dismount and fight forward on foot, since I felt that the APCs were attracting the heavy RPG fire and was concerned that entire squads might be destroyed inside them. But the company commander said the battalion commander's

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orders were to fight mounted as far as we could. (He was absolutely right, because the APCs were crucial to our task of evacuating the wounded once we had linked up with TF Ranger.)

The column started moving again under steady enemy fire. I called all the platoon leaders to remind them to exercise fire discipline, because we did not want to run out of ammunition. Communications with the platoons were not very good, because they were inside the APCs and their radios were not transmitting well, but all three acknowledged.

The column kept moving and stopping. Along with the commander and first sergeant, 2d Platoon had dismounted to clear several obstacles. I again asked the commander if we could dismount, and his RTO said, "Negative." The Pakistani tank platoon was now nowhere in sight, and I didn't see them again until the next morning (apparently, they had been ordered to go only so far on National Street and not to advance any farther).

The column again stopped five or six blocks short of the turn toward the Olympic Hotel. The two lead APCs, with the 2d Platoon leader, one of his squads and an engineer team, were separated from the company. The platoon leader had been unable to get his Malaysian driver either to make the correct turn or to stop. The two lead APCs continued down National Street past the intersection where the company was supposed to turn north and continued out of sight of the company commander. The commander repeatedly tried to contact him by radio without success. This element was now separated from the company and out of communications, and we would not hear from them again until early on the morning of the 4th.

(After being separated and taking a wrong turn to the south, their vehicles were stopped and ambushed. Both vehicles were hit by multiple RPG rounds. The lead APC was set on fire, killing one Malaysian and wounding two soldiers of 2d Platoon. Just after they dismounted the APC, it was destroyed by coordinated RPG fire. The platoon leader ordered his surrounded element into a nearby building—after

blowing a breach point into it with a large satchel charge from the engineers. For the next several hours, they fought for their lives until Company C finally linked up with them.)

The company commander now decided he must continue the mission instead of trying to recover the two lead squads. When the new lead APC halted at another obstacle and enemy fire intensified, the commander decided to dismount. The rest of 2d Platoon, under the leadership of the platoon

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sergeant, was already clearing the obstacle by hand while one squad with its M60 machinegunner laid down suppressive fire. I got off my HMMWV and moved up the company column pounding on the APCs to get 1st and 3d Platoons to dismount, and then directed them up toward the lead element of the company. Enemy fire was still flying everywhere, but the soldiers moved quickly along both sides of the street. Squads moved across alleys and streets by having one fire team lay down suppressive fire while the other bounded across.

We were now by the main intersection of National Street and the street Olympic Hotel was on. The company was stretched out about three city blocks on both sides, with the APCs in the middle. I made my way to the commander to get an idea what he wanted. He said we would continue to fight into the northern crash site, but that he was having a hard time getting the Malaysian APCs to move under fire. I moved back to tell the leaders of 1st and 3d Platoons what we were going to do and to push the rest of the company forward.

The company again started to advance, attacking toward the Olympic Hotel (the original objective of TF Ranger several hours earlier). We had no direct communication with the APCs; so I had to move into the street several times to pound on them and motion them forward. They were buttoned up, making it difficult to get their attention or to direct the fires of their heavy machineguns, which they were not firing. I ran back to the attached antitank platoon, which was still firing to the south and north along National Street, and told the platoon leader that my company had started to make the right turn up to the north and they needed to watch their fires, especially the MK19 that was pounding some nearby buildings from which they had taken fire. After cautioning him to maintain control of his fires and watch his ammunition, I moved back toward the front of the company, by now three or four city blocks up the street.

Laboring heavily under the weight of the AN/PRC-77 with his ear to the hand mike, my radio operator kept me updated on what battalion was saying and constantly reminded me to stay out of the street.

When I made the turn back north, the company was stopped, with a lot of incoming and outgoing fire. So I wouldn't be mistaken for a Somali, I yelled, "XO coming through," and moved up past 3d Platoon, which was hunkered down on both sides of the street. A destroyed U.S. five-ton truck was still smoldering in the middle of the street. Both 1st and 2d Platoons were taking and returning a large amount of small arms fire from the Olympic Hotel and nearby buildings and alleys. One APC was up next to the lead platoon. The M60 gunner was mortally wounded, and two other soldiers were hit and yelling for a medic. The battalion surgeon, the first sergeant, and two soldiers from 1st Platoon moved into the intersection under fire to give them aid. Nearby, soldiers laid down heavy suppressive fire until the casualties could be pulled into the relative safety of a depression next to a building.

The commander was pinned down with 1st Platoon. There was bad crossfire from the hotel and several buildings. Despite the efforts of the liaison officer, the lead Malaysian APC refused to move, effectively stopping the company's progress. The company was only five or six blocks from TF Ranger and having a hard time pinpointing which street we should take to make a link-up. (Our maps often did not match up with the ground, and it was difficult to find intersections, especially at night.) The commander moved into the street to make the lead APC move and wanted me to call battalion to get a better fix on where the Rangers were.

I moved back to where the casualties were being cared for under cover and called the battalion commander on the radio. I gave him a brief situation report and our casualty status, and told him we were having difficulty getting a fix on the Rangers' position. He said to continue to push to link up and he would get the Ranger liaison, who was with him, to notify the surrounded element that we were nearby and have them ensure that their infrared strobe lights were on (the link-up signal). The company commander then came on the radio to give the battalion commander a more detailed report.

The company was still pinned down, and the commander told me to get a HMMWV with a MK19 up to the front of the company. I left my RTO with the casualties and moved back along the column, carrying an AN/PRC-126 squad radio on the company net anyway.

Three or four blocks back through the company, on National Street, I found a MK19 HMMWV near the front of the column, the squad leader coolly directing the fires of his MK19 gunner. I told him we needed his firepower and to inform his platoon leader I was taking him. Enemy fire was still intense, and there was still heavy friendly fire all along National Street where the battalion TAC, the antiarmor platoon, and the scouts were. We worked our way back through the company, the MK19 HMMWV following me. It was having a hard time getting by the APCs, and I had to ground-guide it up on the sidewalk several times.

We finally reached the front of the company where the lead APC was stopped and learned that the fire was coming from the large hotel on the left side of the street, about 50 meters to the front of the lead platoon. I guided the MK19 HMMWV

up onto a steep sidewalk so the gunner could get an effective shot and told him to watch my M16 tracer rounds and to work the building from top to bottom. I fired several tracers into the hotel; he fired a spotting round into one of the top-story windows and then fired the grenade launcher on automatic, hitting every single window in the building. The effects were devastating. Concrete fragments flew everywhere, and one or two Somalis fell out of the building.

When the gunner ceased fire, I asked the lead man again where the fire was coming from now. He said it was from the right side of the road. I made sure I could see our lead man on the right side and directed MK19 fires onto a building about 40 meters in front of him. I felt that if we could start attacking forward again the APCs would follow.

I crossed to the left side of the road where the lead man was and told him we were going to continue the attack. I moved to the front of the platoon and forward about a block. The platoon then stopped and directed fires onto the opposite side of the street to cover the lead squad, which now bounded forward. Both squads had fired and maneuvered forward about a block, and I moved back to the casualty collection point (CCP).

The battalion surgeon had stabilized the two wounded soldiers at the CCP, behind 1st Platoon in a small depression next to a building. I had my RTO turn his radio to the battalion administration/logistics net so I could make a casualty report and coordinate a medevac. The battalion XO wanted to send a ground medevac forward from the New Port, but I asked him to stand by. I knew an aerial medevac would be destroyed and a ground medevac would almost certainly be ambushed. I also felt there might be more urgent casualties soon and didn't want to waste the asset yet; the surgeon said he could keep the casualties stable for at least several hours. I called the battalion XO and told him I wanted to keep the casualties with us.

As the company was advancing toward the embattled Rangers, 3d Platoon had moved up next to the CCP. 1st Platoon had taken the lead of the company and was eliminating sniper positions as it neared the Rangers' position. The company's senior medic brought the HMMWV FLA forward, and we loaded the wounded soldiers onto it while 3d Platoon poured suppressive fire down the alleys to cover us. By the time we had finished, the entire company had passed us.

I told the FLA driver and the commander's HMMWV driver to stay with the antiarmor platoon near National Street and then led the FMTT and my RTO to catch up with the company several blocks in front of us. We moved at double time past several alleys from which we received sporadic small arms fire, and in a short time linked up with the company again.

The lead elements of 1st Platoon made contact with the Rangers around 0030 hours. The company commander linked up with the TF Ranger commander to coordinate the recovery of casualties. The first sergeant, the platoon leaders, and I met with the commander to get instructions on how he wanted the company deployed. Our company commander continued to direct the operation, while the Ranger commander concentrated his efforts on his casualties.

The situation on the objective was well under control. The TF Ranger soldiers were consolidated in two or three buildings with security, while more than 20 wounded and three or four dead soldiers were being kept inside. The Black Hawk helicopter was just outside the perimeter on the east side, crushed in between two buildings, with the dead pilot trapped inside. We were still receiving small arms and RPG fire, but as long as we stayed out of the intersections, we were fine. The Special Operations soldiers were understandably tired and short of water and ammunition. They seemed happy to see us, and we were happy to see them as well.

The company commander and the platoon leaders quickly deployed the company into a perimeter around TF Ranger. I went to one of the buildings to coordinate with the medics for the loading of their casualties onto the APCs. Inaccurate small arms fire was still coming in, with an occasional RPG round landing near the APCs; the APCs were attracting most of the enemy fire now. I had to go into the street numerous times to bang on the driver's periscope to get his attention and then guide him forward. Eventually, we got two APCs into the perimeter and next to one of the buildings where the medics began to load the casualties. I talked with several soldiers to find out how many wounded they had and where they were, so I could move other APCs into position.

Out in the street, another of our soldiers was wounded by RPG rounds fired from a nearby building, and a minute later, without warning, an attack helicopter hit the building with 20mm cannon and 2.75-inch rocket fire. I thought the helicopter was firing on our position until I saw the tracers hitting the building only 50 meters north of our position. The expended shell casings dropped into the perimeter. I told the officer who was controlling the air strike to warn us next

As soon as the company began to move, heavy small arms and RPG fire erupted on all sides. Squads and platoons bounded by fire and movement, laying down heavy suppressive fire, while elements sprinted across alleys. The Somalis seemed to know we were making a break for it and were giving us all they could.

time. I had never been so close to an air strike, and all of us were plenty scared. For the next several hours, aircraft continued to fire all around our position 35 to 60 meters from us.

I continued guiding the APCs around. As one was filled, another one moved up to receive casualties. While the casualties were being loaded, several TF Ranger soldiers and one of our squads moved to the helicopter crash site to try to extricate the body of the pilot. One of the soldiers had a power saw for just such a purpose. Meanwhile, four or five other APCs were filled with dead and wounded. By 0330 all casualties were loaded—about 20 wounded and three or four dead.

During this time, small arms and RPG fire continued to come into the company position. At one point the Somalis fired hand-held illumination flares and shortly afterward, we received several mortar rounds in the perimeter, wounding one soldier. Enemy fire would build, two or three RPG rounds would be launched into our position, followed by heavy outgoing suppressive fire and attack helicopter strikes; then things would quiet down for a few minutes. This cycle continued until morning. Three more men from the company were wounded, stabilized, and loaded with the other wounded.

On the south side of the perimeter, we began receiving heavy machinegun fire, most of it two or three feet over our heads. The commander, the first sergeant, and I had been running from position to position through the night, checking the perimeter and reassuring the soldiers. The incoming fire was from the south, mostly machinegun and sporadic RPG fire that was landing about a block away. No one was firing back because the fire was ineffective, and we knew we had friendly units (Company C and the battalion TAC) to our south. At first I thought it was friendly fire, but battalion assured us that no friendly unit was firing to the north. The commander repeated his previous instructions to engage only well-identified targets to the south. The 2d Platoon showed tremendous fire discipline, engaging only a few targets, and about half an hour later the fire died down a bit.

Meanwhile, the team trying to extricate the dead pilot from the Black Hawk was not making much progress. The power saw was taking too long, and one of the Delta operators asked if we had a cable. We did not, but I remembered that armored vehicles usually have tow cables. I found one mounted on the driver's side of an APC, pulled it off with the help of my RTO, and gave it to the recovery team. They took the MK19 HMMWV and the cable and pulled the aircraft apart one piece at a time while the rest of the team provided covering

The company was now spread out along a distance of four or five city blocks, firing and maneuvering at a fast pace. In the tight confines of the streets and alleys, the incoming and outgoing fire was deafening.

fire (the Black Hawk was still attracting Somali gunfire). The rest of the company and the Rangers stayed in the perimeter awaiting word to move out.

At 0500 the recovery team was still trying to recover the pilot. We all knew that once the sun came up it would be difficult to fight our way back out, but we knew we couldn't leave without the dead pilot. By now, the company commander and the Ranger commander were wargaming how we would fight back out. The APCs we had ridden on earlier were now full of wounded, the sun would negate our night

vision advantage, and it was more than three kilometers through the city to the nearest UN compound.

The battalion commander put an end to the discussion by ordering us to exfiltrate back to National Street by the same route we had come in on. The street was secured by the TAC, the scout and antiarmor platoons, the Ranger GRF platoon, and some Malaysian APCs and Pakistani tanks. It was the only road that would really allow the movement of the APCs and tanks; many of the side streets were too narrow.

By 0600 the pilot's body had been recovered and placed on the MK19 HMMWV. The order of march back to National Street would be 3d Platoon, 1st Platoon, 2d Platoon, and then TF Ranger. The APCs would travel in the middle of the formation.

The sun was now up, and 3d Platoon began to move out quickly. The commander moved behind them, and the first sergeant and I picked up the trail of the company, with the Rangers behind us. Although I was not told so, I felt it was my responsibility as company XO to ensure that not only my own company was cleared off the objective but also the 60 or so of TF Ranger who were still effective.

As soon as the company began to move, heavy small arms and RPG fire erupted on all sides. Squads and platoons bounded by fire and movement, laying down heavy suppressive fire, while elements sprinted across alleys. Several Somali gunmen were shot and killed at almost point-blank range by the lead element. The Somalis seemed to know we were making a break for it and were giving us all they could.

The company was now spread out along a distance of four or five city blocks, firing and maneuvering at a fast pace. In the tight confines of the streets and alleys, the incoming and outgoing fire was deafening. The commander directed Cobra gunship strikes along both sides of the road to cover our movement and to suppress heavy fire from the Olympic Hotel. Several more soldiers hit by small arms fire were quickly treated and put on a nearby APC. The Malaysian APC machinegunners were now spraying the second and third floors of surrounding buildings. The lead platoon of the company was now moving so fast that 2d Platoon and the Ranger soldiers were falling behind. Several times, other leaders and I had to run into the street to get the Malaysian APCs moving again.

As my RTO and I neared the hotel, an RPG round exploded several feet behind me. A few moments later, my RTO was hit by a bullet through the arm; its force spun him around and knocked him down. Although bleeding, he picked up his M16, and the first sergeant applied an ace bandage on the move.

I returned my attention to the TF Ranger element that was beginning to break contact with us. They were visibly tired, having to double-time and fight, and many of them were walking wounded. I moved back to encourage them to keep up and continued to bang on the APCs to keep them moving. Now intermingled with the TF Ranger element, I maneuvered with them, trying to make sure everyone stayed together.

The rest of Company A had now reached National Street, and the commander told everyone to get on a vehicle any way

they could. When the Ranger element and I reached the intersection that turned onto National Street, it was receiving heavy automatic fire from two directions. Several Rangers and I laid heavy suppressive fire down both streets while the rest of the element rushed past onto National. We then ran to catch up with the company.

We linked up with the rest of the battalion, and there was still a lot of fire, both incoming and outgoing, especially near the rear of the column at the intersection we had just passed. I grabbed an antiarmor platoon machinegunner and told him where to direct his fires to cover us while we loaded onto vehicles. While the TF Ranger soldiers loaded, I double-timed forward to let the commander know we were clear of the objective. I ran past several alleys and had to be careful as many soldiers were firing off the vehicles; I had to run up behind a vehicle to get their attention before running past.

I eventually came upon the TAC, with the battalion commander, the sergeant major, and the battalion S-3. I told the battalion commander we were cleared off the objective and asked if he would relay that information to the company commander. (I had failed to retrieve my battalion net radio when the RTO was hit, and my small squad radio on company net was not reaching the commander.)

I jumped onto a vehicle loaded with the scout platoon, whose leader had one radio on the battalion net. Then I heard the division commander, in a command and control helicopter overhead, tell the battalion commander that several special operations soldiers were still making their way to National Street. I couldn't believe it; I thought we had everyone. I jumped off the vehicle and ran to the rear of the formation, where I could see two Pakistani T-55 tanks and two M113 APCs moving fast to catch up to the column. Behind them, six or seven soldiers were running as fast as they could under fire to catch the vehicles. But the APCs didn't stop.

I ran up to two armored TF Ranger HMMWVs and sent them back to retrieve the soldiers. I jumped in back with the Rangers, and the HMMWVs moved backwards 400 to 500 meters toward the intersection that was receiving heavy fire. Over our heads in the back, the .50 caliber machineguns fired, suppressing both sides of the road for the running soldiers (and nearly blowing out our eardrums). Once we were near the intersection, the HMMWVs stopped and I jumped out to help the soldiers get onto the vehicles. Small arms fire buzzed all around us and for a few moments we were badly exposed. Both HMMWVs were so full that there was no room for me, so I jumped onto the hood of the front vehicle and hung on for my life as we sped to catch up to the column. Soldiers in the back fired at every alley, taking no chances of being hit.

Soon we were with the column, and I jumped off and ran forward through the convoy to find a safer ride and a vehicle with a battalion net radio so I could tell the company and battalion commanders that the last element was out. I found the S-2's vehicle and jumped on. My message was relayed, and we finally began moving east along National Street toward the Pakistani compound (in an athletic stadium). Sporadic fire was still coming in, and everyone in the vehicles suppressed alleys and intersections as they passed.

Finally, the firing began to die down as we neared the sta-

dium. When the convoy pulled into the safety of the compound, I breathed a sigh of relief. I dismounted the vehicle I was on and moved back to make sure the casualties were being unloaded. Then I moved inside the stadium to find my company. I was physically and mentally exhausted, dripping with sweat, and my cargo pockets bulged with empty M16 magazines. I had fired more than eight magazines and had

Inside the stadium, dozens of wounded soldiers were spread out going through triage with medics and doctors. Medevac helicopters continued to fly in and out with wounded.

three left that I had reloaded from the first sergeant's extra bandolier.

Inside the stadium, dozens of wounded soldiers were spread out going through triage with medics and doctors. Medevac helicopters continued to fly in and out with wounded. I found the company commander and the first sergeant, who looked as tired as I did. Then I found my RTO on a stretcher, awaiting his turn for medevac. He was going to be fine.

Several hours later, the company was airlifted back to the university compound and, per SOP, we began recovery and prepared to go out again if we were called.

The mission to relieve the Rangers and recover all the dead and wounded was a complete success for the company. In all, Company A's casualties were one killed in action, one died of wounds, and 15 wounded in action. Numerous other soldiers had minor injuries.

Despite these casualties, the company as a whole felt proud of accomplishing the mission under very tough combat conditions. We had fought our way in, retrieved all American soldiers, and fought back out again, essentially according to plan. In about four days, after a full recovery and a memorial service for our dead, the company was prepared for, and expected, further combat operations. A cease fire had been declared, however, and we had only minor enemy contact until we left Somalia in December.

EDITOR'S NOTE: In the November-December 1994 issue of INFANTRY, Captain Ferry will complete his account of the battle in Mogadishu with a detailed discussion of the lessons learned from the combat operations his unit conducted in Somalia. These lessons apply specifically at company level and below.

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