Task Force Ranger in Somalia

1st Special Forces Operational Detachment – Delta

3-4 October 1993

By

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INTRODUCTION

On 3-4 October 1993, I was involved in a battle in Mogadishu, Somalia, while assigned to the 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment – Delta. The battle had a significant impact on my personal and professional life and on the Army as a whole. The following is an account of what I personally witnessed during those 18 hours.

BACKGROUND

"It all started when Time magazine ran a cover of a starving child in Somalia; this shriveled little kid who was dying from malnutrition. It was uproar in the American people. We had to do something about this." (Bruckheimer, 2001) In 1991, militant warlords forced the Dictator of Somalia, Said Barre, out of Mogadishu. What followed were inter-clan fighting and the purposeful starvation of approximately 300,000 Somalis. The resulting media attention forced the world to action. In March of 1992, UN observers began arriving in country, and, by August, the UN began sending aid under United Nations Operations Somalia I (UNOSOM I). This effort was largely ineffective, and, by December, the people of Somalia were starving to death at a rate of 1000 per day. By December, the media frenzy reporting the "crisis in Somalia" was at its peak; CNN had even developed a specific hauntingly somber soundtrack for the story. Every evening the world was shown starving children with flies all over their hands and faces as they were eating; this prompted the United States, by midmonth, to conduct a high visibility amphibious landing of approximately 25,000 troops under intense media observation to restore order and facilitate food distribution to help the famine stricken country. President Bush visited Somalia New Years Day of 1993 and deemed the operation a success. (PBS, Frontline, 2001)

By March, 1993, operations in Somalia transitioned to UNOSOM II when the United States returned responsibility to the United Nations. With the bulk of U.S. forces gone from

Somalia, the warlords increased their quest for power. General Mohamed Farah Aideed, leader of the Somali National Alliance (SNA), was the leading contender for assuming the bulk of power in Somalia and began conducting attacks against UN troops. In June, 1993, the SNA ambushed and massacred 24 Pakistani soldiers. This resulted in a UN resolution to target Aideed and to emplace a $25,000 bounty on his head. The U.S. followed with aerial attacks on Aideed's stronghold with AC-130 aircraft and forced him into hiding toward the end of July. Conventional attacks were not able to defeat General Aideed, so a special operations force was assembled at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, for this very purpose. (PBS, Frontline, 2001)

GOTHIC SERPENT

Task Force (TF) Ranger was formed in the middle of August and given the task to capture General Aideed. The operation was code-named "Gothic Serpent." The TF was comprised of B Company, 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment; C Squadron, 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment – Delta; and elements of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR). The operation would be conducted in three phases: phase one consisted of a train-up period, deployment, and preparation for combat operations; phase two consisted of the search for Aideed and operations conducted specifically to capture him; and phase three consisted of the dismantlization of Aideed's infrastructure through the meticulous and methodical capture of the top personalities in Aideed's organization.

The training was realistic, challenging, and almost exclusively live-fire (at least for the main effort.) When it wasn't live-fire, there was ample support from outside units providing non-combatants to test our ability to manage hostile crowds with non-lethal munitions. Our operation was based on a template plan that would apply to any scenario encountered. The two scenarios we focused on were the convoy takedown and the stronghold takedown.

We operated on a reverse-cycle schedule. We would show up to work about 1500, train until about 0300 the following morning, and then repeat. We would conduct several iterations of rehearsals every day in both daylight and night. Each rehearsal was conducted exactly as we would receive the missions in Mogadishu. Intelligence would drive the time and place of the mission. I suspect the time between receipt of the mission and "wheels-up" was probably 20-30 minutes. Senior TF leaders, trying to determine the credibility of the intelligence and deciding whether the mission would be conducted, consumed most of that time. By the time the mission details got to the operator level, we had about five minutes to disseminate, digest, and kit up.

I actually preferred it this way rather than detailed planning. First, it was more fun. Second, detailed plans rarely pan out the way they are designed. I also felt like a monkey could execute a detailed plan. What really tested the unit's capability was the ability of its operators to react to unknown situations as presented on the ground. The detail was in the template plan, and that was all that was required. All we needed to know was where we would be dropped off, where the target building was, where adjacent units were going to be, and who we were going in to get. The template plan would take care of everything else. We conducted these types of rehearsals for approximately ten days before the National Command Authority (NCA) seemingly lost interest in deploying the TF. This was not unusual. We frequently "spun up" and began mission rehearsals for a lot of missions that would never take place. If a mission had the slightest chance of happening, we would conduct rehearsals for it. Most of these missions never took place, but it all chalked up to good training. In the case of Gothic Serpent, however, the TF was dissolved, the Rangers returned to Fort Bliss for a scheduled deployment, and the rest of us went home for the weekend.

PHASE I

That Saturday, 21 August 1993, Aideed's militia killed four and wounded six U.S. Military Police soldiers in a command detonated demolition ambush. It was enough to remove any indecisiveness on the part of the NCA on the decision of going after Aideed.

It was Sunday morning, 22 August 1993, at approximately 0900. I was on my way to church when my pager began to vibrate. I looked at the display; I recognized the coded message that directed the squadron to proceed to work for training. I immediately turned around. When I arrived at work, the first person I saw was Tom S. He told me a deployment order had been signed. A notice on the chalkboard confirmed what he had said. We would leave Wednesday, but, until then, we would resume our mission rehearsals. I proceeded to my team room to prepare my kit.

I was on F Team, Troop 2, C Squadron, 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment – Delta. There were four members of my team for this mission, enough to max out an MH-6 "Little Bird" when wearing full assault kit. I was the most junior member of my team. I had previously come from the 75th Ranger Regiment, serving in B Company, 3rd Battalion, and in the Regimental Reconnaissance Detachment. I was a staff sergeant with about two years in grade and about six years in service. I was 24 years old. Norm H. was my team leader. Formerly from the 5th Special Forces Group (SFG), he was one of the most competent operators in the entire Unit. Jim F. from 10th SFG was the next senior member of the team and would act as the assistant team leader. He was also the team breacher. Greg A. was the next senior member of the team. Greg and I went to the same Operator Training Course (OTC), but he was senior in rank to me.

F Team was one of four teams in the TF main effort. We rode on the MH-6 designated "Star-44" flown by MAJ Ron C. and CW5 Joe S., the last MH-6 in the echelon formation. We

could count on these two men to put us down and pick us up anywhere we needed under any conditions. They were consummate professionals, as were all members of the TF, but had a no-nonsense style that preceded formality. MAJ C. told us, during our initial introduction, "Our callsign is 'Star-44', but if you can't remember that, just get on the radio and say, 'Ron and Joe, come pick us up!'"

We continued our mission rehearsals until our deployment on 25 August. The day before our deployment, the Task Force gathered in the unit dining facility. MG Garrison clearly articulated to us his intent. We would capture General Aideed. It was that simple. He also told us that our mission would no longer be known as Gothic Serpent but as United Nations Operations in Somalia II (UNOSOM II). The General added that "There is nothing in Somalia worth one drop of American blood." He made clear that we were not going to Somalia to kill Somalis but to capture General Aideed and dismantle the infrastructure of his organization. I felt very fortunate to have the opportunity to take part in this operation.

On Wednesday morning, we showed up for work as if it were a typical day. The atmosphere did not seem to be any more urgent than any other day. Squadron members were giving themselves last minute high-and-tight haircuts in the latrine. The haircuts were required for us to blend in with other TF members. We boarded busses that took us to Pope AFB, boarded a C-5 Galaxy, and flew the 17 hour non-stop flight to Mogadishu.

I had never been to Mogadishu before, but it was typical of most "developing nations" I had previously visited. When I stepped off the aircraft, the foul stench of rotting garbage made the country's first impression on me. We began unloading the aircraft and made our way to an airport hangar, which would be our new home for the next several weeks. The hangar was empty, but over time, it would be a project for continuous improvement. Sleeping cots would

soon fill the hangar with areas segmented by waist high walls of sandbags to compartmentalize damage from potential mortar attacks.

Phase one was completed in a matter of days. We established an ammunition supply point, loaded up our equipment and weapons, prepared vehicles and aircraft, and established a Joint Operations Center (JOC). MG Garrison gathered the Task Force once again and spoke to us through a bullhorn on 28 August. He told us that the Task Force was fully mission capable to conduct combat operations. He also told us that he believed "this Task Force is the most capable force ever assembled on the face of the earth." I believe that to this day. For all its limitations, the precision and lethality of the TF was truly impressive. The competence of the Unit members and Ranger NCOs outmatched the best conventional force any world army unit could muster. Any inexperience in the Ranger privates would be offset by their audacity and the historically uncanny ability to rise to the occasion.

We began conducting signature flights almost immediately. Signature flights were designed to condition the enemy to frequent TF launches from the airfield so that the enemy would not be certain if and when we would conduct an actual operation. At first, we would conduct the signature flights full force, but, after a couple days, they became reduced force exercises. The first signature flight I went on was at night. Norm briefed the team on the Rules of Engagement (ROE) for the signature flights. He briefed, "If you see a technical vehicle in the open, you're cleared hot. If you see anyone with a weapon, you're cleared hot. If you have *any* doubt in your mind whatsoever..." I nodded my head, already knowing the rest. We were conditioned never to fire at anything unless we were absolutely sure of the threat. Norm continued, "...you're cleared hot." My eyes widened as I digested this clear departure from normal procedures. It was a simple and welcome adjustment, however. The signature flights were conducted at least once a day and usually twice. We would fly close to the ground as if conducting an actual insertion. Frequently, small children would be throwing rocks at our aircraft

as we flew by. They didn't have the slightest chance of hitting us of course, but it was clear that we were not welcome in some neighborhoods of town. In one incident, after seeing children throwing rocks at us, I leaned out of the aircraft and aimed my SAW in their direction. The children cowered and scattered as if I were shooting at them.

I was configured to carry the M249 SAW on the assault. It wasn't my weapon of choice for clearing rooms, but Norm thought it might come in handy. In all the rehearsals we had conducted, I could see the weapon's utility in the convoy hit role, but, on the assault, I believed the CAR-15 was a more suitable weapon. Norm finally changed his mind the first night Somalis attacked our compound with mortars.

PHASE II

Two mortar rounds landed in our compound that night. We had been mortared before, but none of the rounds had landed close. Previously, many of the TF members cheered as if it were funny. Adjacent units didn't think it was that funny. I didn't either. The same night that MG Garrison declared us mission capable, a mortar round landed directly on the roof of the JOC. There was minimal damage and some very minor injuries, but it was enough for the General to retaliate.

Later that night, I was sleeping in my cot when I felt a presence over me. I opened my eyes to see Norm standing over me. "How fast can you configure for CAR-15?" he asked. I raised my hand in front of my face and snapped my fingers once. "That fast." "Do it," he directed. I immediately sat up and pulled my LBE from under my cot and began replacing SAW drums with 30 round CAR-15 magazines. The General had authorized an attack on what was known as the Lig Legato compound. We conducted the hit that night, rounded up a number of personnel, and exfiltrated without incident; however, this was the first mission where we fell

victim to poor intelligence. The building was supposed to be home to one of Aideed's lieutenants and a security force of some 15 armed militiamen. In reality, it was a headquarters for some UN relief agency. The next day, newspaper clippings posted at the JOC read "Delta Farce Strikes Again" and similar headlines. It's frustrating to read things like that, especially written by someone who clearly has no understanding of how difficult it is to do our job.

Being in combat is a terrifying experience. My experience has taught me that the peak of my anxiety is in the moments before I step off the aircraft. On all our missions, I had absolutely no idea who or what would be on the ground when I got there, and I could feel the anxiety like it wanted to explode out of my chest. On each mission, just before liftoff, I would turn and look back to Norm; we would bump our fists together with a nod in acknowledgement. One would probably never know it from watching me, but, on the flight in, the anxiety would be nearly unbearable. I had to consciously concentrate on calming my nerves. It was at this point my faith in God helped tremendously. Once I stepped off the aircraft and began the assault however, the anxiety miraculously went away, and it was business as usual. It would seem like it would be the other way around, but for me it is not. One might call it "the training taking over."

We conducted several different missions for Phase II. None of them produced Aideed. It was difficult to get timely and credible intelligence in Mogadishu. Perhaps two or three times a day, the TF senior leadership would mull over some intelligence received about Aideed's whereabouts. Each time, the TF would spin up, and sometimes launch, only to be called back and the mission scrubbed. Sometimes we would just turn one of these scrubbed missions into a signature flight since the whole task force was on the aircraft and kitted up anyway.

During the day, most of the TF members would do PT or go to the range down at the beach. We played a lot of volleyball in the afternoons to pass the time. When intelligence would come down that might turn into a mission, these became known as "pants alerts" because it

meant we needed to change from our PT uniform to fatigue trousers and boots in case the intelligence resulted in a mission.

One night we received intelligence that Aideed was attending a meeting at an old Russian compound in the city. We launched as usual and lined up on the compound. I sat on the front left side of our MH-6. Norm sat next to me on the rear seat. After the Lig Legato hit, I now carried a CAR-15 slung across my chest, and I kept my SAW in my hands. It was tethered to the aircraft. I would use it on infil and exfil only and assault with my CAR-15. As we were on approach into the compound, I viewed through my NODs the AH-6s lift up high, level off, then turn down on their gun-runs. It was the first time I had seen them used on infil: miniguns and rockets both.

As we approached the objective, I activated the AIM-1 laser on my SAW and began looking for targets. My anxiety began to lessen as I became more aware of and had more control over the situation. The aircraft was flying forward at about 20 feet into its landing position when I saw them. There were three to four Somalis running from left to right (relative to my position) inside the compound behind an approximately four foot high concrete wall. There is a distinct visual difference between someone who is running as if trying to escape and someone moving rapidly to a different position while carrying something as if to create trouble. My senses were at a heightened state. After all, the AH-6s were shooting at *something*. These Somalis looked too much like crouched commandos rather than terrified civilians. Even though I could only see them from the shoulder up and couldn't ascertain whether they had weapons, my instincts told me they were guilty. The butt stock of my SAW was already shouldered. This is simply the way a commando carries his weapon. I raised the weapon, leveling it on my newly acquired targets. Looking through my NODs over the top of the weapon, I tuned the laser onto the group and fired. I held the trigger down for about two seconds before my SAW malfunctioned. The Somalis had disappeared from view, and, by that time, the skids were hitting

the ground. Without clearing my malfunction, I set my SAW in the back of the aircraft, shouldered my CAR-15, and followed Norm onto the objective. Jim and Greg were close behind.

We cleared multiple buildings and arrested about 30 Somalis but still no Aideed. Close to exfil, Norm and I went over to examine the area where I had engaged the group of running Somalis. Several weapons and several pairs of sandals were scattered in the sand in the beaten zone of my SAW. There was no evidence that bodies had been dragged away. We assumed that I had literally scared them out of their sandals and that they dropped their weapons and ran. Norm jested that I should have lost pro-pay for missing. The next time I had a similar opportunity the enemy was less fortunate.

PHASE III

After having little success relying on various intelligence sources to provide us with information that would lead to the arrest of General Aideed, the TF transitioned to Phase III: the dismantlization of the SNA infrastructure. To facilitate this, the TF was directed to destroy the facility that broadcasted Radio Mogadishu, an anti-UN radio program that Aideed used to propagate his anti-UN rhetoric. Radio Direction Finding (RDF) equipment provided us with a city block that contained the Radio Mogadishu transmitter.

For this mission, we changed our method of infiltration to ground vehicle convoy. The convoy was a collection of turret and cargo HMMWVs. F Team was on a turret HMMWV, the last in the order of movement in and the first out. Since navigation was difficult throughout the city, the lead vehicle received help from a command and control aircraft hovering high above. The aircraft would designate the route with an IR laser so that the lead vehicle would know where to make the appropriate turns. Upon arrival at the objective, the mission went similarly to the others thus far. The execution went well, but we didn't find what we were looking for. As it

would turn out, the Radio Mogadishu transmission equipment was located in a city block adjacent to where we were sent to find it. Several Somali militia were killed on the assault by squadron members. After the search was complete, we began our exfiltration. MH-60s were hovering around the objective, providing air support with 7.62mm miniguns. This created a beacon by which to draw crowds on this night.

As we began our exfil, many Somalis had begun converging on the objective area. War is a spectator sport to Somalis. Even if the area is dangerous for spectators, they still want to come watch. I was in the back of the turret HMMWV trying to determine (discriminate) the intentions of the hundreds of Somalis gathered on the sides of the road. The large majority of them stood unimposing on the side of the road as if watching a parade going by as our convoy passed. Down the street, however, I saw something out of the norm. There were two Somalis about 100 meters in front of us on the left side who were looking as if they had a vested interest in what was coming down the road. My instinct kicked in again, and I spoke one word loud and clear in my mind: "guilty." As we approached the group, I realized there were more of them. I could see them through my NODs much further away than they could see us. They were standing in the middle of an alley that intersected the road we were traveling down. Once we came within about 15 meters of them, they finally realized what was coming at them. A group of about five to seven of them turned and ran straight down the alley perpendicular to the road. As the HMMWV passed the intersection, I could clearly see all of them running straight down the center of the alley, silhouetted against the sandy surface. One of them turned to look back, and, in doing so, he profiled a German G3 battle rifle. My SAW fired seemingly on its own. I don't even remember making a conscious decision to fire, but I held the trigger down as long as I could, making figure-8s with my laser on the center mass of the group. The militiamen began shaking violently as if being attacked by hornets as I fired. As the HMMWV cleared the intersection, I leaned to the rear to get as many last rounds as I could down the alleyway before rounds would begin hitting the corner building. Almost immediately, the ground force

commander, CPT Ben S., was on the radio. "Looks like we're taking some fire from the left side." With that, I looked back and saw every turret in the convoy turn its weapons in that direction. Each HMMWV was alternately equipped with a MK19 40mm automatic grenade launcher or a M2 .50 caliber machine gun. Every vehicle's occupants on the left side fired down the alleyway as they passed. The explosions from the grenades and tracer fire from crew-served weapons made it appear like a 4^{th} of July celebration through my NODs.

That said, during the six missions conducted before 3 October, the TF did not encounter significant enemy resistance and was able to arrest a significant number of SNA members. On one mission in particular, the TF enjoyed success by capturing the SNA's chief financier, Osman Atto. The TF was efficient at achieving its purpose, and TF members at the operator level looked for ways of making themselves even more efficient.

One of these ways was to trade protection for mobility. One can achieve a high level of protection by wearing ballistic helmets, body armor, ballistic "chicken" plates, groin flaps, collars, etc. But, once a soldier is wearing all this, in addition to all the other kit an assaulter may be required to carry, his mobility drops significantly. The decrease in mobility by wearing all this kit is more dangerous. You are more likely to be hit by enemy fire for not moving fast enough. It was not unlikely for an operator to be carrying 70 pounds of combat equipment, not including a ruck. With this in mind, many TF members began leaving gear behind because the precedent set for six missions dictated that certain pieces of equipment would not be required. It was a gradual process, but, by the time the seventh mission started, some of the gear being left behind included ballistic "chicken" plates, survival radios, "excess" water, and night observation devices (NODs).

I was sensitive to the burden of carrying too much equipment. While assigned to the 3^{rd} Ranger Battalion during Operation Just Cause, I was required to jump in an enormous amount of

equipment. On my body were 12 magazines, 8 fragmentation grenades, 2 quarts of water, 36 rounds of 40mm HEDP, a Kevlar helmet, and a flak vest. This was so much equipment that it took two jumpmasters to attach my horizontal chest strap simply because it wouldn't close due to the bulk of equipment. My ruck was worse: 4 more quarts of water, 12 more magazines, 8 more grenades, 36 more 40mm HEDP, 2 M72A2 LAWs, 1 M21 AT Mine, 2 M18A1 Claymore mines, the RRF1 packing list, and a Black & Decker "quickie" saw with masonry blade and extra quart of fuel. All this was crammed into a prototype "Vector" ruck which I was physically unable to put on my back because of the weight. Upon seeing me struggle to put the ruck on my back in the hangar, a Lieutenant from 2nd Ranger Battalion, stopped to tell me, "Your ruck is entirely too heavy... Dump your water." With that, four quarts of Gatorade were poured down the drain. My ruck made it to the drop zone but never made it to the assembly area. The two quarts of water in my LBE were consumed within the first five minutes of landing on the drop zone, and I was on the edge of heat exhaustion for the next 48 hours until we were relieved by the 7th Infantry Division. I could have used more water and fewer mines, fewer magazines, fewer HEDP, fewer LAWs, fewer "quickie" saws, and fewer RRF1 packing list items.

Hence, I absolutely *refused* to leave my water behind in Mogadishu. It was the right decision. However, I compromised and left behind some non-lethal munitions, my PRC-112 survival radio, and, most significantly, my NODs. Of course, I only left them behind on daylight missions. No mission up until then had lasted longer than 90 minutes. On Sunday, 3 October 1993, we had another "pants alert" at approximately 1500. I decided I wouldn't need my NODs that day either. This was the wrong decision.

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I was playing volleyball when my Troop SGM got my attention and simply informed me, "Pants alert." I quickly moved over to my cot and began putting on a set of BDUs. Soon after, I

saw Norm enter the hangar at a brisk pace. We finished putting on our kit and moved out of the hangar onto the airfield to our aircraft. Norm briefed us on the way and showed us a photocopy of an aerial photograph of the target building. We were going into the Bakarra Market area where a meeting was taking place that included two Tier 1 personalities: Osmar Salad Elmi and Mohamed Hassan Awale. The target building was located on Hawlwadig Road and across the street from the Olympic Hotel. Norm showed us where the aircraft would set us down in relation to the target building. There really wasn't anything more to say.

Norm and I exchanged our usual salute, and the aircraft lifted off. I fought back my usual anxiety as the formation of aircraft circled the city to line up on Hawlwadig Road. As we descended into the objective area, I scanned for targets on the ground with my SAW. Somalis were running everywhere as the dust began to form from the aircraft rotorwash. In time, I could see nothing. I wasn't sure if the aircraft was going to land or hover in place, so I stowed my SAW in the back of the aircraft and secured the fast rope, getting ready to throw it out. The brown out was so thick I could barely see ten feet in front of me.

I had great faith in the pilots who were flying our aircraft. The pilots from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment are, without question, the finest pilots on the face of the earth. On a previous mission, we were being put down onto a narrow street. There were power lines on both sides of the road and a box truck driving down the street. Fearlessly, the pilots of Star-43 dropped their aircraft onto the street between the power lines in front of the moving box truck. The box truck fishtailed to a halt in a desperate attempt to keep MH-6 tail rotor from becoming a permanent fixture on the front cab of the truck. I watched this with wide eyes as our aircraft landed behind the box truck. Both aircraft lifted off as if nothing was amiss as soon as the assaulters were on the ground. Instead of requiring us to fast rope, if there was a way to put us on the ground, they would find it.

Descending on Hawlwadig Road, I prepared to drop the fast rope onto the ground when I felt the skids touch down in the sand. I could still barely see anything, but I saw Norm move out perpendicular to the direction of flight, and I instinctively followed. We moved directly into a building that was some sort of crude store. There were empty glass soda bottles in plastic crates stacked in the corner of the room. We ordered the Somalis to get down using the internationally recognized hand and arm signal: pointed rifle and an open palm lowered in a rapid downward motion. It took us several minutes to move to the target building. We had been set down at least a block away. As we moved to the target building, I could hear the first reports of the distinctive sonic crack made by bullets passing nearby. The bullets could be passing next to my ear or 50' away. It's impossible to tell, especially when wearing earplugs, except that the bullets are definitely out there.

We finally turned the corner to the target building and proceeded inside. We were the last assault team into the building, having been dropped off the farthest from the objective. We moved up to the second floor and joined the assault in progress.

The Somalis we encountered in the buildings were generally cowards. They were brave when it came to shooting at us from far away, but once they knew that assaulters had entered the building, they would throw their weapons out the window and give up. I never had to shoot anyone or heard of anyone shooting a Somali inside a building on the assault. When F Team made it to the rooftop, the members of E Team were already there. They were taking cover behind the raised wall on the roof in an effort to protect themselves from fires from one of the Ranger blocking positions. The squad leader at that position had seen the E Team members moving around on top of the building and engaging targets beyond. He misidentified them as hostile and directed his SAW gunner to fire at the assaulters on top of the target building. The E Team Leader, Paul H., was understandably furious over the incident and used it as the basis by which to harbor deep resentment for Rangers. The squad leader of the blocking position was

relieved of his position after the battle and sent home immediately. He then became a MOUT instructor at the Ranger Training Brigade.

We consolidated the Somalis we had arrested in the walled-in courtyard outside the target building. There were perhaps 20 of them. There was only one entrance into the courtyard, secured by a couple Rangers, so I felt somewhat unemployed as we waited for the word to move the prisoners to vehicles provided by the Ground Reaction Force, a platoon of Rangers in HMMWVs and 5-ton trucks. One of the Rangers at the entrance was holding a pressure dressing to his neck. However, the wound was not serious.

The firing was becoming more intense in the area. I could see Rangers firing their weapons down the street outside the courtyard. Feeling idle, I wanted to get in the fight and help out. My Troop SGM ran in the entranceway with a smile on his face cheering, "Whew! Whoo!" as if he had found some kind of fun in beating the odds of running across the street. I wasn't in the mood he was. Steve C., a C Team member and former OTC mate, looked at me reflectively and simply stated, "This is some shit." I nodded in agreement.

The prisoners we had arrested were finally moved out to vehicles of the ground reaction force, and we were preparing for exfil when the radio message came down. The MH-60 designated "Super-61" had crashed. Norm briefed the team, "A helo has crashed; we need to go secure the site." "Where's it at?" I asked. Norm gestured to the northeast, "Over there somewhere." I knew better than to ask for more details. They simply weren't available and weren't of immediate importance anyway. We excelled at adapting to the unknown. This would be another opportunity, albeit unwelcome, to do so.

Scott M. was the squadron operations officer at the time and was acting as the ground force commander. He organized the assault force and got it moving east down the road toward

the crash. We moved in a column formation on both sides of the street. We took advantage of cover as best as we could while moving down the street, but we took casualties anyway. We could hear the sonic crack of bullets passing down the street but very rarely could we see the actual shooters. Many times the Somalis would simply stick their weapon around the corner and fire off a magazine in our general direction without aiming. I saw a Ranger across the street get hit and go down. It was frustrating because there appeared to be nothing to shoot at, no known enemy positions to suppress.

We traveled east for two blocks and arrived at an intersection. The ground reaction force drove by from north to south. There was a distinct difference in operating procedure when I saw it. Instead of Rangers and operators boldly pulling security from their positions on the vehicles, they were maintaining very low silhouettes as if they had driven through several ambushes. The convoy passed, and we continued east one more block before turning north.

At the corner of the intersection, the enemy fire began to increase. Greg engaged targets with his M203 at the intersection, and the column turned north. As we moved north up the street, it was clear we were getting near the crash site. I could see Rangers and operators down the street at an intersection ahead and could clearly see Somali militiamen further beyond. I took up a kneeling firing position and engaged targets down the street. At this point, I could see women and children intermingled with the militiamen, making target acquisition difficult.

We continued to move north toward the crash site when enemy fire began impacting close around us. Two members of B Team, Earl Filmore and Mike M., went down. Norm directed me to enter and clear the building next to us and establish a casualty collection point (CCP). I entered the building. Greg followed me in. There was a family inside the building. After ensuring they had no weapons I instructed them to sit in the back corner of a room and be quiet. I never heard a peep from them the rest of the night.

After the building was clear, we began to consolidate casualties in the building. The Troop 2 medic, Bob M., treated casualties while F Team secured the entryway. There were Rangers still outside in the street who were trying to take cover behind corners of buildings; however, this tactic was largely ineffective because of the nature of the 360 degree threat.

Chris F. ran in the building and fell down, claiming he was hit. I tried to hold him down while Bob isolated and exposed the wound under his body armor. On his lower back side, where his kidneys would be, there was a five inch diameter area where it appeared the skin had been burned off like a giant blister. Whatever hit him did not penetrate the soft portion of the body armor. His armor saved him quite a bit of pain.

Shortly after that, John B., the B Team Leader, entered our building and informed us, "Earl's dead." I couldn't believe it. I had just seen him a few minutes before. I saw Earl get hit and go down, but it was surprising to me that he was dead. I stayed in a state of disbelief until I saw his body several hours later.

By this time, other TF members had secured the crash site. A Ranger blocking position had already made it to the crash site, and the Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) had been inserted. At this point, we were consolidating our positions to defend the crash site until a plan could be put together for extraction. We continued to collect casualties at our position and form a strongpoint in our building. CPT Mike Steele, the Ranger Company Commander, was outside our building in the prone behind a tree with his Fire Support Officer (FSO), 1LT Jim Lechner.

The enemy fire was dangerous outside. Rangers were still being wounded from enemy fire. It was clear that there was a certain amount of safety inside the buildings. We told CPT Steele to move his CP inside the building, but he refused. Finally, we were able to convince him

to move inside. CPT Steele and 1LT Lechner got up and quickly began moving inside our building when 1LT Lechner let out a terrifying scream and fell to the street. As if seeing things before they happened, Bob had come from behind and rushed out the door into the street. He was nearly knocked down by CPT Steele running into the building. Norm followed Bob out, and I instinctively followed my team leader. Dan N. from A Team came out as well. We took up kneeling firing positions out in the street and fired our weapons to suppress the enemy so Bob could drag 1LT Lechner to safety inside the building. As Bob dragged him by me, I looked down briefly at 1LT Lechner's wound. He had been shot through the lower leg. About two inches of his tibia had been completely blown out of his leg, and blood was running out as if someone had turned on a garden hose full blast. I had to turn my head. We withdrew back into the safety of the building, and Bob treated 1LT Lechner's wound and continued to triage.

As darkness approached, we all felt stupid for leaving our NODs behind at the airfield. There was still firing around the perimeter of the TF, but the Somali advance was more sporadic than continuous. I shut off my radio and handed Norm my batteries. We didn't know how much longer we would be here, so it was important to conserve battery power. Only team leaders would have communications on the Troop net from now on. Norm activated his infrared (IR) strobe and threw it on the roof the building to mark our position to prevent fratricide from our AH-6s that were making gun runs throughout the night.

Soon after nightfall, an MH-60 flew over at low level and pushed out MK-19 ammo cans full of CAR-15 magazines and water cans. Enemy fire erupted violently as the aircraft slowly passed over. It sounded like militiamen were firing from the very next door. I had fears the enemy was going to take up a position directly across the street and fire a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) into our position. I told Norm that I thought we should be trying to maneuver on some of these Somalis. My suggestion was either unheard or dismissed.

Not much later, a call came from Scott M. asking for some crew-served weapons to help build up the intersection between us and the crash site. CPT Steele refused, saying he didn't want to move any of his Rangers. F Team was still securing the entrance to the building. There were a lot of casualties in the back of the building but also a lot of able but unemployed Rangers. Norm decided that, since CPT Steele would not send his Rangers to the next building, we would go and leave security of this building to him. F Team stacked on the door.

Norm led the way, and the rest of the team followed. As we turned the corner to go down the tight space between the buildings, we found the area blocked by debris. Enemy fire began picking up, so we quickly rushed to our original position. Norm went again by himself and cleared the debris and called the rest of the team forward. We entered the next building through a hole in the wall and helped fortify the cross-coverage defense of the intersection. Earl lay dead on the floor of the room I was in.

The TF was unable to move due to the amount of casualties we had taken. We also didn't have the organic assets to safely get us out of the city. As a result, an armored column of Pakistani and Malaysian vehicles with the Quick Reaction Force from the 10^{th} Mountain Division, under TF leadership, was organized to extract us from the objective area. It took the column about 2.5 hours to travel about two miles to our location due to the enemy resistance. In the meantime, we continued to defend our perimeter.

We had our small arms to protect us as well as air support from AH-6s. At times, it was necessary to direct air strikes of 7.62mm miniguns and 2.75 inch rockets as close as directly across the street. I could see the AH-6 approach silhouetted against the night sky. Its line of fire was directly over our position. I was reminded of an incident in Operation Just Cause where my platoon was engaging an enemy force in a building, and we called in an AH-6 air strike. The AH-6 missed the target the first time, and, when it came around for the second pass, it strafed

half the line of my platoon, killing two Rangers and wounding several others. That night in Mogadishu, however, they would get it right. The difference was that in Panama we did not have our position sufficiently marked so that the AH-6 pilot could easily identify us. In Mogadishu, we had several IR strobe lights marking all the friendly positions. Still though, as the AH-6 approached, I began to flinch slowly as if it would help. The AH-6 strike was on target however, and the enemy wasn't heard from again.

The AH-6 pilots played a key role in keeping a lot of militia out of our area. After the battle, I spoke with one of the AH-6 pilots, CW3 Paul White, about what he had seen and done the night before. I asked him how many Somalis he had killed. He replied, "Maybe two... or three... hundred. The AH-6s worked in two teams of two. He explained that they would observe a group of 10-15 Somali militiamen running down the street towards the battle. The lead AH-6 would strafe the group with miniguns and rockets. A number of the group would be killed while the rest of the group would scatter into nearby buildings. After the first AH-6 would pass from its gun-run, the militiamen would assemble on the road again and continue their movement toward the battle. This was just in time for the #2 AH-6 to be lined up on the same target to finish the job.

The column finally arrived at about 0200. The 10th Mountain Division soldiers were dismounted alongside of Pakistani wheeled Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs). Dan N. and I began preparing Earl's body for loading on the vehicles. Earl was already stiff. Dan massaged Earl's shoulders so that he would keep his arms straight to his side. It didn't work. We ended up flex-cuffing his arms to his belt and his ankles together. Earl was still gripping one of his NOMEX flight gloves in his hand.

We placed Earl on top of one of the APCs and loaded the remainder of the casualties inside. The 10th Mountain Division soldiers got back in the APCs and shut the hatches. There

was no room for the rest of us. It didn't matter at the time; we weren't leaving yet anyway. Norm led us down to the position that Scott M. occupied. Scott was trying to assess the situation and figure out what needed to be done before the rest of us could exfil. Scott asked the assembled team leaders, "Who still has a full team left?" Norm looked at me, took a deep breath, stepped forward, and replied, "Right here." Scott directed us across the street to help out with the crash site. We moved out immediately.

The aircraft had landed on its side. The body of one of the pilots, CW4 Clifton Wolcott, had been trapped inside. It would take some equipment to remove him. Norm directed the team further down the alley to push out security to protect the crash. Greg and I pushed down the alley about 75 meters and pulled security. A couple of Rangers eventually joined us. One of them had a SAW. At this point, we shot at everything we saw. The situation was too sensitive to allow any Somalis to exploit the ROE and cause more casualties. There were several kids down the alley about another 50 meters. They kept running back and forth across the alley repeatedly as if it were some kind of game. Every time they ran across, the Ranger SAW gunner would engage them, but the exposure was too quick to hit them. Feeling useless at this position, I returned to the crash site to help.

Cliff was on his left side. His left leg was pinned in by helicopter wreckage. We pulled up a HMMWV to the front of the wreckage and attached a tow strap to begin pulling the aircraft apart to access Cliff's body. The aircraft came apart little by little but not enough to free Cliff's body. Dawn was falling over Mogadishu, and we didn't want to be here when it got light. LTC Lee Van Arsdale finally commanded, "Alright enough of this. Get him out of there." I reached down into the wreckage and managed to wrap the tow strap over his neck and under one of his arms. It was the best I could do. The HMMWV pulled slowly as the tow strap began riding up under Cliff's arm. I pushed his arm down fearing his arm was going to snap and spray blood all over me, but we were able to pull Cliff's body from the wreckage after some difficulty. We then

bagged Cliff's remains and loaded him in the HMMWV. Luke V., the squadron Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD) technician, prepared the aircraft for demolition. We moved back out to where the APCs were waiting and finalized accountability of all TF personnel.

It was daylight. There was no room inside the APCs for the 40-50 TF members who were able to move on their own. Norm instructed the team that we would run alongside the APCs and use them for cover on the way out. The APCs began moving down the street past the target building and turned south on Hawlwadig Road. At this point, they accelerated to about 30 miles per hour and left us behind.

The situation was desperate. If we had taken a single casualty on the run out of the area, the TF could have been rendered immobile again. We had also had enough of allowing the Somalis to exploit the ROE to their advantage. On this run down Hawlwadig Road, if we saw a single Somali trying to interfere with our movement, he was put down immediately: man, woman, or child.

We moved down Hawlwadig Road for eight blocks before turning east on National Street. There, a number of HMMWVs were lined up on the side of the road. We were still taking fire from Somali militia. F Team consolidated behind a HMMWV. At this point, a 10th Mountain Division M60 gunner who was firing his machine gun wildly from the turret of a HMMWV across the street nearly wiped out the whole team. Multiple rounds from the M60 impacted into the building several feet above our heads. The soldier was kneeling inside the turret of the HMMWV with his head down and hands over his head grasping the weapon and firing it out of control. I yelled at him to get behind the sights of his weapon. Another TF member, who was not fixed by his fire, rushed across the street and violently "corrected" him.

We loaded the HMMWV when accountability was reestablished, and we drove out of the SNA controlled area to a stadium controlled by the Pakistani UN contingent. There we triaged our casualties and gathered our dead. I was sent to a room in the building to get the bodies of any squadron members. When I saw Earl's body again, I could barely recognize him. It wasn't because of his wounds; he just simply looked different. He was still gripping his NOMEX flight glove. I retrieved some help from my team, and we carried him out into the field. Casualties were loaded on aircraft on the field and flown out to the airfield. After the situation became more orderly, Norm and I sat down high in the stadium seats. I offered him my fist, and we exchanged our usual salute.

F Team finally returned to the airfield after being at the Pakistani Stadium for about an hour. I retrieved my SAW from Star-44 and moved to my cot. The compound was a disaster. There were shot up vehicles sitting in pools of diesel fuel and used bandages and bloody litters everywhere. I felt fortunate not to have been hit. I returned to my cot, took off my gear, and began refitting my equipment. I learned that an additional MH-60 had been shot down, and there were a handful of TF members still in the city that were Missing In Action (MIA). I also learned about the other TF members who were killed. I exchanged all my non-lethal munitions for more ammunition and fragmentation grenades. When my equipment was ready to go back out into the city, I finally lay down on my cot and rested.

THE AFTERMATH

Our mission to capture Aideed shifted to recovering any MIAs and the one prisoner taken by Somali militiamen, CW3 Michael Durant. Another Ranger company and Delta squadron arrived from the United States to reinforce our TF. After the SNA returned Durant and the remains of our MIAs, our mission went away completely, and we were sent home. Just like that.

Our mission has become known in the media as a failure, a debacle, a catastrophe, and a hundred other words to imply that we did not perform as we were expected. I submit that our mission was a success. All our mission objectives were accomplished. We captured the two top SNA lieutenants we were sent there to get. There were casualties, but, when soldiers are sent on combat operations, casualties must be expected.

The next question is, "was it worth it?" I believe it was not worth it. We were sent to capture Aideed in order that peace and stability could be returned to Somalia and that people could freely receive the food shipments intended for them. In return, we got bloody causing an embarrassment for the existing administration which, in turn, "pulled the plug" on our mission. A week or two after we returned home, 10th Mountain Division soldiers were performing security detail functions for Aideed. The policy shifted from arrest to protect.

I disagree with Bruckheimer that "we had to do something about this." If it were so, we would be there now. Somalia is the same pathetic, backward country now than it was when we were sent there in 1993. Only now, different warlords are oppressing different people. If we really cared about Somalis, we would have finished the job and restored stability. Starving Somalis were nightly news in 1992-1993. Somalis are starving today, and the media isn't interested in reporting anything about it.

If one were to try to find something positive to conclude the battle, that might be that the survivors of the TF became more competent soldiers from our experiences there. The lessons that the Army generally gives lip service to were all reinforced and permanently instilled in our psyches: the value of battle drills, combat life saver training, marksmanship, and physical training. We learned that small unit leaders make the difference in stressful environments and that younger soldiers should be trained and prepared to take the place of their leaders at least one level up. We learned that everyone is a medic and should be able to stop bleeding in even

the most horrific wounds. We learned that Army Physical Training does not lend itself well to the rigors of urban combat. Pushups, situps, and two mile runs do not train a soldier well to do the obstacle course style tasks required of him like jumping up through windows, sprinting across streets, and dragging wounded comrades out of harm's way, all required in addition to carrying heavy loads. We learned that the street is the most dangerous place to be in a hostile urban environment. It makes little sense to move slowly down a street trying to point a gun at every possibly enemy location when you'll never see the enemy who is shooting at you anyway. We learned that non-lethal munitions proved absolutely worthless. Flashbangs, "stinger" grenades, and beanbag rounds had little effect in the role of crowd control. The only thing that Somalis understood was force, and, when it was used judiciously, the Somali crowds stopped operating on the edge of our ROE and became more manageable.

I also learned that war is not personal. I had no personal vested interest in what I was doing in Somalia, other than fighting for my mates on my left and right. I didn't hate my enemy, though I probably had good reason to. They were criminals for the most part, but I didn't allow their illegitimacy as an opposing force cloud my judgment.

The battle on 3 October 1993 has already had a significant impact on the way the U.S. Army fights and the way it is employed. The lessons learned by TF members that night should continue to be implemented so that other units will not make the same mistakes.

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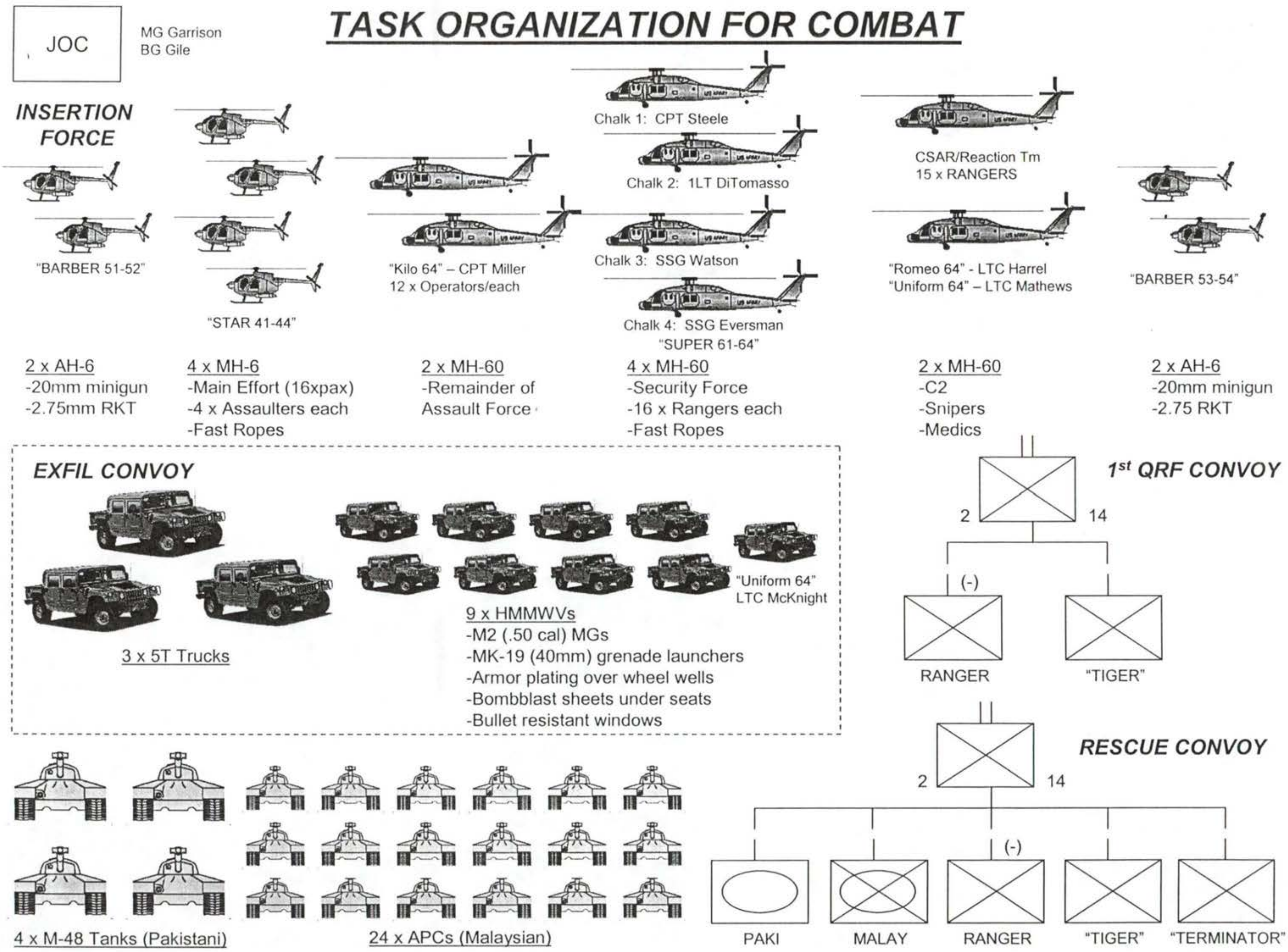
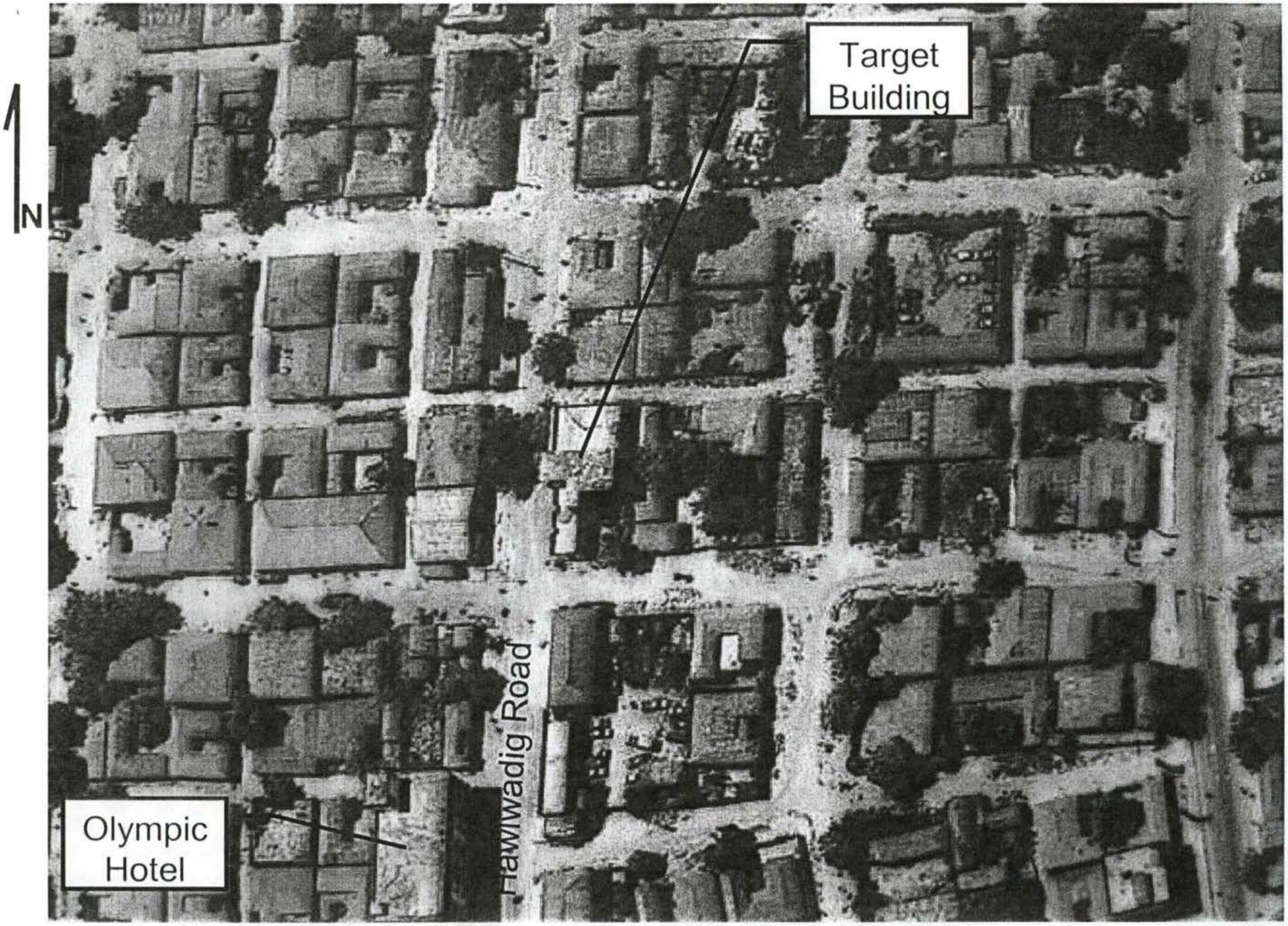
TASK ORGANIZATION FOR COMBAT

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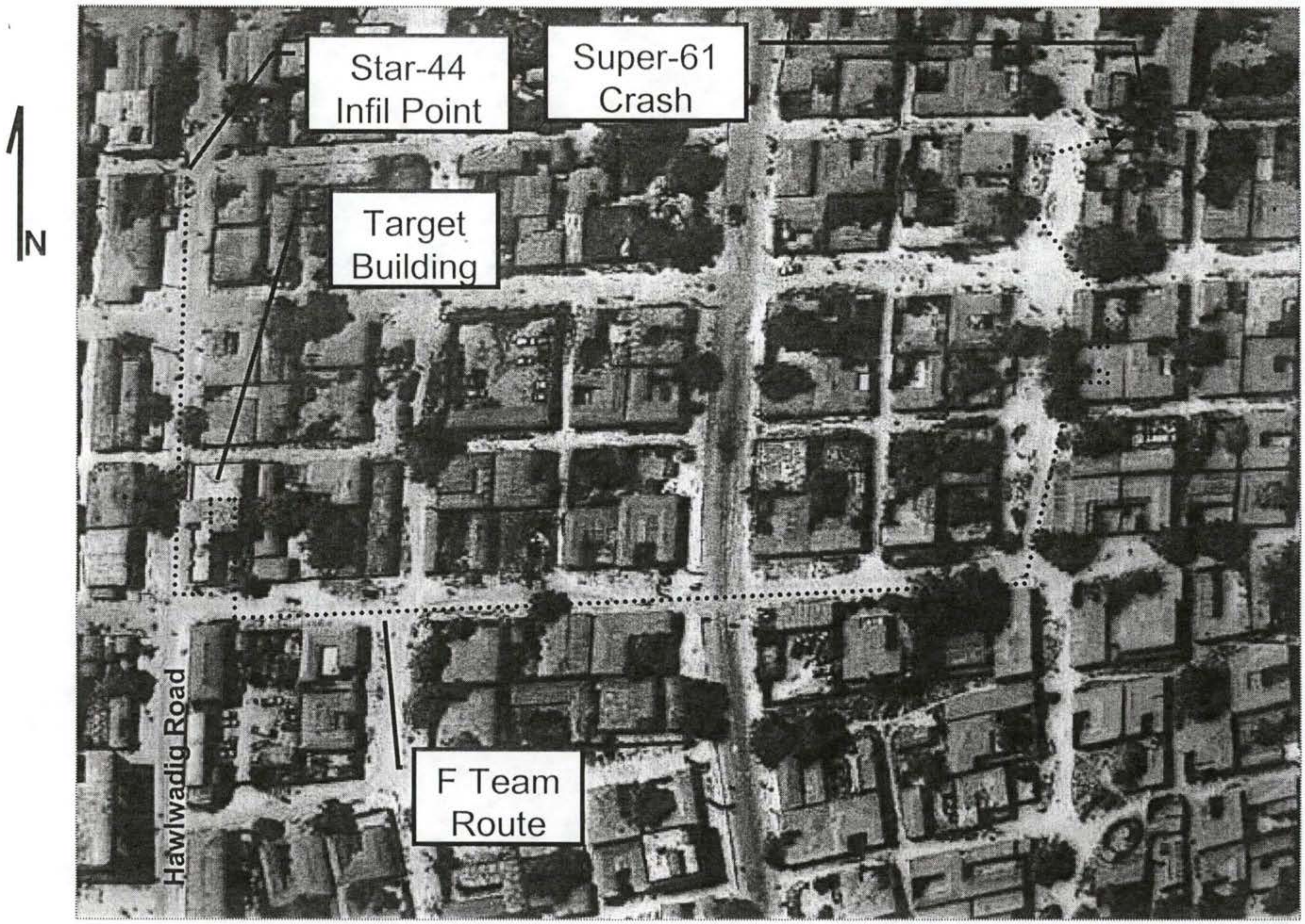
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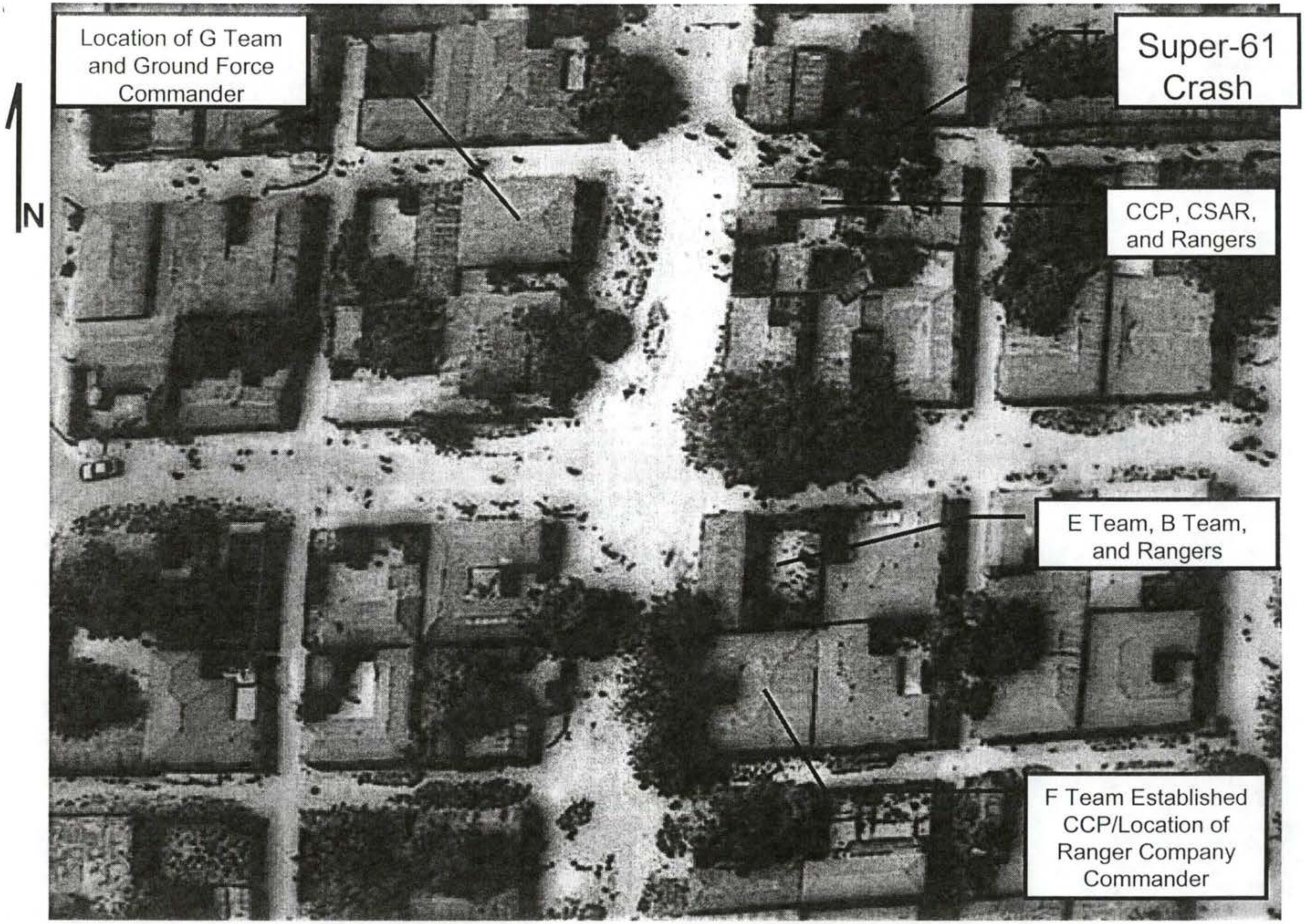
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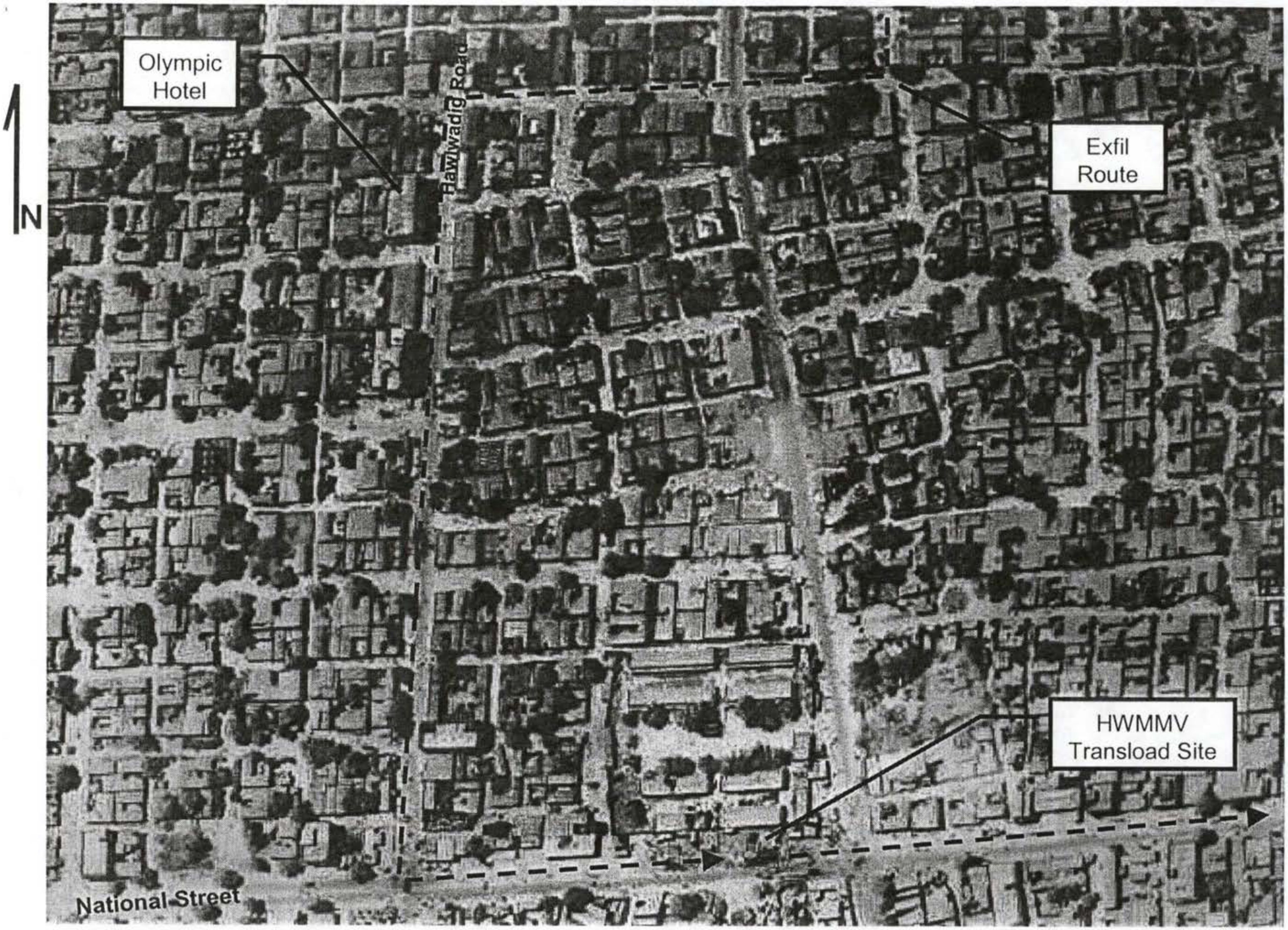
E Team, B Team, and Rangers
F Team Established CCP/Location of Ranger Company Commander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