Platoon Under Fire

Mogadishu, October 1993

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During the battle in Mogadishu, Somalia, on 3-4 October 1993, a rifle platoon was separated from the main body of the company, ambushed, and pinned down. I had become leader of this platoon—2d Platoon, Company A, 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry, 10th Mountain Division—on 25 July 1993, just five days before it deployed to Mogadishu as part of the UN Quick Reaction Force (QRF). This is the story of the "lost platoon" as it worked to break out of an encirclement and link up with friendly units.

The 10th Mountain Division elements and support units relieved the United States Marines, who had been sent into Mogadishu in the fall of 1992 to establish order and allow the distribution of food to starving Somalis. These U.S. forces operated under UN command on a mission of mercy, but they still had to deal with pockets of unrest. One of these was Mogadishu, which gained the attention of U.S. forces. General Farah Aideed and his Somali National Alliance (SNA) wanted control of the country and would stop at nothing to attain that goal.

The SNA was blamed for such incidents as the ambush of a Pakistani unit and the command detonation of a mine that killed four American military policemen, which spurred the United States to action. The authorities issued warrants for the arrest of Aideed and his lieutenants. A special operations

group known as Task Force Ranger (TF Ranger)—composed of one Ranger company, a contingent of assault and attack helicopters, and other elements—was sent to the region to search for and capture Aideed. *(For a detailed account of Company A's overall role in this operation, see Captain Charles P. Ferry's two-part series: "Mogadishu, October 1993: Personal Account of a Rifle Company XO," INFANTRY, September-October 1994, and "Mogadishu: October 1993: A Company XO's Notes on Lessons Learned," INFANTRY, November-December 1994.)*

The 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry, unlike others sent previously, was staged in Mogadishu and did not escort convoys outside the city. The battalion's mission was to act as a QRF for U.S. and UN forces in case of trouble. The battalon task force organized the three rifle companies to accomplish certain missions—support, main supply route (MSR) security and training, and QRF. Each of the platoons would execute one of the assigned missions for three days and then rotate duties, a procedure that maintained combat readiness, assured cross-training, and prevented mission burnout.

Elements from Headquarters Company (HHC) and transportation assets augmented the QRF company. The transportation company provided five-ton trucks, which were sandbagged for protection. HHC provided security assets such as armored HMMWVs (high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles) and medical assets, including a front line ambulance. Engineers and field artillery observers also joined the QRF as needed.

The QRF elements ate, slept, and attended all meetings with the current QRF company. Reaction time was meant to be less than 15 minutes. We soon had it down to less than five.

Early in the afternoon of 3 October, elements of TF Ranger were stranded during a daylight raid to capture Aideed. The task force had executed nighttime raids in the previous weeks without success, and planners believed this daylight raid would be worth the risk.

The mission changed when Somali gunmen shot down one of the UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters used for the Ranger insertion. The TF Ranger operation now became a rescue and recovery operation. The Rangers pulled off their initial objective, the Olympic Hotel, and secured the helicopter crash site. There, they were engaged by a numerically superior force, took numerous casualties, and were trapped. Another Black Hawk was shot down. The second crash site, about one kilometer south of the first, became known as Crash Site 2 (Figure 1).

The battalion's Company C, the QRF company, was sent to relieve the embattled Rangers. But the five-ton trucks carrying the soldiers were easy targets for Somali gunmen with rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), and the column, having sustained heavy casualties, retreated to the airfield to

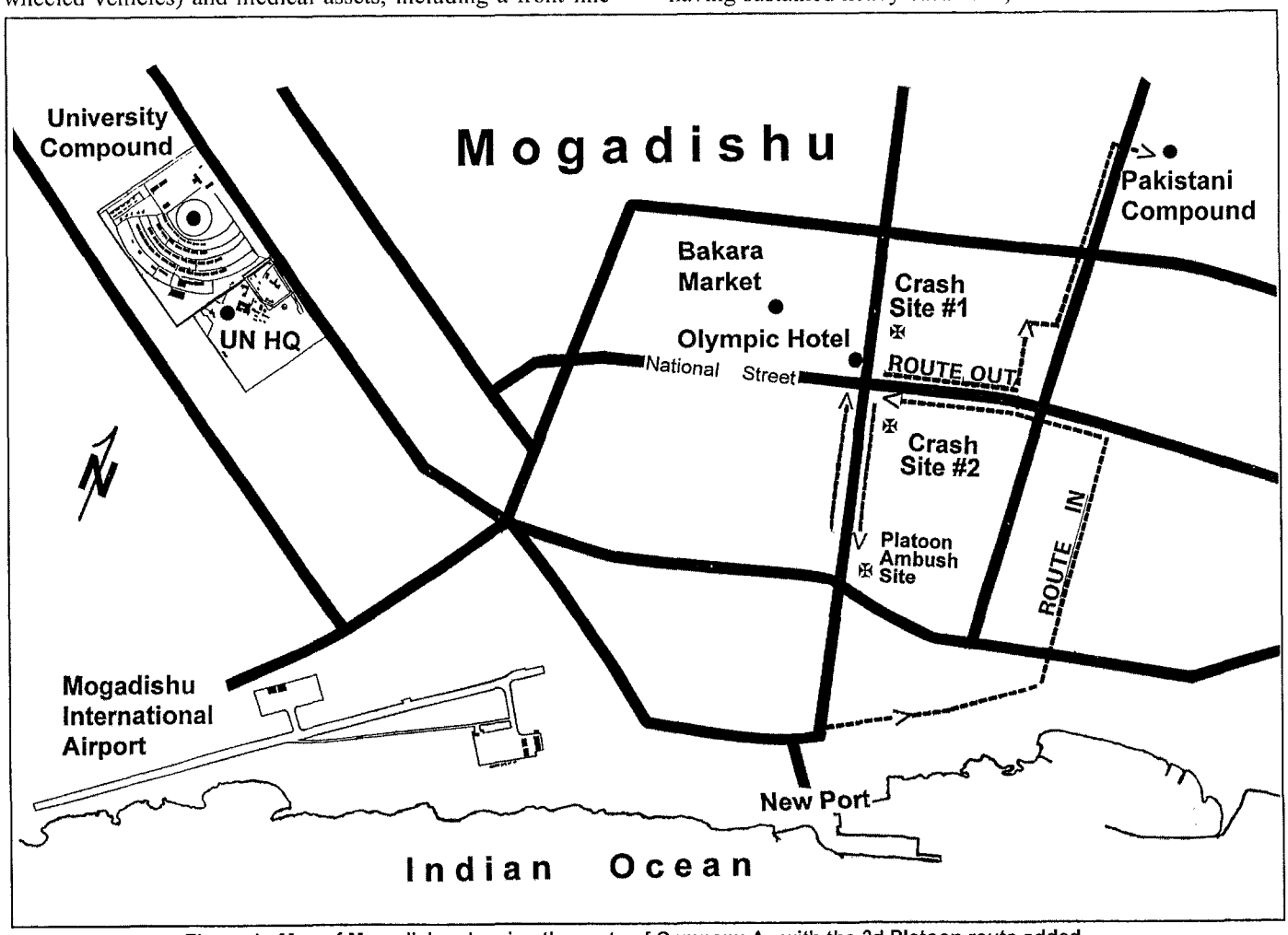

Figure 1. Map of Mogadishu showing the route of Company A with the 2d Platoon route added.

regroup. The battalion commander organized a second rescue attempt, and soon Company A linked up with Company C at the airfield to resume this mission.

Company A, which was on the support mission cycle, was sent to reinforce Company C at the airfield, while Company B conducted training north of the city. Because vehicles were not readily available to move both companies at the same time, Company A, located at the university compound, was moved first while vehicle assets were freed to move Company B later.

Because of the support requirement, Company A's 2d Platoon had been tasked to provide one squad to augment the airfield's internal QRFs, and the platoon's 2d Squad was sent to perform the mission. This meant that 2d Platoon was missing one rifle squad. The company commander assessed the situation and placed the engineer squad under 2d Platoon's control.

We arrived at the airfield around 2030 hours. Companies A and C linked up with the rest of TF Ranger. I attempted—unsuccessfully—to make contact with my 2d Squad on the platoon and company nets, then switched to battalion and tried again. Told to clear that net because of incoming orders, I switched back to the company net and awaited instructions.

Minutes later, the company commander informed us that elements of TF Ranger had been trapped and were in danger of being overrun. He said the company was moving over to New Port where we would load onto armored personnel carriers (APCs) for the trip to the Rangers' position.

The column began moving with Company C and elements of TF Ranger in the lead, followed by Company A. Upon arrival at New Port, final pre-command inspections were completed, more ammunition was issued, and the commander moved forward for more instructions.

The plan he returned with was simple: Pakistani tanks would lead Malaysian APCs carrying 2d Battalion soldiers. Company A would attack to break through to TF Ranger, followed by the battalion tactical command post, and then with Company C in the remaining APCs. Company B, once moved down to the airfield, would become the task force reserve staged at the airfield.

The element was to move mounted as far forward as possible, dismounting only on its assigned objectives. Company A was to secure the northern crash site and extract the Rangers. Company C was to secure the southern crash site and secure any survivors or remains. Both companies were then to return to the New Port for mission completion.

My task as leader of 2d Platoon was to attack, secure TF Ranger's location, and extract the Rangers. The platoon was task organized as follows:

1st SQUAD	3d SQUAD	PLATOON CONTROL
Squad Ldr	Squad Ldr	Plt Ldr
1 x APC	Plt Sgt	M60 Tm
	M60 Tm	Engr Tm
	Medic	Interpreter
	Engr Tm	1 x APC
	1 x APC	1 x APC

Along with the 1st and 2d Platoon leaders, I linked up at the commander's HMMWV; when he returned, he briefed us on our task and purpose. Although there was some confusion about the route, we now had enough information to begin loading the vehicles.

The vehicles we were using were German Condors, which have features similar to our Fox chemical reconnaissance vehicle, with a turret on the top. The agreement was that the Malaysians would be the drivers, turret controllers, and gunners. The U.S. soldiers would be passengers.

Loading began with some difficulty in communication. Since none of us had ever seen these vehicles, even opening the door became a problem. Once that problem was solved, loading began.

The 1st Squad loaded in the first vehicle, and my radiotelephone operator (RTO), interpreter, an M60 team, an engineer team, and I loaded in the second vehicle. The commander's HMMWV was the third vehicle. The fourth held my platoon sergeant, an M60 team, a medic, 3d Squad, and the second engineer team. The rest of the company followed with 1st Platoon, then 3d Platoon, in the remaining vehicles.

After loading, I found the commander and tried to get confirmation on the exact route. He told me not to worry about the route, that the Malaysian driver knew the directions. I returned to my vehicle. I was positioned directly behind the driver, and my RTO was seated next to the side door, which had a small view port. From this position, I could see some of what was to the front and the side.

The column began movement around 2145 hours, with the Pakistani T55 tanks in the lead. Immediately, the tanks took small arms fire and returned fire with their coaxial machineguns. Slowly, the column began moving east, then north toward National Street.

The Pakistani-driven tanks were supposed to lead the column to the Rangers, but arguments ensued, and the Pakistanis only agreed to lead as far as National Street, where the Malaysian-driven Condors were to take the lead. I did not receive this change in plans.

The trip to National Street was uneventful, for the most part. Sporadic small-arms fire hit the sides of the vehicles. The soldiers in my vehicle seemed relaxed and quiet. The only noise was the engine and the Malaysians talking. I tried to count blocks as they went by and approximate our location as we moved through the city, but this was very hard to do.

As the column approached the turn onto National Street, all hell broke loose. I heard small-arms fire and RPG explosions and felt shrapnel hit the vehicle. The Malaysian driver began to jolt the vehicle forward in an unpredictable manner, causing everyone in the back to be tossed about. Land navigation at this time was impossible; every time I tried to look out, I was thrown in a different direction.

The vehicle began to pick up speed. We started going over curbs and obstacles in the road, which again threw us around. Unknown to me, at the same time the first vehicle, which held the 1st Squad leader, and my vehicle, the second, began pulling away from the rest of the column. The commander's placement of his HMMWV, the third vehicle in

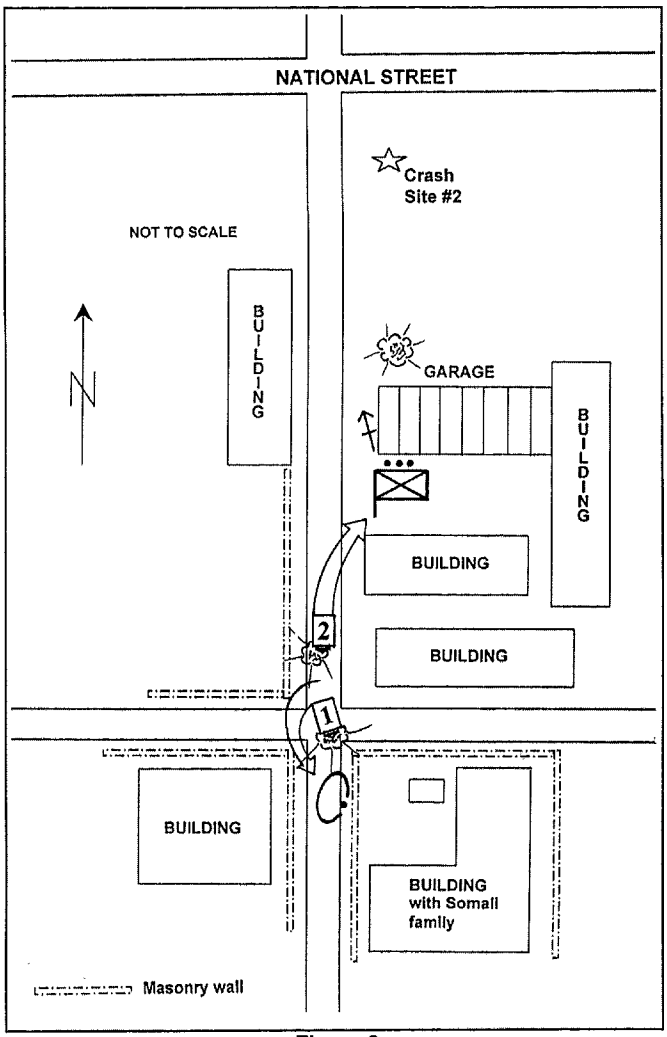

Figure 2

the march order, was the only thing that kept the rest of the Malaysians from following the runaway lead vehicles. This effectively separated me and my two lead squads from the rest of the company. We did not see the rest of the company again until the next morning.

At this time, I was totally disoriented and had not realized we were on our own. Being bounced around in an armored vehicle made it difficult to tell which way I was going, while the explosions outside made communication with the company commander virtually impossible.

The two APCs continued west on National Street, then turned south toward Crash Site 2 and continued past it. I believe they were trying to return to the New Port facility.

The vehicles were about one kilometer beyond Crash Site 2 when they entered a Somali ambush. RPG fire struck the lead vehicle head-on, mortally wounding the Malaysian driver. My vehicle was struck a moment later in the engine compartment (the front right-hand side of the vehicle). The blast felt like someone had lifted the vehicle up and was trying to balance it on a pedestal. The vehicle teetered back and forth a bit, I heard a high-pitched ring, and the smell of an explosion filled the compartment.

The 1st Squad leader called from the lead vehicle, saying his vehicle was hit and requesting guidance. I instructed him to get out of the vehicle and establish security. I was going to do the same. When I opened the door and got out, I realized we were on our own. Looking back the direction we had traveled, I saw a long upward sloping hill with no one behind us. Green tracers and RPG rounds were hitting all around us.

At this point, I turned back to my RTO, and we moved to a building east of the vehicle and occupied some low ground on the south side. I still did not want to believe we were alone. I made contact with the squad leader and told him to stay in his security position. I told him that my group was going to move north, back up the hill, and try to reestablish contact with the rest of the company. Low ground and the buildings were blocking all radio transmissions (Figure 2).

I led my platoon headquarters group with the engineer team north past two buildings, attempting to gain sight of the company. Small arms fire began to intensify from the direction of travel farther up the hill. The M60 gunner engaged targets from the corner of what appeared to be some sort of garage. All he was actually doing, however, was drawing fire; every time he engaged someone, the RPG fires into our location intensified. I instructed the gunner to engage only identified targets to limit the RPG fires and not to suppress the area. He said that he *was* only engaging identifiable targets and that there were a lot of people up the road.

With the enemy fires getting even worse as we pulled away from the squad leader in the security position, and with the fear of the enemy coming in between my divided forces, I decided to return to the original location. Before moving out, I heard the clearing of a weapon on the other side of the wall. I pulled out a grenade, pulled the pin, flipped the thumb clip, and threw the grenade. There was no explosion. I pulled out another grenade, repeated the arming process, released pressure from the spoon, and the spoon did not fly off. The tape we used to silence the grenade rings had left small strands that kept the grenade from arming. I then pulled the spoon off and threw the grenade, and a huge explosion followed. The weapon noise stopped.

Throughout the entire movement, the RTO kept trying unsuccessfully to initiate radio contact. About 15 minutes from the time of the ambush, I led the element back to the original security position and reestablished a secure perimeter (Figure 3). An M60 assistant gunner, in his haste to leave the vehicle, had left behind his gear and additional ammunition, and I sent him back recover it.

When he returned, the Malaysians in the vehicle apparently decided they were going to exit the vehicles as well and join our perimeter. When they came running from the vehicles, the M60 gunner, catching their movement out of the corner of his eye, spun with the M60 and engaged. Luckily for the Malaysians, this spinning movement caused the M60 to double feed, and they were not shot.

One previously injured Malaysian dived right on top of me. I pushed him off me and over to my RTO, telling the RTO to bandage him up. At this point, my unit was still under heavy fire, and I decided we had to get inside a building to survive. I asked the engineer squad leader if he could make a hole in a wall (pointing to the wall), and he assured

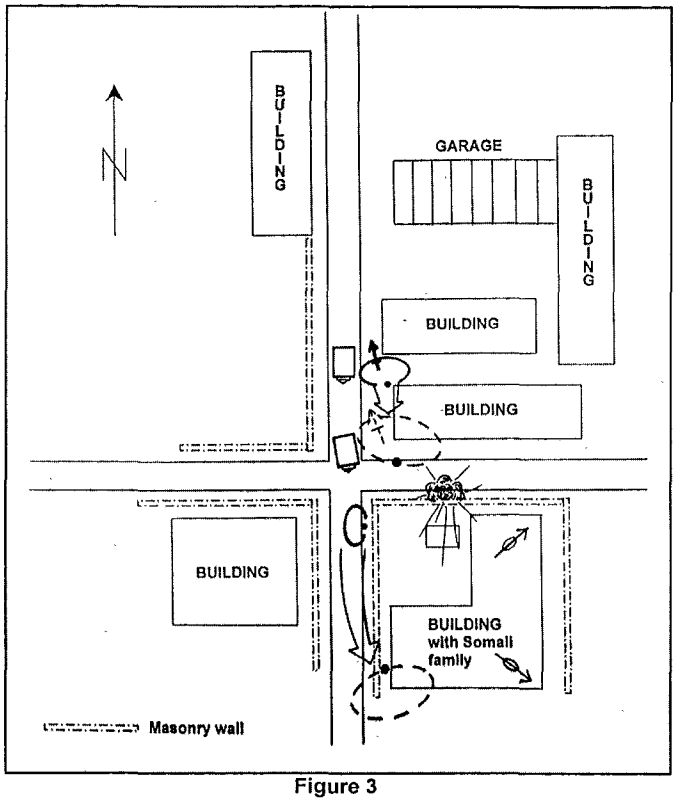

Figure 3

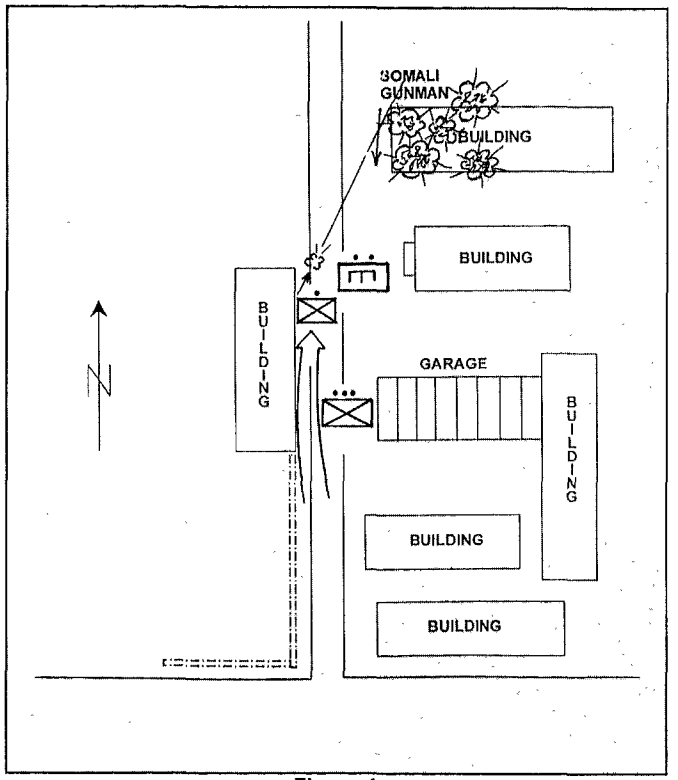

Figure 4

me he could. I then contacted the squad leader, telling him my plan was to blow a hole in the compound he was backed up against and establish security positions inside. He was to make sure he had no personnel beyond the corner of the wall.

Once I received confirmation that all his personnel were out of the direct blast radius, the charge was set. It had a 42-second time fuse, which seemed to burn forever, and I in my haste looked up just as the blast went off, receiving a chunk of concrete in my face. The PVS-7As I was wearing took the brunt of the blast. The device's optics tube bent sideways, and I had only a small cut above my right eyebrow.

Everything on the battlefield seemed to go quiet after the blast, as if it had surprised the Somali gunmen. The blast was so large that it not only made a hole in the wall but knocked down the wall and a small building on the other side. The squad leader reported that part of the wall on his side had come down on his soldiers as well. (Next time, I will specify how large a hole I want.)

In the quiet after the blast, I figured someone would have to make the initial entry, and all my soldiers were pulling security. So I jumped up, sprinted across the street, and entered the compound, firing at the house I was entering. No fire was returned. I then called the squad into the compound to establish a more defensible perimeter.

We formed two mutually supporting battle positions. The squad was oriented south, west, and east. The engineers and an M60 team were oriented north, west, and east.

The RTO and the Malaysians also entered the compound. The RTO continued to work to establish voice communications. He put up the long whip antenna and tried different nets. The Malaysians were placed in the hallway toward the rear of the building. The squad's combat lifesaver began working on the injured Malaysians while I checked security.

Two adults and several children who were in the house positioned themselves in the back room, and we left them alone. I figured we had done enough, blowing up their home and occupying it as a defensive position.

Then screams of pain were reported, coming from the lead APC, apparently from a wounded Malaysian who had been left behind. I told a team leader to go out there and get the man. Without concern for his own life, he ran back into the kill zone and retrieved the mortally wounded soldier and attended to his wounds. (This act earned him a Bronze Star with Valor device.)

Returning to the RTO, I found that he still had not been able to contact anyone on any net. In my frustration, I pulled the PRC-77 radio out of the ruck sack, took off all secure devices, and transmitted in the red. The battalion commander's voice was the first I heard, and this was the most calming influence I had that night. He said, "Keep doing what you're doing. You're alive, and I will work on getting you out."

The battalion commander then told me to drop down to the Company C net and make contact with the commander. I did so, and the captain and I conducted recognition procedures. I shot a red star cluster so he could see how far away I was, and he shot a green one. We agreed that we were about one kilometer apart. He then informed me that he would work on getting his company down toward our location once he had completed the search of the crash site, and that we should stay put.

While I was speaking to him, an AH-1 Cobra helicopter flew over us. The battalion commander must have talked to

someone and sent some fire support to our location. The Cobra flew east and started engaging targets a block or two away. This prompted me to place my M203 gunners on the roof of the building, and they engaged targets toward the east throughout the night.

During that time, Somalis continued to conduct sporadic attacks. Their favorite action was to stand off and lob RPGs at the compound. I counted no less than ten impacts in a one-minute period, and this kept up throughout the night.

I received a call from my M60 team saying its current location was getting too hot. I then pulled the M60 crew into the compound. The vehicles were still the favorite targets for the Somali gunners. My vehicle sounded like a mad popcorn machine and, with one huge final pop, the top of it was gone. All that remained were four burning tires.

Around 0300, the commander of Company C asked to speak to me. He said that he was having trouble moving south, that enemy resistance was too great for his company. He wanted us to try and move north and link up with his lead platoon.

I called in my element leaders to formulate a plan to get out of the area. The plan was for the engineers to lead, followed by my gun team and me and the Malaysians, then 1st Squad. My theory was that if I ran into trouble, the engineer squad leader could become a base of fire, and I could maneuver my 1st Squad leader, since I had maneuvered him in the past.

The element leaders disappeared to brief their soldiers, and I retrieved a poleless litter from the combat lifesaver. Returning to the Malaysians, I found that the mortally wounded soldier's bandages were soaked with blood. I knelt next to him and laid out the litter. I tried to explain to the Malaysians what was about to take place, but they did not understand. I picked up the wounded man, placed him on the litter, and tied him in. Then I grabbed the Malaysians' hands and placed them on the carrying loops and pointed up the road. Then they understood.

As I informed my company commander that we were beginning movement, the RTO told me he had heard over the net that one of my soldiers in 3d Squad was dead.

The engineers began moving, and I followed with the RTO and the gun team. The Malaysians were supposed to stay behind me, but I had trouble keeping them in formation. They tended to move past me, then stop and allow me to catch up. The leader of 1st Squad took up the trail (Figure 4).

The engineers moved up past the garage where we had been earlier that night. I positioned myself on the corner of the garage looking north. The Malaysians came streaming by, moving up toward the engineers. Then a Somali gunman stepped out in front of the engineers and sprayed their advance.

Three men were injured; one of them took a round in the chest and died later in Germany when surgeons tried to remove the bullet. I moved forward to a door stoop and began suppressing the gunman's position. An engineer helped pull the wounded men back behind the door stoop.

From that stoop, all I could do was suppress the gunman's location. I needed a better shot if I was going to kill him. I yelled back to the 1st Squad leader to take a team across the street, move up the wall, and kill the gunman. He came back with, "*This* street? The one with bullets flying down it?" I said, "Roger." Reluctantly, he and the combat lifesaver moved across the street and worked their way forward.

The medic came up to my location to help with the wounded and to see if I needed any help suppressing the gunman. I told him to take care of the wounded because no more than one person at a time could fire from the small stoop.

Just as I ran out of ammunition and was changing magazines, the gunman moved around the corner and began shooting at my location. His actions gave the squad leader enough time to draw a bead on him and kill him. I was so eager to ensure he was dead that I grabbed grenades from the medic and hurled them into the building. We had no more shots from that gunman. Then another one began engaging us from across an open lot to our north.

The new gunman's shots were accurate enough to keep the squad leader and the combat lifesaver pinned against a building. At this point, I had two casualties who were litter priority, two who were litter urgent, and eight who were walking wounded. We needed help. Yelling back to the RTO, I said to contact Company C, tell the commander our status, and request transport out. He informed me that the Malaysians were en route, and that we had "Little Bird" on station. (Little Bird was a special operations AH-6 helicopter equipped with 2.75-inch rockets and twin 7.62mm mini guns, an outstanding close-support platform.)

Yelling over to the squad leader, I asked him if he could mark the building with an M203 flare, and he said he could. Then I yelled back to the RTO to tell the pilots. The flare was shot, but it hit the wrong building, which Little Bird came in and destroyed.

I then told the RTO to tell Little Bird I was marking the building with tracers. Standing up from behind the stoop, I emptied an entire magazine of tracers into the building. Little Bird came in perpendicular to our location, fired his 7.62mm gun, then his rockets, and the building disappeared.

Turning to the task of extraction, I asked the squad leader if he had any chemical lights on him to mark the road. He did, and the glow of a green chem light now filled the road. I had one white smoke, and he had one. The plan was that once the vehicles moved down here and turned around, we were going to pop the smoke and allow the cloud to build, then all of us would enter the vehicles.

In between the time that the vehicles were en route and our pick-up, I started looking for a new building from which to defend. I started firing rounds into the door on top of the stoop, trying to blow off the lock. I then realized the roof had collapsed behind the door and even if I blew off the lock, we were not getting in.

Company C was having some difficulty getting the vehicles to move down to our location. Waiting was the worst part. Finally, two Condors appeared. The language became a problem once more because I wanted the drivers to turn around before we entered the vehicles. What I did not want

was for the vehicles to move back into the ambush thinking that was the fastest way back to the New Port. Finally, one of the Malaysians who had been with us all night understood what I wanted and started yelling in his language, and the drivers turned the vehicles around.

We popped the HC smoke, allowed a cloud to form, and then everyone sprinted to the vehicles—only to find the doors were locked. I went to the front of the vehicle and began pounding on the windshield of the driver's compartment to get him to open the doors before the smoke dissipated. Finally, everyone boarded.

All the wounded engineers were loaded onto the vehicles for transport. Our ordeal was almost at an end. We moved back to Company C's location and on to the Pakistani stadium. This represented a change for me. In previous operations, we had always returned to the point of departure. This time, we had left from the New Port.

Arriving at the stadium, we unloaded the casualties and moved inside to take accountability and wait for the rest of the company. My RTO was finally able to make radio contact with the company RTO. I felt it was better not to bother the company while it was extracting.

Soldiers guided the Company A vehicles inside the stadium. We began unloading the Ranger and 2d Battalion casualties. I sorted through the commotion, locating my soldiers and directing them to the 1st Squad leader, who was taking accountability. All the soldiers were accounted for, including the one who had been killed by a Somali sniper near the Olympic Hotel.

All of us were exhausted and extremely hungry. The Pakistanis brought us goat meat and tea with milk and sugar, which tasted great after not eating for 20 hours. Then we lay down on the benches to nap until helicopters arrived to transport us back to the University compound.

I looked around at my soldiers while they ate and rested. Everyone seemed different, including me. We all had that 1,000-yard stare and looked old. I know I gained a new outlook on life that day. The 14th Infantry crest has a picture of a golden dragon earned from prior campaigns. On that day, we had seen the dragon and survived.

Lessons Learned

The lessons my platoon and I learned are relevant for new platoon leaders. Having taken command of my platoon five days before deployment, I really had to learn "on the go." I am thankful for the good noncommissioned officers and well-trained soldiers I could rely on in a tough situation. My first platoon sergeant was an excellent trainer who shaped 2d Platoon into a superb fighting unit. Unfortunately, he fell ill and had to be sent back to the States before this battle. But the senior squad leader performed superbly in his absence. One of the true tests of a leader is to be able to leave and have someone else step into his position and perform well.

Doctrine states that we should train as we fight and fight as we train. I remember going through the Infantry Officer Basic Course and learning about the Bradley fighting vehicle, thinking to myself, "Why is this important? I'm going to be a 'light' fighter." But the concepts taught about maneuver with mechanized forces *were* important, and I should have paid closer attention to them.

The location from which I chose to command and control our vehicles' movement was unsatisfactory. I learned that I should avoid any location where my field of view is limited. If I had taken the assistant driver's position instead, I would have known immediately when my element broke contact with the rest of the company.

Under the "train as you fight" doctrine, a platoon leader sent into a theater of operation needs to know and understand the equipment he may be using. I had never seen or heard of a German Condor APC until the day of execution. Finding out how to open the door to a vehicle 15 minutes before rolling out the gate is not the way to start a mission. A platoon leader needs to coordinate through his company commander to arrange a time when the allied forces can come over and teach his soldiers about their equipment. This is particularly significant at a time when operations with other United Nations forces are becoming more frequent.

Communications were a problem all over the battlefield that night. The old adage about the "fog of battle" is true. Fortunately, there are some filters to limit the effects of the noise. A platoon leader should always know the route. The company commander may be too busy, but the platoon leader must find a way to obtain the information. If he cannot backbrief his commander, he should find another platoon leader or the executive officer to get the information.

The leader should check and recheck FM communication before rollout. There was a major problem communicating with the man-packed radios inside the vehicles. The solution was to communicate with the mounted radio or stick the antenna outside the vehicle to improve communication. The platoon leader must render reports frequently to the other platoon leaders and the company commander. This way, the commander can understand the situation and make intelligent decisions. The leader must transmit all radio traffic in a calm voice. Leaders trying to gain information will not understand jumbled or shouted transmissions. My battalion commander spoke clearly and effectively on the radio. His transmissions inspired confidence and had a great calming influence.

One problem has yet to be resolved: How do we communicate with those who do not speak English in the midst of battle, with no interpreters available?

During fire fights, adrenaline kicks in, and it helps at the beginning. But it is only a tool and should not be used as a crutch. Firefights are physically and mentally demanding; every sense is on maximum overload. The adrenal high lasts for only 15 to 20 minutes; after that it is the physical and mental conditioning attained before the battle that decides the outcome. Aggressive physical training (along with extensive road marches) enabled 2d Platoon to fight on past the adrenaline high and complete the mission.

I did not conduct the train-up with 2d Platoon; I only refined and continued the training once we deployed. For me, Ranger school was the best, most realistic training for combat. I graduated from the Ranger course, went on leave for two weeks, and then arrived at the battalion. Ranger training

gave me the ability to look beyond my physical and mental exhaustion and make the tough decisions. I believe that junior NCOs and senior specialists should attend Ranger school as well.

Throughout the entire time in country, the 2d Battalion conducted live-fire training. This training was another combat multiplier that gave each man in my platoon confidence in his fellow soldiers. These soldiers were used to other soldiers firing over them and beside them, while engaging targets of their own. As a deployed platoon leader, I never fired one round of blank ammunition and never incurred any training accidents due to live-fire training. Leaders down to team level were responsible for the safety and certification of their soldiers before any live-fire training event. It built confidence between the leaders and the soldiers. They were able to locate and control fires. All soldiers received extensive cross-training and familiarization with weapons. Any time a soldier became a casualty, another was able to fire his weapon.

Casualties will occur no matter what happens. This is the nature of our high-risk profession, but a platoon leader can do several things to reduce the burden. He must know his soldiers. He must sit down with them, throughout his time as a platoon leader, review their counseling packets, tell them what he expects from them, and tell them what they can expect from him. He should find out about their home life and what their expectations are. He must develop an understanding with his soldiers. In the end, he will find out he has some outstanding soldiers working with him and discover some life-long friends. Writing a letter home to a parent who has lost a son in combat is not an easy task. But this task becomes more manageable as the leader takes an interest in the soldiers' well being, both professionally and personally.

The final learning point is not one over which a platoon leader has much control—allowing for a "cooling off" time at the end of a deployment.

Our company allowed soldiers to talk among themselves and to begin dealing with any problems they were facing together. For several weeks after this battle, soldiers had an opportunity to talk among themselves and deal with their problems. The chaplain and mental health care personnel were readily available to assist soldiers with this important task.

Platoon leaders need to talk to their soldiers and evaluate how well they are dealing with stress. I found that a good time for gauging how my soldiers were doing was the middle of the night while they pulled guard duty. I would take time to talk to them then. I believe I got a true feeling for how my platoon was dealing with the stresses of combat. I was able to direct soldiers who were having a hard time with something in their lives to appropriate resource persons so they could get the help they needed. The key here is to deal with the situation before it becomes a problem.

The 2d Platoon, Company A, 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry found itself in a critical situation that could have resulted in its annihilation, but the unit fought as a team in the face of heavy enemy resistance to establish contact and link up with friendly forces. The soldiers who took part in this action performed very well because that is what they were trained and prepared to do, and in so doing saved their own lives and those of our Malaysian allies.

Captain Mark A.B. Hollis led 2d Platoon, Company A, 14th Infantry, 10th Mountain Division, in Somalia. He is now assigned to a unit in Korea.