

Medals of Honor

Master Sgt. Gary Gordon and Sgt. 1st Class Randall Shughart

Operation Restore Hope

Less than a year after the deaths of Master Sgt. Gary Gordon and Sgt. 1st Class Randall Shughart in Mogadishu, Somalia, the two Delta Force operators were posthumously presented the Medal of Honor by President Bill Clinton on 23 May 1994. The snipers would be the first to receive the Medal post-Vietnam. In his remarks, the president said,

The pilot of their helicopter said that anyone in their right mind would never have gone in. But they insisted on it because they were comrades in danger. ... And so, they asked their pilot to hover just above the ground, and they jumped into the ferocious firefight.¹

He continued,

They believed passionately in the creed that says, "I will not fail those with whom I serve." ... Gary Gordon and Randall Shughart died in the most courageous and selfless way any human being can act. They risked their lives without hesitation. ... Both were men whose dreams and generous hearts we can never adequately portray. Both were quiet men whose steadiness gave strength to all who knew them.²

Gordon, who grew up in Maine, joined the U.S. Army at eighteen. He was a combat engineer prior to joining the 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta.³ Shughart grew up in Newville, Pennsylvania, and joined the Army right after high school. He served in 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, and then in 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta as an assistant team sergeant.⁴



Army Sgt. 1st Class Randall Shughart (left) and Army Master Sgt. Gary Gordon. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army)

Gordon and Shughart have been remembered fondly; elementary schools near Fort Liberty were named after both men, and a memorial was built in Gordon's hometown of Lincoln, Maine.⁵ The urban warfare training facility at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Johnson, Louisiana, is named Shughart-Gordon in honor of the two men, while the U.S. Navy honored them both by naming two Large, Medium-Speed Roll-on/Roll-off vessels USNS *Shugart* and USNS *Gordon*.⁶ In 2001, actors Nikolaj Coster-Waldau and Johnny Strong portrayed the two soldiers in the award-winning film *Black Hawk Down*.⁷

To fully understand the sacrifices Gordon and Shughart made on 3 October 1993, a summary into the



Army soldiers of Company B, 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, watch helicopter activity over Mogadishu, Somalia, on 3 October 1993. Later the same day and throughout the night, the battalion's A and C companies were part of a rescue convoy assembled for nearly one hundred Rangers who had become trapped in the city after two Black Hawk helicopters were shot down. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army)

leadup of what would be commonly known as the Battle of Mogadishu is needed.

Amid a civil war, Somalia's socialist dictator Mohamed Siad Barre was overthrown and fled Mogadishu in 1991, leaving the city to the rebel group United Somali Congress.⁸ The rebel group then split into several factions led by former military officers, including one commanded by Gen. Mohamed Farah Aidid. However, a man-made famine the following year brought international attention to the country.⁹ The UN sent humanitarian relief, but not without difficulty.¹⁰ Food became "the new tool of power" among regional warlords, who would have relief organizations pay protection money while distributing food supplies that, more often than not, never reached those in need.¹¹ The United States joined the relief efforts in August 1992, attempting to use its logistical expertise without support by military ground forces.¹²

Aidid held little to no respect for those in charge of the relief efforts, and tensions flared. The United States deployed Task Force (TF) Ranger on 22 August 1993 to capture Aidid and his lieutenants after a 5 June ambush by his Somali National Alliance killed twenty-four Pakistani peacekeeping soldiers and wounded another forty-four.¹³ Between August and September 1993, TF Ranger successfully completed six missions in Mogadishu; however, it would all go wrong during its

seventh, and what would become its final, mission.¹⁴

On 3 October, TF Ranger was tasked to capture Aidid's key lieutenants along with supporters at his Mogadishu stronghold. Under increasingly heavy enemy fire, the task force was loading twenty-four prisoners into a truck convoy when a rocket-propelled grenade struck one of the UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters providing air support.¹⁵ When Super 6-1 crashed about three blocks from TF Ranger's position, the mission changed from "capturing [Aidid] supporters to one of safeguarding and recovering American casualties."¹⁶ The situation would only worsen. Another two Black Hawks were struck; one was able to return to the airport while the other, Super 6-4, crashed less

than a mile from the first.¹⁷

There was no rescue team immediately available to Super 6-4 as the first crash site was being secured by soldiers already on the ground, but two Delta Force snipers providing air support during the raid volunteered to protect the second helicopter's survivors until forces could arrive.¹⁸ Aware of the mob making their way to the second crash and knowing any "survivors wouldn't stand a chance," Master Sgt. Gary Gordon and Sgt. 1st Class Randall Shughart volunteered to secure the crash, fully aware of the danger they would face.¹⁹ Twice they asked to go in but were denied. It wasn't until their third request that they received permission. Gordon and Shughart were inserted about one hundred yards from the site. After making their way through a maze of buildings, they pulled lone survivor Chief Warrant Officer 3 Michael Durant from the wreckage and moved him to a safer location before attempting to secure the perimeter.²⁰

"Gordon and Shughart knew their own chances of survival were extremely bleak."²¹ Each was armed with only a sniper rifle, a sidearm, and limited ammunition. During intense fighting, Shughart was fatally wounded, and Gordon was running out of ammunition, having used up the supply from the downed Black Hawk. Gordon gave Durant the last of the ammunition and a rifle, saying "good luck" before reentering the fight with only his sidearm; he would be shot and killed shortly

thereafter.²² A badly injured Durant was overrun by the mob and held hostage before his eventual release eleven days later.

The fighting would continue into the next day until TF Ranger broke contact with the aid of a 10th Mountain Division battalion and support from Pakistani and Malaysian armored vehicles.²³ In less than two days of fighting, sixteen members of TF Ranger were dead and eighty-three wounded, with the Red Cross estimating two hundred Somali dead and seven hundred wounded.²⁴ President Clinton ordered the end of combat operations except in self-defense on 6 October and ordered the full withdrawal of U.S. ground forces by 4 March 1994.²⁵ As stated in a 2003 after action report,

The battles of 3–4 October were a watershed in U.S. involvement in Somalia. The already complex mission and difficult environment took a dramatic turn with those events. ... In a country where the United States, perhaps naively, expected some measure of gratitude for its help, its forces received increasing hostility as they became more deeply embroiled into trying to establish a stable government. ... The Somali people were the main victims of their own leaders, but forty-two Americans died and dozens more were wounded before the United States and the United Nations capitulated to events and withdrew.²⁶ ■

Notes

1. William J. Clinton, "Remarks at the Presentation for the Congressional Medal of Honor, 23 May 1994," American Presidency Project, accessed 11 July 2024, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-presentation-ceremony-for-the-congressional-medal-honor>.

2. Ibid.

3. Katie Lange, "Medal of Honor Monday: Army Master Sgt. Gary Gordon," U.S. Department of Defense, 1 July 2019, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Feature-Stories/story/Article/1890858/medal-of-honor-monday-army-master-sgt-gary-gordon/>.

4. "Randall D. Shughart," Veteran Tributes, accessed 15 July 2024, <http://www.veterantributes.org/TributeDetail.php?recordID=210>.

5. Drew Brooks, "Gordon Elementary Dedicated to 'Name of a Hero,'" *Fayetteville Observer*, 28 February 2009, archived 30 July 2017 at the Wayback Machine, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170730071957/http://www.fayobserver.com/article?id=319840>. "Shughart Elementary School," Department of Defense Education Activity, accessed 18 July 2024, <https://shughartes.dodea.edu/school-about-us>.

6. Patricia Dubiel, "JRTC Commemorates 25 Years since Actions of Shughart, Gordon," Defense Visual Information Distribution Service, 5 October 2018, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/296046/jrtc-commemorates-25-years-since-actions-shughart-gordon>; "Gordon (T-AKR-296)," Naval History and Heritage Command, 10 February 2016, <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/g/gordon--t-akr-296.html>; "Shughart (T-AKR-295)," Naval History and Heritage Command, 14 January 2016, <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/s/shughart--t-akr-295.html>.

7. *Black Hawk Down*, directed by Ridley Scott (Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures, 2001). The film is based on Mark Bowden's book *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* (New York: Signet Books, 1999).

8. Richard W. Stewart, "The United States Army in Somalia, 1992–1994," in *United States Forces, Somalia After Action Report and Historical Overview: The United States Army in Somalia, 1992–1994* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2003), 6.

9. "Somalia: Background," The World Factbook, CIA, last updated 10 July 2024, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/somalia/>.

10. John S. Brown, introduction to *Somalia After Action Report*.

11. Eugene G. Piasecki, "If You Liked Beirut, You'll Love Mogadishu: An Introduction to ARSOF in Somalia," *Veritas: The Journal of Army Special Operations History* 3, no. 2 (2007): 20; Stewart, "The United States Army in Somalia, 1992–1994," in *Somalia After Action Report*, 4.

12. Ibid., 5.

13. Ibid., 9, 10.

14. Ibid.

15. U.S. Army Special Operations Command History Office (ARSOF), *Task Force Ranger: Operations in Somalia, 3-4 October 1993* (Fort Liberty, NC: ARSOF, 1 June 1994), 3, [https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/International Security Affairs/07-A-2365 Task Force Ranger Report Operations in Somalia 1993.pdf](https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/International%20Security%20Affairs/07-A-2365%20Task%20Force%20Ranger%20Report%20Operations%20in%20Somalia%201993.pdf); Stewart, "The United States Army in Somalia, 1992–1994," in *Somalia After Action Report*, 11.

16. ARSOF, *Task Force Ranger*, 3.

17. Stewart, "The United States Army in Somalia, 1992–1994," in *Somalia After Action Report*, 11.

18. Lange, "Medal of Honor Monday."

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid. Super 6-4's other copilot and crew chiefs—Ray Frank, Tom Field and Bill Cleveland—were already dead when Gordon and Shughart arrived.

21. Clinton, "Remarks, 23 May 1994."

22. Lange, "Medal of Honor Monday."

23. Piasecki, "If You Liked Beirut, You'll Love Mogadishu," 26.

24. Ibid., 12.

25. Rick Atkinson, "Night of a Thousand Casualties," *Washington Post* (website), 31 January 1994, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1994/01/31/night-of-a-thousand-casualties/1f-0c97b1-1605-46e5-9466-ba3599120c25/>; Clinton, "Remarks, 23 May 1994."

26. Stewart, "The United States Army in Somalia, 1992–1994," in *Somalia After Action Report*, 13–14.