

AFEHRI File 19-5-1-20

Research Materials/Source Documents
AWARDS & DECORATIONS

FILE TITLE: Air Force Cross Recipient: TSgt Timothy A. Wilkinson

Reviewed by:

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Director
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EYEWITNESS STATEMENT FOR TIM WILKINSON

On the afternoon of 3 October 1993, in response to the downing of an MH-60 Blackhawk helicopter in the Black Sea District of Mogadishu, Somalia, Tim Wilkinson distinguished himself through repeated act of heroism. Tim was one of two USAF PJ's assigned to the CSAR Blackhawk. At approximately 1620 hrs the CSAR team was inserted vicinity of the northern crash site. During the infiltration TSGT Wilkinson was exposed to intense small arms and RPG fire. Once at the site he began immediate treatment of the survivors of the crash site. At this time the remainder of the assault force arrived on the scene. The assault force immediately took several casualties. TSGT Wilkinson, without regard for his safety moved across the open street to the location of the casualties and began immediate treatment. He realized that he needed additional medical supplies, and made a return trip back to the crash site to pick up the additional supplies. During this time he received a shrapnel wound to the face. Ignoring his wounds he moved a third time back to the casualties and began life saving measures on the casualties. It should be noted that these trips across the open street were at the peak of the battle when the enemy fire was at its most intense. We were receiving intense and accurate small arms and RPG fire. His repeated acts of heroism saved the lives of at least 4 soldiers. One of his casualties was in critical condition, however he managed to stabilize the patient with his expert care. Throughout the night he continued to provide care for the casualties which was critical to the overall success of the rescue.

as i
A. Scott Miller
CPT USA

Witness Statement for Tsgt Tim Wilkerson, USAF, CSAR team PJ.

On October 3 1993, while conducting combat operations in Mogadishu Somalia, Tsgt Wilkerson displayed bravery and dedication beyond the call of duty. An AH-60 Blackhawk was shoot down. The CSAR aircraft was alerted and inserted 8 minutes later. Upon insertion the CSAR element came under fire from three directions. They assaulted through and moved into the crash site. During this time period the head PJ. was shoot through the leg. He was immediatly pulled to cover and treated. There were two wounded crew members and two dead pilots still in the aircraft. At this time Tsgt Wilkerson with total disregaard for his own personal safety, jumped into the aircraft which was laying on its left side. While the aircraft was being struck by small arms fire he cleared the debris away and evacuated one crew member. He stayed in the aircraft and treated the second crew member until he was evacuated. When this was completed he saw a Ranger element being engaged. He left the crash site and ran across a large intersection that was still active and hot with enemy small arms and RPG fire and started treating Rangers that had been hit. Once he ran out of medical supplies he again crossed the same intersection under fire to get more medical equipment recovered from the downed aircraft. He then crossed the intersection again under fire to continue treating the injured personnel. He stayed with the injured until they where evacuated the next morning. He then linked up with the CSAR team and conducted the foot movement out the target site.

There is no doubt in my mind, if Tsgt Wilkerson had not taken the action he did, there would be at least three more dead Rangers. I believe his actions definitely went beyond the call of duty.

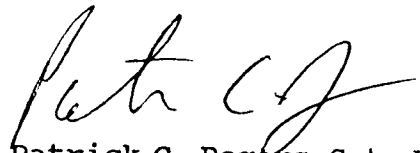


SFC Alfred J. Lamb
SST Team Leader U.S. Army
Task Force Ranger

On 3 OCT - 4 OCT 93 I, Patrick C. Rogers, witnessed TSgt. Tim Wilkinson display heroism during an operation to rescue the crew members of Super 61, a UH-60 that had been shot down over Mogadishu, Somalia.

After sustaining a gunshot wound to the face, TSgt. Wilkinson treated injuries from both the helicopter crew and members of the Sar Security Team who had also sustained wounds from a plethora of small arms and Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) fire.

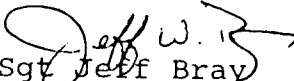
During this intense enemy offensive, TSgt. Wilkinson exposed himself to enemy fire numerous times to treat injuries within a team that had maneuvered to a nearby location to aid in security of the crash site. TSgt. Wilkinson remained at that location throughout the next ten hours, providing medical treatment under endless small arms and RPG fire.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pete C. Rogers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Pete" and last name "C. Rogers" clearly distinguishable.

Patrick C. Rogers, Sgt. USAF
24th Special Tactics SQ.

Witness Statement: Sgt Jeff Bray

On October 3, 1993. I was part of a security position in a strong point situation. My position had been marked as a casualty collection point. We had 4 wounded Rangers 1 critically, and no medic. We treated the wounded as best we could and put out a call for a medic. Tsgt Tim Wilkerson then arrived on the scene and immediately administered medical care. He stabilized all the wounded and moved them into a house. He continued treatment through the night and next morning with little or no medical supplies left. At one point 2 RPG's impacted the house we were in and the front rooms caught fire. The house was filled with a toxic like fume. Tim would not leave his 4 patients who where all inside. Two more patients were brought to him after the RPG attack. He not only stabilized these patients but kept a close watch on all the friendlies inside my perimeter. Just one example was when he located a water source to help combat dehydration. It is my firm belief the care administered by Tsgt Wilkerson for 17.5 hours saved the lives of those he treated.


Sgt Jeff Bray

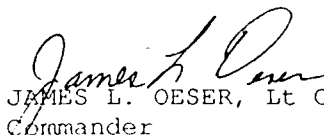
Special Tactics Operator 24th STSQ U.S.A.F.

CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF
THE AIR FORCE CROSS
TO
TIMOTHY A. WILKINSON [REDACTED]

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Section 8742, Title 10, United States Code, awards the Air Force Cross to Technical Sergeant Timothy A. Wilkinson for extraordinary heroism in military operations against an opposing armed force as a 24th Special Tactics Squadron Pararescueman in the vicinity of the Olympic Hotel, Mogadishu, Somalia, from 3 October 1993 to 4 October 1993. During that period, in response to an incident in which a United States helicopter had been shot down by a rocket propelled grenade, Sergeant Wilkinson conducted a fast rope insertion into the crash site and came under extremely heavy enemy fire from three directions. In the initial rescue effort, he repeatedly exposed himself to intense small arms fire and grenades to clear debris, provide emergency medical treatment to the survivors, and extract dead and wounded members of the crew from the wreckage. On his own initiative, Sergeant Wilkinson broke cover on three separate occasions to locate and provide emergency medical treatment to three Ranger casualties. In doing so, he ignored all concern for his personal safety to cross a 45 meter-wide open area blanketed with intense fire from small arms, and rocket propelled grenades. Sergeant Wilkinson's medical skills and uncommon valor saved the lives of multiple gravely wounded American soldiers in the longest sustained fire fight involving United States combat forces in over 20 years. Through his extraordinary heroism, superb airmanship, and aggressiveness in the face of the enemy, Sergeant Wilkinson reflected the highest credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

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I recommend Technical Sergeant Timothy A. Wilkinson, [REDACTED], for the award of the Air Force Cross. Sergeant Wilkinson distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in military operations against an opposing armed force as a 24th Special Tactics Squadron pararescueman in the vicinity of the Olympic Hotel, Mogadishu, Somalia, from 3 October 1993 to 4 October 1993. Sergeant Wilkinson, with extensive expertise in trauma care and triage management, casualty evacuation, and combat search and rescue (CSAR) operations, was attached to a joint service CSAR specialty team in support of United Nations Operations in Somalia II (UNOSOM II)/Task Force Ranger combat operations in Mogadishu. At approximately 1620 hours local on 3 October 1993, Sergeant Wilkinson and his crew were directed to respond to an incident in which a U.S. UH-60 helicopter had been downed by a rocket propelled grenade (RPG). Upon arrival on scene, Sergeant Wilkinson and his team conducted a fast rope insertion into the vicinity of the crash site and immediately came under extremely heavy enemy small arms fire from three directions. After assaulting through the enemy fire with his team to reach the crash site, Sergeant Wilkinson assisted in the establishment of the casualty collection point and made his way to the wreckage to conduct an assessment of the crew, provide emergency medical treatment to the survivors, and begin extraction of all on board. During this initial assault, he repeatedly exposed himself to intense enemy fire while clearing debris and extracting wounded and dead crew members from the aircraft. He provided immediate trauma care to an injured crew chief and expertly directed his evacuation to the designated casualty collection point. Remaining inside the hulk, he was subjected to a continuous stream of small arms fire and shrapnel perforating the skin of the aircraft and received wounds to the face and lower arm. Undaunted, he calmly continued to free the second trapped crew chief, render expert medical attention, and evacuate the stabilized individual. Once the last crew survivor had been evacuated to the casualty collection point, Sergeant Wilkinson was alerted to a situation in which a Ranger security element was engaged and suffering casualties in an intense fire fight approximately 45 meters from his location across an open four-way intersection. On his own initiative, Sergeant Wilkinson broke cover and ran through a thick barrage of small arms fire, shrapnel, and RPGs to reach the Ranger position. Upon reaching their location, he continued to expose himself to deadly enemy fire while he and others on scene pulled the wounded one by one into the safety of a covered position. He then began immediate medical treatment of three seriously wounded Rangers. After exhausting his initial stock of medical supplies, he ran back across the open intersection through the deadly barrage to the helicopter wreckage, retrieved all available emergency medical supplies and darted back through a wall of enemy fire to rejoin the wounded Rangers. According to the report of the on-scene team leader, Sergeant Wilkinson demonstrated absolutely no concern for his own personal safety by willingly exposing himself to devastating enemy fire from multiple directions to aid his wounded comrades. From the team leader's vantage point, the three Rangers would have died had it not been for the personal courage and decisive actions undertaken by Sergeant Wilkinson. After stabilizing the casualties, Sergeant Wilkinson assisted in their evacuation to a defensive strong point to await the arrival of the quick reaction force. He continued to provide medical treatment to them throughout the night and remained with them even when the house in which they were sheltered received two direct RPG hits, caught fire, and became filled with toxic fumes. In this latter emergency situation, he provided covering fire and lifesaving medical care until relieved by elements of the quick reaction force. During this operation, Sergeant Wilkinson provided expert medical treatment to a total of seven casualties with injuries ranging from life-threatening gunshot and shrapnel wounds to shock and limb trauma. His decisive actions, personal courage and bravery under heavy enemy fire were integral to the success of all casualty treatment and evacuation efforts conducted in an intense 18-hour combat engagement. His medical skills and uncommon valor saved the lives of multiple gravely wounded American soldiers in the longest sustained fire fight since the Vietnam war. Through his extraordinary heroism, superb airmanship, and aggressiveness in the face of the enemy, Sergeant Wilkinson reflected the highest credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.


JAMES L. OESER, Lt Col, USAF
Commander

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Photo by A1C Richard Johnson

First visit

U.S. Army Gen. John Shalikashvili, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is greeted by Lt. Gen. Jay Kelley, Air University commander. General Shalikashvili visited Maxwell Monday to speak to students at the Joint Flag Officer Warfighting Course held at the Air Force Wargaming Institute. During the two-week course, which began Monday, the generals study warfighting, military doctrine, and application of unified, joint and combined combat forces.

Air Force honors heroism

NCOs awarded Air Force Cross, Silver Stars for gallantry

BY MSGT. PHILIP F. RHODES
AIR FORCE NEWS SERVICE

BOLLING AFB, Washington (AFNS) — Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Merrill A. McPeak presented two of the Air Force's highest decorations for heroism Jan. 31 to three airmen for their actions in Mogadishu, Somalia.

McPeak awarded the Air Force Cross for extraordinary heroism to TSgt. Timothy Wilkinson, and Silver Stars for gallantry to MSgt. Scott C. Fales and SSgt. Jeffrey W. Bray during a special ceremony at the Bolling enlisted open mess.

Air Force Secretary Sheila E. Widnall and other Defense Department leaders also attended the ceremony.

Wilkinson is the first enlisted man to earn the Air Force Cross in 19 years. Fales and Bray join nine enlisted men from Desert Storm who earned Silver Stars.

All three NCOs, assigned to the 24th Special Tactics Squadron, Pope AFB, N.C., were involved in the Oct. 3-4 battle in Mogadishu. Their squadron, composed of combat controllers and pararescuemen, was part of United Nations Operations in Somalia II/Task Force Ranger, a joint-

service team sent to capture militia leaders believed to be responsible for attacks on U.S. and U.N. troops.

In the ensuing gun battle, 18 Americans were killed and 84 others wounded in what would become the longest firefight involving U.S. troops in 20 years. Civilian news agencies reported that 312 Somalis were killed and 814 wounded.

Before presenting the medals, McPeak told the standing-room only crowd that the medals were "not easily earned nor often awarded."

He went on to say he had overflowed the scene of the operation during a recent trip to Somalia and described the roads, maze of streets, alleys and multi-story buildings at the site of the heated battle. "Even months later, in the light of day, during what passes for peace, I can see why what was done there was so difficult — why urban warfare is a soldier's nightmare," McPeak said.

Pararescuemen Wilkinson and Fales were part of a combat search and rescue team who descended into downtown Mogadishu after Somalis downed the first of two U.S. Army Blackhawk helicopters.

Small-arms fire came at them from three directions, yet Wilkinson and Fales disregarded their own

See HEROISM... Page 4

MAXWELL-Gunter Dispatch Friday, Feb 4, 1994 MONT, AL

...Lt. Col. Ray W. Kline, AU commander, addressing "The changing Air Force";

• Brig. Gen. P. K. Carlton Jr, director of Medical Services and Training, Headquarters Air Education and Training Command, providing an "Update on military health care benefits";

• Dr. John Kline, AU director of

...Lt. Col. Ray W. Kline, AU commander. Additionally, the spouses will learn "How family support center programs can help you" from Ms. Debbie Root, family support center chief.

Registration deadline is Feb. 15.

For a registration package, contact your unit representative or Maj. John Durrer at 953-4012.

HEROISM... from Page 1

safety and worked their way to the downed chopper to extract wounded and dead crewmembers. Fales was shot in the leg during the rescue, but disregarded his injuries to tend to his more seriously wounded comrades during the 18-hour ordeal, often throwing himself over the wounded during frequent grenade attacks.

Crouched in the hull of the destroyed chopper, Wilkinson worked frantically to free a trapped crewman as small-arms fire turned the chopper's insides into a meat grinder. Metal fragments ripped Wilkinson's face and tore through his lower arm, yet he continued until all the injured were removed to the casualty collection point.

Wilkinson then raced through a hail of small-arms fire across an open intersection to care for rangers cut down while maneuvering toward the helicopter crash site. He ran through a thick barrage of enemy fire to help pull the wounded — one by one — to safety.

When his medical supplies ran out, Wilkinson ran back across the deadly intersection to retrieve supplies from the wreckage. Darting through a wall of enemy fire, he rejoined the wounded rangers and treated them throughout the night, despite continuous small-arms fire and two direct hits by rocket-propelled grenades in their defended position.

Also in the same position was Bray, who helped fend off advancing Somalis by directing helicopter gunship

missions over the besieged area.

Bray, a combat control operator, called in "danger close" fire support missions that brought gunship rounds to within 10 meters of his position.

Eyewitness accounts confirmed his courage and coolness under fire while directing precise helicopter gunfire to keep a determined enemy from overrunning the team.

While proud of the NCOs' accomplishments, CMSAF Gary Pfingston said the fact that the decorated men were enlisted is not paramount.

"Regardless of who it is, when Air Force people do something of that magnitude, we need to recognize them for what they did, not for who they are," he said.

Among family and friends at the ceremony were eight other members of the 24th STS who earned medals for their actions during the firefight.

Earning the Bronze Star with valor were MSgt. Jack J. McMullen, SSgt. Daniel G. Schilling and Sgt. Patrick C. Rogers.

Bronze Stars were awarded to Lt. Col. James L. Oeser, 24th STS commander; SMSgt. Russell J. Tanner; MSgt. Robert G. Rankin; SSgt. Ray J. Benjamin; and SSgt. John L. McGarry. All will receive their awards later this year.

(Sergeant Rhodes is assigned to the Air Force Special Operations Command Public Affairs Office at Hurlburt Field, Fla.)

Crosswalk con

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Somali clansmen surround one of two U.S. Army helicopters shot down Oct. 3, 1993.

No Time For Fear

by MSgt. Philip F. Rhodes, Hurlburt Field, Fla.

Oct. 3, 1993, began like most days for members of Task Force Ranger in Mogadishu, Somalia. MSgt. Scott Fales woke to an

early breakfast and strapped on his medical rucksack for a jog around the compound perimeter. TSgt. Timothy Wilkinson and SSgt. Jeffrey Bray hung out in the hangar after chow.

May 1994

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Somalis lift a main rotor blade of a U.S. Army helicopter shot down in Mogadishu.

They and nearly all members of the joint-service team were enjoying the day off, yet they were chomping at the bit for another mission. It had been nearly two weeks since their last outing — the successful capture of 34 of Gen. Mohamad Farah Aideed's men in a lightning-quick raid, the sixth operation since the team arrived in August.

Shortly before lunch, word came that a HUMVEE had hit a land mine in downtown Mogadishu. Fales, Wilkinson and Bray, part of a quick-reaction team, raced to a waiting Blackhawk helicopter. As suddenly as the call came, the mission was off. Another unit had already responded.

"Yup," Wilkinson thought to himself as he

dismounted, "another boring day." Fales stripped off his load-bearing equipment and went for lunch. Bray wrestled with the disappointment.

Around 3 p.m., Task Force Ranger got the call to remount. Fales, Wilkinson and Bray "re-jocked" and headed toward their waiting Blackhawks. A tobacco dipper, Bray paused, remembering he didn't have his dip. "Nah," he thought. "I won't need it. We won't be gone long enough for it to matter."

Before the sun would rise the next day, those bluesuiters and the rest of the 200-man Task Force would display incredible heroism in the dark, dusty streets of Mogadishu. Out-manned and out-gunned, they would be in-



lved in a ferocious 15-hour battle that would come the longest sustained firefight involving U.S. troops in nearly 20 years. Wilkinson could earn the Air Force Cross for extraordinary heroism; Fales and Bray, Silver Stars for gallantry. Eight other members of the trio's unit — the 24th Special Tactics Squadron, Pope AFB, N.C., — would earn Bronze Stars, some with "Valor" devices.

It was a battle of heroic proportions. Members of Task Force Ranger repeatedly risked their lives to save comrades. In the end, 18 Americans perished and 84 were injured. Somali losses were put at 312 dead, 814 wounded.

Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Merrill A. McPeak overflew the battle scene months later.

He described the maze of streets, alleys and multistory buildings at the site of the battle: "Even months later, in the light of day, during what passes for peace, I can see why what was done there was so difficult — why urban warfare is a soldier's nightmare," McPeak said.

For Fales, Wilkinson and Bray, the nightmare began at 3:39 in the afternoon.

Bray, a combat controller, was the lone bluesuiter in the main assault force. The aerial convoy deployed into the snarl and confusion of mid-day traffic in the center of Mogadishu. The mission: capture 24 militia leaders believed to be responsible for attacks on U.S. and U.N. troops.

"I was pumped, totally pumped," said Bray, a square-jawed 27-year-old Superman look-alike.

Gunfire greeted the team as members fast-rope from the helicopter onto busy Hiwadag Street.

"There was a lot of shooting coming at us," Bray said, as his team moved up the crowded street.

After joining other elements in the assault team at the target building, Bray took up a door security position, firing at gunmen in an alleyway. Realizing they needed more firepower, Bray got on his radio and talked a Blackhawk gunship onto the target.

Meanwhile Rangers rounded up the suspects, among them Ahmed Warsame, one of Aideed's principal lieutenants.

"We moved around to the courtyard, started counting to make sure we had everyone, then called for the reaction force to put the detainees in trucks and move out," Bray said.

The mission proceeded like clockwork.

Then tragedy struck.

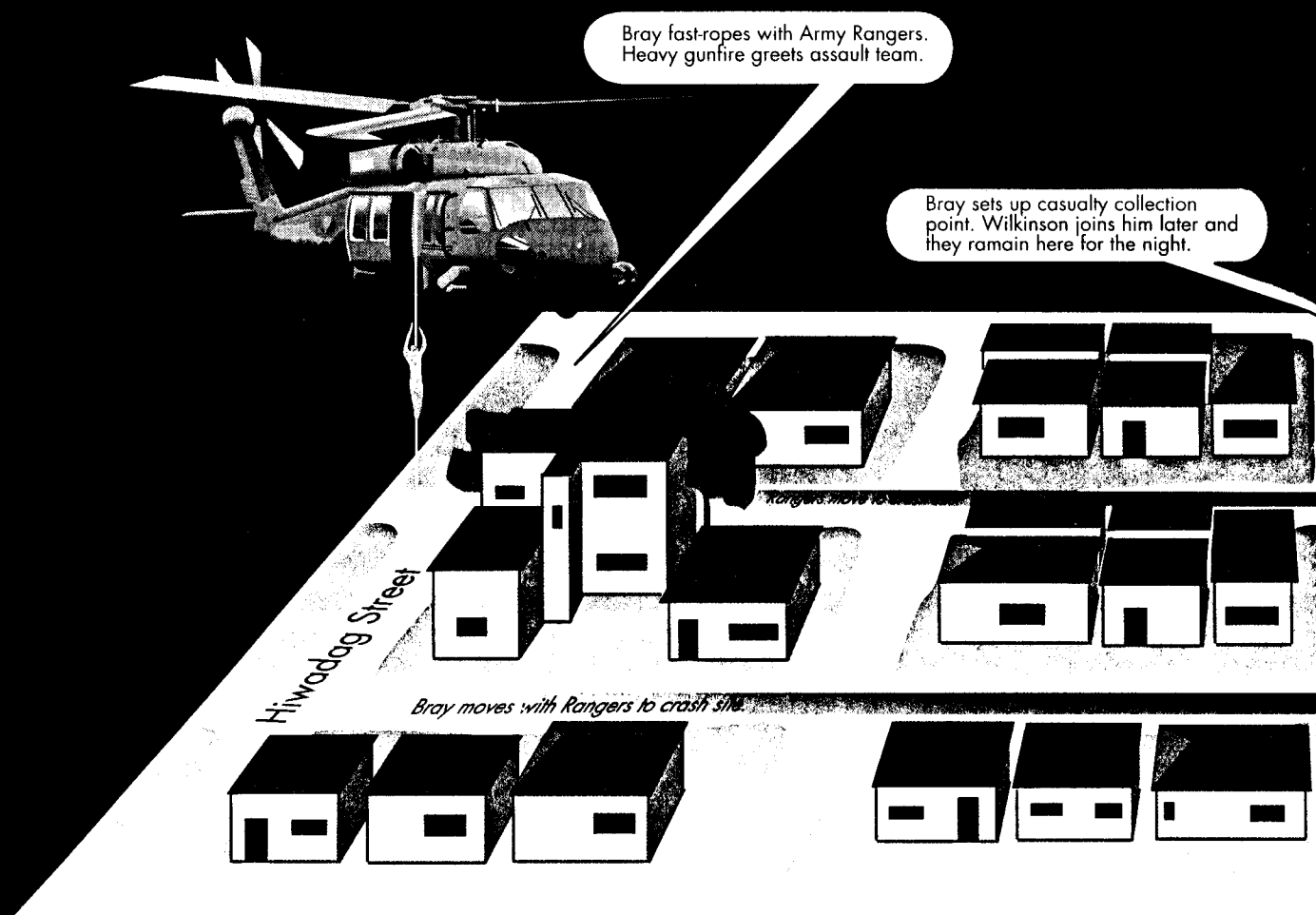
A rocket-propelled grenade fatally crippled a Blackhawk, call sign Super-61, sending it and its five passengers crashing into a narrow alleyway 300 yards northeast of Bray's position.

"I got a call from the C2 [command and control] bird: 'Super-61 is down. Move to crash site.' "

Task Force Ranger was prepared for this contingency. Part of its mission planning involved practicing a helicopter rescue. Ironically, Super-61 was used in the practice mission.

One-minute Call

Pararescuemen Fales and Wilkinson were aboard Blackhawk Super-68, a search and



Mogadishu Firefight

Graphics by Steve Ingram, Bob Guade and Sgt. Steve Doyle

rescue helicopter circling in a holding pattern over the Olympic stadium northeast of the crash site. "We got the one-minute call," said Fales, at 36 a veteran of Panama and Desert Storm. "I looked at my watch. It was 3:39 p.m."

The PJs sat on opposite sides in the chopper. Pilots brought Super-68 to a hover about 40 feet over Freedom Road as the 15-man search and recovery security team fast-roped out. Fales went out the right side; Wilkinson out the left. On the ground were litters, ruck sacks and medical supplies they'd thrown out before descending. They were the last ones out.

Suddenly, there was an explosion, and a violent jerk. An RPG slammed into the helicopter just below the main rotor blades. "Those pilots deserve a lot of credit," Wilkinson said. "The natural tendency would be to transition to forward flight and get the wounded bird out. But they held hover until we got on the ground."

On the ground, they immediately heard the rat-tat-tat of AK-47s as bullets ripped past them from three directions. "Bullets don't make that whizzing sound you hear in movies," Fales said, recalling those first moments in the line of fire. "There's a snap. An incredibly loud snap!" he said, snapping his fingers near his head.

Scrambling for cover, Fales and six others advancing along the left side of the street ducked into a courtyard. Wilkinson's group, caught on the right side of the street, had to cut across the stream of bullets to reach the courtyard.

Deadly Fire

Meanwhile, Bray and a Ranger platoon began their advance toward the crash site. The platoon split into two elements, one on each side of the road, leapfrogging ahead of the



other to provide cover, firing at Somali forces also racing to the crash site along parallel streets. Bray found himself at the head of the left element as they turned north onto Freedom Road and into the deadly path of Somali gunfire. "We took a lot of casualties," Bray said. Rangers caught on the right side of Freedom Road were cut down almost immediately.

Gunfire intensified as they neared the crash site. Bray searched for cover. "I saw this little courtyard, actually an uncovered garage with two metal grate doors," he said. Throwing himself repeatedly against the doors, 10, maybe 15 times, the doors finally gave. Stumbling backwards into the courtyard, Bray was in no position to protect himself. "One of the guys behind me covered me. Luckily there was only a family in there." Bray and his team set up a casualty collection point after detaining the family and clearing the house.

Afternoon was giving way to evening. Somalis swarmed through the streets, firing rifles and RPGs at the pockets of U.S. soldiers, now barricaded in buildings along Freedom Road.

Casualties still lay in the street. "We were having trouble recovering some of the bodies," Bray said. It is a Ranger tradition to not leave anyone behind, especially in light of recent mutilations by Somali hordes. "We knew we were going to be there a long time," Bray said. As it happened, his station would become the focal point for directing gunship fire at militia advancing on several American positions.

At about the time Bray reached the courtyard, Fales and Wilkinson were nearing the downed helicopter. Facing a torrent of hand grenades, RPGs and rifle fire, Fales and a small security detachment finally reached the wreckage. Wilkinson's team made it about a minute later. The aircraft lay on its left side; the cockpit folded over. Both pilots dead.

Ironically, neither PJ knew if the pilots were dead or alive. Fales approached the cockpit

beside the tibia. Very lucky, no bone was involved," he said with a medic's nonchalance.

Adrenaline, not medicine, kept the pain away. Fear, too.

"The whole time the firefight was going on, we maintained a really good sense of humor," said Fales, reflecting on how they handled fear. "We were cracking jokes back and forth." Wilkinson said there was a lot of stoic behavior

going on. "I think it was — there was no time to feel. There was this sense of fear, fearing for your life as it's all going on around you. But because of the training you've had, and the task at hand, you put the fear aside and press on. You focus on what you've got to do."

Bray piped in: "I don't want to give a false impression of what was going on. We were in a grave situation. And we knew it. We would occasionally look at one another and say, 'This is bad, real bad.'"

Wilkinson edged toward the front of the chopper as Rangers helped Fales to the triage point at the rear of the aircraft. He and other Rangers managed to free one of the dead pilots and move the body to the collection point. Returning to the wreck, Wilkinson and an Army medic climbed into the cabin to help free the pinned crew chief. "All I could see was his uniform," Wilkinson said. "I started calling to him and saw his finger move, so I knew he was still alive."

Finally freed, Wilkinson began handing the severely dazed crew chief up and out of the aircraft. Then the shooting intensified. Small arms fire erupting into what Wilkinson said looked like a snowstorm of flying shrapnel. Metal fragments ripped Wilkinson's face and tore through his lower arm; the Army medic caught it in the hand. The crew chief ended up losing part of his finger.

There was continuous shooting throughout



SM Sgt. Bill Thompson

Wilkinson
Bray (f
news

g cover every few feet of small arms fire. of the crewmembers age, trying to free an

li gunmen in a small t loose a tremendous ist him. Fales felt a . A split second later, not.

ook a hot poker and shoved it through my calf muscle," he said. Survival instincts took over. He took cover behind a pile of rocks, then patched himself.

"I took my scissors out, cut my pants and saw what I had. I thought, 'Damn, this should hurt,' but it didn't." He stuffed the muscle tissue back into his leg, packed it with some gauze, then put a pressure dressing over it. "The bullet went through my calf muscle, right

the ordeal, Wilkinson recalled. "The volume would change. It would be crack-crack-crack, then a barrage, then it would slow to a crack-crack-crack. Then a rocket-propelled grenade would come in. Whoomp-boom!"

RPGs were a particular concern for Task Force Ranger. The deadly weapons caused innumerable casualties, brought down two helicopters and severely damaged two others during the battle. In fact, helicopter gunships ignored the throngs of Somalis carrying rifles and concentrated on those toting RPGs. The tell-tale sound of an RPG launch is etched in Wilkinson's mind. "You hear this whoomp-boom! Sort of like a chest freezer door closing, only 30 times louder," he said.

Fales and Wilkinson began treating the wounded at the tail of the aircraft while the Rangers laid down protective fire. Over the din of automatic gunfire someone yelled, "Medic! Medic! We need a medic over here!" The call was coming from across the street in the courtyard where Bray's group was huddled. Unable to run, Fales looked at his partner and said, "They need a medic, Wilky."

Glancing back at his buddy, Wilkinson grabbed his medical ruck sack, waited for the Rangers to lay down cover fire, then dashed up the narrow alley. A hail of bullets, shrapnel and RPGs greeted Wilkinson as he greeted some 45 meters across the open intersection. "I felt like I was moving in slow motion," he said. "I remembered thinking, 'My God, these boots weigh a thousand pounds.'"

Safely across the deadly intersection, Wilkinson caught his breath, then assisted in dragging the wounded off Freedom Road. Inside the "safe" confines of the casualty collection point, Wilkinson assessed the medical situation. Four wounded, one critical. One problem — no medical supplies.

"I called over on my inter-team radio to Scotty [Fales] and asked for more medical supplies. He said yes, so I ran back over there, collected the spare medical gear, then came

back across the street. I had to get those medical supplies back to my patients," Wilkinson said, skipping the details of his heroic effort.

Eyewitnesses saw things a little differently. Army Ranger Capt. A. Scott Miller wrote: "It should be noted that these trips across the open street were at the peak of the battle when enemy fire was at its most intense. We were receiving intense and accurate small arms and RPG fire. His repeated acts of heroism saved the lives of at least four soldiers."

The battle raged on into the night. Fales glanced at his watch, the first time since they fast-roped into that mess. "It was midnight, right straight up. I hollered at everyone, 'Holy s--- guys, it's midnight.' They were like: 'wow!'"

Time took on new dimensions during the battle. Sometimes things happened as a blur going Mach 3; at other times, as stop-frame photography, Fales said. "You would lose track

of large portions of time; others you would remember vividly."

Night presented particular problems for Task Force Ranger. Expecting a quick mission, the team did not bring night-vision goggles. NVGs would have been their only distinct advantage. Throughout the night, Somali gunmen, in groups of three and four, probed Ranger strongholds. However, night-vision equipped helicopter gunships overhead kept the attackers at bay, thanks in large measure to Bray and other combat controllers.

Bray's strategic position gave him only a partial view of friendly positions, yet he managed to talk "steel onto

the targets" throughout the night. Circling helicopter gunships repeatedly heard "Kilo 64 Charlie," make calls for fire. CW2 Paul White wrote: "I will always remember the calm demeanor and professionalism [Bray] showed over the radio even as I heard bullets hitting very near his position each time he keyed his radio microphone."

Bray's ingenuity and coolness under fire saved countless lives, according to eyewitness

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— CW2 Paul White

Air Force Cross
For extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force not justifying the award of a Medal of Honor, while serving in any capacity with the Air Force.



Silver Star
For gallantry in action (high risk of life) against an opposing armed force that does not warrant a Medal of Honor or Air Force Cross, while serving in any capacity with the Air Force.

accounts. He developed an ingenious marking system so gunships could hit the enemy without fear of injuring American forces. Capt. John C. Harrison, Army Aviation, wrote: "I am convinced that without his outstanding courage and professionalism, many more of his force would have become casualties that night."

At one point, Bray had to call in a gunship strike almost directly onto his position. After moving everyone into a covered area, he went into the open courtyard to direct fire at advancing Somali gunners. "Danger close" preceded his instructions to helicopters streaking overhead. That meant friendlies were extremely close to the line of fire. Gunships fired on Somalis barely 10 meters away. So close, in fact, spent shell casings from the helicopter miniguns dropped on Bray's head.

Feeling more comfortable, Bray brought the gunships around again, this time clearing them to use rockets, which temporarily eliminated the threat. "That pretty much happened all night," Bray said. "I think they expelled 60,000 rounds and 63 rockets on our targets."

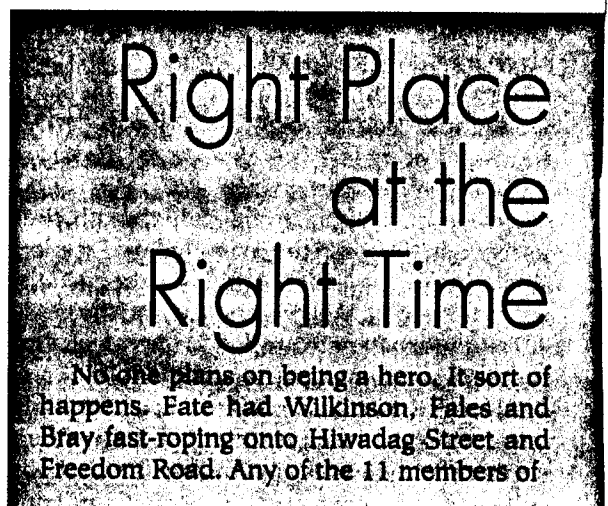
Meanwhile, Somalis closed in on Fales' group, which moved from the alley into a building as darkness fell. "They pounded our building with RPGs until it nearly collapsed," Fales said. "We didn't have a way out."

This was by far the worst fighting Fales had experienced. On a scale of one to 10, he gave it a nine. "The only way it could have been more intense is if we fought to the last man and all perished. At one point, we figured we'd run out of ammunition and have to."

One of the Rangers blew a hole in a wall, creating an exit into a courtyard. Still not safe, they blew a hole into another building, giving Fales' team a safer refuge. The wounded were moved in, followed by the security detachment. "Things settled down for about an hour because the Somalis didn't know where we were," Fales said.

Sanctuary didn't last long. A heavy machine gun across the street pummeled the building. Luckily, Fales' group was laying on the floor working on the injured when a line of fire streaked through the wall about four feet off the ground. Tracers, coming every fifth round, lit the room in a strobe-like fashion.

"The light was catching people in stop-frame action as they dove for cover. People were flying everywhere," Fales said, recalling one of



the morbidly funny moments during the five-minute siege.

"Relentless" is how each airman described Somali attacks on their positions. Throughout the night, the tempo of the battle would rise and fall, but there was always a threat to contend with. Bray and Wilkinson fought off continuous attacks from RPGs. Two direct hits caused a fire in one of the rooms their team occupied, filling the air with toxic smoke. Wilkinson stayed with his immobilized patients. Bray continued to expose himself to enemy fire to bring devastating gunship rounds on target.

At around 4 a.m., Fales could hear explosions and gunship fire off in the distance. The relief column was inching its way through the city. "We could hear the battle sweep past us," he said. At this point, Fales' gunshot wound was bleeding. He gave himself an intravenous solution to fight off the shock and unconsciousness.

Lapsing in and out of consciousness, Fales remembered hearing an armored personnel vehicle move up the street. "I knew they were here to get us," Fales said. "They came in and told us to move our casualties."

At 7 a.m., after fighting their way out of the

city, the relief column carried an exhausted Fales, Wilkinson and Bray to the safety of a makeshift aid station inside the Olympic stadium. Fales finally gave in to shock, fatigue and dehydration and was evacuated to a hospital for surgery.

The battle was over. The detainees were



SMSgt. Bill Thompson

Fales, selected as an Air Force outstanding airman in 1993, was not able to attend the induction ceremony at the Pentagon. Ironically, when the ceremony was held, Fales was already in Somalia.

delivered. Task Force Ranger completed its mission. But not without cost.

"There were a lot of heroes out there," Bray said, swallowing to hold back emotion. "Everyone did more than their job. It was probably the greatest team effort I've ever seen. I'm proud to have been a part of Task Force Ranger.

"The way I see it, we went into the tiger's cage. We took his bone. And we came out." ♦

the 24th Special Tactics Team involved in the firefight could have been in their shoes. "It's just a matter of luck and being in the right place at the right time," said Lt. Col. James L. Oeser, 24th Special Tactics Squadron commander.

"I firmly believe you could have put any PJ or combat controller in their positions, and they would be here receiving medals at this time," Oeser said at the special awards ceremony at Bolling AFB, Washington, D.C. "Everyone in the unit is equally qualified. There are no superstars."

Evidence is the number of decorations the

unit received. In addition to the Air Force Cross and Silver Stars to Wilkinson, Bray and Fales, respectively, eight other members of the 24th STS earned medals for their roles in Somalia.

Bronze Stars with "Valor" device were earned by combat controllers MSgt. Jack J. McMullen, SSgt. Daniel G. Schilling, SSgt. John L. McGarry and Sgt. Patrick C. Rogers. Earning Bronze Stars were Oeser, pararescueman SMSgt. Russell J. Tanner and combat controllers MSgt. Robert G. Rankin and SSgt. Ray J. Benjamin. All will receive their awards later this year.