

# Rogers' Rangers and the Mentality of the Modern Firefighter, Part II

By Bill Carey for [tinhelmet.com](http://tinhelmet.com)

[bcarey6873@yahoo.com](mailto:bcarey6873@yahoo.com)

December 2, 2005

*"I can just remember Sgt. Eversman telling me, you know, "Moore, find some cover. Moore"- you know, because I was out in the open. And it still didn't register, you know, what was going on until people started getting hit."*

*Ranger Specialist Jason Moore, Chalk 6*

On Sunday, 3 October 1993, Rangers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 75<sup>th</sup> Ranger Regiment, along with various Delta Force operators, Special Operations Aviators, Air Force Para Jumpers and Navy Seals left in the daylight for a raid that was assumed to take approximately one hour. 17 hours later, 18 American soldiers were killed, dozens wounded, over two days of what is still considered the most intense firefight since the Vietnam War. There has been much written about the assault as well as the production of the movie Black Hawk Down. In this second part, we'll compare how the Army looked at problems in Mogadishu and problems the fire service encounters with line of duty deaths.

*"I don't think anything could have prepared us for what happened on the 3rd. Prior to the third we had done 6 other missions in Somalia; all went very well. No one was injured. We did start to become confident. Maybe we should not have gone out in daylight, but we had a mission to do. I don't think our confidence level had anything to do with what occurred on the 3rd. It may have affected the decision to launch the attack, but once we were on the ground it just didn't matter."*

*Ranger Specialist Jason Moore, Chalk 6*

The military mission in Mogadishu, Somalia, was part of the larger mission that made up Operation Restore Hope. The Special Forces in the operation were identified as Task Force Ranger. Their mission, at the behest of Admiral Jonathan Howe (special representative to the U.N. Secretary General), was to capture Mohamed Farrah Aidid and his staff. The initial use of military muscle was easily available at the moment the United Nations issued an "arrest warrant" for Aidid. On 12 June 1993 Spectre gunships destroyed Aidid's radio station. Cobra helicopter gunships destroyed Somali National Alliance targets while forces on the ground assaulted other targets. The following day, Spectre gunships destroyed Aidid's home and headquarters. Two days later Aidid's deputy had his home leveled by the Spectres and Cobras. Almost a week later, buildings used by Aidid and Ato his treasurer, were assaulted by Spectres and Cobras again, as well as by armor from Pakistani and Moroccan forces under U.N. command. With war being literally declared by both sides, Task Force Ranger was quietly deployed in August of 1993 to conduct "snatch and grab" operations to get Aidid primarily, and his staff, if he couldn't be found. The U.S. military had come to the gunfight not with just a six-shooter, but with a Gattling gun as well.

*“ But I really didn’t feel very differently about that (increased armament on helicopters). I think we’d all gotten a little complacent. We all thought that since nothing serious had happened before, nothing was going to happen this time out, regardless of these changes.”*

*Ranger Sergeant John Bellman, Combat Search and Rescue Team, Super 68*

How many times have we gone to that same address for bells? How many times have we gone out for the odor of smoke in the building, and with a glance at a watch, easily surmised that it will be food on the stove? “Odor of electrical”? We laugh at it.

- On Wednesday, March 15, 2001, a report of a debris fire was received from a caller in the 1500 block of north Lynwood Street. The caller reported a fire in a pile of debris at the rear of an Ace Hardware store located at 35th Avenue and McDowell Road. Engine 24 was dispatched to the fire reported by the caller.

- On March 18, 1996, at 1129 hours, a call came into the fire/police dispatcher from an auto parts store in a strip shopping mall, reporting sparking and popping from an inside "fuse box". Engine 3, Engine 1, Ladder 2, and Battalion 2 were ordered to respond. Engine 3 was the first on the scene (1135 hours) and assumed command. When Engine 3 pulled up in front of the auto parts store, no smoke or fire was visible.

- On October 27, 1997, Engine Company 63 (a Lieutenant and 3 fire fighters) was dispatched at 0028 hours in response to a 911 call regarding a downed power line in a residential neighborhood. They arrived on the scene at 0032 hours and proceeded to rope off the area of the downed power line with barrier tape, and called the power company to report the downed line.

- On June 11, 1999, at 1300 hours a call came into central dispatch from a large department store, stating they had smoke in an electrical room on the second floor, the lights in the store were out, and the emergency lighting generator failed to start automatically. The fire department dispatched two engines, one ladder truck, one ambulance, and one battalion chief. The Chief of the department also responded to assess the situation. After receiving reports from the first arriving engine company that there was no fire in the store, the fire companies that responded were released to return to the station.

- On June 16, 2001, at 1815 hours, Central Dispatch received notification of a smoke detector alarm at a single-family residence. Engine 151 with one fire fighter/driver operator and Engine 101 with a Lieutenant and a fire fighter/driver operator were dispatched to the scene

These five incidents appear to be rather “routine” almost insignificant. How prepared would you be on any of these incidents? Would you be completely dressed for each one? Would you be thinking of your assignments or would you be thinking of something else unrelated? In each of these incidents, there was a line of duty death while participating in suppression operations. None of the fallen was victims of heart attack; none were run over by a vehicle while on the scene. None of them were victims of stress, fatigue, or poor physical fitness. But all of them were involved in the fire attack. Advancing the line, trying to locate the fire, searching for victims, they were all quickly put to work after arriving at what appears to be “routine” calls.

The first incident described is the rather infamous Phoenix supermarket fire that killed Firefighter Bret Taver. Prior to this incident, the fire service was comfortable with the topic of rapid intervention. In most departments, a RIC, RIT, or FAST depending on your location was quite sufficient to handle any problem involving a firefighter. A crew of

six could easily be assigned to assemble the right tools, come up with a game plan, and spring into action. Complacency came about when it was reasoned that regardless of the structure size and type, this single team could handle the “mayday”.

The Phoenix Fire Department, after Taver’s death, did a study that factually proved this was not the case. In their study, they found that not just one unit could make up a sufficient RIC, but it would take approximately four engine companies, two truck companies and a rescue company (for commercial structures), to first access the down firefighter, free him, and then escape with him. And, with regard to air management, this wasn’t going to be able to be done by each company. They might have to operate in stages.

In Somalia, there was only one CSAR (Combat Search and Rescue) team in the flight group. When the first Black Hawk helicopter (Super 61) was shot down, the CSAR Black Hawk (Super 68) was immediately dispatched to the crash site. While the personnel fast roped down this helicopter was hit by an RPG (rocket-propelled grenade). The pilot pulled out, and limped back to the airbase. Twenty minutes later Super 64, was shot down. There was no CSAR team available, and the ground elements were taking serious casualties of their own while trying to leave the city.

***“When you’re on the march, act the way you would if you was sneaking up on a deer. See the enemy first.”*** Some in the fire service still believe that it is acceptable to have no more than six men stand ready as the RIC while an average of thirty men fight a fire in a commercial structure. Complacency kills.

***“Don’t forget nothing.”*** The number one rule from Rogers’ Standing Orders. Prior to the firefight many Rangers left behind night vision goggles, canteens, and some had even removed armor plates from the rear of their body armor vests. The thought behind these actions was that the mission would go well, and they would be back in approximately one hour. In Houston, on October 13, 2001 an engine company captain died while fighting a fire on the fifth floor of a high-rise building. A firefighter on a ladder company had forgotten to bring the TIC. Rather than return to the rig himself, he asked the driver of the engine company to retrieve it. The driver did so, but forgot his PPE, and the TIC never made it to the fire floor due to conditions in the attack stairwell.

***“Tell the truth about what you see and do. There is an army depending on us for correct information.”*** Chalk 4, led by SSG Eversman, was ordered to go to the first crash site. Eversman reported “roger”, meaning that they would move out. However, what he meant was that he understood the order. Chalk 4 had no easy way to get to the crash site. They were heavily engaged on three sides, had the enemy grouping between them and the crash site, and had only five able-bodied soldiers still in the fight. They were luckily rescued when the ground convoy unknowingly came upon them. Had this not have happened, it is certain that Chalk 4 would have been overrun. In 2003 a firefighter became lost and dies while fighting a fire on the second floor of a mattress warehouse, that was last inspected – only the first floor - in 2000. Six months prior to the fatal fire, that same firefighter and his company fought a fire in the same building on the second floor. Information regarding rollup doors on the second floor, bars on windows, no sprinkler system, no detection system, and the building contents, were never entered into the departments Critical Information Dispatching System.

The firefight in Somalia on 3, 4 October 1993 was considered to be the most intense firefight U.S. soldiers had experienced since the Vietnam War. Many young men fought courageously, and died. What was meant to be an hour long “snatch and grab” turned into a two-day battle. It can be said that no one in any level of command had anticipated such an escalation of events. The same can be said of the fire service. We don’t expect to lose a firefighter at every fire, but do we train for it? Do we train for errors, common mistakes we see on the fireground, almost routinely? We train for WMDs, trench collapse, and fires in hybrid fuel vehicles. However, we have firefighters hookup to the riser on the same floor as the fire (Houston), get lost and killed with a TIC in their hands (Missouri), blown off of a silo (Ohio). We have firefighters improperly use a PPV (Massachusetts), become confused as to what floor is on fire (Washington, D.C.), and run the wrong length hoseline (Ohio). Firefighters died in each of these instances.

The mentality of the modern firefighter has become shifted towards new trends, new technology, and catch-phrase firefighting. The strategy and tactics however remain the same. An engine company has to run a line as close as possible to the seat of the fire. A truck company has to open up the building and search for occupants. Despite technological advances, the job has remained the same. Experience alone builds confidence, however when experience comes slowly, then the modern firefighter must be trained to handle possible problems, just as much if not more, as he would yearly or monthly recertifications. Complacency and miscommunication kill just as well as falling trusses and flashover. Fire attack is stressful and the modern firefighter needs stressful training.

***“Soldiers who have not been trained under stressful conditions do not react well when confronted with antagonistic situations.”***

“To Fight With Intrepidity” Major John D. Lock, U.S Army, Pocket Books 1998

“Black Hawk Down” Mark Bowden, Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999

“The Battle of Mogadishu” Matt Eversman and Dan Schilling, Ballentine Books 2004

“Shadow Warriors” Tom Clancey, Putnam 2002

U.S. Fire Administration, Firefighter Fatalities 2004

NIOSH, Traumatic Occupational Injuries, Firefighter Fatalities 1985 – 2005

NIOSH, Firefighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program, Annual Report 2003

Line of Duty Enhanced Report, 1131 Laidlaw Avenue, Cincinnati Ohio, March 21, 2004

U.S. Army Research Institute, Impact of the Army Continuing Education System (ACES) on Soldier Retention and Performance: Data Analyses, 2002, 2003

U. S. Army Research Institute, Assessing and Measuring Training Performance Effectiveness

Bill Carey is interested in your feedback, he can be reached at