

The United States and Somalia in 1993: Some Recollections

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I was in Somalia from Jan 27th to March 3rd 1993, after entering the U.S Army in August 1992; I did my Basic Training and Advanced Initial Training (AIT) together at Fort McClelland, AL and was then assigned to 795th Bravo Company, MP Company. Towards the end of AIT we received our orders for our first duty stations, and I initially received orders to go to Okinawa, but I made arrangements to switch with a young eighteen-year-old male because I was twenty-seven, married and the mother of a toddler. I ended up in the army because I really wanted to be a police woman.

After college during the first one million years of my life I ended up in Richmond, managing KFCs, and I had tried to be a Richmond policewoman, but my eyesight was too bad. I guess you have to be able to see before you can just go shooting at folks, so I decided to enter the army and became a member of the Military Police corps (MP). I know you're wondering if the U.S. Army has MPs just shooting at people blind! Well, anyway, the young man that I traded with had orders for a place called Ft. Drum, New York that's located in the northern New York close to Canada, and one thing about that area is when it snows it POURS!!!!

Before I got out of Alabama rumors started about the Somalia conflict and the possibility that the Army was probably going to be involved. A drill sergeant was nice enough to gather a group of us together that were headed to Ft. Drum and inform us that Fort Drum was a base that deployed all over the world and would be deploying to Somalia. This information, of course, made me sad because I had to go directly home to make arrangements for my family and daughter and to again be away from her and to psych myself out for what lay ahead of me.

I will always remember the day I arrived at Ft. Drum, NY. That was the longest drive I ever took alone along I-81 North, and it was eight to nine hours in January 1993. Snow was everywhere, and it was piled almost up to the sky in parking lots. After getting used to an area that didn't go haywire, beat down the doors, buy all the bread and milk out of the grocery store when they got a foot and a half of snow and close schools, I was finally sent on my journey to Somalia to meet up with my new platoon and company which was called the 511th MP Company.

Before catching up with my new company my journey to meet them was quite adventuresome because I was on this journey with a small group of individuals. This group of people was all made up of army personnel but some were newbies like myself while many were veterans, and they knew the lay of the land. So their priority, if it was at all possible, was to get to a party and drink as much as they could. Whereas my best friends during the journey were a phone to call my little girl, a diet Pepsi, a good book, television in a language I could understand, some good food, site seeing, taking pictures, and some rest.

Our first stop was one of the most beautiful places I've ever seen in my entire life. I've always promised myself that one day I would return if I can ever win this darn lottery. It's a place called Azores Portugal, and we had a day and half layover at an Air Force Base called [Lajes Air Base](#). This place has the bluest water you'll ever see in your entire life!

Our next stop was Germany for one night. This was my first time in Germany, and I would later be stationed in Mannheim, Germany's [Taylor Barracks](#) during my time in the army. I took this time to again relax in my room and get acquainted with German TV and the almighty

one German TV station I kept hearing about called AFN. You should know that it was truly as boring as I heard, so I wasn't impressed.

There was something no one clued me in on though and that was the fact that the bathrooms were unisex. So imagine my surprise when I walked into the shower area, and a man walks out of the shower area. Color me confused. I flew down the hall to try to find one of the 'seasoned' soldiers in their rooms, but of course they were all partying. I finally found the showers when they were empty and asked about it the next day on the bus to the airport. Believe me everyone got quite a laugh on my account, and I was officially introduced to some of the German customs.

My final stop, and I can only say STOP because that's exactly what it was, occurred when we landed in Egypt, and we weren't allowed to get off of the plane. I was honestly very terrified just sitting on the tarmac. All I could think was; what if someone would be throwing bombs at the plane? Or would they poison the box lunches? I think I will wait and watch the others before I tear into mine. Of course I asked why we couldn't exit the plane and was simply told we couldn't get off the plane. It had to re-fuel, and we sat on the tarmac for at least two to three hours. Finally away we flew until we landed in Somalia.

It was very weird landing in the cloak of darkness and trying to get where you needed to, in literally a strange land, hearing helicopters, hummers, and as we got further away from the airfield, we started to hear weapons fire in the distance. The place had a smell about it as well that took some weeks to get used to. I would have given anything to have closed my eyes and then opened them to see the almighty glowing red seven from a 7-11 convenience store to purchase one of those scented trees to hang around my neck to make the area around me to smell

better. I kept wondering if I would ever make it to where my new 'family', my new company would welcome me, or if I would get shot in a convoy en route to the my new home.

I finally made it. I became a member of the third platoon, third squad of the 511th MP Company, and since I was a PFC, I was a gunner and a very nervous one I might add.

Remember I just got out of basic training people. Can anyone besides me see my legs shaking? I spent a lot of time learning how to take a M60 machine gun apart and put it back together, apart and back. Well, you get it. It drove me crazy, but with time I realized I wasn't at Disney World, and people were losing their lives. This was real doo-doo. In the back of my mind, as the days kept going by and as we saw and heard things about people getting killed, and in the nights we stayed hunkered down trying to watch a row of buildings, trying to capture a warlord named Mohamed Farrah Aidid, with night vision goggles on I kept thinking about the fact that I and others were taken right out of basic training and thrown straight into the pan in the hot grease. This was no joke.

As time went on, I got the hang of how things worked. Each platoon did what were called rotations, and that's how the work was divided up amongst the MP Company. We usually did 12 hr. days. I thought the better of the many jobs was running the convoys which meant providing protection for the tractor trailers as they took food cross country. Then we got to go long distances and see other places. This particular journey was also dangerous due to possibilities of snipers hiding out in what I considered desert conditions because there really weren't that many trees to hide behind.

There was one unfortunate incident of a Red Cross worker being hit by a sniper's bullet. She bled out and died right there on the road. The helicopter we were able to call didn't make it

in time. That was the bad part about the convoys. You would be so far away from everyone if trouble was to come across your path. It was doing these times that I also learned the importance of the word “TEAM.” Being out there in the hummers, each individual is tired and hot, possibly feeling like 120 degrees with all the gear on, and you want to dose off, but you have to watch out for one another because it takes a quick half second for something to happen and someone might get hurt or cause an accident. Someone can get shot because someone didn’t see someone hiding behind something or didn’t notice something being thrown, etc. Everyone’s priority should be to make sure the team and everyone else gets back home to their loved ones safe and sound.

To me the good part of the convoys was when we pulled into a new little town, and the kids would be happy to see us and, of course, the food trucks. The food trucks are what the clans were stealing in the past, and that is the reason the people were starving. The clans were stealing the aid the United States and others were sending over the Somalia to assist in feeding the hungry. But to see the smiles on the little children’s faces could just make your day. They would look at us like we were their best friends, jolly green sweaty heroes. If we were lucky, we would get to camp out overnight near the Indian Ocean and feel the breeze come off the water. You have no idea how much of a treat that can be after being in that gear all day. Believe it or not, the temperatures would get down to about 70 at night, and you would start shivering. That would happen to me when I first got to Somalia, and I thought it was the weirdest thing, but it was something about the difference of being 120 degrees with all the gear and later at night in shorts and t-shirt, we would be freezing.

We were constantly busy in Somalia. I often couldn’t believe how a cot became my home for almost three months, and I had a hard time understanding how what I was seeing was supposed to be peaceful. It seemed as if every day platoons were finding more and more old

raggedy AK-47s that these people were going to use to kill each other. One night one of the platoons had raided some old hut. It seems that they had a guy who became their translator. He was on the books, which meant that he had an identification card and was registered with the military, but he was Somalian. Someone told him where some weapons were. They figured out they could trust the old man, and he wasn't setting anyone up. He didn't ask for anything in return, no money, no food, nothing, he just walked away. The next night a group went out and found the place he told them about. They knocked the door down, but there was no one around; no one guarding the place, but there were a lot of guns there, and they were operational. The weird thing was that the man was never seen again, and so it was believed he took them from some bad people and put them there for the military to take, and he got the heck out of dodge.

Not all memories are that good to remember and fortunately 511th MP Company completed our part of Operation Restore Hope in March of 1993. We departed Somalia on the 3rd of March; it was about 100 plus degrees. When he landed in Rome, NY, it was snowing and 25 degrees outside. Home sweet home.

Below is some research I found online I did on my former MP Company (511th).

- [511th MP Picture 1](#)
- [511th MP Picture 2](#)
- [Operation Restore Hope-Somalia](#)

Some photos follow:



Tent City set up near the Indian Ocean (beautiful).



