



July 18, 1994: 32 years ago, the indomitable courage of the Italian commando Ferdinando Salvati. A forgotten story we want to remember.

Published on 18/07/2026

On July 18, 1994, in the streets of Mogadishu, a United Nations patrol engaged in reconnaissance fell into an ambush prepared by Somali militias. Among the men involved was then-Captain **Ferdinando Salvati**, a paratrooper commando of the [9th Paratrooper Assault Regiment "Col Moschin"](#), wounded three times and subsequently taken prisoner.

It is a little-known page of the international mission in Somalia, far from the major media reconstructions of those years, but capable of telling the courage, preparation, and sense of duty of the Italian soldiers engaged in operations abroad.

Salvati was participating in the United Nations peacekeeping operation and was employed in the information sector. The situation appeared relatively calm, but reports gathered on the ground indicated a different reality. In fact, an increasing number of so-called "technicals" were

circulating in the streets: ordinary cars modified to carry machine guns and other heavy weapons.

Their presence suggested that the Somali factions had not reached an equilibrium and that, on the contrary, they were preparing for a new escalation of violence.

To better understand what was happening, the mission command decided to obtain photographic images capable of documenting the presence of those armed vehicles. Ferdinando Salvati took part in the reconnaissance patrol, offering his knowledge of an area that the Italians frequented daily.

The mission initially proceeded without incident. It was during the return that the patrol reached a stretch of road where a large puddle forced the vehicles to slow down and follow an almost obligatory path.

It was right there that the militiamen had prepared the ambush.

The attackers had positioned themselves in an “L” shape, so as to hit the vehicles from multiple directions when they slowed down. As soon as the patrol entered the area, it was hit by fire.

In the early stages of the attack, Malaysian staff sergeant **Azman Mohd Tahir** was killed, while two other soldiers were injured. A violent firefight followed, in which Malaysian corporal **Ghani Ak Binye** also lost his life, whose name appears in Malaysian sources also as Ghani anak Binyoi or Gani anak Binjoi.

Ghani belonged to the 6th Regiment of the Malaysian Royal Rangers and was in the vehicle driven by Azman. When the patrol was hit by fire, he reacted to the assailants and continued to fight until he was overwhelmed. Behind the name of that young soldier was also a painful family story: he had left his wife Dora and three children in Malaysia. The youngest was born just six days before his death, and Ghani had not yet had the chance to meet him. In the last letter sent to his wife, he had written that once he returned from Somalia, he would personally register the birth. He did not return. For the courage shown, he was posthumously awarded the Malaysian decoration **Panglima Gagah Berani**.

Salvati was hit the first time after getting out of the vehicle and was subsequently wounded two more times. Despite the injuries, he continued to fight until a Somali approached the group asking the survivors to surrender.

The Italian officer was taken prisoner along with three Malaysian soldiers, two of whom were injured, and a New Zealand soldier, who was also injured. The prisoners were taken to the home of a member of Mohamed Farrah Aidid's party.

Here a long discussion began among the militiamen. Some wanted to kill the prisoners, others proposed to release them unconditionally, while another part intended to demand money in exchange for their release.

The captivity lasted just over twelve hours.

Reflecting on those moments, Salvati recounted in an interview published by [*Rivista Militare*](#) that he did not feel fear or particular concern, although he acknowledged that fear always accompanies those who operate in dangerous situations. A reaction that he himself links to the way of conceiving the military profession: not simply as a job, but as a life choice.

If I had to find a word to define who the Soldier is, I would probably have difficulty, but I believe that a reflection should be made that can well help to understand the profession. In all trades, one can die from an accident. The only trade where one can die because it is necessary is that of the soldier, and therefore, those who choose to do it should think about it because it can happen.

Words that take on an even deeper meaning in light of what happened on that July 18. Salvati does not recount the episode with emphasis, nor does he present it as a moment destined to change his life or career. Instead, he considers it one of the risks that the military must be prepared to face in the fulfillment of their duty.

For his conduct during the ambush and subsequent captivity, he was awarded the **Bronze Medal for Military Valor**.

Paratrooper commando officer, assigned to military information at the UN humanitarian peacekeeping operation command in Somalia, volunteered to participate in a dangerous reconnaissance mission, in which he was involved in an ambush conducted by Somali militiamen.

Although wounded several times, he carried out an effective firefight, demonstrating composure and clarity and allowing other elements of the unit to reach cover.

Unconcerned by enemy fire, he simultaneously attempted to establish radio contact to request reinforcements but, realizing the impossibility of communicating, resumed the firefight, being further wounded.

Having fallen prisoner, he maintained exemplary behavior, ignoring the suffering caused by the wounds sustained and supporting the soldiers who shared his fate.

Clear example of high sense of duty, indomitable determination, and high courage.

Mogadishu, July 18, 1994.

Salvati himself especially recalled the ceremony organized by his unit for the awarding of the decoration. A recognition that, in his words, gains value not only for those who receive it but for the message it indirectly conveys to other soldiers, particularly the younger ones preparing to enter the Armed Forces.

On July 18, 1994, the mission did not achieve its objective. The patrol was surprised, two Malaysian soldiers lost their lives, and several men were wounded and captured. But it was precisely in that situation that the preparation, firmness, and courage of the men involved emerged.

Remembering Ferdinando Salvati, Azman Mohd Tahir, and Ghani Ak Binye today means bringing to light a story often forgotten about Somalia and giving a name, a face, and a story to the men who fought together in those hours.

A story in which the value of the Italian soldier does not appear through solemn declarations, but in deeds: in the ability to face combat, endure wounds, share the fate of his men, and maintain clarity even during captivity.

It is also the memory of two Malaysian soldiers who lost their lives far from their country, in the fulfillment of the same mission. Men belonging to different nations and units, united at that moment by the same duty and the same risk.