



September 15, 1993, Mogadishu: remembering Paratroopers Rossano Visioli and Giorgio Righetti

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On **September 15, 1993**, in the New Port of Mogadishu, Corporals paratroopers **Giorgio Righetti** and **Rossano Visioli** lost their lives, both in their twenties, belonging to the Italian contingent engaged in Somalia in operation **Ibis II**, as part of the UN mission **UNOSOM II**.

Thirty-three years from that evening, their name remains linked to one of the most dramatic events in the Italian military presence in Somalia.

The ambush at the New Port

It is approximately **7:20 PM on September 15, 1993** when four Italian soldiers go out to perform physical activity within the area of the New Port of Mogadishu.

They are Corporal **Giorgio Righetti**, Corporal **Rossano Visioli**, Corporal **Nicola Sforza** and paratrooper **Christian Baldassin**.

They are off duty and run along the quay of the northern pier wearing clothes used for physical activity. The port is an area under UNOSOM control, in which military personnel from various international contingents operate.

While the four traverse the northern area of the quay, shots are suddenly fired.

The Italian official reconstruction will attribute the action to **Somali snipers positioned on the heights overlooking the port**, in the area of the former central prison and the Giacomo De Martino hospital. Also the motivations of the Gold Medals for Army Valor subsequently awarded to Righetti and Visioli specifically mention shots fired by Somali snipers.

The four paratroopers immediately seek shelter.

According to subsequent reconstructions, after having reached the bottom of the quay and skirted the perimeter wall, they would have heard shots coming from behind them. They then attempt to reach some military vehicles parked on the quay.

It is at those moments that **Rossano Visioli is hit**.

Righetti, instead of continuing toward shelter, returns toward his comrade to try to assist him. He is in turn struck by bullets and dies on the spot.

Nicola Sforza manages to find protection between the vehicles, while Christian Baldassin runs toward Italian positions to ask for help.

Rescue operations and an extremely complex situation

The alarm quickly reaches the **Italian Contingency Logistics Unit, the RE.LO.CO**.

A first group of paratroopers arrives at the scene in combat formation and attempts to reach the two men remaining on the quay. A new exchange of fire follows toward positions outside the port from which the fire is believed to originate.

The situation quickly becomes difficult to interpret.

Various nationalities' units are present in the area and, in addition to the Italians, American military also intervene. Operational detachments of the **9th Assault Paratrooper Battalion "Col Moschin"** are also brought to the scene, some of which reach the area to protect the recovery of the wounded while others begin to move toward possible positions from which the

shots were fired.

Visioli is assisted by Italian medical personnel. Around **19:50** the helicopter arrives to transport him to the hospital, but the young paratrooper dies during the evacuation.

Righetti was already dead on the pier.

They were both **twenty years old**.

The official version and alternative hypotheses never confirmed

In the hours immediately following, Italian military reports attributed the killing of the two paratroops to **Somali snipers**.

The same reconstruction was supported by the Defense Minister at the time **Fabio Fabbri**, according to whom Righetti and Visioli had been hit by isolated shots fired by Somali elements.

The complete dynamics of what happened that evening, however, was subsequently subject to discussion.

Journalistic testimonies and documentation examined in the following years raised the hypothesis that during the clashes in the port area there may also have been **fire coming from UNOSOM units**, in a situation made particularly confused by the simultaneous presence of Italian, American, Pakistani, Emirati and other contingents.

In subsequent years, attention focused especially on the **positions of the United Arab Emirates contingent**, present in the port area and positioned in a dominant position over the pier. The simultaneous presence of multiple contingents, together with the exchanges of fire that occurred in the minutes following the ambush, fueled the hypothesis that at least part of the shots could have been fired by UNOSOM forces.

The **Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into the death of Ilaria Alpi and Miran Hrovatin** also examined the matter in depth. In September 2005 it acquired the correspondence of the Military Prosecutor's Office in Rome relating to the killing of Righetti and Visioli and, during the hearings, repeatedly returned to the dynamics of the ambush. Those heard included, among others, General **Carmine Fiore**, commander of the Italian contingent at the time of the events, and figures from intelligence agencies.

Assessments also emerged that differed significantly from the official reconstruction. The former SISMI director **Cesare Pucci** went so far as to suggest the hypothesis that it was not a simple incident, but a deliberate action attributable to military personnel belonging to UN contingents.

The investigations and subsequent documentary acquisitions, however, **did not lead to judicially establishing an alternative certain dynamic nor to identifying those responsible other than the Somali snipers indicated in the official version**: Righetti and Visioli fell as a result of shots fired by Somali snipers.

For this reason it is important to distinguish what is established from the hypotheses formulated later. That evening there was an extremely complex fire situation, but there is no definitive reconstruction that makes it possible to attribute with certainty every single shot fired in the New Port area.

Giorgio Righetti

Giorgio Righetti was born on **11 July 1973 in Viña del Mar, Chile**.

After moving with his family to Italy, he lived in Marina di Carrara. He had practiced swimming at a competitive level and in 1992 he left for military service.

After training at the Military School of Parachuting in Pisa, he chose to extend his service, obtaining the rank of corporal.

In June 1993 he arrived in Somalia with the Italian contingent.

The Presidency of the Republic recalls in the motivation of his decoration how during the mission he had repeatedly volunteered for weapons search and confiscation activities and for escorting convoys.

Rossano Visioli

Rossano Visioli was born in **Casalmaggiore, in the province of Cremona, on 10 May 1973**.

Before military service, he had worked as a typographer and practiced bodybuilding.

He too was enlisted in 1992 and served at the Military School of Parachuting and subsequently in the **3rd Parachutist Battalion "Poggio Rusco"**. After being retained in the armed forces

by request, he participated in operation **Ibis II** in Somalia from June 1993.

Righetti and Visioli thus found themselves both at the RE.LO.CO. of the New Port in Mogadishu.

Two different personal paths that met in the same mission and ended tragically on the same evening.

The Gold Medals for Valor of the Army

On **21 February 1995** Giorgio Righetti and Rossano Visioli were awarded, posthumously, the **Gold Medal for Valor of the Army**.

In the official motivations, the behavior held during the mission is recalled, the willingness to take part in the most risky activities and the service carried out within the Italian Ibis contingent.

For both, the motivation concludes by recalling 15 September 1993, when during a break from service, while engaging in physical and sporting activities within the New Port of Mogadishu, they were fatally struck by gunfire.

Two names in the memory of Italian Somalia

1993 was one of the most difficult years for the Italian Armed Forces engaged abroad.

Just over two months earlier, on **2 July**, Mogadishu had been the scene of the Pastificio battle, with the death of **Pasquale Baccaro, Stefano Paolicchi and Andrea Millevoi**.

On 15 September, the death of Righetti and Visioli reminded us once again how the Somali situation had by then moved far from the initial image of a simple humanitarian operation.

But after thirty-three years, the meaning of a commemoration is not only to reconstruct operations, clashes and controversies.

It is above all to preserve the names of the men.

Giorgio Righetti and Rossano Visioli were twenty years old.

Behind those two names were families, friends, fellow soldiers and a life that should have been still entirely to be lived.

Missions end. Units return. Generations change and, inevitably, the direct memory of those events fades away.

It is precisely then that it becomes even more important to tell them.

The **15 September 1993** remains a date in the history of the Italian presence in Somalia and in the community of paratroopers.

And the names of **Giorgio Righetti and Rossano Visioli** are part of it.

Folgore!