

50TH ANNIVERSARY 1975 - 2025

Aimpoint®

A CUT ABOVE

The ultra-slim COA with integrated A-CUT™ slide revolutionizes pistol-mounted red dots



The Gordon Carbine

Pinnacle of AR clone builds

Micro

The tiny optic that changed the world

ACRO Evolution

From pistols to long guns, the ACRO has you covered



By James Tarr
Photos by RBMT Media

THE GORDON CARBINE

A very special piece of history.

Clone builds have never been more popular, and of them all, the Gordon Carbine is the most famous. Uniquely, it does not represent a specific type of rifle used or adopted by our military but rather one rifle used by one man in a specific, historic incident.

THE GORDON CARBINE



Gordon refers to Master Sergeant (MSG) Gary Gordon whose carbine, known as the Gordon Carbine, was used during the Battle of Mogadishu, part of Operation Gothic Serpent, most famously known as the Black Hawk Down Incident that occurred October 3-4, 1993. This was the largest battle involving U.S. troops since the Vietnam War. SFOD-D “Delta Force” operators, backed up by U.S. Army Rangers, headed out into Mogadishu in an attempt to capture a Somali militia leader. Things went badly for a number of reasons. Two Black Hawk helicopters were downed by rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs).

MSG Gordon and Sergeant First Class Randy Shughart were SFOD-D sniper team members providing helicopter overwatch who repeatedly asked for permission to be dropped on the ground to defend Super Six Four, the second downed Black Hawk, until reinforcements could arrive. Once given the green light, Gordon and Shughart pulled the surviving crew from the downed helicopter and defended it until it is believed they ran out

of ammunition. Both Gordon and Shughart were killed in action and posthumously awarded Congressional Medals of Honor, the first recipients since the Vietnam War. They were two of 18 Americans killed during the incident.

Gordon’s carbine is unique and important not just as a piece of military history but as a waypoint in the evolution of the AR-15. At its heart, it’s an old-school carry handle CAR-15 equipped with a suppressor, SureFire flashlight, and Aimpoint red dot. It bridges the gap between the M16s and often-experimental CAR-15s of the Vietnam era and the modern carbines of today.

Perhaps the first person to build a “Gordon Carbine” clone was Joel Townsend, and he has become a well-known expert in the clone world. Many of his builds have been featured on the Administrative Results YouTube channel. He runs the OtterWeaponWorx YouTube channel and the @Otter_Weapon_Worx Instagram page. I spoke to him at length about the Gordon Carbine.

“I’m prior military and joined in 1996,” said Townsend. “I saw all the photos of Gary Gordon’s gun, and it was a gun I’d always wanted to build. I was already into cloning before it was cool. Sadly, there aren’t a lot of photos of the gun. There weren’t digital cameras in the ’90s. There’s maybe one or two grainy pics from Task Force Ranger, so a lot of it was guessing or talking to someone who knew someone who was there. As for the movie, they took the easy route. Those guns aren’t technically accurate.”

Adding to the difficulty, Delta operators are famous for refusing to talk to the press. For his book, “Black Hawk Down,” Mark Bowden mostly relied on interviews with Army Rangers.

“What’s really shocking is talking to SF operators who aren’t gun guys who had no clue about the guns they were running,” said Townsend. “I had a short one and a long one. I think my optic was an ACOG’ — that kind of thing. To them, it’s just a tool, so you have to rely on the secondary market, photos, or talk to a guy who worked in the 5th Group’s arms room to get the actual details of the guns.”

The Gordon Carbine looks like a short-barreled, carry-handle AR tipped with a suppressor, but looks can be deceiving.

“Talking to people who were there and getting firsthand information,” said Townsend, “I learned it was an Aimpoint 5000 optic and a SureFire 660 flashlight on a Colt with a 14.5-inch pencil barrel.”

This clone was built based on details gathered from SF operators present during the Battle of Mogadishu.



Down to the paint job, this is a true reproduction of the original carbine carried by MSG Gary Gordon.



THE GORDON CARBINE



Gordon's historic carbine wore an Aimpoint 5000 red-dot optic atop its carry handle.

The Colt 727 on right was used by U.S. Army Rangers. Unlike the Gordon Carbine, it uses an A2 upper receiver.



What you see on this clone is the M4 Suppressor from Allen Engineering. That military suppressor was never commercially available. It is a reflex suppressor that slides over the exposed barrel. A collar locks over the barrel just in front of the front sight post to keep the rear of the suppressor centered.

“Ron Allen [of Allen Engineering/Ops Inc.] told me it was originally a .30-caliber can on Gary Gordon’s gun,” said Townsend. “They cut off the end cap, recored it with a 5.56 baffle stack, and then rewelded an end cap on. It indexes over 4.5 inches of barrel. My M4 suppressor is painted with the original coating. Allen found a can of the original paint, this OD green/gray color, an old color of GunKote I think. So now my rifle is true.”

You’ll see a narrow CAR-15 handguard between the fixed front sight post and the carry handle receiver. While 1993 doesn’t seem that long ago, flat-top ARs didn’t exist yet. The Picatinny rail wasn’t standardized until 1994. In fact, the ubiquitous M4 with its 14.5-inch barrel sporting a cutout for mounting an M203 also wasn’t officially adopted until 1994, and the only place you could find free-floating handguards at that time were on competition rifles.

“In the ’90s, the M4 wasn’t a thing yet,” said Townsend. “They experimented with the CAR-15, the XM177. Colt had a lot of short-barrel

variations. There were A1s and the C7 upper of Colt Canada. There are a lot of photos of the time of SF guys running 20-inch guns with goofy configurations. You can find a lot of photos of guys there in Somalia, and some are running pencil barrels, some government-profile grenade launcher barrels, you name it. There’s a giant mix, and the working theory was that a lot of the guys liked the A1 sights better than the A2 sights — and many of them were still using iron sights. So that is why the C7 upper was put on brand-new M16A2 lowers — operator preference. They were getting all sorts of parts from Colt, from Colt Canada, etc., and building whatever guns they could.”

The C7 upper receiver was originally produced by Colt Canada and later added to many U.S.-made Colt carbines. The C7 has the original carry handle and rear sight of the M16A1 as well as the teardrop forward assist, but it also has the “Burton bump” shell deflector found on all the M16A2 rifles.

The A1 rear sight is simple. It has two apertures, one for close-range targets and one marked “L” for longer range. The rear sight is adjustable for windage via a wheel on the side of the fixed carry handle that is designed to be turned using the tip of a cartridge.



On an AR with a carry handle upper, there is a hole in the middle of the handle. Various types of optic mounts attach to the carrying handle using that hole. Here we come to one of the reasons why, historically speaking, the Gordon Carbine is such a big deal. It had an Aimpoint 5000 red dot mounted atop the carry handle.

These days, everyone sticks an optic atop their AR-15, and the U.S. military has authorized and issued a wide variety of optics for use on standard infantry rifles and carbines. Back in 1993, however, the only military guns regularly sporting optics were sniper rifles. Special operators had the freedom to use whatever gear they wanted and, through abusive testing, had proven that Aimpoint’s red dots could be trusted. Not only were they durable enough for duty use, but they found that red dots were faster than iron sights on their long guns. In fact, the M14 Randy Shughart carried that day was topped with an Aimpoint red dot as well, likely an Aimpoint 5000 2X — definitely a better choice for someone tasked with aerial sniper support.

The Aimpoint 5000 was launched in 1991 and has a longer tube than later models. Powered by a CR1/3N battery, it offered a red dot that was adjusted for brightness. Most of the Delta operators were running flashlights on their rifles, and the light of choice was the SureFire 660. This flashlight produced a whopping 60 lumens. At the time, SureFire offered a clamp mount to attach the light to the front sight post of an AR, but many operators used duct tape or pipe straps to attach flashlights to the handguard.

It’s unknown if the Gordon Carbine wore an A1, A2, or Lone Star grip, but they were the only choices at the time. Carbine stocks were mil-spec designs, either polymer or old Vietnam-era metal ones. Townsend even had his lower engraved to match what everyone

told him were the markings on the original.

Townsend understands that the Gordon Carbine isn’t just military history but a piece of AR-15 history, perfectly illustrating the transition between the old and new in function and features.

“In and coming out of Vietnam, they were experimenting,” said Townsend. “The Air Force had the GAU 5A, the Army had the XM177, and there were different barrel lengths: 12.5, 11.5, 10.5, some with moderators, some with flash hiders. They didn’t have round handguards at first. It’s the evolution of the 1955 AR-15. If you look at the modern HK416 or MK18, everything those guns have, the Gordon Carbine has — light, optic, and suppressor.”

“Now, look at the tall Unity mount. It’s 2.25 inches above the rail, which is almost the same height as an Aimpoint mounted to a carry handle. Having that upright, heads-up shooting position, especially if you’re on NODS, well, it was way ahead of its time. When you look at the Gordon Carbine, it literally has everything you need.” •