

# **Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War Study Guide**

**Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War by Mark Bowden**

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# Plot Summary

*Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern Warfare* is a non-fiction book by journalist Mark Bowden. *Black Hawk Down* tells the story of the Battle of Mogadishu that took place October 3, 1993. The author describes the action that took place that day in chilling detail that is written with the unique voice of a journalist that draws the reader into the action. *Black Hawk Down* is a well written narrative of modern combat that will keep the reader stuck to the page until the last word.

On October 3, 1993 Task Force Ranger prepared for a mission in the heart of Mogadishu. It was supposed to be a quick mission, lasting less than an hour. The soldiers, Rangers, Delta operators, and SEALs, were to go to a target house where clan leaders were meeting to capture two of warlord Aidid's important gang members. Due to the fact that it was a daytime mission, the soldiers assigned to the mission replaced things like canteens and NODs—Night Operation Devices—with extra ammunition.

The mission went wrong almost from the first moments for Chalk Four, which was led by Special Sergeant Matt Eversmann. Eversmann was told that his team would have to descend to the streets of Mogadishu several blocks from the corner they were assigned to set up a blocking position around. Then one of his Rangers, a young man straight out of high school who had yet to go through Ranger school, fell from the helicopter as the rest of the team slid down on ropes.

As Eversmann and his men struggled to get through the congestion of the streets of Mogadishu under fire by both the local militia and local citizens angered by the collateral damage of this and previous missions, the Delta operators raided the target house and took prisoner multiple Somalis, including the two target men and a lieutenant of Aidid's. This was even better than they had planned.

The Humvees whose job it was to pick up the prisoners and transport them back to base become lost in the melee that quickly erupted in the streets. Struck with the loss of one of their own while attempting to return to base with Eversmann's injured man, the men were somewhat reluctant to return to the fight. However, with the loss of one Black Hawk, the men knew they must return and recover their men. Others on the base who were not part of the original assault, lined up to join the fight, including one who was kept out of the fight due to an injured elbow.

A rescue team was sent to the crash site to help the injured, but assault by Somalis caused the helicopter to take off again right away, leaving two of the rescue specialists on the ground with little support. The Humvees finally picked up the prisoners and were directed to the crash site, but they lost their direction due to miscommunication with air support and decided to abandon the cause in favor of returning the injured to base. During all of this, another Black Hawk helicopter was shot down and the crew, as well as two Delta snipers who were roped in to help, were killed, with the exception of the pilot. Warrant Officer Durant was rescued by a militia leader who hoped to trade him for

clan members previously captured by Americans. Durant was then taken by leaders who wanted to hold him for ransom against the American government.

The ground troops left in Mogadishu made their way to the first crash site soon after the prisoners were secured. This included both Delta operators and Rangers. The Delta operators ignored orders by the leader of the Rangers, Captain Steele, and moved ahead. Some of the Rangers followed them. Delta Operator, Sergeant First Class Howe, saw the need for cover and cleared a house for that purpose, but others cleared another house, causing a separation in the remaining troops that would make rescue difficult.

Multiple soldiers were wounded during the night and a makeshift clinic was set up to treat them. Rescue was dispatched near midnight, consisting of vehicles and soldiers from America, Malaysia, and Pakistan, but it would take hours to reach the stranded soldiers due to road blocks and fighters in the streets. When the rescue convoy finally reached the first crash site, it took hours to excavate Wolcott's body from his downed aircraft, delaying the rescue mission. Finally the vehicles, loaded with the wounded, took off, but dozens of soldiers were left without a seat in the vehicles and forced to run alongside them to the Pakistani Stadium where safe harbor was offered.



# The Assault

*Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* is a true story based on the Battle of Mogadishu that took place October 3, 1993.

More than a hundred Rangers, Delta operators, and SEALs sat on the tarmac in the hot afternoon sun on October 3, 1993 waiting for the signal to take off and begin their mission. Many times in the past the soldiers had waited like this only to have their mission scrubbed at the last minute, rehearsals that were meant to keep them prepared for the unexpected. This time, however, the mission was not scrubbed. This time, four chinks under the command of Captain Steele would go into Mogadishu to provide cover for the Delta operators to capture two of warlord Aidid's men at a private residence where they were rumored to be attending a clan meeting.

Like many of the men, Chalk Four leader Eversmann left behind his canteen and NODs to make room for more ammunition. The men were confident they would not need this excess equipment because the mission was simple and would only take what they could use during the daylight mission.

There were tires burning in the street when the first of the helicopters began to converge on the skies above the cities, normally a sign that the Somalis knew they were coming. This time, however, they chose to ignore the warning because the tires have been burning all day. As the helicopters hover over the target area, the Rangers and Delta operators begin roping down to the ground. Eversmann's pilot informed him that he could not get as close to the target area as planned. Eversmann's men descended the helicopter, Super Six Seven, several blocks from the corner where they were to set up a blocking position.

When Eversmann landed on the ground, he discovered that the youngest member of his team, Private First Class Blackburn, was injured. At first Eversmann thought he had been shot, but quickly realized he had fallen the seventy feet to the ground from the helicopter. Eversmann radioed his commanders and asked for extraction for Blackburn immediately. When medics came, they informed Eversmann that they would have to take Blackburn to the Humvees waiting to extract the prisoners, which meant taking him toward the target building under fire by local militia and Somali citizens. Eversmann sent five of his men with Blackburn.

At the same time, the Delta operators arrived at the target house and begin storming it, checking each room carefully. Sergeant Paul Howe led the way through the rooms, finally coming into an upstairs room where several other Delta operators were still searching. As they moved around the room, bullets come flying from a corner that was being covered by Rangers. Once again this was proof to Howe that the Rangers were not well trained.

A Humvee driven by Sergeant Jeff Struecker got lost on the way to the Olympic Hotel, where they were to wait to collect the captured prisoners and transport them back to the



base. It was Struecker who was assigned to take Blackburn back to base after his extraction. As they made their way through the building melee in the streets, one of Streucker's men was shot in the head and killed. It was the first casualty of the battle and Struecker hesitated to announce it over the radio, potentially affecting soldier morale.

Eversmann's Chalk Four continued to fight their way toward the target building amid a growing number of militia fighters in the street. Pinned down in an alley, one of Eversmann's men, Sergeant Scott Galentine, was shot in the hand, causing his thumb to be severed. Moments later, Private Anton Berendsen was shot in the shoulder. Medics came to deal with the wounded while yet another of Eversmann's men was shot. Then one of the men saw a Black Hawk helicopter get hit.

This chapter introduces the purpose of the mission and the first few minutes of the assault. In real time, everything taking place in this chapter happens in a matter of minutes.

The purpose of the assault was simple. The Rangers were to act as support to a group of Delta operators who were to capture several of warlord Aidid's men in a private residence in Mogadishu. It was supposed to be a simple daylight mission, in and out in under an hour. However, the timing of the assault was difficult because there would be hundreds of civilians and private militia men in the streets, many of them drug addicts who would be at the peak of their high. Resistance would be intense.

Things began going wrong immediately with Chalk Four when one of their men fell from the Black Hawk helicopter that brought them in. Bad luck continued as the men of Chalk Four found themselves blocked from their intended location and pinned down by enemy fire. Bad luck struck the Delta operators as well, as the Rangers mistook them for enemies and fired at them in the target house. One of the Humvees got lost on the way to the target site and later lost a man on the ride back to base. Finally, multiple members of Chalk Four were shot and wounded.

The author of this book notes on multiple occasions that the mission was thought to be a brief one. The soldiers reacted to this idea by leaving behind important equipment and going into the mission with the optimism of a bunch of young men eager to play soldier. The innocence of some of the soldiers is noted on several occasions as the author points out that many of the soldiers were very young, some fresh out of high school, and that one was the unit clerk until the morning of the assault. This makes these people real to the reader and makes the reader care about what is about to happen to them.



# Black Hawk Down

A week before the mission that brought Rangers, Delta operators, and SEALs into Mogadishu on October 3, 1993, a Black Hawk helicopter was shot down over Mogadishu by an RPG, a rocket propelled grenade. The soldiers had always believed that a Black Hawk could not be brought down by an RPG and that this one incident had been a fluke. However, this would prove to be naive. As Super Six One flew over the city, an RPG ripped through it, causing the helicopter to go into a spin. The pilot calmly attempted to get the aircraft under control, but a crash was inevitable. The helicopter went down in an alley beside a house, crushing a corner of the house and the fence surrounding it as it fell on its left side, crumpling the nose of the craft and killing the pilots on impact.

Immediately the leaders back at the base could see on observation cameras the Somalis running toward the crash. Several Rangers rushed in that direction as well, only to discover one of the smaller helicopters, a Little Bird, had landed near the crash site. The Little Bird immediately came under fire even as they attempted to check for survivors. They identified one of the crewmembers, Staff Sergeant Daniel Busch, but he had a gunshot to the abdomen and there was little anyone could do for him.

At the same time Super Six One was being shot down, the D-boys, Delta operators, were waiting for a signal from the Humvee convoy alerting them that it was time to bring out the prisoners. The convoy, however, was waiting for a signal from the D-boys. In time the confusion was straightened out and they began to load the prisoners. Unfortunately, the Humvees were already filled with dozens of wounded. Instead of taking the prisoners directly to the American base, however, the Humvees were ordered to go to the crash site and pick up any survivors.

A CSAR, Combat Search and Rescue, team was sent to the crash site of Super Six One. Unfortunately the helicopter was hit by ground fire and forced to return to base before they could drop any of their rescue personnel. At the same time, a few blocks from the target building Chalk Four was picked up by the Humvees and joined the convoy to the crash site.

In the air over the city, Super Six Four learned that they had been hit in the tail area by an RPG. At first they were unaware of the damage because everything continued to work normally. After flying another mile or so, the tail rotor evaporated causing the helicopter to fall forward. Durant maintained some control and was able to keep the helicopter level as it crashed into a Mogadishu alley.

As word spread of the second crash, discussion took place as to where the forces should go next. As the convey continued to make its way to the first crash site, a grenade hit the third Humvee in the column. Delta Master Sergeant Tim 'Griz' Martin and Private Adalberto Rodriguez were injured by the explosion and Rodriguez was then run over when the disoriented driver did not see his body where it had been blown into the street. As the convoy stopped to recover the injured, several soldiers took up



defensive position to protect the convoy. Sergeant Joyce was shot in the back. On one of the Humvees, Sergeant Lorenzo Ruiz was hit while shooting the .50 caliber gun on top of the vehicle, a gun he had taken over for another soldier. Another gunner, corporal Jim Cavaco also was hit in the back of the head, killed instantly.

Despite the large number of casualties and the heavy fire, the convoy was ordered to continue on to the first crash site. The convoy had been relying on directions from the helicopters flying above them and directions radioed to the head quarters back at base from the observation aircraft. The problem was that the directions from the observation aircraft were delayed causing the convoy to turn down the wrong roads. The men asked for directions directly from the Black Hawks above them, but they were sending them to the wrong crash site, forcing them to turn around once again.

During the confusion of the convoy, one driver was shot in the back of the head. Although the helmet saved his life, the hit caused him to temporarily go blind. Still driving, the only thing the men could do was to give him verbal instruction until they could safely stop and change drivers. Another driver, a man the others had dubbed Alphabet because his last name was too hard to pronounce, was hit with an unexploded RPG that lodged itself in his chest.

Finally Lieutenant Colonel Dave McKnight came to his senses after being injured and regained control over his confused and disoriented convoy. McKnight announced his intention to take the wounded back to the base rather than going to the first crash site. Less than two hours into the battle, the crippled convoy approached K-4 circle, preparing for another ambush as they made their way to the base.

In this chapter, the author describes the crash of Super Six One, a Black Hawk helicopter. The Americans had assumed the RPGs shot from the ground could never bring down a helicopter as large and powerful as a Black Hawk, but it happened a week before the Battle of Mogadishu. The crew of that helicopter had died upon impact, but their bodies had been mutilated by the Somalis. Also of concern, the Black Hawk helicopters carry technology and equipment the American government did not want to get into the wrong hands. Therefore, it was of great concern to get as many men around the downed aircraft to protect it and the survivors.

In the aftermath of the crash of Super Six One, another Black Hawk suffers a blow from one of the RPGs on the ground. This helicopter crashed south of the Olympic Hotel, not far from the target house. This crash would confuse matters. On top of this, the convoy that carried the prisoners took multiple casualties during their attempts to get to the first crash site. The convoy also suffered the confusion of the small, narrow streets of Mogadishu, road blocks, and miscommunication with the people trying to direct them to the crash site. In fact, the convoy would pass the crash site twice without being aware of it. In the end, the convoy would decide to return to base, get medical help for the wounded, and regroup in order to find a way to rescue the downed helicopters' crews.

An assault that should have been simple and quick turned into a nightmare for the American forces. Not only did they experience more resistance on the streets than they





expected, they suffered the loss of two Black Hawk helicopters and the confusion of miscommunication between the leaders and the ground troops. It was a recipe that spelled disaster for many of the soldiers. Seventy-five men were with the convoy and more than half were injured during the disastrous tour through the city in their attempt to find the first crash site.

## Overrun

As the convoy wandered lost around Mogadishu, a CSAR Black Hawk dropped two medics, Technical Sergeant Tim Wilkinson and Master Sergeant Scott Fales on Marehan Road right in front of the alley where Super Six One went down. Chalk Two had already been at the site and set up a perimeter, killing multiple Somalis to protect the site. Fales ran toward the aircraft and was shot in the ankle. Wilkinson climbed into the aircraft and helped another crew member of the Six One pull out the co-pilot, who was dead. Wilkinson then confirmed the death of Wolcott. However, there would be no pulling Wolcott out of the wreck because the nose of the helicopter had crumpled and then buried itself in the soil, causing Wolcott's body to be wedged in the wreckage.

After the crash of Super Six Four, several helicopters hovered overhead watching the Somalis converge on the site, including Super Six Two. On board Six Two were three Delta snipers. Two of these men, Sergeant First Class Randy Shughart and Master Sergeant Gary Gordon, asked repeatedly and finally received permission to rope down to the crash site to protect the crash until more help could arrive.

Back at the base, several of the soldiers who had been held out of the initial assault for various reasons listen to the reports on the radio. Some of them, like injured Specialist Dale Sizemore, were anxious to get into the fighting. Sizemore even cut off a cast on his infected elbow so that he would be allowed to go when the Humvees that had delivered wounded Blackburn to the base went out again. Others, however, were frightened and wanted to stay as far from the fighting as possible despite the growing need for fresh replacements. As the Humvees and soldiers made their way back into Mogadishu, they found themselves immediately under attack and blocked at every turn by roadblocks. They continued on anyway.

The remainder of Chalk Two was ordered, along with all the other ground troops, to converge on the first crash site. Sergeant Ed Yurek led the men the three blocks to the site, leapfrogging across streets and taking fire from the surrounding buildings. Yurek and his men got pinned down near their destination by several Somalis with a big gun. It took a LAW, Light Antitank Weapon, to stop the shooting. At the same time, Captain Steele gathered the remnants of his Rangers and the few Delta operators on the ground and directed them to make their way to the first crash site. The Delta operators, used to working individually, moved ahead of the Rangers and a few of the Rangers followed them despite orders to remain with Steele and his group.

The group of ground soldiers divided into several groups. Sergeant First Class Paul Howe was a Delta team leader who led the front group to the first crash site, including several Rangers. Then multiple members of Chalk One separated from the other rangers with Lieutenant Larry Perino. Captain Steele brought up the rear with multiple Rangers including his second in command Lieutenant Lechner. Several men would be wounded during the short walk to the first crash site. While placing bright orange panels in the street to direct aircraft to their location, Steele and his men began to take small arms fire. Lechner was hit while radioing for air support.



Across town, as the Rangers were converging on the first crash site, Warrant Officer Mike Durant woke up in his crashed aircraft. Aware that his femur was fractured and that he might have damaged vertebrae in his back, Durant remained in his seat. His co-pilot, Chief Warrant Officer Ray Frank, had similar injuries, but he managed to climb out of the mangled wreck. Shughart and Gordon descended on the crash site and helped Durant from the wreckage, setting him on the ground on the far side of the wreck before returning to the opposite side to fight of the growing mob of Somali people. Gordon was killed and Shughart got his gun, giving it to Durant before returning to the nose of the aircraft to continue fighting off the Somalis. In time, Shughart was killed as well. Without anyone to guard the aircraft, the Somalis overran it. Durant was soon discovered. The Somalis surrounded him and began to attack, beating him and removing his clothing. However, a Somali militia leader, Mo'alim, thought that if he kept the pilot alive he might be used in an exchange for Somali prisoners. Mo'alim fought off the crowd and carried Durant away.

This chapter describes events that took place about the same time as the events in the previous chapter. This chapter focuses on the ground troops who remained after the prisoners were placed in the convoy. This included Rangers and Delta operators as well as CSAR personnel and survivors of the helicopter crashes. The Rangers and Delta operators were ordered to gather at the first crash site, but from the beginning they separated into smaller groups. Each of these groups were vulnerable to attack and suffered some casualties. They might have been stronger as a single unit, but differences in training and attitude made this impossible.

At the same time, Humvees entered the battle zone again, eager to help those who have been left stranded. However, the Somalis have created road blocks that along with the ground fighting made it nearly impossible to maneuver the heavy military vehicles around the city fast enough to provide any aid. Despite this, many men proved themselves to be heroic on that day, including one soldier who placed his own health at risk to fight.

The most important event described in this chapter is the crash of Super Six Four and its aftermath. Warrant Officer Mike Durant would be the only survivor of the crash despite the heroic efforts of D-boys, Shughart and Gordon. Durant's life was ironically saved by a militia leader in hopes of trading him for some clan prisoners held by the United States. This act saved Durant from a horrible death and provided a chance for the soldier to live through this deadly battle.

# The Alamo

The soldiers who had converged on the first crash scene were spread out in an L shape along the block. Howe cleared a house to offer cover for his men while several other teams did the same in houses along the block. The trouble with this, beyond the separation of the force, was that some of the Rangers did not know which houses held friendlies and which held enemies.

Perino and his men took up a position on a small tin porch-like structure not far from the crash site. They came under fire and Corporal Jamie Smith was hit. It did not seem too bad at first, but it quickly became clear that the bullet hit the femoral artery and severed it. The medic, Sergeant Kurt Schmid, went to work on Smith immediately, but he knew if he did not clamp off the artery quickly that Smith would bleed out. Schmid even attempted to find the ends of the artery by placing his hands inside the wound, but the end of the artery had retracted into the abdomen. Opening Smith's abdomen would only cause him to lose more blood. Schmid knew Smith had to be taken out of the battlefield immediately, but repeated requests were denied.

At the same time Smith was hit, Private Rodriguez was also hit in the pelvis. Rodriguez' testicle was blown off, causing him to lose a great deal of blood. Medics rushed him to safety inside a local house and placed him in pressure pants to slow the flow of blood. At about the same time, Stebbins found himself separated from the majority of his group by ground fire. Three times Steele and others watched as Stebbins was knocked down by enemy fire and assumed dead, only to see him pop back up again. The last time Stebbins suffered burns and had shrapnel embedded over his left side. At first Stebbins was not even aware of his wounds. Wilkinson stripped his pants from the burns and handed him a gun after feeding him pain pills, instructing him to guard the single window in the room where they were taking the wounded.

Back at the base, the lost convoy arrived with the wounded and the dead. Major Rob Marsh directed the field hospital, choosing who to treat and who was too badly wounded to waste time on. Among those chosen to discard as unsaveable was Alphabet. Alphabet still had an unexploded RPG in his chest, prompting munitions expert Sergeant First Class Randy Rymes to place the body in a bunker of sorts and disarm the weapon. At the same time, Super Six Six delivered fresh water and IV fluids to the first crash site, leaving the men to settle in for the long night ahead of them.

Steele and his team, as well as the D-boys leader, were instructed to move closer together to make rescue efforts easier. Howe was forced to give up his safe house and move across the street, a position he felt was weak. The courthouse of the buildings closest to the crash site became filled with soldiers and chaos. The D-boys wanted to place a big gun in the street, but Steele refused to allow any more of his Rangers to go out into the darkness. It was about this time that the soldiers regretted leaving their NODs back at the base.



News of Smith's death after repeated requests to have him medivaced out of the area hit many of the men hard, especially Steele. The number of wounded continued to increase and they needed more room to accommodate them. At one point, they broke open a wall in the house where they were taking shelter to increase the size of the room. The rest of the men settled in for the long night, finding various ways to occupy their time.

This chapter moves several hours into the battle, taking the reader from the immediacy of the assault and its aftermath to the movements of the men remaining on the ground after the convoy and the air support has gone. These men were not prepared to spend the night in Mogadishu and lacked the supplies necessary for night battles and the need for simple necessities in a long battle, such as water. Only three miles from their base, the men were stranded and left on their own devices.

Smith was injured in the leg, his artery severed. This wound needed an immediate trip to the operating room, but because of the previous two helicopter crashes and various other attacks on aircraft, the commanders back at base were unwilling to send in another helicopter to rescue the poor man. While the reader is aware of the attacks made on the Little Bird that previously landed in the area, it is still difficult to fully understand the ramifications of this decision. These men were truly on their own until ground forces could find a way to rescue them.

Confusion continues to rule the day, as well. The ground forces, Rangers and Delta operators, are separated along an L-shape down the block where the first crash site was located. In-fighting among these soldiers causes a great deal of tension and miscommunication, leading to a separation of the force that could cause trouble in rescue efforts. Attempts to repair this situation were met with resistance, showing the reader that not only the enemy was at fault for this dire situation, but also the egos of men. The reader can only hope as the story continues that these egos do not leave anyone dead.

## N.S.D.Q.

Durant was taken by a larger militia group after his rescue by Mo'alim with the intention of holding him for ransom. Durant was then taken to a room where he would be forced to make a video tape to be used in ransom demands. The video would be played all over the world.

The Humvees that had gone out earlier in the evening returned to base with the wounded. Then they were packed up again and sent to New Port to meet up with Malaysian and Pakistani soldiers and vehicles to form a rescue convoy of over a hundred vehicles. It took many hours to get the convoy on the road because of disagreements and reluctance on the part of the Malaysian and Pakistani drivers. However, compromises were made and the convoy was finally on its way shortly before midnight.

Steele was notified of the approaching convoy and instructed to set up special strobes to alert them of their position. At the same time, the convoy headed through the city it took ground fire. One man was hit in the head with shrapnel but miraculously survived. Sizemore, despite his infected elbow, was finally seeing battle. About half of the rescue convoy was directed to the crash site of Super Six Four, Durant's Black Hawk. Upon arrival they found the helicopter deserted. The soldiers set off charges in the helicopter to keep the Somalis from taking any sensitive equipment inside. Near the Olympic Hotel, the convoy was stopped by a roadblock that the Malaysian soldiers refused to drive over. The men got out to dismantle it and to set up a protective line. One man was shot in the head just seconds after taking up the position of another soldier.

When the convoy reached the first crash site, the wounded were loaded immediately into the vehicles. However, attempts to rescue Wolcott's body from the wreckage of the Black Hawk took several hours, delaying the rescue mission. Finally, as the sun came up, the convoy began to move. However, there were so many people inside the vehicles that most of the survivors of the battle who were not wounded were forced to run alongside the vehicles over a mile to the Pakistani arena where a field hospital had been set up. The men were exhausted and still under fire from the Somalis, but most made it without incident.

Once inside the arena, the men were able to speak to one another about what had happened and learn who had survived and who had not. Many of the men had lost a good friend or two. It was a sobering time for the men, but some found comfort in a job completed successfully, while others plotted new missions to get revenge for the dead.

As Monday dawned bright, news of the battle began to reach those left behind in America. There was little concern about the mission as of yet. In fact, President Clinton was told the facts and he dismissed them, his mind busy on other matters in Russia and a planned trip to San Francisco. It would not be until later, when the videotape of Durant and images of American soldiers being dragged through the city would be shown that outrage would spread throughout American households.



Wives would begin gathering their friends to watch the news and try to give a name to the soldiers being dragged through the city, hoping it was not their husbands. The father of Jamie Smith learned of his son's death and was set upon by reporters asking cruel and unnecessary questions.

Durant's ransom was paid for by Aidid and he was taken into the custody of Firimbi, Aidid's propaganda secretary. For several days, Durant and Firimbi were alone together and built up something of a friendship. Durant was visited by a doctor and a Red Cross worker. Durant was allowed to write a letter to his family back home and to the men he left behind on the base. In the latter letter, Durant signed it with the initials, N.S.D.Q., but the Red Cross scratched them out, afraid that Durant was attempting to send a coded message. However, Durant was only trying to show his defiance by stating the motto of his company: Night Stalkers Don't Quit.

The Clinton administration changed their policy on Somalia, deciding to move all the soldiers out of the area and assist Aidid in becoming a part of the new Somali government. Robert Oakley flew to Somalia to discuss this change with Aidid's top aides. When negotiations were completed, Oakley then told them that it would be in their best interest to release Durant as soon as possible because he could not be sure what the angry soldiers still in Somalia would do. Durant's release was arranged for the following day.

This chapter covers the final hours of the battle. The men, pinned down in the area around the first crash site, were finally rescued by a huge convoy that consisted of American, Malaysian, and Pakistani soldiers and vehicles. The combined effort finally represented a large enough force that the Somali people could not stop them. Unfortunately, the exhausted soldiers who somehow survived the fight without injury were forced to run out of the city due to fright among the drivers of the vehicles and a lack of room. All in all, nineteen men died and more than seventy were wounded.

Durant was kept hostage for ten days, finally being released when Robert Oakley threatened Aidid with the wrath of the surviving soldiers. In an ironic turn of fate, Aidid saved Durant's life by paying his ransom and holding him hostage in hopes of using him against the Americans. Durant's fate was in question from the moment he survived the crash until Aidid placed him with his propaganda secretary and threatened the secretary with a painful death should anything happen to Durant. If not for the warlord who caused the situation that led to the crash of Durant's Black Hawk, Durant more than likely would have met a darker fate.

The politics involved in this battle left many of the soldiers stunned. Clinton was mortified by what the press was portraying as an utter failure in Somalia. Despite the fact that the soldiers had done what they were sent in to do, Clinton's administration did a complete one eighty on their policy regarding Aidid, deciding that instead of ousting him, they would support his bid to be a part of the new government of Somalia. Clinton wanted the Battle of Mogadishu to disappear and his changing policy did just that. Many of the survivors of the battle were back home within a month, left without recourse to exact revenge on those who had killed their buddies.



# Important People

## Major General William F. Garrison

The commander of Task Force Ranger, Major General Garrison, was a slender, grey haired man who often had a cigar jutting out of his mouth. Garrison was a career soldier who began as a private and served two tours in Vietnam, including time helping to run the infamously brutal Phoenix program that helped root out and kill Viet Cong village leaders. Garrison was a blunt, brutal man who believed it was a necessary evil to take respect and superiority by force.

Garrison and his Ranger force had been dubbed Keystone Kops in the press because of several tactical errors while serving in Somalia. Mistakes had been made that were portrayed in the press to be more serious than they truly were. For this reason, Garrison was conscious of pressure from Washington to quickly and silently remove Aidid as a player in Somalia. Garrison became aware of a certain caution in choosing missions among his staff members, and even he gave a simple list of criteria that must be met before a mission could be executed. Garrison's troops soon became accustomed to gearing up for a mission only to have it canceled at the last minute.

On October 3, 1993, information from spies and reconnaissance informed Garrison that two important members of Aidid's gang would be in a house at the same time in Mogadishu that afternoon. With a strong probability of success, Garrison planned and began to execute the arrest of these two men. Garrison would visit the departing troops and wish them luck personally before the start of the mission.

## Staff Sergeant Matt Eversmann

Staff Sergeant Matt Eversmann was a Ranger. On October 3, Eversmann found himself in charge of his small chalk by default. Eversmann's previous leader was sent home and the man's replacement was taken out of commission by a seizure. Eversmann was nervous before the mission began that afternoon because he had never wanted to be in charge of the lives of the men around him.

Eversmann was particularly aware of the dangers posed to and by one young man in his chalk, Private Blackburn. Blackburn was young and had not yet gone through Ranger school; therefore he was the most likely to get into trouble during the mission. Eversmann told the young boy to stay close to him. As they flew over Mogadishu, Eversmann learned that his men would have to rope down blocks from their assigned section of the crowded city street. This would mean that his men would have to hustle to play their part in the mission.

Upon dropping onto the ground, Eversmann became aware that Blackburn was injured. At first Eversmann thought Blackburn had been shot, but quickly came to the realization that Blackburn had fallen from the helicopter after missing the rope. Eversmann quickly





arranged for medic attention and extraction for Blackburn. The Humvees that were assigned the task of driving the prisoners out of Mogadishu pick up Blackburn and Eversmann's men, eventually taking them back to the American air base.

## **Warrant Officer Mike Durant**

Warrant Officer Mike Durant was the pilot of the Super Six Four Black Hawk shot down over Mogadishu on October 3 by an RPG. Durant survived the crash, but suffered a broken tibia and possible crushed vertebrae in his back. Durant watched his co-pilot, also with a broken leg and possible back injuries, climb out of the helicopter unassisted. It would be the last time Durant would see him.

Durant was pulled out of his helicopter by two Delta Force Snipers, Shugart and Gordon. Durant thought that because the D-boys were there that they would be quickly rescued. Unfortunately, Shugart and Gordon were the only soldiers who would respond to the crash. Gordon and Shugart fended off a mob of militia men and angry Somalis for a time before the mob became too overwhelming. Gordon was killed. Shugart took Gordon's gun, ran around the helicopter and gave it to Durant, wishing him luck before returning to the front of the helicopter to attempt to fend off the worst of the crowd. Shugart would be killed within ten minutes.

Durant was soon discovered by the angry mob and attacked, beaten and stripped of most of his clothing. A local militia leader realized that taking Durant alive could make him a potential trade for Somalia leaders held by the Americans. The man stopped the crowd from killing Durant and took him prisoner, only to be forced to hand him over to a larger and more powerful group hours later. Durant was forced to make a videotape that would be used to ask for a ransom. Unbeknownst to him, Aidid paid his ransom and took him as his hostage.

Durant was taken into the care of Aidid's propaganda secretary. Durant was treated well, allowed access to a doctor and Red Cross workers. Durant was allowed to write letters to his wife and family as well as his buddies back on the American base. In this latter letter, Durant wrote the initials N.S.D.Q. which the Red Cross thought was a secret message, but was in fact the initials of his squads motto: Night Stalkers Don't Quit. Durant would be freed ten days after the Battle of Mogadishu.

## **Sergeant First Class Paul Howe**

Howe was a leader of the elite Delta Force or D-boys. Howe would lead a team into the home in question and assist in the arrests of the leaders in Aidid's gang. Later, Howe would join the Rangers in a rescue attempt at the first crash site. Howe, who perceived a lack of training and leadership among the Rangers would become deeply frustrated with the group and try to take command of the group. In fact, Howe separated from the main body of the group and led his men to the crash site with a few Rangers following close behind. Howe cleared a house near the first crash site to set up a command location, but other commanders would chose a house across the street for the



command post, causing a separation in the forces that would lead to difficulties with rescue efforts.

## **Captain Mike Steele**

Captain Mike Steele was the leader of the four Ranger chinks that would provide support on the ground to the Delta Force who would raid and arrest the targets in Mogadishu. Late in the day on October 3, Steele and his remaining Rangers would team with a group of Delta Force soldiers still on the ground and make their way on foot to the first crash site. The Delta Force soldiers were trained to act individually in battle and would quickly move up ahead of the Rangers. This caused some of the frightened Rangers to follow, causing a separation in the group. Steele would be left behind with a few soldiers where he would watch as his second in command was shot in the leg and two of his soldiers would be knocked flat and appeared dead three times. Eventually Steele would march out of Mogadishu with the remaining uninjured soldiers to a local arena, where he would learn that four of his men had been killed in the battle.

## **Chief Warrant Officer Cliff 'Elvis' Wolcott**

Chief Warrant Officer Cliff Wolcott was a gentle man who rarely got ruffled even in the most tense situations, which, along with his impersonations, earned him the nickname Elvis. Wolcott was the pilot of Super Six One, the first Black Hawk helicopter to be shot down over Mogadishu on October 3. Wolcott would remain calm even as his helicopter spun out of control, teasing his co-pilot as he fought he controls. Wolcott would die upon impact from the massive crumpling of the nose of the helicopter against his body. It would take several hours to extract Wolcott's body from the downed craft, delaying the rescue of the surviving soldiers at the site.

## **Private First Class Todd Blackburn**

Private First Class Todd Blackburn was fresh out of high school and had not been through Ranger school yet when he was assigned to Chalk Four. Eversmann would instruct Blackburn carefully in the moments before his chalk was to rope into Mogadishu to provide support for the Delta Force team assigned to find and arrest two major members of Aidid's group. However, Blackburn would fall from the aircraft as his team made their decent seventy feet down to the ground. Blackburn would be extricated from the battle via Humvee in the first hours of the battle.

## **Mohamed Farrah Aidid**

Aidid was a warlord of the Haber Gidr clan in Mogadishu who took it upon himself to steal food sent to his country as aid to help those suffering from years of civil war and kept it from the people in an attempt to control them. Aidid had picked a fight with America by interfering with this aid and was the prime target in an attempt to rid the



country of unrest and insert a working government in Somalia. It was two of Aidid's high advisors that were the target of the mission that took place on October 3, 1993.

## **Corporal Jamie Smith**

Jamie Smith was with the group of Rangers who moved to the first crash site in the fading light of the evening on October 3. Smith was shot in the upper leg during the move to the crash site, a wound that severed his femoral artery. Medics attempted to find the severed artery and clamp it to slow the bleeding, but the end of the artery had retreated into Smith's abdomen. The medic applied pressure both to the leg and the abdomen to attempt to stop the bleeding. Multiple requests were made throughout the night to have a helicopter pick Smith up and get him the medical help he desperately needed, but all these requests were denied for fear of causing another helicopter to be shot down. Smith would bleed to death before rescue could reach the men.

## **Specialist John Stebbins**

Specialist John Stebbins joined the Rangers to see fighting, but when commanders learned he could type they assigned him to be company clerk. Stebbins watched as all his fellow soldiers went on mission after mission only to be left behind. On October 3, due to the fact that fellow Ranger Specialist Sizemore would not be able to fight because of an infection in his elbow, was assigned to join the mission in Mogadishu. Stebbins would be among the Rangers sent to the first crash site as night began to fall in the city. Stebbins would be knocked down three times by enemy fire, once suffering burns and shrapnel from an explosion that would leave his left side injured. Stebbins was thought dead all three times he was hit, but he would survive to ride out of Mogadishu with the rest of the injured on October 4.

# Objects/Places

## RPGs

RPGs, or rocket propelled grenades, are large grenades that are shot out of a large, tube-like weapon. RPGs were responsible for shooting down two Black Hawk helicopters during the battle of Mogadishu and wounding several other aircraft.

## NODs

NODs, or Night Observation Devices, were among many pieces of equipment Rangers chose to leave behind at their base for what was supposed to be a short, daylight mission. The NODs, delicate and annoying equipment normally hung from around the soldier's neck, proved to be invaluable to the few who managed to procure one during the long night of fighting in Mogadishu October 3-4.

## Canteens

Many soldiers chose to pack extra ammunition rather than carry what appeared to be unnecessary equipment such as canteens during what was supposed to be a short, daylight mission.

## Aden House

The crash of Super Six One damaged the corner of a home occupied by Abdiaziz Ali Aden and his family. Later the Rangers and Delta Force soldiers who converged on the first crash site would take cover in this home.

## Clan

Much of Somalia is divided into specific clans, or tribes. Each clan has its own set of leaders. It is this division that has caused civil unrest in the country and caused the civil wars that brought the attention of the UN and American forces. Warlord Aidid was a leader of one of these Clans, Haber Gidr, and his desire for control over the other clans as well as his own is what led to him becoming a target of American forces.

## Chalk Four

Chalk Four was a small group of Rangers lead by Staff Sergeant Matt Eversmann on October 3. Chalk Four's orders were to rope down into Mogadishu and set up a blocking



position on the northwest corner of the target house. However, Eversmann's chalk was set down several blocks from their assigned corner.

## **Super Six One**

Super Six One was the first Black Hawk helicopter that was shot down over Mogadishu on October 3. Super Six One was piloted by CWO Cliff 'Elvis' Wolcott. Wolcott and his co-pilot, CWO Donovan Briley would die on impact, but several others would be rescued, including Staff Sergeant Dowdy, who would be pulled from the wreckage late in the evening of October 3 and would lose a fingertip to enemy fire.

## **Super Six Four**

Super Six Four was the second Black Hawk helicopter shot down over Mogadishu on October 3. The entire crew of the helicopter would be killed in the aftermath of the crash, with the exception of pilot Mike Durant. Many of the crew members' bodies would be dragged through the streets of Mogadishu by militia and civilians out of anger for the attack by the Americans in the aftermath of the battle.

## **Army Rangers**

Army Rangers are a specially trained group of soldiers who must attend a special school focusing on both extreme physical and tactical training. Most of the Rangers sent to Mogadishu on October 3 had received this training but had not had it tested in real life situations such as they would face that day.

## **Delta Force**

Delta Force, or D-boys, is a group of elite Army Rangers trained to work independently in dangerous, often highly secretive missions. The Delta Force were the men to enter and arrest the target members of Aidid's group during the mission in Mogadishu on October 3.

## **CSAR**

CSAR, or Combat Search and Rescue, is a specially trained team designed to go into a battlefield and rescue injured soldiers. The CSAR team sent to the first crash site in Mogadishu on October 3 runs into heavy fire and forced to defend themselves rather than perform rescue operations.

## **Mogadishu, Somalia**

Mogadishu is a large city on the coast of the Indian Ocean in the African country of Somalia. This would be the site of the Battle of Mogadishu that took place on October 3, 1993.



# Themes

## Battle of Mogadishu

Aidid, a warlord in Somalia, declared war on America by refusing to allow relief aid to reach his people and by his resistance of the UN's attempt to bring peace to Somalia. Aidid was a leader among Somali clans that had banded together to take down the Somali president, but then went out on his own to try to take control. Several years of fighting in and around Mogadishu resulted, leading to the involvement of the UN and American troops.

On October 3, American leaders learned that there was to be a meeting of clan leaders of the Haber Gidr clan in Mogadishu that would include two important members of Aidid's gang. After a disappointing raid on a safe house several months before, leaders in Somalia were cautious, but eager to have some success in Mogadishu. They plan what was meant to be a quick, less than an hour, daylight mission to retrieve these men.

The mission went wrong from the first moments when Private First Class Blackburn fell from a Black Hawk helicopter and then another helicopter was shot down by an RPG. Another helicopter would be shot down a short time later and others wounded by these same weapons. The response of the militia and civilians of Mogadishu was overwhelming and the soldiers would soon find themselves outnumbered.

The battle would continue late into the night as mistakes and underestimation of the reaction of the Somali people would keep soldiers stranded. One soldier would die because of the inability to extract him from his location, even though it was only three miles from the base. The soldiers would eventually be rescued by a line of Humvees and other vehicles driven by both American and foreign soldiers, mainly Malaysian and Pakistani soldiers.

## Hatred

Hatred becomes a theme of this book almost from the first pages, as the soldiers descend on Mogadishu. The UN had sent American and other forces into Somalia to try to get aid to the people who have been torn apart by several years of civil war. The American forces had focused on Aidid, a warlord who appeared to be the main force behind the continued unrest in his country. On October 3, 1993, American soldiers descended on Mogadishu to capture two of Aidid's top gang members.

From the moment the helicopters begin flying over the city, the people of Mogadishu come out of their homes, beckoned by Aidid's militia to defend their homes. Filled with anger toward American forces who have killed family members and ruined homes and businesses, these same people converged on a downed Black Hawk helicopter a week earlier and mutilated the bodies of the crew. On October 3, these same people took to the streets with whatever weapons they could find and began shooting at the soldiers.



For hours, the soldiers were under fire by these militia and civilians. Nineteen soldiers would die before the night was over and more than eighty would be wounded. That is more than half the men sent into Mogadishu that day. When Super Six Four crashed, it was overrun by an angry mob and the entire crew, with the exception of pilot Warrant Officer Durant, and two Delta snipers would be killed. The bodies of most of these men would be dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, their bodies shown on television for days after the battle.

Hatred spurned the actions of many of the Somalis, who resented the intrusion of the American forces and the damage their interference caused in their lives. It did not matter to these people that the Americans were attempting to help make life better for them, they simply saw it as a matter that did not require the force and the bloodshed that resulted. It is for this reason hatred is a theme of the book.

## Politics

At first Washington took little notice of the Battle of Mogadishu, aware only that the key men had been arrested and a few soldiers were still stuck in the streets of the city after a helicopter crash. However, as the American press caught hold of the story, images began to be shown on television of American soldiers being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu naked, all of them dead.

President Clinton is said to have expressed outrage upon seeing the first few images out of Mogadishu. A meeting was quickly called and the situation discussed. After a six hour meeting it was decided that the American policy on Somalia would take a complete one-eighty. Instead of trying to rid Somalia of Aidid, the UN and America would support a formation of a government that included Aidid. The troops in Mogadishu were immediately informed that they were to return home within the month, their mission completed. At the same time, Aidid agreed to free pilot Durant. It is this quick turnaround to hide what the Clinton administration saw as a colossal failure that makes politics a theme of the book.





# Style

## Style

### Perspective

The author of this book is a journalist who had little to no knowledge of the military and military training before becoming aware of the Battle of Mogadishu. This book began as a series of articles published in multiple newspapers across the country. The author interviewed hundreds of people involved in the Battle of Mogadishu, including Somali citizens who were direct witnesses of some of the chaos of the battle.

The author's perspective is that of observer. The author was not a member of the military who fought in Mogadishu, he was not a Somali citizen, and he was not reporter on the ground that day. The author's interest in the story was purely professional and he brings this to the story. The author is objective in his retelling of the events of the Battle of Mogadishu, with the exception of some American pride that colors his opinions as expressed in the epilogue of the book.

### Tone

The tone of the book is one of journalistic intensity. The author tends to keep an objective tone throughout the main portions of the book, telling his story with a narrative tone that details the battle without some of the attention to detail that other authors might use in such a book. The tension of the book grows as the story continues to be told, increasing each time a soldier is wounded or killed. The author does use some vulgarities in his telling of the story, offering the reader dialogue that has been summarized but presented as accurately as possible to express the emotions that ruled the day.

The tone of the book is not dry and detail oriented like many books of its genre, but softened somewhat and given a narrative feel. The author has used this tone to help engage his readers with a reporter's eye toward entertaining while informing. The author's tone helps draw the reader into the story he is trying to tell and increases the tension at important points in the novel in such a way that the reader becomes deeply drawn into the story and feels an emotional impact as the story draws to its conclusion. It is a well written book, with a tone that works incredibly well with its story.

### Structure

The book is divided into five chapters and an epilogue. Each chapter is divided into smaller sections to help the reader keep track of changes in scene and the use of character. The story is told mostly in an exposition style, as non-fiction books are often

done, but also includes dialogue and snippets of radio transmissions heard and recorded the day of the battle.

The book tells one simple story, the story of the battle of Mogadishu on October 3, 1993. The book begins with the soldiers, Rangers, Delta operators, and SEALs, preparing for takeoff in their respective aircraft. Many of the men are ready for battle, tired of missions that are often scrubbed at the last minute. The story then takes the reader to the moment the men are dropped in Mogadishu, through the devastation of two helicopter crashes, and the long night survivors must spend near the first crash site. The book ends with the resolution of the hostage situation with Super Six Four pilot, Warrant Officer Durant. In the epilogue, the author discusses the aftermath of the battle and his reasons for writing the book.



## Quotes

"At liftoff, Matt Eversmann said a Hail Mary."  
The Assault, p. 3

"Ali moved on to the next street, leaving Adan with two friends. He would shoot a Ranger or die trying. Why were they doing this? Who were these Americans who came to his neighborhood spraying bullets and spreading death?"  
The Assault, p. 32

"He really did go cyclic on the .50 cal then, just fired continually for maybe as long as a minute, taking down trees and walls and anyone in, around, or behind them, before Sergeant Lorenzo Ruiz stood up in the turret and took the gun."  
The Assault, p. 63

"But they had seen it, the chopper spinning, falling, one of the D-boys hanging on with one hand, both feet in the air, riding it down."  
Black Hawk Down, p. 80

"They were driving into the bloodiest phase of the battle."  
Black Hawk Down, p. 101

"In ordinary circumstances, as close to the first crash as they were, the convoy would have just barreled over to it, running over and shooting through anything in its path. But with all the help overhead, Task force Ranger was about to demonstrate how too much information can hurt soldiers on a battlefield."  
Black Hawk Down, p. 112

"Too many things were happening at the same time, all of them bad."  
Overrun, p. 135

"The most important thing was to keep moving. One of the hardest things in the world to hit is a moving target."  
Overrun, p. 175

"Blood was everywhere. It was hard to believe Smith had any more to lose."  
The Alamo, p. 214

"Waddell thought about the Grisham novel he'd been reading before they left. He couldn't wait to finish that book. Wouldn't t be just his luck to get killed and never finish the last few pages?" The Alamo, pg. 247

"Lorrie said, 'Like you always say, Mike, Night Stalkers Don't Quit.' His message of defiance had gotten through."  
N.S.D.Q., p. 322



"The men around him cheered and then, as the stretcher approached the ramp to the plane, they began to sing. The song started in one or two places at first, boldly, then spread to every voice. They sang 'God Bless America.'"

N.S.D.Q., p. 330



## Topics for Discussion

Where is Somalia? Where is Mogadishu? Why were their American forces in Somalia in October of 1993? What was the purpose of their mission on October 3? Was the main intent of the mission successful? What happened in the early moments of the battle that caused things to go wrong? Why did this have such an impact on the mission?

Who was Special Sergeant Eversmann? Why does the author chose to focus on Eversmann at the beginning of his book? Why was Eversmann made the leader of his chalk on the morning of October 3? What happened to the men in Eversmann's chalk? What happened to Eversmann?

Who was Chief Warrant Officer Wolcott? What happened to his helicopter? Why did the soldiers not believe that a Black Hawk could be taken down by a RPG? What happened eight days before the Battle of Mogadishu that should have changed this opinion? What happened to Wolcott during the crash? How long did it take rescue to come for the survivors of the crash of Wolcott's helicopter? How many survived?

Who was Warrant Officer Durant? What happened to his helicopter? What happened to his crew members? Who came to Durant's rescue? What happened to them? Why was Durant not killed by the mob of Somalis that approached his helicopter? Where was Durant taken? For what reason? What was Durant forced to do? Why was Durant eventually released?

Who was Stebbins? What was unusual about his involvement in the Battle of Mogadishu? How many times was Stebbins attacked on the night of October 3? What were Stebbins' injuries at the end of the battle? Who was Sizemore? How was he connected to Stebbins? How did Sizemore react when the battle got out of control and turned into more than a brief mission? What was heroic about Sizemore's actions?

What happened to Corporal Jamie Smith? Why was he not immediately evacuated from the battle site? What did medics do to try to save Smith? Did it work? Why did Smith die? How did reporters treat Smith's family in the aftermath of his death? What could have been done differently to help Smith? What is ironic about Smith's location at the time of his death?

Who was Aidid? Why did the Americans target him and his gang? Why were the Americans after two of Aidid's high ranking men? How did the Somali people react to the Americans' actions? Why? What happened in the aftermath of the battle with Aidid? Was this an insult of sorts to the soldiers who fought the Battle of Mogadishu? Explain.