

History Essay

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The Battle of Mogadishu, 3 Oct 93

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### Abstract

Over the last 25 years, there has been no solid form of government, poor economic conditions, and continual internal fighting.

On 3 Oct 93, the mission for the U.S. Special Operation forces was to raid a house across the street from the Olympic Hotel in Mogadishu, Somalia and abduct warlord Mohammed Aidid and several of his top Lieutenants, and return to base. The events that followed included 18 Soldiers losing their lives, 70 Soldiers wounded and a battle that lasted nearly 24 hours. During this time, American Soldiers were devastated to see their fellow warriors dead bodies, dragged through streets of this run down city. Over 500 Somalis died and over 1000 injured in this battle that was deemed the biggest, bloodiest, single firefight for U.S. troops since Vietnam.

In 1991 Mohammed Farah Aidid became the leader of one of the larger clans in Mogadishu. By the end of 1991, over 20,000 people had been killed or injured due to months of brutal internal fighting throughout the country. Large areas of the country faced starvation due to the destruction of farmland from these constant battles. In hopes of reducing this widespread starvation, nations from throughout the world began providing food. Even with these efforts, it was estimated that 3000,000 people still died and another 1.5 million suffered because warring factions stole a majority of this food.

In August of 1992, United States military aircraft began supporting an international U.N. relief effort initiated by then President George Bush, and Operation Provide Relief commenced. Multi-national humanitarian agencies received nearly 50,000 tons of food and medical items that was sent on 10 U.S. Air Force transport planes. Unfortunately these efforts were not enough for the country. 500,000 Somalis died and 1.5 million became refugees.

In December 1992, the United States established Operation Restore Hope. This was a large multi-national mission designed to help with and secure humanitarian efforts this new joint mission would place the United States in Unified Command of the activities.

In January of 1993, President Bill Clinton chose to reduce the number of U.S. forces in Somalia allowing the U. N. forces to take over control. Only 1,200 U.S. troops were still in Somalia by the end of June 1993.

The Battle of Mogadishu revealed how the U.S. military underestimated the enemy that resulted in fatal consequences.

On August 29<sup>th</sup>, 1993, 440 Delta Force and Ranger troopers, led by General William Garrison, known as Task Force Ranger, flew into Mogadishu. Garrison's goal was to abduct warlord Mohammed Aidid. The Clinton administration, however, at the same time was using former President Jimmy Carter to negotiate, and was planning an agreement with the warlord, which American commanders in the country had not been briefed on.

On October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1993, another operation, Gothic Serpent, was taking place at the same time the Battle of Mogadishu occurred. The battle involved Somali militia loyal to Aidid, with the help from armed civilian fighters and United States Soldiers supported by UNOSOM II. American forces included U.S. Army Delta Force, Rangers, an air element from the 160<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Aviation Regiment, four Navy SEALs from SEAL team 6 and Air Force Para-rescue Combat Controllers. General Garrison's plan was to capture ranking members of the Habr Gidr clan led by Aidid. 160 American troops, nineteen aircraft and twelve vehicles, made up the primary team. The fighting continued throughout the night. During the mission, some Soldiers were able to evacuate fellow warriors who were wounded, back to medical treatment. Others were pinned down at the crash site of two Blackhawks that had gone down from RPGs. Three other aircraft were also severely damaged. The next morning a joint task force of over 100 vehicles including tanks from Pakistan which were old American M-48s and armored personnel carriers from Malaysia were enroute to assist the trapped Soldiers. This convoy received air support from U.S. A/MH-6 Little Birds and Blackhawk helicopters. This force consisted of

Soldiers from U.S. 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, Pakistan and Malaysia. By the time the convoy reached the second crash site, it had been over run and pilot Mike Durant had been taken prisoner by the militia, as he was the only survivor there. 14 days later, he was released. When the rescue team reached the first crash site, the exhausted Soldiers collected their wounded and were escorted to safety, (The Battle of Mogadishu, 2009.)

The International Committee of the Red Cross estimated 200 Somali civilians killed and several hundred wounded. United States estimates however were that up to 1500 Somali militia and civilians were killed and up to 4000 were injured. More than 1000 wounded and more than 700 killed are yet other estimates of the Somali casualties, (Bowden 1999, pg 333.) 18 American Soldiers died and over 70 were wounded. Delta operator Matt Rierson was killed in a mortar attack two days later. On a Frontline documentary on American television, the Somali National Alliance claimed only 133 killed in the whole battle. In reality, actual Somali numbers are unknown, (Ambush in Mogadishu, 1995).

The arrests of these clansmen came at a very high price and came as a shock to a President new to the presidency. Clinton felt as misled as President Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs. The 2 targeted clan leaders of the raid, Salad and Awale were placed in custody, and so in strict military terms the mission was a success.

Commanders, who doubted that Somalis could knock out their helicopters, saw two shot down in the city and three barely make it back to base before crash landing. The ground units sent to rescue the trapped Soldiers were delayed for hours by roadblocks and ambushes. Five U.S. Soldiers died awaiting transport including two Delta snipers who were awarded the Medal

of Honor posthumously for volunteering to fast rope into a hostile crash sight to defend the downed crew. The mission was executed into very hostile parts of the city during the day, even though the Special Operations Soldiers were trained and equipped to work at night using their night vision goggles providing the advantage. This is a story of a well-planned mission going very bad, of fatal mistakes, expert soldiering, heroic acts, and some cowardice. This outcome is an example of a military team underestimating the enemy.

Needed items such as water, night vision gear, and bayonets, were left at base by the American Soldiers who assumed a quick snatch and grab operation, and some removed the ceramic plates from their body armor, all sorely needed later, just trying to lighten the load for the quick daytime raid, (Bowden, 1999, pg 6, 353.) Soldiers interviewed later said that during most of the battle, they engaged groups of Somalis and later at anyone they saw, and in some cases their own teammates. Strict rules of engagement limiting Soldiers to fire on Somalis only if they aimed weapons at them were soon ignored during the stress of the fight.

Delta operators received friendly fire on multiple instances from the younger Rangers. Communication between the air and ground commanders was poor, sending convoys through a hailstorm of rounds, leading to six casualties, including five U.S. Soldiers and one Somali clansman in custody. Essentially two ground force commanders were established because of the tensions between the Delta and Ranger forces, who refused to speak to each other during parts of the fight. This friendly fire just made relations worse between the Rangers and Delta operators, (A Defining Battle, 1997). Had it not been for the leadership of the NCOs from the SEALs and Delta teams improvising, adapting and overcoming the obstacles together, the aftermath could have been much worse. When things got bad in the streets, and the Officers were not

communicating, it was in large part the NCOs, who held things together and got most of the force out alive, (Bowden, 1999, pg 345).

It was believed that due to their training, these Soldiers were unstoppable, invincible, and flexible and could easily adapt (Bowden, 1999, pg 6). They probably could have if they had all of the proper equipment.

Delta Force is an elite Special Operations unit and an important element within the U.S. military. Some of their primary functions are counterterrorism, counterinsurgency and are capable of assuming many covert missions, and covertly neutralizing enemy forces. The Rangers operate as a light infantry special operations force of the United States Army. The Rangers consist of rapidly-deployable light infantry forces with specialized skills. Some of their capabilities include a variety of conventional and special operations missions, by air, land or sea in addition to support of general purpose forces among other uses. Without essential equipment such as their night vision goggles, extra ammunition, medical supplies, ceramic plates for their body armor, food and water, the mission was made more difficult resulting in a lower performance than these Special Operations warriors were accustomed to.

The Battle of Mogadishu was a rude awakening to the U.S. military. It revealed how a supposed simple operation of trying to help a hungry nation, can go terribly wrong, leading to the deaths of 18 service members, wounding of more than 70, and the reassessment of future military operations. We as leaders should let this battle be a reminder that we should never underestimate the enemy, have all the necessary equipment, and communicate

with everyone on the battlefield. We should always plan for the worst, hope for the best and with a positive attitude, emerge as the victor.



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