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Black Hawk Down

On October 3rd, 1993 the U.S attempted to capture two lieutenants under the command of the Somalia warlord, Mohammad Farrah Aidid. The lieutenants were located in the heart of Mogadishu where Aidids militia were plentiful, and could easily put up a strong fight within short notice. After deploying over 150 U.S soldiers, what started as a simple “get in, get out” mission turned into a bloody and fierce firefight that had every soldier simply trying to make it back to base alive. After fighting for hours against thousands of heavily armed Somalian militia, numerous Americans were either injured or dead.

I felt that the author’s heavy use of outside sources (interviews from soldiers) and real time description led to a piece that kept my interest peaked for long periods of time. It was solely based off of “fight or flight” moments. i.e. U.S soldiers nearly missing deadly moments and escaping by pure luck itself. The author’s use of background stories from multiple soldiers gave me a feeling of sympathy and sorrow as the book digs deep into the experience of war. The level of description that the author used was of perfect balance. The war seemed to be going on in real time, but yet didn’t get bogged down with details or lengthy events. This piece brought about a memoir like feeling, yet it showed perspectives from a variety of members on the team.

This book covers a moment that is very complex and asynchronous. There are multiple different events occurring at the same time, all with varying levels of importance. A Black Hawk helicopter may drop off its “chalk” or team, and then head off to another location to assist somebody. The team on the ground is doing one thing while other ground troops, armor, and birds in the sky are all working together by doing their specified tasks. All of this action was well captured when the author used the description of a massive variety of different individuals. This included soldiers in battle, soldiers escaping with wounded, helicopters and spy planes watching above, those in vehicles, and even the Somalian militia’s perspective on the battle. I learned that through the use of multiple perspectives you can capture a complex event, and fit it into a densely detailed experience of the taste of war.

I find it very interesting how close the soldiers are with one another. It reminds me of a football team where each of every one of the members are all brothers. But on this team they will fight and literally die for one another. It also amazes me of what the soldiers go through, the training, the pressure, having guns pointed at them, and taking the lives of others. All for the sake of getting the job done, and getting out of it alive. When you read some of the soldiers background stories, you really get a sense of the type of people that are on the front lines doing the dirty work. This information tends to take the dehumanized people in the battle and turns them into people just like you and I.

There are two things I noticed when I read about descriptions of the heat of battle, and what the U.S troops do for a living. First I noticed the soldiers are allowed an amazing amount of freedom when at war. They decide who is hostile, where the team should go, and who takes what role. Most of what goes on in war is simply improvisations. There is no rulebook that they are strictly following, things just go. Many events happen so fast that there is no time to think, only to act. These seem to come across as “Don’t think, just shoot” moments. At times there even seems to be a lack of organization. On top of this I noticed that when the book would create descriptions from the enemy’s perspective it gave a twist on who the United States is and what we stand for. At times America even seemed to appear as the “bad guy” in the war. Americans shot at women and even children. They harassed the Somalian people heavily, especially with the Black Hawk helicopters. As the helicopters passed by the wind ripped of woman’s robes, kicked up lots of dust, and sometimes ripped off tin roofs of shacks that the Somalian people live in.