

BOOK REVIEW

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Black Hawk Down

A Story of Modern War

Mark Bowden. *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern Warfare*. 1999. 400 pp. ISBN: 978-1-5558-4604-6 (EB)

Review by Scott P. Graverson, PhD

As we approach the 30th anniversary of the Battle of Mogadishu, we review Mark Bowden's "Black Hawk Down," a compelling narrative that vividly captures the harrowing events of October 3, 1993. That day, a U.S. Military mission in Mogadishu, Somalia, went terribly wrong. This book delves into the gripping account of the Battle of Mogadishu, illuminating the events of that day, what went wrong, why it went wrong, and the lessons that needed to be learned.

"Black Hawk Down" is set in the chaotic backdrop of post-Cold War Somalia, where famine, warlords, and a volatile political situation had turned the nation into a lawless and dangerous territory. Against this backdrop, the United States embarked on a humanitarian mission named Operation Restore Hope to provide aid and stability. However, a straightforward operation to capture a Somali warlord quickly escalated into a deadly firefight that lasted for hours.

Bowden's narrative is an immersive journey that transports readers into the heart of the battle. The book skillfully weaves together the stories of Soldiers from the elite Delta Force, the U.S. Army Rangers, and U.S. Air Force Pararescuemen, giving the reader a sense of the chaos, fear, and camaraderie that defined the Battle of Mogadishu.

The author's meticulous research and extensive interviews with the participants allow him to reconstruct the events with remarkable detail and authenticity. Bowden presents the events in a chronological fashion, providing readers with a clear understanding of how the mission unfolded and ultimately went awry. His crisp and engaging writing makes it difficult to put the book down.

One of the book's strengths is its vivid portrayal of the Soldiers involved in the mission. Bowden humanizes these individuals, allowing readers to connect with them on a personal level. Bowden also delves into the psyche of these Soldiers, exploring their motivations, fears, and the bonds that develop under extreme circumstances. This human element adds depth to the narrative, making the book not just a chronicle of events but a study of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

The author also delves into complex themes such as the nature of warfare, the role of the military in humanitarian missions, and the consequences of political decisions. Bowden does not shy away from exploring the political and strategic aspects of the mission, highlighting how decisions made at the highest levels of government can have dire consequences on the ground.

Amid the chaos and danger, ordinary men display extraordinary courage, risking their lives to save their comrades. This book offers a nuanced portrayal of heroism, showing that it

often emerges not from grand gestures but from small acts of selflessness and determination. It also introduces us to MSG Gary Gordon and SFC Randy Shughard of the 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta. These brave men volunteered to enter the battle, knowing the overwhelming odds against them. Both Operators died defending the pilot, CWO Mike Durant; both were posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for their heroism.

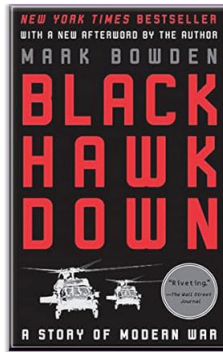
The book also tells the story of Air Force Pararescueman Timothy Wilkinson. Along with Sgt Scott Fales and SSgt Jeffrey Bray, TSgt Wilkinson fast-roped to the Super 61 crash site, where they found the pilots dead and the two crew chiefs critically wounded. Wilkinson and his team moved the wounded men to a nearby collection point, where they built a makeshift shelter using kevlar armor plates salvaged from Super 61's wreckage. For his actions, President Clinton awarded TSgt Wilkinson the Air Force Cross, the second highest medal behind only the Medal of Honor.

Then-Combat Medic SFC Bob Mabry was with the Pararescue team, providing medical attention to the wounded. Mabry was awarded the Silver Star for his actions that day, but more importantly, he was inspired to pursue a medical degree and complete his training as a trauma surgeon. Dr. (COL, Ret.) Mabry was instrumental in developing the Combat Application Tourniquet and was a founding member of and advocate for the Committee on Tactical Combat Casualty Care.

While "Black Hawk Down" is a compelling and well-researched narrative, it does have some weaknesses. Some readers may find the sheer volume of characters and military terminology overwhelming, making it challenging to keep track of who's who and understand the intricacies of the mission. However, Bowden provides a helpful cast of characters at the beginning of the book, which can aid in keeping track of the numerous Soldiers involved.

"Black Hawk Down" profoundly impacted readers and the military community. It became required reading at U.S. Military academies, where Cadets studied the text for its insights into urban warfare and leadership under fire. The book also inspired a successful film adaptation directed by Ridley Scott, bringing the story to an even wider audience.

Beyond its military significance, "Black Hawk Down" is a powerful reminder of the sacrifices made by those in uniform and the inherent risks of military operations. It honors the memory of the 18 U.S. Soldiers who lost their lives in the battle and the countless others who were wounded.





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