



U.S. Army Soldiers with the 6th Ranger Training Battalion, observe a moment of silence to remember the fallen from Operation Gothic Serpent at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, Oct. 1, 2020. The events that occurred during the operation became the basis for the book and film “Black Hawk Down.” (U.S. Air Force photo by Samuel King Jr.)

Battle of Mogadishu

The Mission Command Perspective

By Sgt. Maj. Clayton Dos Santos & Mr. James Perdue

NCO Leadership Center of Excellence

In 1993, trying to compel, influence, and support Somalia after their bloody military coup, the United Nations (U.N.) launched United Nations Operation Somalia (UNOSCOM II). The operation’s goal was to provide humanitarian assistance to Somalia’s population, yet warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid and his troops used this opportunity to divert food and relief supplies, kill peace-keepers, incite violence, and commit crimes against humanity (McKinley, 1996). These were the beginning of the actions that culminated in U.S. forces, with U.N. endorsement, launching an operation to overmatch Somalia National Alliance (SNA) forces and capture Aidid’s senior leaders. To avoid some the problems experienced during this operation, leaders should create unit environments

where development and emotional intelligence is an everyday activity. Only then will Soldiers feel trust, support, and encouragement to grow. This article describes an activity used at the Sergeant’s Major Course that developed emotional intelligence and trust in students and can be adapted and implemented at the unit level Army-wide.

On Oct. 3, 1993, Task Force Ranger conducted a mission, expecting to overmatch the enemy and that everything would run smoothly. It was initially successful, but while U.S. troops tried to return to base, it turned into the 15-hour bloody battle known as the Battle of Mogadishu (Dotson, 2016). This battle provides several examples of poor planning and failures in executing mission command (MC) which can be lessons learned by

today's leaders. This article analyzes the Battle of Mogadishu, highlights critical MC shortcomings, and provides critical insights into the successful execution of MC for noncommissioned officers (NCOs) in the future fight.

Overview

On Oct. 3, 1993, Task Force Ranger headed to the center of Mogadishu, Somalia, to capture rebel leaders using a combination of air and land assets. Air operations used helicopters to insert troops and provide them with fire support as they executed the mission. The ground assault force was responsible for getting to the target location and capturing the rebel leaders. Maj. Gen. William F. Garrison led the operation.

It is important to mention that before the operation was launched, Garrison requested AC-130 gunships and Armor to provide support the ground troops, but because of the rules of engagement (ROE), he was denied these assets. This showed a lack of understanding and directly affected U.S. capacity to achieve a position advantage over the enemy. Another point to consider is that U.S. Soldiers were overly confident. They believed NSA forces did not have the weapons or training to fight back. Also, both Soldiers and their leaders thought the SNA would not be ready for them, and assumed the raid would be easy and successful. They underestimated the enemy.

Turning Point

The operation was initially successful, when they captured 24 prisoners; however, an unforeseen significant event changed the mission's outcome. According to Sangvic (1998), "an MH-60 designated Super 61 was shot down at 1620 by an RPG and crashed about 300 yards from the target" (p.15). The fact that MH-60 helicopters are vulnerable to Rocket-Propelled Grenades (RPGs) and small arms fire was a failure by leadership to assess the operating environment. That one RPG changed the course of the entire operation.

The ground assault force did not see where Super 61 crashed and asked for directions to the crash site. Garrison provided a P3 Orion spy plane direct them but that came with its own set of obstacles. First, the SNA blocked and barricaded most of the streets and the Orion could not detect them. Second, according to Dotson (2016), "The problem was that the plane gave directions to the pair of forward observers who then relayed the information to the drivers on the ground" (p. 143). Because the information/intelligence went through a third party (forward observers) first, it created an extra step and caused a delay in real time.

The Second Crash Site

Approximately 20 minutes after Fadid's forces shot down Super 61, when the ground assault force neared



The crew of Super 64 a month before the Battle of Mogadishu. From left: Winn Mahuron, Tommy Field, Bill Cleveland, Ray Frank and Mike Durant. (Photo by former U.S. Army Ranger Phil Lepre while on-duty during Operation Restore Hope, September 1993)

the location to secure the crash site, the SNA shot down another MH-60, Super 64. Super 64 was about half a mile from the ground assault force, which was still fighting its way to Super 61.

A large problem the convoy encountered while trying to find a direct route to Super 64 was recovering the casualties they encountered along the route. After 45 minutes, the convoy was loaded with so many casualties and wounded it had to turn around and drive back to the base (Sangvic, 1998).

Final Results

By the time the sun set over Somalia the next day, 18 Americans were dead and 73 were wounded. Chief Warrant Officer 3 Michael Durant, 160th Special Operations Group and one of Super 64's pilots, was taken prisoner, and hundreds of Somali civilians were killed in what came to be known as the Battle of Mogadishu. (Longley, 2019, para. 2)

Mission Command Considerations

In hindsight, the Battle of Mogadishu is a great teaching tool because it provides many lessons. It wasn't just one misstep that caused mission's failure, there were several that compounded upon each other.

Faulty Planning

Denying Garrison's request for AC-130 gunship and tank support was a critical mistake. The ability to employ those weapon platforms would have drastically prevented or improved crash site security and hindered the enemy's ability to block, impede, and harass patrols and reinforcements moving through the Area of Operations (AO). Allo-

cating appropriate resources to accomplish the mission is a leadership responsibility (Department of the Army, 2019a).

In addition, the decision to employ Super 64 to support of Super 61's crash site was vital. However, if leadership had planned better and not underestimated how effectively Aidid's forces employed RPGs, they might have reevaluated their fire support tactics. If the ground assault force had received AC-130 gunship support as requested, they may not have lost Super 64 or suffered the number of casualties they took that day. The authority and responsibility for those decisions showed a clear lack of MC.

Lack of Shared Understanding

The capacity to assess and reassess enemy capabilities and update the commander's knowledge of the OE should be a priority to the success of the mission. Understanding the OE is vital in helping the commander visualize the current state of operations (Department of the Army, 2019c). A shared understanding of the OE enables Soldiers to effectively exercise disciplined initiative during the chaos of combat, but faulty assessments and inaccurate or not up-to-date information will always lead to failure.

Lack of Correct Information

In this instance, U.S. troops did not properly understand the OE's current state. They were confident the enemy was not ready and lacked the capacity and skills to fight back, which was clearly not true. Commanders and intelligence analysts painted an inaccurate picture of enemy numbers, capabilities, and will to fight. This

ultimately led to a lack of mutual trust, poor communication, and flawed decision-making. Mission accomplishment depends on commanders' ability to lead their forces while continuously assessing and reframing the current state of their OE and communicating any changes to the forces in contact or operating in their AO.

Delayed Communication

Another point to consider is that Garrison relied on the P3 Orion aircraft to maintain contact, using it as a middle man to update U.S. forces on the current state of the OE at key points of friction throughout the battle. The problem was he could not communicate directly to the land team. Because the OE was constantly changing, that delay was a big issue for the operation, it proved an inefficient way to provide accurate and timely information to the units who needed it.

Conclusion

The Battle of Mogadishu demonstrated the importance of Mission Command in combat operations. An in-depth analysis of the battle reveals that if some of the decisions were made with a better understanding of the OE, U.S. forces could have planned and maneuvered more effectively and suffered fewer casualties. The key critical failures were a combination of limited resources to accomplish the mission and a lack of command and control. From an NCO perspective, the Battle of Mogadishu presents how leaders must be proactive in planning and following mission command principles. This helps leaders make sound decisions appropriate to the situation and prepares them for the challenges ahead. ■

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Sgt. Maj Clayton Dos Santos is currently an instructor at the Department of Army Operations at the Sergeants Major Course (SMC), Fort Bliss, Texas. His previous assignments were as operations sergeant major of the 6th Intelligence Battalion with the Brazilian Army, and as command sergeant major of the Battle Staff Course, at the Brazilian Army Advanced NCO School. He holds a bachelor's degree in human resources from São Paulo University and a bachelor's degree in business administration from Santa Catarina University. He also holds a master's degree in leadership and management from Santa Catarina University.

Mr. James Perdue is currently an instructor at the Department of Army Operations at the SMC. He served 27 years in multiple assignments and personally participated in the Battle of Mogadishu. He holds a master's degree in Human Resources, a master's degree in organizational leadership, and master's degree in public administration.



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