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MEMOIRS OF
AN ELITE NAVY SEAL
SNIPER

HOWARD E. WASDIN
AND STEPHEN TEMPLIN

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*Howard E. Wasdin
& Stephen Templin*



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Battle of Mogadishu

As we pulled back into the compound, everyone was jockeying up for something big. Helicopters spun up, Humvees pulled into position, and everyone topped off their magazines. Although the sun shone brightly through clear blue skies, I knew the troops weren't heading out on a picnic. "What's going on?"

Commander Olson approached us before we stepped out of our "cutvee"—a cut Humvee without a top, doors, or windows, officially called the M-998 cargo/troop carrier. It had no special armor. Tech reps from the States had arrived less than a week earlier and put a Kevlar ballistic blanket underneath the vehicle to protect against land mines or other fragmentation. I sat in the driver's seat with Casanova riding shotgun. Behind me was Little Big Man, Sourpuss beside him. To the rear of them we had two benches running parallel to the vehicle where two army guys sat—I think they were Rangers, but they could've been Delta operators. In addition, a Ranger manned the .50 caliber machine gun.

Commander Olson briefed us in just a few minutes. "You'll be part of a blocking force. Delta will rope in and assault the building. You guys will grab the prisoners. Then get out of there." Usually such a brief would last an hour to an hour and a half. Delta, the Rangers, and others got that briefing, but we missed it. Although the mission

was important enough for us to be briefed on, it had popped up suddenly while we were out in town setting up repeaters for the CIA. Commander Olson slapped me on the shoulder. “Shouldn’t take long. Good luck. See you when you get back.”

Each of four light AH-6J Little Birds carried four snipers, two on either side of a helo. The Little Birds also carried rockets underneath—where we would be going wasn’t going to be good. The two AH-6Js, armed with 7.62 mm miniguns and 2.75-inch rockets, would guard the front of the target building from the air while two hovered to the rear. Delta’s C Squadron would fast-rope from two MH-6 Little Birds and assault the building.

Eight Black Hawks would follow, two carrying Delta assaulters and their ground command. Four of the Black Hawks would insert the Rangers. One would hover above with a Combat Search and Rescue team. The eighth Black Hawk contained the two mission commanders, one coordinating the pilots and one directing the men on the ground.

Three OH-58D Kiowa helos, distinctive for the black ball mounted above the rotor, would also fly in the airspace above the target. The black ball was a sight with a platform that contained a TeleVision System, a Thermal Imaging System, and a Laser Range Finder/Designator to provide audio and video of the ground to General Garrison at the Joint Operations Center. High above everyone circled a P-3 Orion.

I drove into position at about the third vehicle in the convoy. Behind our Humvees idled three 5-ton trucks, and five more Humvees brought up the rear. Rangers made up most of our convoy. In all, nineteen aircraft, twelve vehicles, and 160 men.

Aidid’s men had already seen how we did this six times before, and now we’d be operating under broad daylight on his home turf. Many of his militia would be pumped up on khat at this time of day, not

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coming down off their high until late in the evening. Risks that pay off are bold moves. Those that don't pay off are stupid. Part of my job included taking risks.

At 1532, the helicopters took off first, following the coast. When we received word that the birds were headed inland, our convoy headed out. I wasn't afraid—yet. *This is going to be a routine op.*

On the way, the lead Humvee took a wrong turn. Nobody followed. They would have to catch up to us later. We sped northeast on Via Gesira. Before reaching the K4 traffic circle, we encountered sporadic fire. Little Big Man yelled, "Aw hell, I'm hit!"

Are we driving into an ambush? Does Little Big Man have a sucking chest wound? The needle on my fear meter was still close to zero. Little Big Man was shot, not me. All the same, I worried for Little Big Man's life, and my alert level went up.

I pulled off the road underneath an overhang, slammed on the brakes, jumped out, and checked Little Big Man. He lay on the floor with part of his Randall knife blade beside him. I expected to see blood come from somewhere but only found a huge raspberry on his leg. An AK-47 round had hit that Randall knife he loved so much and carried everywhere. The blade lay on the floor. It saved his leg—worth all the kidding he had ever endured about that big-ass knife.

The convoy continued moving during the minute we were parked on the side of the road. I returned to the driver's seat, then sped forward, catching up to our former position. The convoy passed the K4 circle and went north on Via Lenin, then east on National Street. Finally, we turned left on a dirt road parallel to and south of Hawlwadig Road.

At 1542, we arrived near the white five-story Olympic Hotel. I didn't know that a mile west of the target, militia gathered at the Bakara Market, distributing smuggled weapons and ammo. To the east, a mile away, was where foreign insurgents had recently arrived. We were already being sandwiched and didn't know it.

Our intel guys had probably already jammed all the cell phones in the target area. In a sandstorm kicked up by the helos, Delta operators roped down to the target building, a white building with two stories in front, three stories in back, an L-shaped structure on top, and trees in the courtyard—one of Aidid’s militia headquarters. Delta stacked up near the door, lining up behind each other in preparation to enter and snatch their target. Four groups of Rangers, twelve in each, fast-rope down and sealed the four corners of the city block around the target building. They made up the blocking force. No one gets in, and no one gets out.

I left the cutvee and took up a firing position in an alley parallel to the hotel. To the rear of the hotel, an enemy sniper moved behind a wall. Five stories above and to the left, another sniper moved on a veranda.

Shifting my position to get a better look, I realized we couldn’t get a clear shot from where we were. I told a Delta sniper, “We’re going to have to move on them.”

We bumped up, moving forward to within less than 100 yards. As we settled into our new position, the enemy had already begun firing into the target building where Delta assaulted. This felt like a setup to me. They were too well prepared. It seemed like too much of a coincidence that those snipers had set up so perfectly. *Probably a United Nations leak.*

The ground sniper sticking his rifle over the wall, approximately 100 to 150 yards away, aimed his scope at the Rangers in my convoy. The sniper had a good shooting position, only exposing his head. With a squeeze of my trigger, I overexposed his head.

Through an alleyway, I saw the veranda of the nearby five-story building. Less than 200 yards away on the fifth floor, two men fired AK-47s into the back of the target house where the Delta assaulters were. From where I was, I couldn’t get a clear shot.

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I looked over at the Delta operator. “We need to move on these two or it’s going to get real bad.”

We slipped through the alley and took positions behind a pillar to our right. Still didn’t have a good shot.

The two men on the fifth floor continued to pop out, spray at Delta’s assault force, then pop back inside.

The Delta operator and I moved forward again. Finding a good spot, I lay in the prone position while my partner protected the perimeter around me. I set the red dot of my sight on the spot where the bad guy had appeared on the right. In sniper talk, it’s called an ambush—aiming at a point and waiting for the target to appear there. The same technique could be used for a running target—aiming at a spot ahead of the runner’s path. When the man with the AK-47 appeared on the right, I squeezed the trigger, hitting his upper torso. He popped back into the building and didn’t pop out again. With a concrete divider hiding his demise, the second man with an AK-47 didn’t learn from the first one’s mistake. The second man popped out to spray with his AK-47 but also took one of my rounds to his upper torso and disappeared. If I hadn’t taken out those two, they would’ve had more opportunities to kill someone by shooting through the target building’s windows—an assaulter’s worst nightmare. While the assaulter takes down the building and controls everything inside, suddenly bullets come through the windows at him from the outside.

At least thirty minutes had passed since we’d arrived. Every minute we stayed in the target area increased the level of danger. Over the radio came the command to return to the convoy. On my way through the alley, heading back to the cutvee, a ricochet hit me in the back of the left knee, knocking me to the dirt. For a moment, I couldn’t move. On a fear scale of 1 to 10, 10 being out of my mind with fear, the needle jumped up between the 2 and the 3. The pain surprised me, because I had reached a point in my life when I really thought I was more than

human. I was better trained. People around me got shot or injured, but not me. Even other SEALs got shot or injured because they were not me. *That's why you fell off that caving ladder—because you're not Howard Wasdin. That's why you couldn't pass me on the O-course—because you're not Howard Wasdin.* Even after getting shot that first time in the Battle of Mogadishu, I clung to my arrogance. I was stunned with disbelief more than anything else.

Dan Schilling, the CCT, appeared. Casanova arrived and calmly shot one booger-eater. Then another. A medic had just started treating me when Dan grabbed my bandolier and pulled me out of the enemy's kill zone. The medic stuffed my leg full of Kerlix gauze and wrapped it up. Then I was on my feet again.

The bad guys burned tires—a signal to their comrades to join the fight and a black smoke screen to obscure our vision. Militiamen with AK-47s popped up from behind smoke, side streets, and buildings—everywhere. As soon as I shot someone down, a replacement popped up. Unarmed women walked out as spotters, then pointed out our positions to the enemy. RPGs went off.

Aidid's men yelled into megaphones. I didn't understand that their words meant "Come out and defend your homes," but I understood they meant us harm.

One of the 5-ton trucks in our convoy smoldered from being hit by an RPG. Someone in our convoy finished off the truck with a thermite grenade so it wouldn't fall into enemy hands. The vehicle flamed brightly.

Delta loaded two dozen flexicuffed prisoners into two of the remaining 5-ton trucks. Included among the prisoners was Aidid's top political adviser, Foreign Minister Omar Salad. Although Delta missed snatching Qeybdid, they'd captured a lieutenant of similar rank, Mohamed Assan Awale. They found a bonus, too, a clan chieftain named

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Abdi Yusef Herse. After returning to the compound, Delta would sort out the big fish from the others and release the little ones.

At thirty-seven minutes, word came over the radio, “Super Six One down.” An RPG had shot down a Black Hawk with a cartoon of Elvis Presley on its side, captioned VELVET ELVIS. Its pilot, Chief Warrant Officer Cliff Wolcott, had performed Elvis impersonations and was one of the pilots who’d taken us on safari. Now our mission shifted from a prisoner snatch to a rescue.

We loaded up in the convoy to move out again. Aiming a Squad Automatic Rifle down an alley lay a Ranger who didn’t look more than twelve years old.

I sat in the driver’s seat calling to him, “Load up, let’s go!”

The kid remained frozen.

I hopped out of the cutvee, ran over to the corner of the building, and kicked him.

He looked up at me with dazed eyes.

“Load your ass into the vehicle!”

He picked himself up and climbed into his Humvee.

Sometimes the young Rangers got so focused on the one thing they were supposed to do that they lost sight of the big picture. Their vision didn’t widen in response to changes in the environment, and their ears missed verbal commands. Experiencing sensory overload of the sympathetic nervous system, they couldn’t catch everything that was going on.

Fortunately, my father’s harshness to me as a child had prepared me for difficulties like this. Adding to that preparation were Hell Week, SEAL Team Two, SEAL Team Six, Marine Corps Scout Sniper School—intense training for years. The more you train in peace, the less you bleed in war. Desert Storm helped prepare me. I had developed a tolerance for sensory overload. Some of these Rangers

had only been out of high school a couple of years, but every one of them fought bravely.

I loaded into the cutvee with Casanova, Little Big Man, and the others. Sourpuss wasn't with us. My mind was so focused on the combat that I didn't hear Little Big Man tell us that Sourpuss was tasked to three Humvees evacuating a Ranger casualty back to the compound. Little Big Man and Casanova stayed together with me in the cutvee, riding in the main convoy.

I drove out of the target area north on the sandswept paved Hawlwadig Road. With my left hand on the wheel, my right fired the CAR-15. AK-47 rounds came at us left and right. As bullets passed over my head, they created pressure waves faster than the speed of sound, waves that crashed into each other like two hands clapping. I heard the rounds coming—the clap—then the sound of them passing by.

White trails of smoke stretched out, resulting in exploding RPGs that shook the air, filling it with a bitter smell. The smell of burning tires and burning refuse rose above the normal stench of Mogadishu, stinking like hell.

Our .50 caliber machine gun rattled off, shaking our Humvee and pounding our ears. Still, it felt good to have the .50 cal, and I was too busy using my eyes to scan for booger-eaters in my field of fire to be bothered by the horrendous noise. SEAL veterans had often talked about how reassuring it felt when their machine gun fired in battle. We're trained to use surprise, speed, and violence of action to win battles. In our convoy, we weren't surprising the enemy and couldn't move faster than the Humvee in front of us. The .50 helped us with the violence of action. Its barrel glowed from the steady stream of bullets pouring out, chewing through concrete, metal, flesh—it literally knocked out walls. *Yeah, the .50 is kicking ass.* Unfortunately, the enemy had .50s, too, bolted to the beds of their pickup trucks courtesy of Osman Atto's garage. The trucks ducked in and out of alleys shooting at us.

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A helicopter gun blasted at the enemy, demolishing the side of a building. Somalis ran in all directions. Some screamed. Some froze. Dead people and a dead donkey lay on the ground.

Aidid's people are way better equipped than we thought, they fight better than we thought, and there are a lot more of them armed than we thought. Now I was afraid we were going to get our asses kicked. On my fear scale, the needle jumped past 3 and hit 5. Anyone who says he wasn't scared in combat is either an idiot or a liar. Everyone becomes scared. It's a healthy fear. I'd never want to go into combat with someone who wasn't a little afraid. What makes a warrior is being able to control and focus that fear. He develops this ability to control fear by believing he *can* control fear. This belief is gained by having overcome fear in previous experiences, seeing Teammates overcome such fears, knowing that he is an elite warrior, and channeling that anxious energy to boost his performance.

In our convoy, we had wounded men in *every* vehicle. We still wanted to rescue Velvet Elvis and his crew in the downed Super Six One. Nearing a road where a couple of Rangers lay wounded, I thought, *What the hell is wrong with these Somalis? We're here to stop the civil war, so people can get food, and they're killing us. This is how we're repaid?* I couldn't believe it. I pulled our cutvee off the road and stopped. The first Ranger I picked up was shot in the leg. We loaded him in the back of our cutvee. Then we loaded the other one, who'd been shot in the web of his hand—not such a debilitating injury. As I returned to the driver's seat, I looked back. The Ranger with the wounded leg was helping resupply us with ammo while the other Ranger sat there in a daze with his head down staring at his wounded hand.

The Ranger resupplying us with ammo was hit again, this time in the shoulder, but he kept feeding us ammo in the front. Then a round tore into his arm. He *still* kept feeding us ammo.

Meanwhile, the Ranger who'd been shot once through the web of

his hand remained out of it, the needle on his fear meter stuck on 10. He was the only Ranger I saw back down from the fight. Then again, it's not every day a person gets shot. His reaction of shock is understandable—he was just a young kid in a horrific battle. Considering some of their youth and lack of experience, all of the Rangers fought bravely.

Stepping hard on the accelerator, I caught up with the rest of the convoy. It turned right on a dirt road. When the first Humvee slowed down at the intersection, each vehicle behind was forced to slow down, creating an accordion effect. Then we turned right again, toward the south—but we had just come from the south.

I was getting pissed at our ground convoy leader, Lieutenant Colonel Danny McKnight, but I didn't know he was just doing what the birds in the sky told him. The Orion spy plane could see what was happening but couldn't speak directly to McKnight. So it relayed information to the commander at JOC. Next, the JOC commander called the command helicopter. Finally, the command helicopter radioed McKnight. By the time McKnight received directions to turn, he'd already passed the road.

All I knew was that I was getting shot at again, holes being poked into the holes of our cutvee. Our men in the back were getting hit. *Holy crap.* I wanted to stomp the accelerator to get out of the kill zone, but I could only go as fast as the Humvee in front of me. I shot militia coming at us from the side streets. Trying to drive and shoot militia ducking in and out of side streets, I'd be surprised if I had as much as a 30 percent kill rate.

People in buildings on the second floor shot down at us. I took some time to get into my ACOG scope, lining up the red dot on my first target and squeezing the trigger. One enemy down. Then another.

The bad guys had thrown up burning roadblocks and dug trenches to slow us down. While the convoy tried to drive through and around

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the roadblocks, the enemy ambushed us. Ahead and to the side of us, five women walked shoulder to shoulder holding their colorful robes out to both sides, advancing toward the convoy. When a Humvee reached the ladies' position, they pulled their dresses in and the men behind opened fire with their AK-47s on full auto. Later, they tried the same tactic on our cutvee. For the first time in the firefight, I flicked my selector switch to full auto. With one hand on the wheel, and the other holding my CAR-15, I fired thirty rounds, cutting down the women—and the four armed militia hiding behind them. Better to be judged by twelve than carried by six.

Then over the radio I heard that an RPG had taken down a Black Hawk piloted by Mike Durant. The word came down from the command helo to rescue Velvet Elvis first, then move on to Mike at the second crash site.

We stopped on the street, set up a perimeter, provided first aid, replenished ammo, and figured out what to do next. A medic bandaged the Ranger's shoulder and arm and other guys' wounds in our cutvee. Some Rangers looked like zombies, shock in their eyes.

A Delta operator came over. "I took a hit. Can you take a look at my shoulder?" A shot had clipped the hard armor plate in his back, but it didn't take him out of the fight.

The .50 cal machine gunner in another Humvee wore an armored vest, good for resisting small-caliber rounds. He had also inserted a specially designed 10" × 12" ceramic plate in the front for protection against heavier rounds like the AK-47. However, he hadn't worn a plate on his back. Probably, like many other soldiers, he considered the extra plate in back too hot and too heavy. Besides, most shots are from the front anyway. He rolled the dice—and lost. Over the radio, we offered to let our .50 gunner replace him. The Humvee of the dead .50 gunner pulled up next to our vehicle. Inside, tears streamed down a Ranger's face as he held on to his buddy, one arm under his

head. “You dumb sonofabitch. I told you. I told you to wear your back plate. I told you.”

They pulled the dead gunner out, and our gunner replaced him. Without a qualified .50 gunner like our Ranger, their Humvee would’ve lost the ability to use its hardest-hitting weapon. Our gunner would end up saving their Humvee.

Casanova and I had used up the ten thirty-round magazines in our bandoliers, plus five more magazines that the Ranger with the wounded shoulder and arm resupplied us with. Because both of us carried the CAR-15s, which used the same 5.56mm ammo as the Rangers in our Humvee, they could resupply us with their ammo stockpile in back. Little Big Man realized he’d brought the wrong weapon to the gunfight—a SEAL modified M-14. Nobody had extra 7.62 ammo for Little Big Man’s depleted M-14 rifle.

The convoy moved forward, and we turned left, heading east, then left to the north. I didn’t know that McKnight was hit, with shrapnel in his arm and neck. We stopped. McKnight radioed the command helo for directions, but miscommunication would send us on the wrong path again. The convoy continued north to Armed Forces Road and made a left.

I also didn’t realize that Dan Schilling had taken over for McKnight while he was wounded. Dan succeeded in bypassing the convoluted communication loop and communicated straight to one of the helos. When Dan told them to vector us to the crash site, he assumed the helo knew we were headed to Velvet Elvis at the first crash site, but the helo assumed we were headed for the nearest one—Mike at the second crash site.

We turned left on Hawlwadig, heading near the Olympic Hotel and the target building. The convoy had gone around in a complete circle! We had showed our hand to Aidid’s people during previous assaults, then launched the current assault during daylight, and now I was get-

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ting shot at again—I was beyond pissed! SEAL cadre had taught us, “If you live through one ambush, go home, get in your rocking chair, and thank God the rest of your life.” I remembered Commander Olson slapping me on the shoulder before we left the compound: “Shouldn’t take long.” *Yeah, right. These are the same booger-eaters who were shooting at us a while ago. What the hell is McKnight doing? Hey, dumb-ass, we just did this. It didn’t work out too well the first time.*

While there was confusion on the radio about whether we were heading to the first crash site or the second, I heard that a crowd was closing in on Mike Durant with no ground forces in the area to help, and I remembered what happened to the Pakistanis when a crowd descended on them—they were hacked to pieces.

The first time Aidid’s men ambushed our convoy, they killed some of our guys and wounded more, but we had pulled out a can of whoop-ass on them. Corpses lay everywhere. Now the enemy ambushed us a second time—dumb bastards. They paid a hell of a price. In particular, our helicopter guns and rockets sent bodies and body parts flying.

During the fight, I called for more helicopter fire to get the enemy off our backs.

A pilot answered, “We’re Winchestered.” They had used up all their ammunition, including the 20 percent they were supposed to keep in reserve to defend themselves during the return to base. I was counting on that extra 20 percent. Even though they were out of ammo, the pilots buzzed over the bad guys almost low enough to hit them with the skids. The enemy turned away from us and directed their gunfire at the helos. While the booger-eaters aimed at the sky, we shot them. The pilots didn’t just do that once. They did it at least six times that I remember. Our Task Force 160 pilots were badass, offering themselves up as live targets, saving our lives.

As I drove, I ran out of ammo in my CAR-15. I let it hang from the

battle sling harnessed to me and drew the SIG SAUER 9mm pistol from the holster on my right hip. Our convoy slowed down, and a booger-eater emerged in a doorway, aiming his AK-47 right at me. I brought my SIG SAUER across. Double tap. I'd made that double head shot over a thousand times in training. Under the present combat conditions, I rushed the shot. Miss. Adrenaline pumping at full blast, the world seemed to decelerate around me. The booger-eater pulled the trigger in slow motion. The bullet hit my right shinbone, practically blowing off my lower right leg. His bolt went back. The empty casing ejected. *This guy ain't playing around.* I took an extra half second and got on my front sight. Like John Shaw says, "Smooth is fast." Double tap. Both rounds hit him in the face. If I'd have taken that extra half second the first time, I could've capped his ass and saved my leg.

Our cutvee slowed down. *What the hell is wrong with our cutvee?* I tried to stomp on the accelerator and couldn't. Looking down on the floorboard, I saw a big toe pointing behind me. I didn't even realize it was my leg twisted inward. Surely I'd be in a lot more pain if it was my leg. I tried to step on the accelerator again. My right foot flopped. *Sonofabitch. That's my leg.* Reaching with my left foot, I jabbed the accelerator. *Wow, this is some really serious crap. I better get on top of my game.* Even though this was my second time getting shot during the battle, I still embraced my own superhuman strength. My fear meter rose to 6, but it hadn't reached 10. I felt numbness more than pain because my nerve receptors had overloaded. Although surprised for the second time during combat, I still felt superior as a SEAL Team Six sniper—Howard Wasdin.

I was furious with McKnight and called him on the radio. "Get us the hell out of here!"

Finally out of the danger zone, the convoy stopped to help the people who were leaking to stop leaking, feed our weapons more ammo, and plan our next move. Casanova helped me crawl over the center console

and into the passenger seat, so he could drive. The battle sling of my CAR-15 got hung up on the center console. Little Big Man wrestled with it, trying to get it clear. Whatever love he had for the M-14 and its longer range seemed to have faded. Little Big Man wanted my CAR-15.

My shattered bone had jagged edges that could slice into an artery and cause me to bleed to death. Casanova propped my wounded leg up on the hood of the Humvee and placed my left leg next to it as a brace. The elevation would also slow the blood flow. "I'm going to get you home," Casanova said.

The convoy moved out, and Casanova stepped on the gas. Our cut-vee ran on three flat tires. The convoy made a U-turn and turned right at the Olympic Hotel, heading toward the first crash site, Velvet Elvis. It was like the movie *Groundhog Day*, repeating the same actions over and over again.

Five or ten minutes later, an enemy round shot through my left ankle. Unlike the fracture in my right shin, where my central nervous system shut off the pain, this one hurt like a bitch. My fear level rose from 6 to 7. My emotions toward the enemy rocketed off the anger scale. They had taken away my superhero powers. Suddenly, I realized I was in trouble.

True to form, our convoy missed Velvet Elvis at the first crash site—again. Then we stopped. Guys stepped out of their vehicles and set up a perimeter. McKnight got out of his vehicle with someone, and it looked like they laid a map on the hood of their Humvee, plotting our location. It was surreal. *While we're getting shot, why not walk into the 7-Eleven and ask for directions?*

Our convoy had failed twice to navigate its way to one of the downed pilots. We had used up most of our ammunition. Wounded and dead bodies filled our vehicles. Half of the men were severely wounded, including most of the leaders. If we didn't return to base and regroup, we might not have anyone left to launch a rescue.

Our cutvee had more holes in it than a sponge. The side mirrors dangled from their L-brackets. As the convoy moved forward again, our cutvee hit a land mine. The ballistic blankets covering the floor saved us from fragmentation. (I would later be made an honorary member of the Kevlar Survivor's Club.) Casanova pulled off the road, where our cutvee died. The booger-eaters descended on us. *We're about to be overrun.*

I remembered the old 1960 movie *The Alamo*, starring John Wayne as Davy Crockett. It was one of my favorite movies, and Davy Crockett was my favorite person in the Alamo. *This must be how Davy Crockett felt before they killed him: outgunned, undermanned, without protection. Seeing his people get wiped out while the enemy continued to advance. This is it. Howard Wasdin checks out in Mogadishu, Somalia, on the afternoon of October 3, 1993. My one regret is I haven't told the people I love that I love them enough. During my time on earth, it's what I should've done more of.* The first two people who came to mind were my children, Blake and Rachel. I probably only told them I loved them about six times a year. Part of the problem was that, with frequent training deployments and real-world ops, I just wasn't around for a large part of their lives. Even though I was married, now I didn't think of my wife, Laura. My relationship with the SEAL Team had been more important than my marriage. I wanted to tell Blake and Rachel how much I loved them.

My fear meter peaked at 8. It never reached 10. When you hit a 10, you can't function anymore. You succumb to the mercy of events going on around you. I wasn't dead yet. Firing back with my SIG, I tried to keep six or seven of the booger-eaters from surrounding us. Physically, I couldn't shoot effectively enough to kill anyone at that point. I had used up two of Casanova's pistol magazines and was down to my last. Over the radio, I heard that the QRF were on their way to rescue us—four hours into the gunfight. Quick Reaction Force—*what is their definition of "quick"?*

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Our vehicle still disabled on the side of the road, I looked up to see the QRF drive past our road. *Sonofabitch. We had a chance to get rescued and there they go. They are going to leave us here to die.* Then the QRF stopped and backed up with a deuce-and-a-half. *Thank God, at least they can see us.* When they reached the road beside us, the booger-eaters took flight. The QRF stopped.

Casanova and Little Big Man helped transfer the wounded over to their vehicles.

A Ranger struggled to coil up a fast rope that had been dropped from a helicopter during the insertion—just doing what he'd done on training ops many times. In sensory overload, soldiers rely heavily on muscle memory, fighting the way they trained.

Unable to walk, I stared at the Ranger in disbelief. “This is not a training operation!” I yelled. “Put the rope down, get your ass in the deuce-and-a-half, and let's get out of here!”

The Ranger continued trying to recover the rope, not conscious of the situation around him and not listening to verbal commands.

I pointed my SIG SAUER at him. “I won't kill you, but you will walk with a limp if you don't get your ass in that truck!”

The Ranger looked confused for a moment before dropping the fast rope. He hurried into a vehicle.

Finally, my guys loaded me into the deuce-and-a-half. “Be careful with him,” Casanova said. “His right leg is barely hanging on.”

We rode back to the compound unmolested by Aidid's forces. Arriving inside the gates, we met chaos: forty to fifty American bodies laid out all over the runway with medical personnel trying to get them through triage—figuring out the nonsurvivable from the survivable, the critical from the less critical—and attending to them accordingly. A Ranger opened a Humvee tailgate—blood flowed out like water.

Casanova and Dan Schilling carried me to the triage area.

Still in daylight, the medics stripped off all my clothes and treated me. They left me lying naked on that runway covered with bodies. Exposed.

Once again, death had just missed me. Like it missed when the enemy shot down the QRF helo, killing three men. Like it missed when Aidid's militia massed to attack us at Pasha. Like it missed when mortars bombed the CIA compound I had visited the day before. Like all the other misses. I thought maybe Casanova and I could've made a difference if we'd been riding in the QRF helicopter flight when the three men died. It hadn't occurred to me that maybe I could've been killed. It hadn't occurred to me that God was looking out for us. Now forty-eight years old and not as cocky, I wonder, *Would I have been able to get the enemy before he got me? Maybe people would've been coming to my memorial ceremony.*

Before the Battle of Mogadishu, the Clinton administration's support for our troops had sagged like a sack of turds. They had rejected or removed M-2 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles, M-1 Abrams tanks, and AC-130 Spectre gunships. The Clinton camp was more interested in maintaining political points than keeping some of America's finest troops alive.

During the Battle of Mogadishu, eighteen Americans were killed and eighty-four wounded. Also, one Malaysian died and seven were injured. Two Pakistanis and one Spaniard were wounded, too. In spite of only about 180 soldiers fighting against nearly 3,000 of Aidid's militia and civilian fighters, we captured Omar Salad, Mohamed Hassan Awale, Abdi Yusef Herse, and others. Thousands of Aidid's clan members were killed, with thousands more wounded. They'd depleted much of their ammunition. A number of the chieftains evacuated in fear of America's inevitable counterattack. Some were ready to turn in Aidid to save themselves. Four fresh SEAL Team Six snipers from Blue Team were on their way to relieve us. Delta's Alpha

Battle of Mogadishu

Squadron was gearing up to relieve Charlie Squadron. A new batch of Rangers was coming, too. We had broken Aidid's back, and we wanted to finish the job.

In spite of the gains, President Clinton saw our sacrifices as losses. Even though we could've finished the job of taking down Aidid and getting food to the people, Clinton turned tail and ran. He ordered all actions against Aidid stopped. Four months later, Clinton released Osman Atto, Omar Salad, Mohamed Hassan Awale, Abdi Yusef Herse, and the other prisoners. *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*.

We had spent so much time working with local Somalis to build their trust, to convince them that we would be with them in the long run. Many of these Somalis risked their lives to help us. Some endangered their families. Our former Somali guards at Pasha joined in the Battle of Mogadishu, loyal to the end. Only one of them survived. Other Somalis died on our side trying to stop Aidid. We left our Somali friends dangling in the breeze. I felt like our sacrifices had been in vain. *Why did they send us if they weren't willing to finish the job?* We shouldn't have become involved in Somalia's civil war—this was their problem, not ours—but once we committed, we should've finished what we started: a lesson we are required to keep relearning over and over again.

Somalia lost the assistance of the international community to bring peace and food to the country. Chaos and starvation spiked sharply. Aidid tried to downplay his losses, but he would never rule over a united Somalia. He died in 1996 during an internal battle against his evil genius, Osman Atto.