

Ambushed...

**How a Third World Warlord Shattered
America's Aura of Invincibility**

Their mission was to swoop down from the sky using high-tech Black Hawk helicopters, abduct two deputies of a Somali warlord and return to base. It was supposed to take an hour. Instead, these elite US forces found themselves pinned down through a long and terrible night fighting against thousands of heavily armed Somalis. The following morning, 18 Americans were dead and more than 70 had been badly wounded.

*Read the gritty, riveting narrative of the historic battle's heroism and courage – including the firsthand account of a Jewish soldier who was there and who later became a baal teshuvah... and who shared his story with **Zman**.*

Moshe Holender - Yitzchok Wagschal



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Clang! A grenade hit the car, bounced off, struck Jason Coleman's helmet, and then bounced to the ground. Shawn Nelson, who had been using the roof of the abandoned car as a mount for his M-60 machine gun, pulled the gun away and dove for cover, as did all the soldiers in the immediate area. Then, they waited....

After about a minute, nothing had happened. The soldiers slowly rose. The Russian-manufactured grenade must have malfunctioned. They retook their positions amid the stench of rotting garbage, burning tires, gunpowder and death. Half a minute later, another grenade rolled into the intersection. Again, the soldiers rolled away, taking whatever cover they could. Again, nothing happened.

As Nelson was crawling back to the car to retake his position, a third grenade rolled right next to him. All he could do was try to block the blast with his helmet and weapon. He braced himself for the impact that was sure to come....

The grenade sat on the ground... fizzling... and fizzling. Finally, Staff Sergeant Ed Yurek grabbed it and threw it into the intersection. It seemed that one of the "Sammies"—as the Americans called their Somali adversaries—had purchased a lot of bad grenades.



Location of Somalia on the eastern coast of the African continent. Mogadishu is in the south, near the equator (blue line).

Bullets were ricocheting all around them, knocking pieces out of the exterior walls of nearby buildings. It was very difficult to see where the enemy fire was coming from. The Somalis were terrible shots and wore no protective gear, but the one tactic they had mastered was firing from hidden positions. Often no more than the end of a gun barrel was visible to the men being targeted.

Sergeant First Class Paul Howe spotted the soldiers. It looked to him like they were just standing around, though in reality they were still recovering from the shock of the grenades landing near them, even though ultimately they did not explode.

"Start shooting!" he yelled over at them. He sent a few members of his elite Delta Force team to help them get into strategic positions.

Meanwhile, Lt. Larry Perino, Sgt. Chuck Elliot and Corporal Jamie Smith were on their way up the street toward his position, about 10 yards down. They were crouching behind a small tin shed that protruded from the wall of the alleyway. They were taking heavy fire.

To the three men, rounds seemed to be coming from every direction. It was very disorienting. A bullet hit the wall above Perino and debris came raining down on his helmet.

Up the street and across the intersection, about 30 yards away, Perino saw a Somali aiming an automatic rifle. The rifle flashed, indicating that some of the assault on the soldiers further up was coming from that position. He realized that Coleman, Nelson and the others at the intersection were hiding behind a tree and could not see the gunman.

It would have been quite difficult for Perino to hit him from so far away with his rifle, but Cpl. Smith had a grenade launcher on his back. He inched forward to tap Smith on the shoulder. Yelling would have done no good amid the deafening gunfire surrounding them.

Just as he was about to tell Smith, who was on one knee, to use his grenade launcher, bullets came tearing through the shed,



Mogadishu, Somalia's capital, viewed from an Army helicopter.

throwing up dirt between Smith's legs. The others saw Smith roll to the ground.

"I'm hit!" he called out.

The soldiers engaged in this fierce fire-fight were a part of Task Force Ranger, one of America's elite fighting units. The Rangers, numbering about 100, had been split into small groups and were now pinned down by enemy fire. They were surrounded by several miles of hostile territory and several thousand angry, armed Somali militiamen who had declared an all-out war against them.

The mission was not supposed to have taken this turn. The Rangers had rappelled down into the middle of Mogadishu, Somalia's capital, from Black Hawk helicopters. They were to storm a building, capture a few high-ranking clan members and quickly exit the area. One hour. Two hours, tops.

What they hadn't realized is that when they dropped out of the sky in the middle of a hostile clan's territory, they were poking a veritable hornet's nest. Now the shadows grew long as the sun dipped low on the horizon. The promised rescue convoy that was supposed to take them out of the area was nowhere in sight. The soldiers realized that they would be spending the night in this horrible place. They prayed that this night wouldn't be their last.

Somalia: Model of a Failed State

Although it is considerably larger than France, most people would have difficulty



Pvt. Jason Wind at a training range outside Mogadishu, Somalia shooting a .50 cal machine gun. Note the size of the shells.



Photo taken by Jason Wind of the Somali countryside.

picking out Somalia on a world map. The thing that makes it stand out most is its status as a place that almost no one in his right mind would ever want to visit. It is one of the poorest, most war-torn nations on the globe.

It sits on the Horn of Africa, abutting the Indian Ocean and lying just across the Gulf of Aden from Yemen. Its proximity to the Arabian Peninsula brought Islam to the