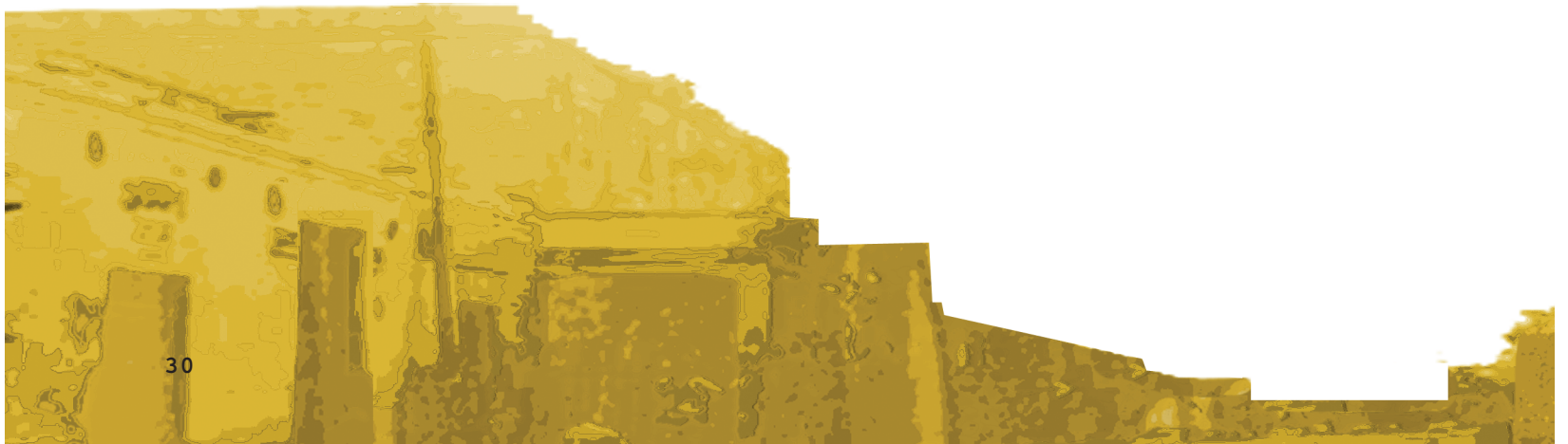


# BRAVERY ON THE BATTLEFIELD

**MATT EVERSMANN, HAMPDEN SYDNEY 2000**, QUESTIONED HIS ABILITIES AS A LEADER BUT SHINED AS HE LED HIS GROUP OF 13 U.S. ARMY RANGERS THROUGH A DANGEROUS MISSION IN 1993 IN WHICH THEY WERE TRAPPED IN BATTLE IN SOMALIA. HIS ACTIONS INSPIRED THE 2001 FILM, *BLACK HAWK DOWN*. TODAY, EVERSMANN HOPES TO SEE WITHIN THE IRAQI SOLDIERS THAT ARE HIS TRAINEES THE SAME TRAITS THAT MADE HIM A SUCCESS.

By **Matt Eversmann**



30

I learned a great deal about all brotherhood, leadership and courage on Sunday, Oct. 3, 1993, as I led a group of 13 U.S. Army Rangers through battle after our Black Hawk helicopters were downed in Mogadishu, Somalia. Delta Force, the nation's top commando unit, was to storm a target house and capture two top Mohamed Farrah Aidid lieutenants. Four helicopters full of Rangers, including my men, would rope down to all four corners of the target block and form a perimeter, isolating the target house so that the enemy could not come or go.

In what became a troubled mission, this experience later became the inspiration for the 2001 film, *Black Hawk Down*.

The Rangers and I had rehearsed the mission in which we paratrooped into Mogadishu to take the lieutenants a hundred times and had executed similar missions on four or five occasions in the city. I had no doubt about the ability of my team, but I could not help having concerns about myself. I was

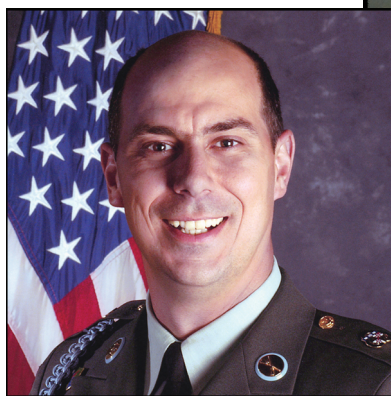
officially in charge of all 13 of these men; whether they succeeded or failed was my responsibility.

I gave a quick mission briefing as I stood under the turning blades of an MH-60 Black Hawk helicopter. The troops nodded in agreement to their orders and we boarded the helicopter. As I sat on the helicopter between two men who served as door gunners, I remember saying my prayers and giving myself a last-minute pep talk, mentally rehearsing my actions for each major piece of the plan. "It should work, we've done it before," I told myself.

It was only a three-minute flight to the target. The birds, or aircraft, would provide cover fire as we slid down long nylon ropes to the ground. Because there was not room to land the helicopter, we had to paratroop in. The birds would continue to provide cover until the last Ranger was on the ground, then they would fly away and orbit over the Somali desert.



Matt Eversmann, **Hampton Sydney 2000**, saw himself portrayed on the big screen by actor Josh Hartnett in the Academy-Award winning film, *Black Hawk Down*. The 2001 flick was based on Eversmann's actions in leading a group of soldiers who were to paratroop into downtown Mogadishu to help with the capture of two top Mohamed Farrah Aidid lieutenants.



As we sliced through the Somali sky toward the target, we felt the adrenaline rush inside us as our hearts thumped against our body armor. It was scary, exciting and exhilarating. As we mentally prepared for the change in flight speed on our approach to our insertion point, the spot where we would paratroop, the nose of the helicopter suddenly shot up into the sky. Something was not right. I heard the pilot say, "I can't see. We're about 200 meters short of the insertion point. We'll drop the ropes and put you in here. Once you get on the ground, just look at the nose of the bird and head in that direction."

"Roger," was about all I could say.

As I looked out of the helicopter all I could see was a cloud of thick brown dust. The blades had stirred up so much debris that the pilots could not see past their windshield. But it was better to be on the ground than sitting in a stationary target 60 feet over a city that was infested with rocket-propelled grenades. The nylon ropes were tossed from the helicopter and the men started to exit. I was the last one out. As I made my way to the rope, the helicopter suddenly lurched in one direction. I regained my balance, grabbed the rope and started my descent. As I made my way 65 feet to the ground below, I was horrified to see one of my men lying on the ground below me. I thought he had been shot.

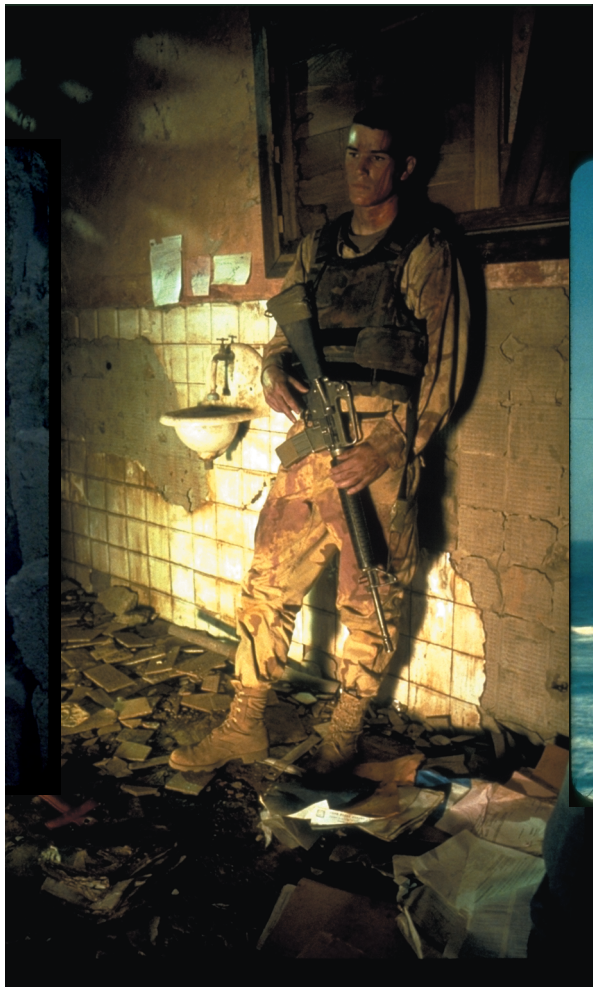
When I reached the ground, I immediately counted the rest of the team and ensured that we were securing the area. The medic had begun giving aid to the man who was down. He definitely needed an immediate medical evacuation. I told my radio operator to call for a medevac unit. "Sergeant E, I've got no (radio communication)," was his reply. We suddenly started receiving fire from the enemy in three directions. During my first 30 seconds of being in charge of the mission, we were in the wrong spot with no radio communication, had an urgent casualty and were under fire. I could not have dreamt of a worse scenario.

The battle ensued, Black Hawk helicopters were shot down, and about 100 Rangers and Delta Force operators were pinned down in the city. In what became known as the Battle of Mogadishu, 18 Americans died from battle wounds. I did my best to lead my men out of the situation safely, and we relied upon one another to get through the battle.

Through this experience, I learned that being a good brother, a good leader or a man of courage is easy when there is no crisis. Anyone can talk a great game about the type of man he is. But he will never know if he speaks the truth until he is tested. If you saw a mate in trouble, would your first instinct be to run to help him? Would you be able to direct others to go into harm's way? If you were told to face

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adversity to help your brother, would you immediately do it? I lived through this dilemma that Oct 3, as I witnessed college-aged boys sacrificing all they had for the love of their comrades.

It is easy to pontificate about courage, to make pious remarks from under the umbrella of an elite unit such as the Task Force Rangers, or to brag about having made brilliant decisions. The truth however, in my opinion, is not what we see in ourselves but how we are perceived by others. For instance, many will remark about the heroism depicted in *Black Hawk Down* or read in the book on which the film was based, *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War*, by Mark Bowden. But if you asked a Ranger who was involved in the real-life drama, he would undoubtedly say he was just doing his job and doing it well for the good of the mission, the unit and his Ranger buddies. He simply did the tasks with more pride, dedication and commitment than anyone else. Therein lies the rub.

I see much of the same happening today in Yusufiyah, Iraq, where I am 1st Sgt. for a Light Infantry Company from the 10th Mountain Division. I am honored to lead college-aged boys who have every bit of the same desire to serve their country as did the "heroes" of the Task Force Rangers. However, in some ways the mission we have in Iraq is even more difficult and dangerous than the fight was in Mogadishu, as we are training the Iraqi Army to sustain order in the midst of an ongoing, chaotic national crisis. Language barriers, cultural barriers and war-fighting skills at times hinder our progress.

However, despite their differences, young men of every race, color and creed do beg for strong, values-based, ethically guided leadership. They need to belong to something bigger than themselves. They yearn for an organization that contains "no brigands and hoodlums" and is composed of men of good character. And the Iraqi soldiers will be successful so long as they are compassionate leaders, courageous men and committed members of their brotherhood.