

them alone in the darkness of night with high mountains all around. For today's tactical aviator accustomed to flying with night vision goggles that kind of flying is a scary thought. Johnson presents the missions in chronological order and includes occasional flashbacks to his basic and advanced helicopter training.

Even though the technology and political context have changed substantially since the Vietnam conflict, for a line pilot flying day-to-day missions in support of the army the essence of the missions as well as life in austere field locations is still very familiar. All tactical aviators, aircrew as well as technicians, will find familiarities with their own experiences somewhere in this book.

Tom Johnson's book, *To the Limit*, will be appreciated by anyone who loved reading Robert Mason's *Chickenhawk* as well as those who have a keen interest in how the war in Vietnam was fought from an aviator's point of view.

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Review by Major Bill March

“HERE IS HELL” CANADA'S ENGAGEMENT IN SOMALIA

BY GRANT DAWSON

VANCOUVER:
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA PRESS, 2007
230 PAGES ISBN 978-0-7748-1298-6

Somalia! The mere mention of the country can evoke a wide variety of visceral emotions among Canadians. For some it will be the shock surrounding the death of 16-year-old Shidane Arone at the hands of Canadian soldiers. For others it will be a sense of disbelief and angst over the revelations of problems within the Canadian Forces (CF) and the Department of National Defence (DND) exposed during the well publicized Commission of Inquiry into the

Deployment of Canadian Forces to Somalia and its subsequent report, *Dishonoured Legacy: The Lessons of the Somalia Affair*. Finally, there are those who will remember Somalia through a sense of horror at the images of the corpse of a US serviceman being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, or with a feeling of pulse-pumping entertainment watching Hollywood's take on events through the movie *Blackhawk Down*.

Regardless of the emotional impact of this period in our history, I wager that few Canadians, unless they were among the small number intimately involved in the mission, have a clear understanding of the complexities surrounding the decision by the Canadian government to become “engaged” in this troubled African country. Grant Dawson, in his book *“Here is Hell”*, provides a window through which the reader can gain a better understanding of the political, bureaucratic and military forces that shaped the mission from start to finish.

From a Canadian perspective there were three Somalia missions. The first grew out of public and political desire to ameliorate a humanitarian crisis brought about by famine and civil war that gained international attention in the early months of 1992. Under the auspices of the United Nations (UN), Canada contributed to a humanitarian airlift commencing in August of that year. However, the increasingly chaotic environment in Somalia—especially in urban areas such as Mogadishu—made it difficult to protect UN and non-governmental organization (NGO) workers and aid shipments. Various Somali factions quickly realized the political and financial worth of the aid shipments and looting was rampant. In response the UN looked to move beyond traditional peacekeeping to offer a modicum of protection through a more robust military presence, but by late November the international body acknowledged that it had failed to achieve the desired results. The US, already somewhat impatient with the UN’s slow progress, became the lead nation in what would be called the Unified Task Force (UTF). The UTF was authorized by UN Security Council Resolution 793 (3 December 1992) with the general mandate to enforce a certain level of stability, especially in southern Somalia where the humanitarian need was the greatest. Canada approved of this second mission and contributed a battle group formed around the Canadian Airborne Regiment (CAR).

The deployment of the UTF was to be temporary in duration, with the UN taking over from coalition forces as soon as the security situation had improved. Unfortunately, this goal proved

more difficult to achieve than had originally been forecast. Canada was approached in the March/April 1993 timeframe to extend the original commitment and perhaps agree to transfer the Canadian contingent to a new UN mission at a mutually agreed upon date. Circumstances in Canada had changed drastically between December 1992 and April 1993. Canadian military and foreign affairs staffs were sceptical that lengthening the UTF mission would have any practical results. At the same time, the strain placed on military resources by the shrinking defence budget and increased commitments to ongoing UN missions, such as in the Balkans, made it difficult to recommend support for remaining in Somalia. The Minister of National Defence, Kim Campbell, sought approval from the Prime Minister (PM), Brian Mulroney, to refuse the UN overture. Although he seriously considered extending the Canadian mission, Mulroney was cognizant that domestic public and media interest had switched from Somalia to the Balkans. The death of Arone, and the growing political scandal stemming from the incident and its subsequent mismanagement by DND and the government, were also factors taken into consideration as the PM deliberated on the UN mission. In June 1993, the UN was informed that Canada would withdraw its forces as soon as its area of responsibility could be transferred to a UN contingent.

Dawson does an excellent job of explaining the political and military complexities surrounding Canada’s approach to Somalia. Although Canada’s support of multilateralism will not come as a surprise, readers should pay close attention to the pitfalls associated with an over exuberant pursuit of this approach to international affairs. This is especially true when political decisions are motivated more by public and media perception rather than national interest. Dawson argues that the self-perceived “need” to support every UN mission, spurred on by images of war and famine on the television, resulted in Canadian participation in a course of action for which the international community was woefully unprepared. Caught up in a sense of action-oriented optimism brought about by the end of the Cold War, the UN found itself

mired in a land where there was no peace to keep and, perhaps far worse, there were no coherent political authorities amongst the Somali factions to interact with. Attempting to shift gears from peacekeeping to peace enforcement only exacerbated UN confusion and eventually led to Canadian involvement in a non-UN coalition. The UTF's UN-sanctioned peace enforcement role opened up a new and untried chapter in Canadian foreign policy that was not anticipated.

Of special note is Dawson's detailed examination of the military planning process associated with the Somalia mission. This is often an area that is ignored or quickly glossed over in many works that have a more political/policy focus. The author paints a picture of a military planning process that was in the throes of change. The CF, reacting to the end of the Cold War and recent initiatives brought about by the Gulf War, was moving towards a more coherent joint planning matrix better able to deal quickly with complex missions such as Somalia. Like the UN and the Canadian government, the CF was working through the difficulties associated with preparing and implementing a mission that was less than war, but more than traditional peacekeeping. Undoubtedly, mistakes were made, but valuable insight was gained that would stand the CF in good stead during later missions.

Dawson does not shy away from discussing the Arone murder, but he does not dwell on it; it happened and the ripples it created will always taint the mission. He does spend more time examining the process by which the CAR was chosen as Canada's contribution to the UTF. Despite some internal disciplinary problems, which he argues were no greater than those of other battalions, he provides clear evidence that the decision to send the CAR to Somalia was based on a clear professional assessment. The CAR was trained, available and was designated as the UN standby force. Not to send it would have made no sense. Dawson stops short of addressing the Somalia Enquiry, as it is outside the scope of this book; however, this should not be construed as a weakness, but as a strength. "Here is Hell" is about the mission, not its aftermath.

I have two minor criticisms—one of which I will blame on the publisher and the other on the author. The title "Here is Hell" was undoubtedly chosen by the publisher to be eye-catching for potential buyers scanning rows of books at the local bookstore. Unfortunately, although the narrative does convey a sense of the complexity and chaos that was Somalia in 1992, it does not leave the reader with an emotional impact worthy of such a graphic title. My second criticism deals with the way the narrative is put together. Each chapter begins with an introduction that repeats many of the main themes and information from the preceding ones. The end result is a certain amount of redundancy of information that interrupts the flow of the narrative and gives the impression that the book is a compilation of stand-alone parts that have been cobbled together.

Why read this book? In many ways Somalia was the harbinger of the type of mission that Canada would increasingly become engaged in—less about peace and more about enforcement. As such Dawson's work will be of interest to students of both foreign and defence policy. From an aerospace perspective, it offers a very good overview of the airlift portion of the mission which is often an important, but overlooked part, of many of the CF's international missions. The book also offers some insight into how the military planning process coped with large-scale political and organizational changes of benefit to planners today. Most of all, "Here is Hell" provides a concrete example of how the best efforts of all concerned can be quickly overshadowed by a single event and its follow-on effects. That is a lesson that we should always keep in mind. ■

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