



Significant Incident: Canada's Army, the Airborne, and the Murder in Somalia

David Bercuson

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The Canadian army is in crisis. Its command structure is ineffective. Its soldiers are demoralized. Its equipment is outmoded and inadequate for many of the tasks to which it is assigned. The causes of the problem can be traced to a number of sources, including political indecision, peacetime neglect, and budgetary cutbacks. But, perhaps most crucially, the ability of the army to carry out its essential function, which is to maintain the capacity to fight wars, has been undermined by the process of bureaucratization initiated by passage of the Unification Act of 1968 and reinforced by later structural changes. This process has transformed and disfigured the military command structure at every level, from the Chief of Defence Staff to the so-called Hellyer corporal, with disastrous results.

The dreadful torture and murder of a teenager in Somalia was significant precisely because it showed how badly morale and discipline have deteriorated in Canada's army. In *Significant Incident*, David Bercuson gives readers a rare inside look at the state of our armed forces. He draws on historical sources, leaked documents, material submitted to the Commission of Inquiry into the Somalia Affair, and on scores of exclusive interviews. He uses this material to describe today's army, both on duty in Bosnia, for example, and on the home front. It is against this multifaceted background that the deterioration of a proud regiment, the Canadian Airborne, and its ill-fated mission to Somalia begins to make sense.

Significant Incident will be welcomed by soldiers, but will send shockwaves through the media, the military high command, and political circles.

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