



Operation **URGENT FURY**

THE INVASION OF GRENADA, OCTOBER 1983

Cover: Patrol Extraction, Grenada, November 1983, by Marbury Brown
All photos are from Department of Defense files.

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Introduction

At the end of the Vietnam War and the end of selective service, the United States Army was forced to rebuild itself into an all-volunteer force. The Army in the late 1970s and early 1980s was untested in combat and faced a crisis in confidence, a reduction in size, and the need to reorganize and restructure. Army leaders, doctrine, and the political climate of the time compelled the Army to focus on its primary potential military mission: the defense of western Europe. Equipment and manpower were geared toward this mission.

In October 1983, the U.S. Army was unexpectedly thrown into a “no-notice” joint force contingency operation on the little island of Grenada. Confronted with a deteriorating political situation on Grenada after the deposing and execution of the leader of the government by its own military, the perceived need to deal firmly with Soviet and Cuban influence in the Caribbean, and the potential for several hundred U.S. citizens becoming hostages, the Ronald W. Reagan administration launched an invasion of the island with only a few days for the military to plan operations. While the military’s capabilities were never in doubt, the unexpectedly strong Cuban and Grenadian resistance in the first two days of the operation and the host of U.S. military errors in planning, intelligence, communications, and logistics highlighted the dangers of even small contingency operations. As the first joint operation attempted since the end of the Vietnam War, the invasion of Grenada also underscored the problems the U.S. Army faced in trying to work in a joint environment with its Air Force, Navy, and Marine counterparts.

This pamphlet was prepared by Richard W. Stewart, the Center’s Chief Historian, and is an edited extract of Senior Historian Edgar F. Raines’ forthcoming account of U.S. Army operations on Grenada entitled *The Rucksack War: U.S. Army Operational Logistics in Grenada, October–November 1983*. We hope that you enjoy and profit from this synopsis of the short, yet significant, contingency operation conducted by the U.S. Army as part of the joint team in the early days of the all-volunteer force.

JEFFREY J. CLARKE
Chief of Military History

Operation URGENT FURY

The Invasion of Grenada, October 1983

The U.S. Army spent much of the decade after its retreat from Vietnam rebuilding itself into a supremely capable, all-volunteer force. With the application of new doctrine, equipment, and, especially, dynamic leadership at all levels, the Army slowly recovered from that traumatic time. Focused primarily on preparations to counter the Soviet and Warsaw Pact threat to central Europe, the U.S. Army trained hard in conventional operations as enshrined in its primary doctrinal manual, Field Manual 100-5, *Operations* (1976). Within ten years of the end of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the Army had rebuilt itself but had only begun to integrate into a joint team capable of fighting in a synchronized multiservice operation. World events, however, have a way of forcing a nation to go to war or, at least, to engage in operations “with the Army it has, and not the Army it wants,” to quote a more contemporary statement of how occurrences have a way of surprising policy makers. In the case of Grenada, an obscure island in the Caribbean, the circumstances resulting from an internal power struggle between Communist leaders spilled over into a short, but intense, contingency operation for the U.S. Army.

Strategic Setting

The island of Grenada is the smallest and most southerly of the Windward Islands in the Caribbean Sea (*Map 1*). It is a poor island and had a population of some 91,000 in 1983. It is only 100 miles from Venezuela but almost 1,500 miles southeast of Key West, Florida. The main island of Grenada has an area of about 200 square miles, with a few smaller islands bringing the total to some 220 square miles. The next closest island to Grenada in the Windward chain is St. Vincent to the north. The capital of Grenada, St. George’s, had a population of about 7,500 inhabitants. Grenada’s main cash crops were mace, nutmeg, and bananas, but one of the island’s main sources of revenue was the St. George’s University School of Medicine. The school was founded in 1976 and had two main campuses at True Blue near Point Salines and Grand Anse just south of St. George’s. The medical school had about seven hundred American students attending in 1983 and by itself generated between 10 and 15 percent of the entire gross national product of Grenada.



Map 1

The leftist government of Grenada in 1983 was headed by Maurice Bishop, the party leader as well as the head of the revolutionary “New JEWEL” (New Joint Effort for Welfare, Education, and Liberation) movement. Bishop led a Communist-style government that looked to Cuba and the Soviet Union for financial and moral support and blamed the United States for all the ills of the island, real and imagined. He had come to power in 1979 by overthrowing the democratically elected—but highly eccentric and increasingly autocratic—government of Sir Eric Gairy and immediately signed trade and military agreements with Havana and Moscow. Limited military aid and advisers followed, and the Grenadians accelerated plans to construct a major international airport with an extended runway at Point Salines. By the fall of 1983, that runway, built mainly by about seven hundred Cuban workers who were all reservists in the Cuban Army, was nearly complete.

The Grenadian military, even with outside training and support, was not a formidable force. It consisted of a small permanent military force called the People’s Revolutionary Army of fewer than three hundred soldiers, a partly trained militia called the People’s Revolutionary Militia of fewer than a thousand, and a small coast guard with a few converted fishing boats. The soldiers were armed with light weapons: AK47s, a few mortars, some antitank rockets, and light machine guns. The main striking force was provided by eight Soviet BTR60 amphibious armored personnel carriers and two BRDM2 amphibious scout cars, all with heavy 14.5-mm. machine guns. Their armor and armament made them formidable weapons platforms. The main threat on the island to any external intervention force was, however, the seven hundred Cuban “construction workers” who were loosely organized into military units.

The United States had grown increasingly uneasy about the expansion of Soviet and Cuban influence in the Caribbean and in Grenada in particular. By the early 1980s, Soviet support of the Communist Sandinista government of Nicaragua and of the Communist insurrection in El Salvador was on the rise. The new U.S. administration of President Ronald Reagan viewed further encroachments into traditional U.S. spheres of influence in South and Central America and the Caribbean as constituting an increasing menace. Soviet and Cuban military aid and equipment and the construction of an airfield larger than any needed for purely civilian purposes set off alarm bells in the U.S. national security establishment.

The U.S. intervention had its roots in a bloody power struggle within the New JEWEL movement in Grenada between Prime Minister and New JEWEL party leader Maurice Bishop and his Deputy Prime

Minister and chief Marxist theoretician in the party Bernard Coard. In a series of internal political maneuvers in the Central Committee, Coard consolidated his personal support and on 12 October 1983 deposed Bishop and ordered his arrest. When riots broke out after the arrest of Bishop was announced, Coard panicked, resigned, and went into hiding. Coard's conspirators, however, kept Bishop under arrest. A few days later, unhappy about the imprisonment of the popular Bishop, a crowd of Grenadians stormed Bishop's residence at Mount Wheldale where he was confined and freed him. Bishop moved to Fort Rupert, the army headquarters, and with a mob of supporters overawed the guards. Before he could consolidate his support, however, he and his followers were attacked and fired on by three of the army's armored cars, which killed anywhere from ten to a hundred people. Bishop and several of his prominent supporters were captured, lined up against a wall, and executed. The head of the People's Revolutionary Army, General Hudson Austin, announced the formation of a Revolutionary Military Council with himself as president of an interim government.

The government of Fidel Castro in Cuba, long a supporter of Bishop, was surprised by the events on Grenada and on 20 October 1983 issued a statement condemning the killings and asking for explanations of the coup and the following bloodbath. Cuba also promised continued aid and support of the Grenadian people. Despite the bloodshed, Castro did not want to risk losing all influence on his new client state.

Despite growing unease about Communist penetration of the Caribbean, the initial reaction of U.S. officials on 19 October was concern for U.S. citizens on the island. Officials began to contemplate a noncombatant evacuation of American citizens. Initially, there was no serious consideration given to intervening to change the regime. Early concepts of the evacuation included using a show of force followed by the seizure of a few departure locations with only enough lethal force to defend the operation and protect the evacuees. On the nineteenth, the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a warning order for possible evacuation operations to the commander of U.S. Atlantic Command (USLANTCOM), Admiral Wesley L. McDonald.

Planning

Initial planning for the noncombatant evacuation of U.S. citizens postulated two different levels of U.S. force, depending on whether the evacuation was opposed. Admiral McDonald's naval staff briefed Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General John W. Vessey on using

a combination of fleet warships, elements of a Marine amphibious unit, and, if necessary, one reinforced airborne battalion for a show of force. General Vessey suggested using portions of recently formed Ranger battalions to seize the almost completed Point Salines airfield. This would take full advantage of their training in airport seizure. He also suggested using some of the Pentagon's special operations forces since hostage rescue specialists might be needed.

On 20 October, the president's deputy national security adviser, Rear Adm. John M. Poindexter, convened a crisis preplanning group to discuss the looming crisis. He recommended that the Special Situation Group, a committee of senior policy makers chaired by Vice President George H. W. Bush, assume responsibility for managing the crisis. President Reagan concurred, and late that day the group met for the first time to discuss how the United States should respond. It directed the Joint Chiefs to prepare a detailed operational plan for an opposed rescue of U.S. citizens and recommended that the USS *Independence* carrier battle group with a Marine amphibious unit be diverted to the region just in case. At the same time, General Vessey asked the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) commander, Maj. Gen. Richard A. Sholtes, to develop some ideas for his unit's potential role in the operation.

The announcement of the diversion of the *Independence* battle group to the eastern Caribbean on 21 October received positive reactions from many of the governments of the small islands nearest Grenada. The heads of those governments met in Barbados and unanimously agreed to support any intervention on Grenada and to request assistance from Barbados and Jamaica as well as from the United States and Britain. The violence in Grenada had shocked them and heightened their fears for more unrest in the region.

Attempts to resolve the crisis peacefully met with constant roadblocks as the Grenadians, either because of their own dissension and confusion or because of a hope to exploit the situation for their own benefit, frustrated every U.S. effort to gain an explanation of what was happening on the island. Not until 22 October did the Grenadians allow a counselor visit that confirmed that the students at the medical school were unharmed—for the moment. Endeavors to arrange the departure of the Americans, however, including docking a passing ocean liner, were blocked by the Grenadians, heightening suspicions that the Austin government was in disarray or that foreign nationals were beginning to be viewed as potential hostages or bargaining chips. In addition, clandestine agent reports from the island indicated that the Grenadians had confined the American medical students to their dormitories and had posted

Grenadian troops to keep them there. To many in the U.S. government, this seemed proof that the students might already be hostages.

As planning for a possible intervention intensified, the need for speed and operational security restricted the number of people involved in the discussions. Communications, in addition, were not compatible between the various intelligence-gathering activities, the JSOC world, and Atlantic Command, the operational headquarters. Also, to keep the planning for the operation “close hold,” Atlantic Command cut U.S. Readiness Command and, for a while, U.S. Forces Command, out of the planning loop. On 19 October a staff officer at Atlantic Command placed a telephone call directly to XVIII Airborne Corps at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, advising it to place its subordinate unit, the 82d Airborne Division, on alert for a possible rescue operation in Grenada. The corps and division began their planning with very little information, however, and dispatched a team to Atlantic Command at Norfolk, Virginia, on Saturday, 22 October, to attend a planning conference.

During the night of 21–22 October, Prime Minister Eugenia Charles of Dominica, as acting chair of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, formally asked the United States to intervene in Grenada. President Reagan’s newly appointed national security adviser, Robert C. McFarlane, met with the president early in the morning on the twenty-second and informed him of the request. Reagan indicated his strong preference for action and steered his national security team in the direction of intervention while withholding a final decision.

Meanwhile, 82d Airborne Division planners at Atlantic Command met with Admiral McDonald and his staff to learn more about this operation, only to discover that intelligence on enemy forces and the situation on the island was very weak. Nevertheless, preparations continued with a Marine and special operations forces plan on the table along with a heavier joint plan involving the marines, the 82d Airborne Division, and JSOC forces, including one or two Ranger battalions. But which of them would be the spearhead force and which the follow-on peacekeeping force was still undecided.

Using the cover of preparing for a division emergency deployment readiness exercise, Maj. Gen. Edward L. Trobaugh, commanding general of the 82d Airborne Division, directed his staff to put together a series of plans for multiple contingencies from 22 through 25 October. Complicating the logistical arrangements was the decision by Atlantic Command to exclude XVIII Airborne Corps, then commanded by Lt. Gen. Jack V. Mackmull, from the planning and operational chain of command. Neither Admiral McDonald nor his staff apparently understood



Members of the 82d Airborne Division wait in an equipment-filled light utility vehicle before boarding aircraft for deployment to Grenada. The vehicle has a wire-cutting bar mounted on the front.

the critical functions of logistics, communications, and especially the complicated ballet of the airflow (the arrival, loading, and movement of Air Force transporters in conjunction with Army airborne soldiers) that the XVIII Airborne Corps performed for the 82d. Many of the support resources the division needed in an airborne operation—communications with the Air Force, engineers, loading ramp operations, medical support, airdrop and rigging support, and even water purification units—were provided by the corps. The corps was also a critical element in planning and conducting air assaults. Cutting it out of the chain of command threw a heavy and unexpected burden on the already overworked 82d Airborne Division staff.

On 23 October, Atlantic Command charged the commander of the U.S. Second Fleet, Vice Adm. Joseph Metcalf III, with command of Joint Task Force 120 and with overall command of the Grenada operation. General Sholtes was to command all the special operations forces as part of Task Force 123. In a final meeting at Atlantic Command on 24 October, the participants modified the starting times for the increasingly ad hoc operation. They also changed the target listing for the

special operations forces by adding (at State Department insistence) the Richmond Hill prison. They even proposed changing the chain of command when Admiral Metcalf tried to make Maj. Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, Admiral McDonald's Army adviser, the overall ground forces commander over General Trobaugh, a more senior officer. That attempt was quashed, but the role of the XVIII Airborne Corps remained uncertain, with General Mackmull still missing from the chain of command. The plan continued to evolve, and the new invasion time was set for 0500 on 25 October.

Preparations

Having received a warning order for the operation late on 22 October, the 1st Battalion (Rangers), 75th Infantry, at Hunter Army Airfield, Georgia, alerted its soldiers to assemble and to start loading for deployment. The 1st Battalion was joined by the 2d Battalion (Rangers), 75th Infantry, out of Fort Lewis, Washington, late on the twenty-third. The 1st Battalion was commanded by Lt. Col. Wesley B. Taylor Jr. and the 2d by Lt. Col. Ralph L. Hagler Jr. Both units were highly trained in airfield seizure operations and, although activated only in 1974, they already had reputations for high morale and levels of readiness. Despite fewer C-130 Hercules aircraft arriving than anticipated on the twenty-fourth and constantly shifting plans for the time of H-hour, most of the men were loaded and ready for departure by 2230. They would spearhead the attack on Grenada by a parachute assault onto the airfield at Point Salines.

While the Rangers were loading, the 2d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, commanded by Col. Stephen Silvasy Jr., was going through a similar process at Fort Bragg. The brigade was assisted by the division and corps staffs. Despite being left out of most of the planning and entirely out of the chain of command, the XVIII Airborne Corps and its 1st Support Command provided every assistance. The combat battalions that constituted the brigade for the operation were the 2d Battalion, 325th Infantry (augmented by a company from the 2d Battalion, 505th Infantry, from the 3d Brigade), commanded by Lt. Col. Jack L. Hamilton, and the 3d Battalion, 325th Infantry, led by Lt. Col. John W. Raines. The brigade was not participating in the first wave of the assault, so its timeline for loading was not as short as that of the Rangers, but its schedule was still compressed. The troops quickly assembled at "Green Ramp" (an area on the base where airborne soldiers habitually assembled, donned their parachutes, and prepared their gear for airborne operations) at nearby Pope Air Force Base and began readying themselves and their equipment



Combat-equipped paratroopers of the 82d Airborne Division awaiting deployment during Operation URGENT FURY

for what some still believed was just an emergency deployment readiness exercise. Word finally began to filter down to the soldiers around 2300 on 24 October, when General Trobaugh briefed his officers on the final invasion plans, that this was a “real-world” mission, not a drill.

At 0030 on 25 October, elements of the 2d Brigade staff and men of the 2d Battalion, 325th Infantry, began their movement to the personnel holding area closest to Green Ramp. With planners still unsure whether the invasion would be by parachute assault or airlanding (keeping troops on airplanes and landing them on already secured airfields), Colonel Hamilton began preparing his men for the more complicated of the two operations: a parachute assault. Working with a compressed ten-hour load sequence rather than the usual eighteen-hour plan, the men began drawing ammunition and equipment in what was called, at the time, organized chaos. The men drew double basic loads of M16 ammunition, but most individuals were not issued grenades because of concerns of having grenades on board the flight to Grenada.

The first of the C-141 Starlifter aircraft, none configured for airdrop, arrived at Pope Air Force Base at 0400. Still uncertain about orders and counterorders from Atlantic Command on whether to prepare for an airdrop or airlanding, General Trobaugh had his men rig the C-141s for



Troops of the 82d Airborne Division gather their gear and prepare to board a C-141B Starlifter bound for Grenada.

parachute assault while the planes were in flight. He wanted to be ready for a combat drop regardless of the outcome of the Ranger assault or the condition of the airstrip at Point Salines. Rigging the equipment for an airdrop was impossible, but the men could “hit the silk” if necessary. Finally departing Pope Air Force Base by midmorning on the twenty-fifth, the men of the 82d Airborne Division continued to work during the flight to prepare for whatever awaited them on an island of which few had ever heard.

Operations

Day One: 25 October

The Rangers and the other special operations forces of the Joint Special Operations Command, including the helicopters of the 160th Aviation Battalion—designated Task Force 160 and commanded by Lt. Col. Terence M. Henry—were the spearhead force for the operation. The Rangers of the 1st Battalion, 75th Infantry, had departed Hunter Army Airfield at 2230 the night before in C-130s. The uncertainty of the situa-

tion on Grenada, like the confusion of the 82d Airborne Division, led the Rangers, except for the lead assault company, to rig for airlanding, not for airdrop. During the flight, however, Colonel Taylor received additional intelligence that the Cubans had placed obstacles on the runway, making airlanding unlikely. He believed that if he parachuted only one company down to clear the obstacles they would be dangerously exposed, with no chance of reinforcement. He therefore decided, just in case, to rig the entire battalion for airdrop and gave the order during the flight. It was well he did. The first two planes with the lead assault company had to abort their drops because of failures in their inertial navigation system and radar. Not originally scheduled as the lead assault element, the Rangers were then air-dropped from the third plane. They jumped in the face of moderate anti-aircraft fire beginning at 0530. Assisted by circling Air Force AC-130 Spectre gunships, the Rangers hit the ground, returned fire, and set up their command post.

Almost simultaneously with the Ranger attack, a company of the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, landed by helicopter south of Pearls Airport on the east coast of Grenada (*Map 2*). A Grenadian attempt to engage the helicopters with anti-aircraft fire ended when Marine AH-1 Cobra gunships silenced the threat. The marines moved out to the north to secure the airfield, encountering only light resistance.

The special operations forces' effort to rescue Governor General Sir Paul Scoon in St. George's did not go as smoothly. The helicopters of the supporting Task Force 160 had arrived late at the intermediate staging base in Barbados and did not depart until 0530, well after dawn and a half hour after the planned attack time. As a result, the assault force, consisting of lightly armed Navy SEALs (sea-air-land commandos) and their Army special operations counterparts, was fully exposed to enemy fire. After rappelling from their helicopters to the ground near the governor general's residence and securing Sir Paul, the special operators found themselves under attack by Grenadian forces including armored cars. Lacking antitank weapons, they called in air strikes from circling AC-130s, Marine helicopters, and Navy A-7 Corsair fighter-bombers, battling the enemy all day and into the night.

Other special operations attacks that day were even less successful. Attempts to silence Radio Free Grenada by capturing the main radio transmitter were unsuccessful. It was later discovered that the Grenadians had alternate transmitters for the station. Counterattacks drove the Americans into the jungle in a hasty retreat. Daylight attacks against objectives at the Richmond Hill prison and Fort Rupert also failed after withering anti-aircraft fire severely damaged the helicopters involved



Map 2

in the assault. Two of the helicopters crashed, killing one of the pilots, Capt. Keith J. Lucas. Two Marine AH-1 Cobra gunships were also shot down by anti-aircraft fire from nearby Fort Frederick. Three of the four crew members were killed.

Meanwhile, the Ranger attack at Point Salines slowly gathered steam. Using two-man teams to clear the vehicles that the Cubans had parked on the runway (in some cases conveniently leaving the keys in the ignition), the Rangers were able to ready the airfield to receive planes. But the Rangers also had to suppress the anti-aircraft fire, and they quickly called in AC-130s to finish the job. Small arms fire from the Cubans and Grenadians continued, however, although it affected troops on the ground more than aircraft. Still, with two companies on the ground, the Rangers were able to shift to the high ground to their east and capture about two hundred Cubans. As they continued on toward the Cubans' construction camp, they took an additional twenty-two prisoners. The airfield was declared secured at 0735. The first C-130 touched down moments later.

Even as the airfield was secured, the Rangers began to push toward nearby high ground to silence enemy snipers. They enlisted airpower and even commandeered a Cuban bulldozer to assist. S. Sgt. Manous F. Boles Jr., a member of the runway-clearing team, put the blade of the bulldozer up for protection against small arms fire and drove it up the hill with a squad following behind to take the heights. Ranger mobility improved when aircraft delivered long-awaited gun jeeps. One jeep immediately loaded up with soldiers and drove off to establish an outpost to protect the nearby True Blue medical school campus. The Rangers, however, lost their way and were ambushed. Four Rangers were killed and one badly wounded.

By midday, all of the close high ground surrounding the airfield was in friendly hands. Using a captured anti-aircraft gun on the heights near a Cuban Army compound north of the village of Calliste, the Rangers forced the surrender of one hundred fifty more Cubans. Only eighty Cubans remained unaccounted for, and enemy fire slackened considerably.

Meanwhile, the Rangers set up a detainee collection and interrogation point near the airfield. The Rangers retained custody of the detainees for only a few hours before they turned them over to the lead elements of a 300-man Caribbean Peacekeeping Force arriving in an Air Force C-130. The U.S. military and civilian leadership, recognizing the public relations value of an international armed contingent and its lack of training

for combat, had arranged for these troops to assume peacekeeping and detainee control duties.

Being freed from detainee guard duty and not wishing to commit his reduced force to the second mission, the seizure of Calivigny Barracks, General Sholtes awaited the arrival of the follow-on 82d Airborne Division elements. They began arriving by airplane and not by parachute assault at 1400. With the airfield secure, General Trobaugh had decided that the risks of losing men in the ocean (the paratroopers had not been issued flotation devices) outweighed whatever advantages of mass that might be achieved by a parachute assault. Though the airfield could only handle one plane at a time, the troops would be much less scattered and less likely to suffer the normal accidents and breakages attendant to any parachute drop.

Even as the command group for the 82d Airborne Division gathered on the island, linked up with the Rangers, and began to assess the fluid situation, a larger problem erupted. When the Rangers had moved to rescue the American medical school students at the True Blue campus, they found only about one hundred forty students. The students told the Rangers that there was a larger campus with even more students—around two hundred—at Grand Anse a few miles to the north. This was the first the Americans had heard of this second campus. No plans existed to capture it.

The frail security of the perimeter protecting the airfield was underscored by an incident about 1530. Company A of the 2d Battalion, 325th Infantry, was reinforcing some Ranger positions near the True Blue campus when three BTR60 armored personnel carriers attacked, pushing down the road from the university campus. The soldiers of the Grenadian Army's Motorized Company drove directly into the Ranger's positions, firing their machine guns wildly in all directions. In response, the Rangers and the airborne troopers showered the vehicles with light antitank weapon (LAW) fire and 90-mm. recoilless rifle fire, which caused two vehicles to crash and their occupants to flee, leaving two dead behind. The third vehicle was fired on by a circling AC-130 and destroyed.

Although this was the last major attack against the perimeter, the assault so surprised General Trobaugh that he requested reinforcements. Calling Fort Bragg on his satellite radio, he told his division rear staff, "Send me battalions until I tell you to stop." This began the flow of additional infantry but severely disrupted the logistical stream as the combat forces received priority over support troops and supplies. He also asked for, and received, operational control over the Ranger battalions

even though the original plan had them departing once the 82d took over the operation.

While action continued around the airfield at Point Salines, air and naval forces raided enemy command posts in the Fort Frederick and Fort Rupert areas and pursued rescue of the cutoff SEALs at the governor general's residence. A-7 Corsairs from the *Independence* attacked the two forts, accidentally hitting a hospital close to Fort Frederick and killing eighteen mental patients. They also struck the gun positions placed near the hospital by the Grenadian military.

Around 1900, a landing force of about two hundred fifty marines with tanks and amphibious vehicles stormed ashore at Grand Mal Bay north of St. George's and pushed south and east toward the governor general's residence. Moving deliberately, the marines finally linked up with the beleaguered SEALs just after sunrise on the twenty-sixth. They flew Sir Paul, his wife, nine civilians, and the SEALs out to the USS *Guam* by helicopter at 1000. The marines then moved on to Fort Frederick to the east and quickly captured the fort.

The 82d Airborne Division's buildup of forces on the airfield continued throughout the afternoon and evening of 25–26 October. The last of the 2d Battalion, 325th Infantry, reached the airstrip before dusk,



Paratroopers of the 82d Airborne Division board a C-141 aircraft for deployment during URGENT FURY.

and the follow-on 3d Battalion of the 325th was in place early on the twenty-sixth. Supplies began to flow more easily as the pace of C-130 landings picked up, but quantities of food, water, and ammunition remained limited.

Day Two: 26 October

General Trobaugh's priority on the morning of the twenty-sixth was to rescue the medical students at the newly "discovered" Grand Anse campus of the St. George's University School of Medicine. (See Map 2.) However, the few helicopters available to him from the special operations aviation task force were too badly shot up for use, and his own helicopters had not yet arrived on the island. He decided to use his forces to consolidate his hold on the airfield—still subject to harassing sniper fire—and then move out in strength the next day to find the students.

The 2d Brigade attack kicked off early on the twenty-sixth only to have a reconnaissance patrol near a hill at Calliste led by Capt. Michael F. Ritz of Company B, 2d Battalion, 325th Infantry, ambushed by Cubans. Ritz was killed instantly, and his sergeant severely wounded. One of the company's platoons then moved cautiously up the hill conducting reconnaissance by fire to flush out the Cubans. Locating some Russian hand grenades, the soldiers bombarded the Cuban positions and fire diminished but not before another soldier was killed and five more wounded. The fight had been an intense and costly one, with two American dead and six wounded in the space of a few minutes.

After the firefight near Calliste, the main attack started at 0630. A combination of artillery fire and Navy fighter-bomber sorties against the center of enemy resistance, a Cuban compound, soon silenced the enemy guns and white flags began appearing. Though some of the Cubans escaped into the surrounding jungle, the main body of the Cuban "construction workers" surrendered, and the compound was secure by 0835.

The 2d Brigade continued to move slowly north and east, expanding the perimeter around the airfield with only minor enemy contact. Despite a few heat casualties, the force advanced toward Frequente. Near Frequente, one of the companies, Company C, discovered a series of warehouses surrounded by barbed wire and chain-link fence. Inside the warehouses were enough Soviet- and Cuban-supplied small arms and military equipment to outfit six infantry battalions, far in excess of Grenadian military needs.



Patrol Insertion, Grenada, November 1983, by *Marbury Brown*

While securing the warehouses, men from Company C watched as five gun jeeps of the battalion's reconnaissance platoon were ambushed by Cubans. The Cubans let the first two jeeps go past and opened fire on the last three. The lead jeeps wheeled back toward the ambush zone with machine guns blazing. Company C opened fire as well and began placing mortar rounds on the Cuban positions. The Cubans broke contact and fled, leaving behind four dead. There were no U.S. casualties. The troops continued the advance east until sunset, when they halted and established a defensive perimeter.

While the paratroopers pushed east and north, General Trobaugh ordered the Rangers of the 2d Battalion, 75th Infantry, to launch a helicopter assault to rescue the American medical students at Grand Anse. He had wanted to delay the raid until the twenty-seventh, but at 1100 on the twenty-sixth he received a directive from the Joint Chiefs to rescue the students immediately. He assigned the mission to Colonel Hagler's Rangers and borrowed some Marine helicopters from the

Guam to transport them to Grand Anse. Hagler met with Col. James P. Faulkner, commander of the 22d Marine Amphibious Unit, to work out the details.

The rescue operation began late in the afternoon. Using Navy and Air Force planes for preparatory fires and fire support, Hagler's Rangers flew in on six CH-46 Marine Sea Knight helicopters and seized the campus. Two companies secured a perimeter while the other company found the 233 students and led them to the waiting Sea Knights. The Grenadian defenders mounted only a token resistance before fleeing, and one Ranger was lightly wounded. One CH-46 crashed into the nearby surf when its blades hit a palm tree, but the evacuees were loaded onto other helicopters without further incident. With one less helicopter for the evacuation, eleven Rangers were forced to stay behind, but they borrowed a rubber raft from the downed helicopter and after dark paddled out to sea where they were picked up by an American destroyer, the USS *Caron*. But perhaps the most unsettling occurrence was when intelligence gained from the students indicated that there was yet a third area where large numbers of Americans resided, a peninsula on Prickly Bay (near Lance aux Épines) just east of Point Salines. Once again a lack of intelligence forced planners to readjust and prepare for another rescue mission.

By the end of the day on the twenty-sixth, most objectives had been accomplished and the 82d was well established in a perimeter along the Calivigny Peninsula. The plans for the following day included expanding the perimeter toward St. George's in the north and receiving follow-on forces from the 3d Brigade and pushing them to clear the southern portion of the island.

Day Three: 27 October

The third day of military operations saw the slow consolidation of U.S. forces on the island. The marines fanned out from their positions in the St. George's area and occupied Fort Lucas, Richmond Hill prison, and other sites without opposition (*Map 3*). The paratroopers of the 2d and 3d Brigades of the 82d Airborne Division, being surprised by the strength of Cuban resistance on the island and wondering if a guerrilla war was in their future, moved east from the airfield and cleared any lingering opposition. Still lacking effective helicopter and artillery support, the paratroopers depended for most of their fires on naval close air and gunfire, but insufficient direct communications with the ships caused requests for fire to be relayed back to Fort Bragg and then by satellite to the ships.



Map 3

Once the 2d Battalion, 325th Infantry, arrived in the Grand Anse area, it found only discarded Grenadian Army uniforms and equipment, indicating a collapse of resistance. The paratroopers also discovered about twenty American medical students that the Rangers missed the day before. Except for a few sniper attacks, the movement north toward St. George's occurred without incident.

The 3d Battalion, to the right of the 2d, advanced north toward St. George's along the True Blue–Grand Anse road. Just short of the village of Ruth Howard, the soldiers were surprised by a crowd of celebrating civilians who began welcoming the startled paratroopers as liberators. The celebration ended abruptly with snipers firing on the crowd, but rapid and accurate return fire ended the attack. The battalion continued north and then east toward the highlands through rough and trackless terrain.

One friendly fire incident in the late afternoon of the twenty-seventh marred the otherwise uneventful movement of the 3d Battalion from the airfield. As one of the companies moved up to Ruth Howard, it was met by elements of an ANGLICO team (Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company) at the crossroads. Suddenly, they came under fire. The marines of the ANGLICO element identified what they thought was the enemy position and called in an A-7 Corsair. Several dry runs over the target seemed to indicate that the pilot knew where to fire, but on the fourth, live-fire, strafing run, the plane deviated slightly and shot directly into the nearby command post of the 2d Brigade. Seventeen members of the brigade staff were wounded, three of them seriously. One subsequently died of his wounds.

The other military operation that day was an unexpected launch of an air assault by Hagler's 2d Battalion. General Trobaugh had planned to take the Calivigny military barracks the next day, but an order from someone on the Joint Chiefs of Staff (exactly who sent the command and under whose authority it was sent was never determined) demanded that the joint task force capture the barracks "before dark" on the twenty-seventh. No reason was given for this long-distance micromanagement of a tactical battle, but after several attempts to clarify the order failed, General Trobaugh directed the Rangers to prepare for the mission, even though they had conducted two air assaults already and were relaxing at the airfield, expecting to go home.

Trobaugh turned to the commander of his 3d Brigade, Col. James T. Scott, to coordinate the operation, which involved both the 2d Battalion and Company C of the 1st Battalion. Colonel Scott was the logical choice for this mission involving multiple commands. He had only given up command of the 1st Battalion (Rangers) the previous May and was well



Col. Peter J. Boylan, 82d Airborne Division's assistant division commander for operations in Grenada (second from the left), and Col. James T. Scott, 3d Brigade commander (third from the left), conferring

known to both battalion commanders and their staffs. Intelligence on Calivigny was poor, but it was suspected that the enemy had anti-aircraft gun emplacements protecting the barracks, making a daylight air assault risky. It was also possible that a battalion of the Grenadian Army and perhaps as many as three hundred to four hundred Cubans (with some Soviet advisers) were prepared to defend the barracks. Trobaugh and Scott decided to err on the side of caution given the recent proof of how costly daylight helicopter raids could be.

With little more than fifteen minutes to plan the assault, the Rangers boarded their UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters. A few artillery rounds were fired on the landing zone, but most of them did not fall on target. Air support was more effective and, as the helicopters took off from Point Salines, the men could see plumes of smoke from the burning buildings of the barracks in the distance. No anti-aircraft fire greeted the helicopters at the landing zones, and only a few Grenadian soldiers were in evidence to make a token resistance. Nevertheless, a few rounds from small arms from the ground (perhaps exploding rounds resulting from the air strikes on enemy ammunition dumps) hit the lead helicopters, severing hydraulic lines and causing one helicopter to crash into another.

The two helicopters went down in a tangled mess. Nearby, a third one unexpectedly landed in a ditch, striking the tail boom and damaging it without the pilot's knowledge. As the helicopter tried to take off, it went out of control and crashed into the wreckage of the other two helicopters. The Rangers inside the helicopters suffered no major injuries, but several who leaped from the aircraft were struck by the blades. Three Rangers died, and five were seriously injured. While the rest of the helicopters hovered, the Rangers jumped and quickly secured the compound. They suffered no further casualties.

Day Four: 28 October

The collapse of any substantive resistance became apparent during operations on the fourth day. Airborne troopers spent most of the day continuing the search for any fugitive Cubans and trying to locate Hudson Austin, Bernard Coard, and other members of the revolutionary government still in hiding. Elements of Colonel Silvasy's 2d Brigade closed on St. George's, having swept the area between the capital and the airfield to flush out Grenadian or Cuban snipers. Near the Ross Point Hotel, the 2d Battalion, 325th Infantry, unexpectedly ran into the marines, already occupying the position. Absent compatible communications, neither was aware of the movements of the other, and only luck prevented a friendly fire incident.

Elements of Colonel Scott's 3d Brigade continued their advance to the east to clear the southern portion of the island. Early in the morning, the 1st Battalion, 505th Infantry, commanded by Lt. Col. George A. Crocker, moved onto the Lance aux Épines Peninsula looking for more missing medical school students. They found some two hundred Americans, mainly students, as well as a few other foreign nationals needing to be transported out of the country. Black Hawks from the 82d Aviation Battalion flew the rescued group to the airfield where they boarded C-141s for the United States. A total of 581 American students and over 100 other foreign nationals were evacuated during the course of the operation.

As combat wound down, fears of U.S. planners that the Cubans or Grenadians were planning a prolonged resistance to the U.S. invasion or even a guerrilla war evaporated. Although elements of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) were alerted for a possible mission to reinforce the two 82d Airborne Division brigades already on the island, that was soon canceled. The two Ranger battalions were finally withdrawn back to the airfield beginning at 1400 and completed their departure from the



Evacuation of students from St. George's University School of Medicine on Grenada during URGENT FURY

island early the next morning. By the end of the day on the twenty-eighth, General Trobaugh realized that a small peacekeeping force would suffice to secure the new interim government led by Sir Paul Scoon.

For the next few days, intelligence continued to paint a picture of a handful of Grenadian revolutionary government members on the run, with the people of the island welcoming liberation from their tyranny. General Hudson Austin and his bodyguards were captured on the twenty-ninth, leaving any potential resistance force virtually leaderless. On the morning of 1 November, the marines, responding to the chance that a few die-hards had established themselves on the nearby islands off Carriacou, stormed ashore on the main island but found only a small garrison that had already shed its uniforms and blended into the general population. Admiral Metcalf reported back to Atlantic Command that hostilities had ceased as of 1500 on 2 November. General Trobaugh assumed responsibility for all military operations as commander, U.S. Forces-Grenada, shortly thereafter. Troops of the 82d began their withdrawal and turned over peacekeeping responsibilities to the Caribbean Peacekeeping Force.

The next few days saw a number of interesting developments, but no additional fighting. The airborne troopers were first assigned to guard

the Soviet and Cuban embassies to keep them from offering sanctuary to any of the missing Grenadian leaders. Then the 82d provided guards and gun jeeps to escort the Soviet and Cuban embassy personnel to the airfield because the new provisional government was expelling them from the country.

The paratroopers also took over the mission of guarding the Cuban detainees near the airfield. The conditions in the detainee camp were unsatisfactory by any measure, and division planners began mapping out a new temporary camp while decisions were being made about the ways and means of repatriating the Cubans. The 307th Engineer Battalion cleared an area on 2 November and, using U.S. and Cuban workers, built a tent encampment with water, security, and a lighted perimeter. The camp was finished on 3 November, just in time for the Cubans to begin their repatriation process the next day. By 9 November, the new camp was empty.

One of the lingering issues from the invasion was what to do with the captured Soviet equipment in the warehouses at Frequente. A small sampling of the weapons was shipped by air for display at the United Nations, but most of the materiel had to return by sealift. While the plans were being developed for sling loading the equipment under helicopters for transport to a nearby port, the Joint Chiefs ordered on 5 November that it be flown back to Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland, and that it arrive by the fourteenth for a public display that would highlight the degree of Soviet involvement on the island. Tons of ammunition, weapons, and uniforms were loaded onto airplanes from 6 to 9 November by engineers of Company C, 548th Engineer Battalion. Other equipment and munitions were collected, inventoried, and loaded onto trucks and helicopters for movement to the harbor, where the SS *Dolly Thurman*, a cargo ship, awaited them. The *Dolly Thurman* departed Grenada on 18 November, taking its cargo back to the United States.

The withdrawal of the troops of the 82d Airborne Division was slow and deliberate, in marked contrast to their hurried and piecemeal arrival. The 2d Brigade began pulling out at 0300 on 4 November, leaving Colonel Scott's 3d Brigade as the major combat organization on the island. General Trobaugh left the island on 9 November, turning command of U.S. Forces-Grenada over to his deputy, Brig. Gen. Jack B. Farris, who had arrived on 29 October. As the necessity for no antiguerilla campaign became clearer, the 3d Brigade began to depart as well. The last battalion of the brigade, the 2d Battalion, 505th Infantry, pulled out on 12 December. On the fifteenth, General Farris disestablished his command and turned over all responsibility for military forces on



Cmd. Sgt. Maj. Tommie McKoy (right) greets Maj. Gen. Edward L. Trobaugh (center) upon Trobaugh's return from Grenada.

the island to the Caribbean Peacekeeping Force. Except for about two hundred fifty military police, Special Forces, civil affairs personnel, communications specialists, and logisticians, all U.S. military personnel had returned to their home stations.

Analysis

The return of Army combat units to the continental United States precipitated several debriefings. These actions in turn provided the basis for a series of formal after action and lessons learned reports that, when digested, would provide the basis for possible changes to Army doctrine, training, and organization. Army Chief of Staff General John A. Wickham went further and directed the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command to prepare an in-depth analysis of the operation. The commander of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Lt. Gen. Carl E. Vuono, charged the director of the newly established Combat Studies Institute, Col. Louis D. F. Frasché, to create an ad hoc analysis team from officers assigned to the staff and faculty of the Command and General Staff College. Designated the Grenada Work Group, it was “to capture . . . Army lessons learned in terms of doctrine, training,

organization, materiel, and leadership.” At about the same time, General Richard E. Cavazos at U.S. Army Forces Command ordered the 44th Military History Detachment, commanded by Maj. Charles R. Bishop, to collect documents pertaining to Grenada and to conduct interviews with key participants. Once Frasché and Bishop became aware of one another’s activities, they coordinated their work and shared information that allowed Frasché to prepare a comprehensive analytical report on the operation.

The team concluded that Grenada generally validated existing Army doctrine but that difficulties arose when individuals ignored it and tried to operate outside of established practices and procedures. The most disturbing conclusions centered on joint doctrine. Army participants were either unaware of or misunderstood existing joint doctrine, while its implementation revealed deep flaws in the areas of communications, planning, and deployment. Clearly, the subject offered ample room for improvement in professional military education programs and unit training throughout the Army, the other services, and the joint staff.

As an example of military mismanagement, Grenada gave impetus to efforts to reform the Joint Chiefs of Staff and provide greater authority to unified commanders. The Senate Armed Services Committee staff report on Department of Defense reorganization, known informally as the Locher Report, found that the operation revealed “serious problems in the ability of the Services to operate jointly” and proposed major changes. The resulting Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act, signed by President Reagan on 1 October 1986, strengthened the power of the chairman and unified commanders and attempted to ensure that in future operations senior officers had a joint, as opposed to a single-service, outlook. As a consequence of this legislation, the brief combat of Operation URGENT FURY exerted an influence on subsequent military operations disproportionate to its size, duration, or immediate results.

To Cuba, Grenada was both a humiliation and a foreign policy disaster. Shortly after the public welcome to the Cuban veterans of the campaign, Fidel Castro ordered that the Cuban ambassador to Grenada be stripped of his rank and imprisoned without benefit of trial for his failure to detect the impending coup against Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop. The commander of Cuban forces on the island, Col. Pedro Tortoló Cosmas, underwent a secret court-martial that reduced him to private for his inability to mount an effective defense. Shipped to Angola, he died there in 1986. The colonel’s conviction neatly obscured the fact that Castro’s confused directives to Tortoló made any coherent defense of Point Salines impossible on the day of the invasion.

The Grenada operation during the last days of October 1983 was only a minor episode in the sweep of American military history. At best, combat consisted of a few firefights against opponents who could hardly be rated second or even third class. As soon as a large number of U.S. ground troops seized a lodgment on the island, the Grenadian and Cuban defeat in conventional battle was assured. From a logistical and lessons learned standpoint, however, the intervention was much more interesting. As a “no plan” contingency operation, URGENT FURY placed sudden, substantial stress on the U.S. Army’s supply, maintenance, transportation, and medical systems.

From the beginning, logistical problems started at the top of the chain of command with the insistence on extraordinary secrecy and compartmentalization of the planning process. These practices had a chilling effect at all levels and a significant impact on the shape of the operation. Because of the security restrictions, most commanders excluded their logisticians from the early preparations, with the two Ranger battalion commanders being the only notable exceptions. The result was that unexamined assumptions about logistics, communications, and even medical support permeated both joint and Army planning. Communications experts were cut out of the planning, effectively crippling the ability of the commander of the 82d Airborne Division to communicate with his higher headquarters. This inhibited planning before the operation and crippled close air support and coordination between Navy, Marine, and Army units during combat. Until General Trobaugh and his staff actually arrived on Grenada, no one in the 82d Airborne Division’s tactical operations center realized that the unit would have only limited communications with the joint task force headquarters, next to none with the marines, and only episodic interchanges with its own rear echelon at Fort Bragg. Modern systems of command and control are flexible and allow the concentration of much power, but they are also complex and, on that account, fragile. Even a slight disturbance can produce profound and unexpected consequences.

Although time was pressing, the real issue in preparing the intervention was not so much the lack of planning time but the lack of quality planning in the time available. “An extremely short time period” for planning requires full disclosure and absolute coordination rather than the opposite. The absence of these attributes on multiple levels was, as one officer observed, “the crux of the problem.” Sensitivity to public opinion and concerns about the impact of the operation on the strategic context combined to produce a crippling operational security policy that straitjacketed the planners. URGENT FURY was not unique in this regard.

It was a continuing theme in U.S. Cold War and post–Cold War military interventions, although the reasons for the security policies varied from case to case. Some secrecy is always essential, but those who need to know about an operation to ensure that it is thoroughly organized, and thus more likely to succeed with minimal cost, should be involved in the planning process.

This obsession with operational security extended beyond the planning process into the field of media relations. The administration decided during the early days to deny media representatives—print media and TV news—access to the operation. This prohibition extended into the third day of the invasion and led to a firestorm of media criticism. Despite explanations by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Vessey, that the speed of planning for the operation made such practices necessary, the media responded with accusations of censorship and coverup. Prominent media representatives, instead of reporting on U.S. operations on the island, produced articles about the first amendment and criticized the “self-serving accounts” of the actions by the military. A small press pool finally went ashore late on the twenty-seventh, but the damage to media-military relationships had already been done. Both press and Pentagon sought to repair the damage by establishing short-notice pools of reporters for future operations, but the hostility between the two domains inherited from the Vietnam War was hardly over.

Perhaps the most serious military lapse in the early planning efforts centered on intelligence: the failure to identify more than one campus at the medical school and to discover that a large number of Americans lived off campus. Again, excessive compartmentalization for security reasons and compressed planning appear to have severely hampered not only the flow of information within intelligence circles, but also the collection of additional, readily available information from open sources.

Next to the intelligence failure, Atlantic Command’s inability to coordinate planning by all the disparate ground force elements involved in the operation was the most striking flaw. The compressed planning time was only part of the explanation. The failure to design an adequate concept of a joint operation at an early stage indicated that the joint headquarters in question, Atlantic Command, was neither trained nor manned to mount a complicated ground force operation in the time allotted, whatever the size. Atlantic Command was geared to transport massive reinforcements and supplies safely to Europe in the event of a Soviet attack, but in October 1983 it was unprepared for the complexities of its joint task force responsibilities.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff had originally approved a night-time raid by a small, highly trained special operations force, but the concern over the status of the airfield at Point Salines caused the theater commander, Admiral McDonald, twice to change the start time for the operation, causing it to begin only a few minutes before daylight. These changes in timing contributed greatly to the less-than-total success the special operations forces enjoyed in achieving their first-day objectives. Their partial failure on 25 October meant that conventional forces, notably the 82d Airborne Division, would have to carry the operation to conclusion despite poor intelligence and plans and would, therefore, be accompanied by unnecessary losses.

Confusion also resulted from the lack of unity of command, a basic principle of war. Admiral McDonald's plan, approved by the Joint Chiefs, dispensed with two important command and control features: the designation of one officer to direct all the ground forces no matter what the service and the selection of the commander of the XVIII Airborne Corps to head the Army contingent. Lack of a single ground force commander meant that coordination between the Marine Corps and the Army on Grenada was poor, and the severing of the corps headquarters from the chain of command complicated the ability of the 82d Airborne Division to deploy from Fort Bragg and to communicate with the other services once it arrived in the area of operations. Furthermore, once the division reached the island, the new plan left General Trobaugh overloaded with responsibilities.

The decision to delete the XVIII Airborne Corps from the operation had equally far-reaching effects. It not only slighted the institutional changes that had taken place in corps and divisions after the Vietnam War, but it also overlooked the Army force commander's nature and scope of responsibilities, which stretched from depots in the United States to the airfield at Point Salines. The geographic sweep of these obligations delineated that officer's role because, by deciding when and in what sequence units and materiel entered the combat zone, he dealt with the operational level of war. This was quite different from the sphere and responsibilities of a tactical commander, whose charge involved an airhead (the initial lodgment seized by an airborne force) a few hundred meters deep around the airstrip at Grenada. Here he sought to mass and then maneuver sufficient men and materiel to defeat the Grenadians and Cubans on the island. In General Mackmull the Army had an officer fitted by training and experience to act as an Army force commander, and at Fort Bragg he had a highly capable and well-rehearsed staff for

his command post. Many of the unfortunate events of the campaign stemmed from his and its exclusion.

Not all the problems that surfaced in the days before the troops landed on Grenada were centered in the upper reaches of the command structure, but senior headquarters did have a major impact on the ability of their subordinates to complete their preparations. Compared to the two Ranger battalions, the 82d Airborne Division failed to use its planning time efficiently. Its logisticians suffered from a major handicap: with the XVIII Airborne Corps headquarters removed from the chain of command, they had to spend considerable time trying to understand what its replacement, the predominantly naval Atlantic Command, wanted. It was not a question of one group of officers being more intelligent or more professional than the other, but rather the lack of familiarity each had with the other.

In contrast, Ranger commanders and their staffs worked directly with the Joint Special Operations Command, a true joint headquarters, and all concerned shared a common language and common assumptions. The Rangers could devote their energies and attention to planning rather than to attempting to clarify directives written by individuals unfamiliar with the concepts behind airborne operations and the language that expressed them.

Although their objectives shifted during planning, the Rangers' mission, unlike the paratroopers', remained constant: armed entry into the territory of a sovereign country to rescue American citizens. The 82d's staff had to prepare both for this mission and for a mission as a peacekeeping follow-on force. Although General Trobaugh chose to spend much of his planning time on the more difficult and less likely mission of airborne assault, the other possibility exerted an influence on the division's preparations.

As conceived by the theater commander and his staff and approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the plan adopted for the operation anticipated that American forces would meet little or no opposition. In this best-case assumption, Atlantic Command planners allowed the Ranger battalions and the airborne brigade to arrive at Point Salines in a leisurely fashion over a long day. They made no attempt to mass combat power or to muster the logistical support that would be required if a fight occurred. McDonald's order that directed the 82d Airborne Division to airlift and then airland rather than giving its commander the option to airland or airdrop depending on the circumstances was entirely consistent with this approach. In the end, Trobaugh correctly insisted on keeping the option to airdrop open for the initial brigade task force, but he made

this determination so late in the loading sequence that it was disruptive. His next decision, en route to Grenada, to airland was probably correct, given the need to guard against casualties and to guarantee the long-term success of the operation. It exacted, however, a heavy operational and logistical price by impeding the ability of the Air Force to build up men and materiel in the airhead quickly.

At this point, another fundamental problem in the initial concept of operations arose. Trobaugh and his staff were understandably distracted by establishing a tactical operations center in the airhead and picking up the threads of a battle already in progress. The issue existed because the plan called for General Trobaugh's headquarters to replace that of General Scholtes'. Such a changeover made sense only within the context of the initial assumptions—that there would be little or no resistance and that all fighting would have ended by the time the 82d Airborne Division arrived. In fairness, Admiral McDonald may not have felt free to alter that portion of the plan even though the assumptions on which it had been based had proved invalid. The reason for his inability to modify this aspect was because the Joint Chiefs wanted to keep the methods and organization of U.S. counterterrorist units secret and were pressuring him to redeploy the Joint Special Operations Command and the special units it controlled before the news media arrived. In retrospect, General Vessey considered this rigidity to be the main flaw in the initial plan because a pause in ground force operations was guaranteed while Trobaugh and his staff assumed control of the ongoing operation from Scholtes and his headquarters.

Although enough things went wrong to make the Grenada campaign worthy of criticism, there is no doubt that the operation was also a victory for the United States and its allies. Credit for this accomplishment again begins at the top of the chain of command and runs to the bottom. President Reagan, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Admiral McDonald recognized that, given the disparity of the forces available, the United States only had to marshal an overwhelming force to seize the island in a relatively bloodless fashion. The plan that resulted, while flawed, achieved the desired outcome. Of course, more time for preparation would have allowed the participants to perfect these plans, but the paucity of information suggested that the Grenadian government was in disarray—creating a period of maximum danger for the students but also one of great opportunity for their rescuers. At the commanders' conference at Norfolk on 24 October, Admiral McDonald used the occasion to weigh opportunities against risks. Although subordinates recommended postponing the operation, he decided to press ahead. That

resolution left the Cubans and Grenadians insufficient time to organize a sustained and effective defense, though it resulted in a number of U.S. planning errors.

There are three additional factors to consider when pronouncing judgment on the operation. URGENT FURY was an airborne operation, a joint operation, and a very short-notice contingency operation. Of those, airborne assaults are almost always among the most complex, being heavily dependent on both ample time to prepare and good intelligence. Previous military operations, especially involving the potential rescue of hostages, had more time for planning. By contrast, the Rangers and marines had only four days of preparation time for Grenada, and the 82d Airborne Division just three. The intelligence available was sketchy, complicating plans and making any rehearsals impossible.

Unlike most similar operations in the past, the attack on Grenada was also a joint operation, and in the previous decade the U.S. Army and Navy had not had many opportunities to plan and conduct such operations. Moreover, historically, the two services did not always work well together. Navy and Army cultures were different and, in this instance, the officers of each service had worked together too infrequently before 1983 to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of the other. The good working relationship that developed between Admiral Metcalf and his Army adviser, General Schwarzkopf, demonstrated that such cooperation was possible. Even so, that rapport developed after, rather than before, URGENT FURY began.

In sum, the major complicating factor in URGENT FURY was that it was a very short-notice contingency operation involving many specialized participants who had had little practical experience in working with one another. Still, the operation achieved its goals and served as a symbol to the services and to the world that the United States had begun to recover from the “Vietnam syndrome.” While much improvement was needed, especially in learning to fight as a joint force, groundwork for future success was already in place. The operation had been expensive, however, and no observer should look further than the 19 U.S. soldiers killed and the 116 wounded. These casualties, when added to the 25 Cubans killed and 59 wounded and 45 Grenadians killed and 358 wounded, underscore just how costly a short, intense, no-notice operation could be. But costly or not, Operation URGENT FURY was a successful operation that set in train a number of necessary tactical, operational, and strategic reforms that changed the shape of the U.S. military establishment and led to a more capable Army as part of a more effective joint force, ready to face any enemy, anywhere.

Operation URGENT FURY
Killed in Action or Died of Wounds

United States Army

Sgt. Randy E. Cline
S. Sgt. Gary L. Epps
Sp4c. Philip S. Grenier
Sgt. Kevin J. Lannon (posthumous promotion)
Capt. Keith Lucas
Sgt. Sean P. Luketina
Pfc. Marlin R. Maynard
Sgt. Mark A. Rademacher
Capt. Michael F. Ritz
Pfc. Russell L. Robinson
Sgt. Stephen E. Slater
Sp4c. Mark O. Yamane

*United States Navy**

MM1 Kenneth Gary Butcher
MM1 Kevin P. Lundberg
HT1 Stephen L. Morris
ENCs Robert R. Schamberger

United States Marine Corps

Maj. John P. Gigure
1st Lt. Jeffrey R. Scharver
Capt. Jeb Seagle

*The Navy's ranks are a little different from the other services. MM1 stands for Machinist Mate First Class, HT1 stands for Hull Maintenance Technician First Class, and ENCS stands for Senior Chief Engineman.

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