



Operation Urgent Fury Grenada

Ronald H. Cole

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Early in the morning of 25 October 1983, Operation URGENT FURY began with assaults on airstrips at Point Salines and Pearls on the tiny island nation of Grenada. Over the next nine days US troops would rescue American citizens, restore a popular native government, and eliminate a perceived threat to the stability of the Caribbean and American strategic interests there. Memories of the Iranian hostage crisis and the aborted rescue attempt at Desert One were fresh. Anxious to avoid a similar experience, policymakers mounted URGENT FURY in haste in response to a threat to American medical students on Grenada. The operation succeeded, but flaws in its execution revealed weaknesses in joint operations. Together with the bombing of the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut that same month, the experience of Operation URGENT FURY added impetus to efforts to reform the joint system which were already under way. Since 1979, when Maurice Bishop took power in Grenada, concern in the US State Department had grown as the country moved closer to Cuba and the Soviet Union. In late 1983 events in Grenada led to President Reagan's decision to conduct a military operation there. Cuba had built a runway on Grenada suitable for aircraft capable of interdicting US air and sea routes to Europe and the Middle East. Bishop's overthrow in October by militantly anti-US Marxists appeared to pose an immediate threat to the nearly six hundred American students and four hundred other foreigners living in Grenada. The success of Operation URGENT FURY was marred by the consequences of inadequate time for planning, lack of tactical intelligence, and problems with joint command and control. Despite faults in execution, Operation URGENT FURY accomplished all of its objectives. The eight thousand soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines rescued nearly 600 Americans and 120 foreigners, restored popular government to Grenada, and eliminated the potential strategic threat to US lines of communication in the area. URGENT FURY reinforced awareness of weaknesses in the joint system and helped prod Congress to undertake the fundamental reforms embodied in the Goldwater-Nichols DOD Reorganization Act of 1986. Written several years after the end of Operation URGENT FURY, this study focuses specifically on the involvement of the Chairman, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Joint Staff in planning and directing operations in Grenada in 1983. The monograph begins with a discussion of contingency planning for noncombatant evacuation which started after the 12 October 1983 coup that removed Grenada's Marxist leader, Maurice Bishop, and ends with the conclusion of the combat phase of URGENT FURY on 2 November 1983. The author, Dr. Ronald H. Cole, relied primarily on Joint Staff files and interviews as sources of information.

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