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URGENT FURY--A LOOK BACK...A LOOK FORWARD

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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ABSTRACT

Operation URGENT FURY, the American invasion of Grenada in October 1983, was a success at all levels of war--strategic, operational, and tactical. Since then, the United States has been involved in combat operations twice: Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama (December 1989) and Operation DESERT STORM in the Middle East (January 1990). These operations were also enormous successes.

When compared with JUST CAUSE and DESERT STORM, the operation in Grenada was unique--specifically in terms of planning time, in-place forces, and intelligence. The problems in URGENT FURY resulted in numerous lessons learned. It is important for the military community to not let the successes of JUST CAUSE and DESERT STORM detract from what went wrong in URGENT FURY. The military should continue to analyze what went wrong in Grenada and train to future URGENT FURY type scenarios.

URGENT FURY--A Look Back...A Look Forward

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Operation URGENT FURY, the American invasion of Grenada, occurred in October of 1983. Since then, the U.S. military has conducted combat operations in a joint arena in Panama (December 1989, Operation JUST CAUSE) and Iraq/Kuwait (January 1991, Operation DESERT STORM). Planning for and conducting combat operations in Panama and the Middle East were quite unique when compared with what happened in Grenada in that in the two more recent operations the U.S. had:

- 1) up to six months to plan for the specific operation,
- 2) the ability to rehearse in country,
- 3) forces in place, and
- 4) adequate intelligence.

In Grenada, the U.S. had none of these "advantages"--no time to plan or rehearse, no in place forces, and no intelligence. The lessons learned and/or validated in Panama and the Middle East should not be used to say the military has fixed all the problems of URGENT FURY. This paper will analyze URGENT FURY from an operational perspective and look to the future to answer the question--What will preclude the U.S. from making the same mistakes we made in Grenada?

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND

In the early 1980's, the threat of the spread of communism was part of the Cold War. Part of the United States' national security strategy was to prevent against or contain Soviet/communist backed insurgency activities. On the top of President Reagan's priority list was foreign policy issues, standing up to the Soviet Union, and a strong defense. The U.S.'s support of the Nicaraguan resistance demonstrated our resolve to maintain stability and push for democratic institutions--especially in areas close to the continental United States.

By October 1983, a dangerous situation for the United States had developed in Grenada. A large Communist presence had grown on this Caribbean island. Grenada had become a training ground for communist insurgents in Central and South America. There was an enormous Soviet and Cuban presence on the island. Two airfields (Salines and Pearls) were built on this tiny island which indicated that more than tourist flights were being flown.

Ultimately, on October 19, a murderous coup occurred in Grenada and martial law was established by the revolutionary government. With over 500 U.S. medical students on the island and the reality of a permanent communist base so close to the

U.S., President Reagan decided to use military force to achieve his strategic objectives.¹ He also wanted to send a message to potential adversaries that he was more than willing to use (not just threaten) military force to enforce the U.S.'s national security strategy.

CHAPTER III

OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS

WHAT MILITARY CONDITIONS MUST BE PRODUCED IN THE OPERATIONAL AREA TO ACHIEVE THE STRATEGIC GOAL?

FACTS:

President Reagan and the National Command Authority (NCA) communicated three strategic goals to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for Operation URGENT FURY:

1. Protect and evacuate U.S. citizens.
2. Restore democratic government institutions.
3. Eliminate Cuban/Soviet influence and intervention.²

The Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the Commander in Chief, Atlantic (CINCLANT) to accomplish the following strategic objectives:

1. Conduct military operations to protect and evacuate U.S. and designated foreign nationals from Grenada.
2. Neutralize Grenadine forces (Peoples Revolutionary Army).
3. Stabilize the internal situation.
4. Maintain the peace.³

CINCLANT designated Admiral Metcalf (Commander 2nd fleet) as the Joint Task Force (JTF) commander for Operation URGENT FURY. To accomplish his mission, Admiral Metcalf "quickly created a joint task force staff"⁴, primarily made up of Naval personnel, The JTF staff formulated these operational objectives:

1. Secure Salines and Pearls airports.
2. Protect and evacuate the students from True Blue campus.
3. Safeguard the governor-general.
4. Capture/control the main island radio station.
5. Neutralize PRA forces at Ft. Frederick and Ft. Rupert.
6. Free political detainees from Richmond Hill prison.⁵

ANALYSIS:

Based on the intelligence available and a commander's estimate, these operational objectives were adequate and would/could have resulted in achieving the strategic goals. However, there was a substantial lack of intelligence available, "useful intelligence was practically non-existent."⁶ Specifically, there was little information about where all the students were housed and where the Peoples Revolutionary Army (PRA) was located. This lack of intelligence resulted in the JTF not initially accomplishing all operational objectives to achieve the strategic goals. There were long delays in finding and evacuating the students and neutralizing the PRA.

Executing this operation without a reasonable (realistic) amount of intelligence resulted in unnecessary U.S. military

casualties and deaths (more discussion to follow). Additionally, all of the U.S. students who were not initially planned for could have been taken hostage; fortunately they were not.

From a position of leadership and responsibility, it is very questionable and risky to conduct combat operations without any intelligence, especially with American civilians' lives at stake. The operational commander, Admiral Metcalf, and the majority of his subordinate staff and commanders, knew there was a lack of intelligence. There was a responsibility to communicate these concerns through their chain of command to the National Command Authority (NCA). The possibility of a hostage situation and/or unnecessary loss of life should be weighed with the decision to obtain more intelligence and then execute the operation.

In planning for future URGENT FURY's and learning from this one, we can't just say we lacked intelligence, for whatever the reason. This will not fix the problem. Admiral Metcalf stated that "from the intelligence aspect...characterization of resistance was a failure...maps and charts were inadequate...and a national emphasis is needed on the third world, including human intelligence."⁷ This situation is in obvious contrast with JUST CAUSE and DESERT STORM where there was an abundance of intelligence gathering and disseminating for use in planning the operations. In the future we must plan and budget for future URGENT FURY's--real no-time-to-plan contingencies. All unified commanders should plan for such "what if" scenarios in their areas of responsibility. This will help to alleviate future

intelligence failures for crisis action planning and help ensure our operational objectives result in accomplishing our strategic goals.

Joint Publication 3-0 discusses the need for accurate intelligence in contingency operations, "The NCA directs national efforts that support combatant and subordinate commander to ensure...intelligence systems and efforts focus on the operational area, including opposing nations and their armed forces."⁸ Also, the Department of Defense has formed the National Military Joint Intelligence Center (NMJIC), composed of elements of DIA, CIA, and NSA, to assist combatant commands in gathering intelligence.

WHAT SEQUENCE OF ACTIONS IS MOST LIKELY TO PRODUCE THAT CONDITION?

FACTS:

The ad hoc Joint Task Force staff developed a four phase operation to accomplish the operational objectives:

1. Transit--deployment of forces to the area of operations.
2. Insertion--putting the forces on the island.
3. Stabilization/Evacuation--combat operations and NEO.
4. Peacekeeping operation.⁹

ANALYSIS:

Based on the threat and experience of the JTF staff, these four phases were feasible and suitable to accomplish the mission.

However, a different approach may (should?) have been used if the operation had been planned and executed by the military's only rapid response contingency corps--the XVIII Airborne Corps.

Planning and training for crisis situations like URGENT FURY is the XVIII Corps' reason for being. The XVIII Corps has standard operating procedures to plan and execute contingency operations, on short notice, such as the invasion of Grenada. The five phases the Corps uses are:

1. Predeployment/Crisis Action--tailoring the proper force to achieve the operational objectives and planning for subsequent phases.
2. Lodgement--secure airfields and prepare for follow-on forces.
3. Stabilization--force build-up and combat operations.
4. Restoration--achieve the desired end state.
5. Redeployment--deploy back to staging base or CONUS.¹⁰

Additionally, "the XVIII Airborne Corps commander (or one of his subordinate general officers) can expect to be designated the joint task force commander, at least for initial forcible entry operation into the objective area. Conversely, he might be designated the Commander, Army Forces (COMARFOR) under another joint force commander."¹¹ For URGENT FURY, the XVIII Corps' experience in planning and training for just such contingency was not used; nor was a XVIII Corps general used as a JTF commander.

Why was this unit left out of the initial crisis planning and execution of URGENT FURY? One can only speculate. The most common answer is that it was a "political decision" to use the

recently formed, yet not battle tested, units of the Joint Special Operations Command. Whatever the reason, for similar situations in the future (especially with no time to plan), we should use the people who do this type of planning and training every day.

The planned phase for peacekeeping operations and hand-off to Caribbean forces in Grenada was in sharp contrast to what happened in Panama. To a large extent, there was little planning for this phase in Panama. Perhaps the XVIII Airborne Corps needs to add a phase in their planning sequence, between Phases 4 and 5, to plan for peacekeeping operations. This will assist the operational planners in planning for what the JTF will need to do after the fighting has ended.

HOW SHOULD THE RESOURCES OF THE JOINT FORCE BE APPLIED TO ACCOMPLISH THAT SEQUENCE OF ACTIONS?

FACTS:

The concept of the operation was that the island was divided in half with the 22nd Marine Amphibious Unit (MEU) responsible for the north and an Army Ranger/Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) responsible for the south. An Airborne task force was planned for follow-up operations. An Air Force task force and USS Independence CVBG would provide transportation, support, and command and control.¹² Specific operational objectives and the forces assigned to them were as follows:

1. Salines airfield and True Blue campus to the Rangers.
2. Pearls airfield to the Marines.
3. Governor-general and the radio station to the JSOTF.
4. Ft. Rupert and Ft. Frederick to the JSOTF.
5. Richmond Hill prison to the JSOTF.¹³

These objectives were to be secured and neutralized simultaneously at H-hour (0500). An Airborne task force would relieve these initial units, neutralize any remaining resistance, and conduct the Non-combatant evacuation. A Caribbean peace keeping force would take over after the U.S. had redeployed.

ANALYSIS:

Prior to this operation, there was a plan for U.S. intervention in Grenada. The XVIII Corps and a MEU were the forces allocated. As mentioned earlier, the XVIII Corps' expertise wasn't used, nor was the "on shelf" plan.¹⁴ Also, in the haste to plan URGENT FURY, the Ranger task force, MEU, and Airborne task force, all planned their portion of the operation in a vacuum. Neither knew what the other was planning until the day before D-day. For example, the MEU planned to conduct the entire operation by themselves and the Airborne task force thought they were included in the H-hour assault.¹⁵

The NCA decided to use only special forces units for the initial assault on all operational objectives, except Pearls airfield. This turned out to be a mistake which resulted in needless casualties and death. This decision violated one of the

principles of war--mass. It is difficult to understand why lightly armed special forces units were used in an area where the leadership knew they lacked intelligence of the threat. In planning future operations such as this, where we don't know what the threat is, we should use a worst case scenario and allocate a larger more heavily armed force. Also, we should use the forces who regularly plan and train in a given area of responsibility. For example, one SEAL team was assigned to and had planned for operations in this area, yet a different team was used.¹⁶

Other principles of war were violated in URGENT FURY--unity of command and surprise. On the ground, there was not a single joint task force commander. There were two ground commanders, one in the north and one in the south. This resulted in confusion as the two task forces closed in on each other.

Surprise was violated because most of the operation did not occur at H-hour. Delays resulted in the forced entry operations occurring in daylight. Obviously this was very dangerous and caused some problems. Admiral Metcalf commented that, "Rangers are trained to operate in the dark, but we inserted them in daylight. Probably, if we had made the assault in the dark, we would have secured the airport and the governor-general's residence, rescued him and avoided the situation we eventually found ourselves in."¹⁷

To take full advantage of surprise and the U.S. military's ability to fight in the dark, contingency operations such as this must occur in the dark, "night operations are key to our mission

accomplishment".¹⁸ When it became apparent the H-hour was going to be missed, perhaps it should have been postponed. Again, these are decisions leaders at the highest level must make. But we should war game them for future URGENT FURY's. (NOTE: H-hour in Panama was 0100--dark)

WHAT IS THE LIKELY COST OR RISK TO THE JOINT FORCE IN PERFORMING THAT SEQUENCE OF ACTIONS?

The risk to the force has already been discussed. The main question the leadership had to ask was, "Do we execute this operation now (with a higher risk to the joint force). or do we wait and gather more intelligence, then execute?" In future contingency operations, mass (overwhelming force), proper intelligence, surprise, and security will decrease the risk to the joint force.

CHAPTER IV

OTHER ISSUES

COMMAND AND CONTROL:

Admiral Metcalf summarized two lessons from an operations coordination perspective, "the joint task force commander must be on the scene and joint exercises are not currently structured for short-notice operations".¹⁹ The problem of joint task force commander is still being addressed today. Even in a maritime environment, if there is ground combat, a single commander on the ground must be designated--unity of command. "The physical separation of the joint command from ground combat on Grenada would inevitably lead to numerous miscommunications and delays."²⁰ Current doctrine does call for a Joint Land Component Commander.

Additionally, every CINC, in his area of responsibility, must plan for and rehearse with pre-designated joint task force commanders. Admiral Metcalf commented,

"My first important (and perhaps key) decision was the organization of the Commander Task Force 120 staff. The normal task organization for CJTF 120 has 88 people assigned. Unfortunately, except for the biannual exercise, 'Solid Shield', most of the time Joint Task Force 120 is a paper organization. When the Joint Chiefs of Staff activated the 120 Task Force, there was no time to call in the 88, nor would I have wished to do...early on, the army expressed mild consternation. As joint commander, I was to command significant army forces."²¹

Admiral Larson, the current Commander in Chief of U.S. Pacific Command, is working this issue:

"Pacific Command has devised a two-tiered, streamlined joint command and control structure for contingency operations. We have been in the business of tailoring forces to mission for over three years. We have predesignated three joint task force commands (Marine, Army, Navy) for contingency tasking....and have executed this concept...more than 20 times. We developed and resourced a deployable joint task force augmentation cell to provide joint level expertise and C4I to the JTF".²²

Hopefully, this type of planning and training is going on with all CINC's. It should be. These problems were identified in 1983.

JOINT TRAINING EXERCISES:

The other important issue Admiral Metcalf pointed out was short-notice operations. Major joint exercises are planned years in advance and usually are far too scripted to allow for real crisis planning. OCEAN VENTURE, while an outstanding joint exercise, is not the answer. The units always know if they are participating and planning is the same every year.²³ There are few similarities with URGENT FURY.

Operation GOLDEN PHEASANT, in March 1988, was a no-notice exercise/show of force in Honduras. It was a successful operation but did not have the joint flavor of an URGENT FURY. There was no maritime involvement. XVIII Corps, with their habitual Air Force partners at Pope Air Force Base, were the participants.²⁴ Again, as with OCEAN VENTURE, great joint training but still not fixing all of what the military identified was broken during URGENT FURY. We must use JCS planned, no-notice, exercises, similar to URGENT FURY scenarios.

The ideal scenario is for the Joint Chiefs of Staff to contact a CINC, state the mission, and let the CINC plan and conduct the operation. The scenario should drive the necessity for all services to be involved, a true joint exercise.

Finally, the problems the U.S. encountered in Grenada were not new, just "re-visited". Our military's involvement in the Dominican Republic in 1965 was full of joint command, control, and intelligence problems.

"From the outset, planning and executing the U.S. intervention had been plagued by problems of command, control, communications, coordination, and intelligence. These problems were not unique to the Dominican crisis; similar difficulties have bedeviled joint contingency operations throughout American history, up to and including those in Grenada, the Persian Gulf and Honduras."²⁵

The Dominican crisis was a maritime situation. Most of the C3I problems were a result of Army and Air Force units receiving guidance from Atlantic Command. Also, as with URGENT FURY, there was a plan for U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic. However, the plan was not used as written, and the units involved were not familiar with the plan.²⁶

JOINT FIRE SUPPORT:

Finally, from an "it's still broken category", joint fire support still needs work. It was a major problem in Grenada, and also was a problem in Panama. For example, the four Navy SEALs killed in JUST CAUSE at Patilla airport lacked AC-130 support.²⁷ That was 1989 and the problem was supposed to have been "fixed" with all the military's joint exercises and more of an emphasis on joint fire support. The joint military community needs to continue to work this issue.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Operation URGENT FURY was an operational and strategic success. However, there were short-comings which needed to be addressed. Some of the lessons learned in Grenada have resulted in changes which will improve our ability to conduct no-notice contingency operations. Most importantly, have been the emphasis on joint training, in-place contingency joint task force headquarters/staffs, and the creation of the Joint Military Intelligence Center.

There are areas where the military can continue to improve. An emphasis must be placed on conducting no-notice joint exercises at the Joint Chiefs of Staff level that aren't "scheduled". The military had problems in 1965 in the Dominican Republic and in Grenada in 1983. What is next? We shouldn't let the successes of JUST CAUSE and DESERT STORM continue to fog the failures of URGENT FURY.

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