**Operation Urgent Fury - Grenada**

**BLUF:** The invasion of the island nation of Grenada by the United States military, code-named *Operation Urgent Fury*, began on 25 October 1983. After the execution of Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop by rebel-supported forces, President Ronald Reagan ordered the U.S. military to intervene. An amphibious landing on the north end at Pearls Airport quickly gained its objectives, including the rescue of several hundred American students on the island. The international community heavily criticized the invasion, but the American and Grenadian people widely supported it. The operation concluded officially on 1 November 1983, with the U.S. incurring 135 casualties, including 19 killed in action.

**SETTING THE STAGE:** In 1974, Grenada gained its independence from the United Kingdom. The independence movement was led in Grenada by United Labour Party leader Sir Eric Gairy, becoming the Prime Minister of Grenada. All Grenadians did not widely accept the leadership of Gairy. In 1976 the island prepared for an official election, in which Gairy was elected as the Prime Minister. The election results were not accepted by Maurice Bishop and the New Jewel Movement (NJM). This opposition led to street clashes between Gairy’s private army, known as the Mongoose Gang, and Bishop’s supporters. While Gairy was out of the country in 1979, the NJM staged an armed revolution placing Bishop in charge of the People’s Revolutionary Government.

The first order of business for the Bishop administration was the building of an international airport on the island. The airport project had been a priority since 1954, when the island was under the control of the British government. The airport project began in 1980 on the southern tip of Grenada at Point Salines. Despite the support of the British for the project, the U.S. strongly objected to the airport construction. The Reagan Administration believed that the purpose of the airport was to provide easier access to the island for a Soviet-Cuban military build-up. Congress sent Representative Ron Dellums to inspect the building process in early 1983. He returned stating,

> “Based on my personal observations, discussion, and analysis of the new international airport under construction in Grenada, it is my conclusion that this project is specifically now and has always been for the purpose of economic development and is not for military use.... It is my thought that it is absurd, patronizing, and totally unwarranted for the United States government to charge that this airport poses a military threat to the United States' national security.”

Reagan and his advisers, however, were not convinced. By March 1983, President Reagan started issuing warnings to the world community that the airport posed a threat to peace in the Caribbean region. He emphasized that Soviet-Cuban militarization was most evident in Grenada as the airport neared completion.

Violence erupted in Grenada on 16 October 1983 when Deputy Prime Minister Bernard Coard took control of the government. He placed Prime Minister Bishop under house arrest even though there were mass protests against Coard’s actions. Bishop eventually escaped and reasserted his leadership over the island. Bishop and several government officials were again captured, being murdered by members of the People’s Revolutionary Government. Governor-General Paul Scoon was also taken prisoner and placed under house arrest. The government was placed under military control by General Hudson Austin, who appointed himself the “Government Chairman” of the island.

The reaction to the military coup in Grenada by the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) was immediate. They requested that the U.S. assist them in bringing order to the situation. Through a series of diplomatic back channels, Paul Scoon asked for U.S. intervention. Code named Operation Urgent Fury by the United States and the Regional Security System (RSS) based in Barbados, and initial military action commenced on 25 October 1983. The United Nations, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Trinidad and Tobago officially condemned the movement of the U.S. the following day.

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THE STORY: The invasion of Grenada began on 25 October 1983 at 0500. The invasion force was about 7300 U.S. soldiers and Marines and 300 troops from the OECS. They were up against 1500 Grenadian soldiers and 700 Cuban nationals who possessed various Soviet-made vehicles, anti-aircraft artillery, and small arms. The primary objectives on the 25th were capturing the airports at Point Salines and Pearls and the rescue of American students at St. George’s University at the True-Blue campus. The U.S., relying on tourist maps because of inadequate logistical maps of the island, gained its objectives by the afternoon. Using Navy A-7 Corsair jets and Marine Corps AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters, U.S. forces also attacked Fort Rupert, Fort Frederick, and the Richmond Hill Prison, capturing and killing many of the People’s Revolutionary Government leaders. During the assault on Fort Frederick, two Marine AH-1s helicopters were shot down, resulting in five Marine casualties. The last special operation on 25 October was the rescue Governor-General Scoon from his home in Saint George.

The second day of the invasion was spent rescuing American students in Grand Anse on the southwest coast of Grenada. It was also a day to secure the perimeters of the two airports captured on 25 October. The Army had planned to use their rescue helicopters to accomplish the student rescue; however, the Army helicopters were damaged during the first day. So, the recovery did not occur until Marine CH-46 Sea Knights and CH-53 Sea Stallions were available. Another 233 students were rescued and flown to safety by mid-afternoon on the second day.

On 27 October, resistance by the island forces had weakened significantly. The Marine 22nd MAU and 8th Regiment continued moving along the island’s west coast, capturing towns and destroying the opposition. The 325th Infantry Regiment advanced to Grand Anse, where they discovered 200 additional students they had missed on 25 October. The Army 2nd Brigade command post near Saint George was accidentally hit by friendly fire from an A-7 airstrike killing one soldier and injuring 17 others. As the operation began to wind down, it was believed that Grenadian and Cuban soldiers were gathering a couple of miles from the Port Salines airport near the Calivigny Barracks. The Army howitzer attack on the area failed, as most rounds landed in the ocean. The 2nd Battalion of the 75th Ranger Regiment assaulted the island forces via an air assault using Blackhawk helicopters. One helicopter crash-landed when it approached the landing zone too fast, causing two other Blackhawks to collide with the first helicopter. The mishap killed three soldiers and injured four more. The barracks that were the focal point of the assault turned out to be empty.

The final two days of the operation were spent by Army and Marine units occupying the remainder of the island. They captured Grenadian officials and weapon stockpiles. The Cuban engineers that had been captured at the airport were returned to Cuban authorities. Two companies of Marines landed on Carriacou Island, 17 miles northeast of Grenada, on 1 November to attack the Grenadians defending the outpost. All 19 Grenadian soldiers surrendered without putting up any resistance. The Marine activity on 1 November was the last military campaign of the operation.

AFTERMATH: The U.S. and the Caribbean governments immediately reaffirmed Paul Scoon as Queen Elizabeth’s single legitimate representative in Grenada. Under the Commonwealth’s constitutional tradition, Scoon took power as the interim head of government. He formed a cabinet, naming Nicholas Brathwaite as chairman until new elections could be held. In December 1984, the Grenada National Party won the elections, creating a unified government led by Herbert Blaize as Prime Minister.

For the U.S., the invasion was the most massive military operation since the Vietnam War. The operation, however, exposed issues with American information-gathering capabilities. The map issue and the 30-hour delay in rescuing all of the students resulted from the problem. Part of the difficulty was a lack of coordination between the four elements of the U.S. military. The lack of coordinated communication created a problem for fire support, as half of the American casualties resulted from friendly fire.

The operation also showed a problem in the information apparatus as the U.S. military struggled to get accurate information to a more technologically advanced media. This problem was demonstrated as the U.S. military and the State Department provided changing casualty statistics during the months following the invasion. Because of their shortcomings, the military began to explore new ways to deal with the media during military operations.
In the end, Operation Urgent Fury has deemed a success by the American people, especially when compared to American efforts in Vietnam and the failure of Operation Eagle Claw in 1980. The international community widely condemned the U.S. for the operation, but the U.S. appeared to hold a stronger position in the world after the invasion of Grenada. Historically Operation Urgent Fury continued American foreign policy in the Caribbean region that the Monroe Doctrine created in 1823.

QUESTIONS
1. How was Operation Urgent Fury a continuation of the Monroe Doctrine?
2. What were the results for the U.S. domestically and internationally because of the invasion of Grenada?
3. Was the invasion of Grenada in 1983 a just reaction by the U.S. considering the events?

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY