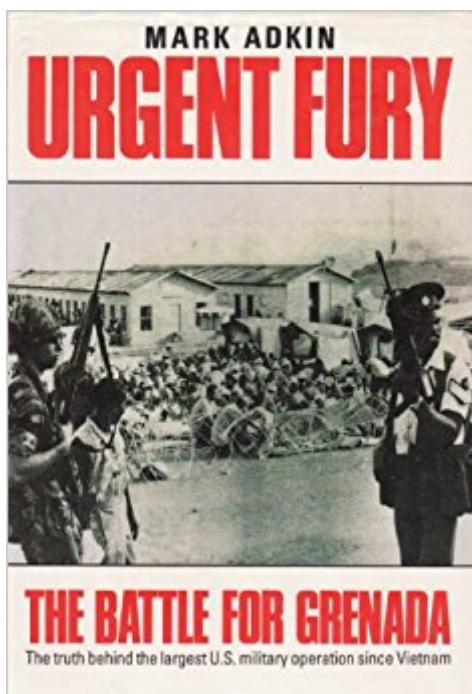


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# Urgent Fury: The Battle For Grenada: The Truth Behind The Largest U.S. Military Operation Since Vietnam



## **Synopsis**

In 1983 the execution by firing squad of Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop, together with seven of his close supporters, triggered the largest US military operation since Vietnam. In the 3-day invasion, code-named "Urgent Fury", 14,000 of the 20,000 troops involved received gallantry decorations. "Urgent Fury" was proclaimed a triumph for the Armed Forces, coming at a time when US morale was low. The author was the Caribbean Operations Staff Officer for the operation and he gives here an eye-witness account.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

A good & informative read. I would have enjoyed it more if the author had left out his personal political views, but other than that it is a wonderful account of this "war".

It's hard to believe I first wrote this review almost ten years ago. Since then, thanks to the miracle of the internet and in research for my own book (in which Grenada will take up a few chapters) of my military experiences, I've learned more about the operation from fellow veterans and Retired Marine Gunnery Sergeant Joe Muccia, who is researching his own book on the battle. In fairness to Major Adkins and the reader I believe I should update my review based on this new information. I've heard numerous times that this is the best book on Operation Urgent Fury, the U.S. led invasion of Grenada. If so, this makes me sad. As a participant of the operation (I was eating my wife's birthday cake when I received the alert notice to go) I bring an eyewitness perspective to many of the events the author describes. I was a Sergeant assigned as a gunner to a howitzer section with Battery B,

1/320th FA (Airborne), 82nd Airborne Division. We were part of the first battalion task force from the 82nd to deploy to the island. Most accounts of the battle have been flawed - most unable to even get the order of battle right. My unit is usually listed at Battery B, 2/325 Infantry - which in deployment was tactically true but wrong. Even though we deployed as part of Task Force 2/325, we were still for all intent and purposes B 1/320th. I do like what one 2/325 commander did when he presented us with a guidon calling us D Battery 2/325. This may seem a minor detail but Truth is like a fine suit, if one thread comes loose, the entire garment can unravel. Others have either hyped the battle to the point of being a mini-Iwo Jima, or worse, demeaned it to the point of being a bad joke. I believe both points of view are both wrong - and unfair. So, having heard about Major Adkins' book on the subject, learning he had been there, and how good it was, I approached this work with some anticipation. There were many questions in my mind which have been unanswered, to this past (has it really been that long?) twenty-four years; I longed for a good book with an overall point of view to make some of the things make sense. After all, I was a witness to these events, but I had a worm's eye view. And indeed, when I first opened Major Adkin's book I was satisfied. He paints a compelling story of the events leading up to the operation. We were never really briefed on the "why" of why we went, in our briefings. I was aware from our threat briefing that there was unrest on the island, the government had been overthrown, and there was concern for the safety of American students on the island. However, Adkins does an admirable job of filling in the gaps. I am grateful to Major Adkins for making a clear argument that the bombing in Beirut had little or nothing to do with Reagan's decision to go into Grenada. This has been much brought up by those who would love to tarnish Reagan's legacy as President. However, I am disturbed when Adkins describes actions in which I was a participant, and I find his description of events don't match my recollections. If I'm going to criticize his work, it's only fair I back up my criticism with facts so let me bring up some cases in point: He does an excellent job in describing the confusion surrounding the deployment. My own detachment from my battery was "stood up" and then "stood down" several times before finally being given the "go." We had even been in the process of putting on parachutes to jump in and then told to take them off and turn them in. When I finally did get the word we were going there was still confusion. In my pocket I had a Xeroxed tourist map of the island (which I now wish I had kept), as there were no military maps available. When I boarded my aircraft as senior man on board I was told we were going to Barbados to link up and organize with the rest of our unit before either jumping or airmobiling in to Grenada. Imagine my surprise when I landed on Grenada in the middle of sniper fire. That was Urgent Fury. I begin to disagree with his account of the rescue of students at the Grand Anse campus. My battery fired the artillery prep for that mission. I have since learned

there were airstrikes, but once again, he neglects the participation of the US Army Airborne Artillery just as he did when he either ignored, or was unaware of, the action of our 3rd Section Howitzer in providing pinpoint fire support for the action in taking the Cuban barracks. Our gunfire was used by the air assets to mark the target. Prior to our gun firing there had been genuine fear of hitting friendlies. Our third sections rounds provided the guide for the jets to hone in on. As at the Cuban barracks, throughout the battle there was a genuine fear of hitting the students or collateral damage, which we did our best to keep at a minimum. This would also explain his swipe at how "slow" we (the 82nd) moved. We were under orders to win the hearts and minds of the Grenadian people; you don't do it by blitzing urban areas and wiping out everything in your path. Frustrating for a soldier, but a political necessity. At Grand Anse the Ranger commander commended us on one of the best artillery preps he'd seen in his entire career. How could we do so well at Grand Anse and so poorly at Calvigny? His assertion we left our aiming circles behind when we deployed is not only untrue, but ludicrous. I don't know where he heard that from. As a gunner I was responsible for "laying" my piece for azimuth of fire. It was Division Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for both battery commanders - and Executive Officers of firing batteries to jump in with an Aiming Circle strapped to their legs if we jumped in. I personally saw our aiming circles on the island and used them to lay my piece and have several pictures of our aiming circles and other aiming equipment on the island. So it was NOT because we on the guns or in the firing batteries failed to bring proper fire support equipment. I have several pictures of our guns on the island that include our aiming devices and the M-2 aiming circle which was used to "lay" our battery for proper azimuth (direction) of fire. Even had we forgotten or lost our aiming circles or aiming points (collimators and aiming posts) 82nd Field Artillerymen were among the best trained in the Army (and certainly the best I worked with) we could have laid our guns by compass and used any stationary landmark as an aiming reference. (I don't mean to get too technical here, but trying to illustrate how ludicrous this charge is). Which brings us to the foul-up on the Calvigny Mission. At first I found it hard to believe we could have been allowed to expend so many rounds when we were missing the target - particularly after the commendations we received for the great job we did on that particular mission(!). There was an intense discussion with Joe Muccia and several of my fellow artillerymen, some of whom were officers during the battle and in a good position to know. Joe had closely studied the after-action reports, and had previous discussions with others who were in a better position than I to know what went wrong (including the Fire Support Officer for the Rangers, who later became our battery commander). Further discussion with us led us to the conclusion that the designated targets and fire support plan had been submitted to our Fire Control Centers and they, in turn, created a good fire

support plan for the operation. However, someone at the top changed the data at the last minute which caused our rounds to miss the target. As the three firing batteries involved co-ordinated our fire together, if one was wrong we all were. On the guns, we could only fire the data given us as we could not see our targets. If our rounds missed the target it was because we were given the wrong targets. I will not name who we believe changed the targets and the why remains a mystery to me. The conclusion is, the foul-up was again in command and control, not on the troop level. So I have to agree with Major Adkins the operation was bureaucratic SNAFU at the top. However, he appears to relish every mistake made by the American high command while giving short shrift to the things done right at the bottom. Perhaps I am overly sensitive to criticism after enduring years of it. But one must remember, we hadn't been to war in over ten years; many of the things learned in Vietnam were forgotten in the years of peace between. The military had just come out of at least four years neglect from 1977 -1981, morale had been low, readiness at an all-time low. As a former commander of the 82nd MG James Lindsay (who I wished had commanded us in Grenada) was fond of saying, "We have eighteen hours to go to war. That's not a lot of time to get smarter, faster, or better - you go with what you got!" Unlike soldiers in most other wars, we didn't have time to learn from our mistakes. We went with what we had. Major Adkins attributes our victory to pure dumb luck. I've never been much of a believer in dumb luck. I discovered one makes his own luck, usually. I think the troopers and Marines on that island made ours. He appears to have an open disdain, even dislike for the troopers of the 82nd. He neglects to mention the two engineers from the 82nd who jumped in with the rangers and were instrumental in clearing the wreckage from the airstrip in a timely manner. It is true, that at first, there was problem keeping the guys in proper uniforms. It was hot, we were, indeed, clothed in uniforms ill-suited for a tropical environment (you go with what you got), as an NCO I insisted that my troops at least keep their helmets and flak vests on and that they not have their M-16A1 any farther than arms' length from them at all times. I believe most NCOs got the guys in line fairly quick. The "magic" helmet, which saved a trooper's life by stopping an AK bullet helped immensely. I never had a problem getting my guys to keep their helmets on after that was passed around. He does mention the reason the marines were able to move so quickly on the island was the fact they met little or no opposition in the north, while we faced the brunt of the opposition and were moving through an urban environment with strict orders to limit collateral damage and civilian casualties. But we were moving. After Calvigny, the artillery's role was to "lay" on targets to be ready to fire if needed as the infantry would move into a new area and clear it. When the area was declared "safe" we would adjust accordingly to the next area. We did this frequently. Someone was moving. I also believe the Marine's presence in the North, forming

a vice or pincers-like movement did a great deal to reduce casualties by depriving any who had the idea of fleeing into the hills and jungle from having an avenue of escape. There is also some discussion as to the sheer numbers of troops sent to the island. I appreciate his explanation of the reason, though I don't remember him mentioning another real possibility that occurred to us on the island- the idea that Castro might have tried to reinforce his Grenadian allies. Remember, at the time we didn't know what the relationship between Castro and the Coard faction was, we were told by the Grenadian people that the Cubans had helped the PRA terrorize the people. I was told this personally by Grenadian citizens who were grateful we came. When our current leaders are being criticized for not sending enough troops to Iraq, pardon me if I scratch my head in confusion. The Iraq war is being criticized for taking too long and causing too many casualties, Grenada is ridiculed because it was over too fast and didn't cause many casualties. Where's the logic in that? His book, written in 1989, criticizes the Army people for wanting to eliminate every pocket of resistance instead of moving rapidly around them and driving on to the main objective. Reading the book in 2007, please excuse me if I find his criticism ironic because our operation in Iraq in 2003 is being criticized for the exact opposite reason: our troops bypassed pockets of resistance allowing them to melt into the landscape and organize a guerilla/terrorist resistance. Perhaps Iraq now proves our commanders on Grenada to be wise? But what do I know? I'm just a cannon cocker. Also, the book, written and researched in 1989 could not have known the impact Grenada had on our training and doctrine. Glaring shortcomings, particularly in interservice communications and cooperation were shown. These were corrected in the mid to late 80s. My last assignment before being medically retired for a parachute injury from the Army was to work in XVIII Airborne Corps G-3, planning and operations section. The US military conducted numerous interservice exercises and operations and worked hard to correct the deficiencies evident in Grenada. I believe Grenada (and I have discovered since first writing this there are many experts who agree now) paved the way for later victories in Panama and the Persian Gulf. Grenada also served notice to our enemies that the U.S. would no longer cower in the shadow of Vietnam and that there would be no more easy victories for the communists. Remember, we were losing the Cold War in 1980. We'd won it by 1989. I believe Grenada and several other smaller, forgotten actions played a part in that victory. I do know that in 2003, on the twentieth anniversary of the battle, the US Army recognized the battle as the turning point in the Cold War. It was the only time a Communist government was removed by direct military action and it marked the end of Communist expansion during the era after a period in which no less than fifteen nations fell to communist revolutions or coups (1975 fall of Saigon and 1983 Grenada); the importance of the battle far outweighs the number of troops

involved or casualties. So, having vented my spleen on this book, what is my final judgment? For the factual errors I have noted above, it is to be approached with care. If he was wrong on these things I know about, what other facts did he get wrong? It is written well, but as stated before, I believe the author appears to have a bias against US special operations troops, this is mentioned by another reviewer, so I was relieved it wasn't just my own sensitivities. He appears to take great relish in describing the mistakes made by the American high command, while glossing over the things that were done right. If there was a problem with the SpecOps people in Grenada I don't believe it was with the troops - they (as were we all) were sent in with lousy intelligence and a minimum of planning. Perhaps, considering the circumstances, it was unavoidable. True, there was a lot that went wrong in that operation, but there was also a lot that went right. I was told at Bragg before leaving to expect a six month deployment ala the Dominican Republic. I was there ten days. I believe the book doesn't give enough credit to the guys on the ground who prevented the admitted SNAFU from becoming FUBAR. There are those who make snide comments about the "12 hour war," or those who call the operation a joke. Well, it may not have lasted long, but our dead are still dead, and our maimed are still maimed. And the people of Grenada celebrate October 25, the anniversary of the invasion, as their Thanksgiving Day. I see nothing funny in that. It is sad that this is the best account of the battle to come forth thus far. I eagerly await the publication of Gunny Mooch's book.

It was fair account but dealt with specifics on a local basis instead of dealing with an overall viewpoint. I visited Grenada with a Grenadian friend who was involved in the operation (as a local estate owner and he ordered the invaders off his personal landing bay). That sort of detailed personal reaction to the invasion would be interesting

I love the detail account of the event during the invasion. The author did an excellent job in giving a historical background up to the invasion. It is rich in detail but not too much to bore the reader.

"We blew them away," a senior White House advisor remarked regarding the overwhelming success of the invasion of Grenada in late 1983. For the first time in history, a democratic nation had crushed a Marxist regime-and did so with few casualties. To the untrained eye, it seemed that the U.S. military had operated flawlessly in defeating the communists in Grenada. However, the British Major Mark Adkin, Commanding Officer of the Caribbean Peace-keeping Force (CPF), contests that theory and counters in his book *Urgent Fury* that the U.S. armed forces came extremely close to a

major political defeat. Adkin asserts that American forces were never in jeopardy of losing the battle for Grenada. However, he believes that the U.S. military command had committed major flaws in the planning and carrying out of Operation Urgent Fury. These leaders narrowly escaped insurmountable American deaths through luck and through the battlefield intuition of lower grade officers. Adkin's main assertion is that the invasion of Grenada was not the staunching success that the military and the Reagan Administration heralded. Adkin draws out several major accounts of compromised military objectives and traces all of these back to poor planning on a senior officer's part. From the initial invasion on October 25 to the "all-clear" in December, the military units involved were sent out on poorly planned and uncoordinated missions that nearly cost America numerous casualties. Fortunately the U.S. had on its side overwhelming superiority and availability of American fire support to bail out our forces from near defeat. The invasion of Grenada was divided into two major sections. The first was the U.S. Marine landing in the northern division of the island. The second assault was in the southern portion of the island and was composed of elements from the Navy SEALS, U.S. Army Rangers, Delta Force, and the 82nd Airborne-the Army's elite paratroop division. It is in the second assault which Adkin details most in the book. This is because of the fact that it was in the southern portion of the island most of the major complications happened. Adkin has a major bias against the special operations units in the southern assault because he is a member of the British elite and the British and American forces tend to have a friendly rivalry. Adkin's main contention against the American elite units is due to the fact that he was the commander of the third assaulting force on Grenada, the British led CPF. Adkin personally witnessed the planning and carrying out of the invasion of Grenada. Therefore, in Urgent Fury he illustrates just how close America came to shipping home hundreds of body bags. There are three reoccurring themes in Urgent Fury which show the ineffective leadership of the planners and senior commanders. The first contention the author has is the lack of military intelligence involved in planning the island invasion. The military had not topographical maps of the island and was forced to use outdated British touring maps to plan the invasion. Also, the nature and location of the enemy forces were almost completely unknown to the invading forces. This lack of knowledge resulted in the shooting down of several choppers by Cuban anti-aircraft guns and caused Delta Force to abort two missions. The helicopters simply could not drop the units off in the middle of a firefight. The second problem was the lack of a fully integrated, interoperable communications system. Unlike the fighting elements which were organized to conduct operations independent of one another, communications systems were not allowed such freedom. Adkin believes that communications was to have been the glue that would tie together the operation of the four independent United States

military service elements. Unfortunately, communications support failed in meeting certain aspects of that mission. It cannot be said that communications capability itself was abundant. The author cites several dilemmas in the shortages of communications, but the most compelling is the account of the SEAL assault upon the Governor-General's mansion in which the units were pinned down against an overwhelming force heavy machine guns. Hovering above the men fighting were two large gunships which they were unable to contact through the radio. They were forced to use a telephone in the mansion to call their commander at Fort Bragg, N.C. to gain radio access to the gunships. Adkin points out that the fact that these units could not communicate one-to-one could have caused more casualties from enemy and friendly fire. However, the most shocking and dangerous part of the mission was the fact that the invasion force lacked precise data on the location of the American medical students they were to rescue. Adkin notes that attack planners did not realize that more than a thousand American medical students were spread out over three locations instead of merely at the True Blue campus in the southern tip of the island. When the Rangers counted the students they realized that there were more than four hundred missing. Fortunately for our sake, Adkin asserts, the Marxist forces did not bother with these students. If the enemy had chosen to use the students as human shields, the battle would have been much bloodier on both the military and civilian sides. The book raises no real objections to the author's validity. Adkin fought in Grenada as a commander and gives first hand account. Furthermore, he also uses primary sources from actual after action reports to support his claims on the fallacies of the senior American command. This book has raised doubts on the quality of leadership involved in the Grenada invasion, but does so logically and with thoroughly grounded contextual evidence. The book challenges our perception as to whether we should believe that superior technology always guarantees battlefield success. In Grenada, American forces had a five to one ratio in manpower and an overwhelming firepower advantage over the Marxists and yet there were multiple opportunities for disaster. We just were lucky. Adkin believes that we cannot trust luck to guide us in future conflicts. In war, the commanders need to be aware of the potential cost of their actions. He believes that there is no excuse for unsound decisions as they are placing men's lives at risk. There is no replacement for real military leadership.

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