

# Grenada, Panama, and Haiti:



Moving inland, Grenada.

U.S. Army (Jon E. Long)

## Joint Operational Reform

By RONALD H. COLE

**T**hree joint operations in the Caribbean—Urgent Fury in Grenada (1983), Just Cause in Panama (1989–90), and Uphold Democracy in Haiti (1994–95)—reveal substantial limits as well as progress in joint planning and execution as a result of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986.

Questions on the effectiveness of joint operations began in Vietnam. After retiring General

David Jones, USAF, who was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1978 to 1982, described that war as “our worst example of confused objectives and unclear responsibilities in Washington and in the field. Each service, instead of integrating efforts with the others, considered Vietnam its own war and sought to carve out a large mission for itself.”<sup>1</sup>

Jones had experienced the fallout from a joint operation conducted in April 1980 that failed to rescue American hostages from the U.S. embassy in Tehran. Hampered by lack of joint training and inadequate command and control, the effort was aborted after the mechanical failure

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**Ronald H. Cole serves in the Joint History Office and has written studies on Urgent Fury and Just Cause and is co-author of *Roles of Federal Military Forces in Domestic Disorders, 1878–1945*.**

of three helicopters. As a Navy helicopter prepared to return, its rotor struck the fuselage of an Air Force transport; eight men died and four were severely burned.

If the Vietnam War and the Iran rescue mission provoked thought on joint reform, events in Lebanon and Grenada in late 1983 sparked action. In October of that year a terrorist truck bomb killed 241 marines in Beirut. The concentration of all marines in one building and restrictions on aggressive patrolling made them easy targets. An investigation revealed that a cumbersome chain of command, unclear objectives, and inconsistent guidance placed them in unnecessary danger.

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**Grenada**

It was, however, the operational mishaps in Grenada that established the clearest need for reform. On October 12, 1983 militant Marxists overthrew a moderate Marxist government on the island of Grenada and executed its leaders. The Department of State informed the Joint Staff of the danger to six hundred American medical students living in the country. Determined not to repeat the humiliation of Iran, on October 20 the National Security Council (NSC) ordered planning for a military operation to evacuate the students.<sup>2</sup>

Although the joint task force (JTF) accomplished its mission, things went wrong. Troops had to use tourist maps, Army and Marine operations were poorly coordinated, and lack of radio interoperability led to casualties among the civilian population and friendly forces. In the words of one member of Congress, "The mission was accomplished, but it was a good deal less than . . . totally successful. . . . It took some luck, an overwhelming force ratio, and we lost more equipment than we should have."<sup>3</sup>

At the NSC meeting the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General John Vessey, USA, warned that Grenadian soldiers and armed Cuban construction workers might resist. He persuaded NSC to expand the rescue mission to include disarming the Grenadian troops (1,200 regulars and 2,000–5,000 militia), deporting the 250 Cuban construction workers, stabilizing internal affairs, and maintaining the peace. He also

persuaded Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger to direct the commander in chief of U.S. Atlantic Command (CINCLANT), Admiral Wesley McDonald, to divert the *USS Independence* carrier battle group and Marine Amphibious Readiness Group 1–84 to the Caribbean for possible intervention.

On October 22 Weinberger inserted Vessey into the operational chain of command. Under the Chairman's direction the Joint Staff coordinated CINCLANT planning with the services. Lack of detailed tactical intelligence on Grenadian defenses compelled planners to opt for a sudden attack with overwhelming force. They hoped swift seizure of key enemy command and control facilities coupled with the quick removal of potential hostages would end the crisis with few casualties.

Grenada is twice as large as the District of Columbia with varied terrain and targets. The nearest available force, a battalion landing team of 1,800 marines, was too small to conduct a *coup de main*. The Joint Chiefs agreed to a joint operation whereby Army airborne troops would be flown from Fort Bragg and naval forces would deter Cuban interference and provide air and gunfire support.

During a review by the Joint Chiefs of the CINCLANT plan on October 23, Vessey drew a tactical boundary dividing Grenada into northern (Marine) and southern (Army) sectors. He also selected two seasoned officers to help U.S. Atlantic Command conduct the joint ground operation. With its focus on maintaining the sea lines of communication with Europe in the event of war, the command lacked experience in directing ground combat involving Army troops with Air Force support. Major General Norman Schwarzkopf, USA, who then commanded the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Mechanized), would serve as advisor (later deputy commander) to the JTF commander, Vice Admiral Joseph Metcalf. Vessey sent the vice director of the Joint Staff, Major General George Crist, USMC, to coordinate the ground operation with the efforts of the United Nations and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States to reestablish democratic rule.

The operation began at 0500 on October 25. The Marines faced little resistance at Pearls and Grenville on the east side of Grenada. A malfunction in the lead C–130 delayed the drop of the Army Rangers at Point Salines Airport for over thirty minutes. After a fire fight the Rangers subdued the Cubans at Point Salines and rescued the students at the nearby True Blue campus.

Fully alerted, Grenadian troops in St. George's discovered and trapped a SEAL team attempting to evacuate the governor general. Schwarzkopf persuaded the JTF commander to send marines to rescue the SEALs and the governor general. He also



General Vessey.



Soldiers taking cover in Panama.

Students being evacuated from Grenada.



persuaded a Marine colonel to lend the support of his helicopter squadron to Army Rangers to rescue a second group of students at the Grand Anse campus outside St. George's.

In the end U.S. forces overwhelmed the opposition, rescued 720 U.S. and foreign citizens, restored popular government, and eliminated a strategic threat to U.S. lines of communication. Urgent Fury cost the United States 19 killed and 116 wounded; Cuban forces lost 25 killed, 59 wounded, and 638 captured. Grenadian forces suffered 45 killed and 358 wounded, and at least 24 Grenadian civilians were killed.

Tactical mistakes marred the operation. On October 25, lacking DOD maps and recent tactical intelligence, Navy A-7 Corsairs bombed a mental hospital near the Grenadian command post at Fort Frederick and killed 18 patients. Two days later, an air-naval gunfire liaison company team failed to coordinate with the 82<sup>d</sup> Airborne Division, and Corsairs attacked a friendly brigade headquarters wounding 17 soldiers. Without adequate maps, intelligence, and organic helicopter gunships, the 82<sup>d</sup> cautiously advanced across the southern half of the island while the Marines raced over the northern part in an uncoordinated action.

## Panama

The intervention in Panama shared a Caribbean locale with Grenada, but its causes differed markedly. The deterioration of the Soviet Union heralded the rapid decline of Soviet and Cuban influence in the region. New problems threatened U.S. interests—drugs flowing from Colombia via Panama, danger to American citizens in Panama, and restricted access to the canal.

Panama was the base of U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), a predominantly Army organization led in 1988–89 by General Frederick Woerner, USA. Anticipating a hostage situation or interference with use of the canal, Woerner initiated a contingency plan for operations against the dictatorship of Manuel Noriega. Named Blue Spoon, the plan envisioned gradually doubling the 12,000–13,000 U.S. troops with reinforcements from the United States. The force would then mount operations to intimidate or overthrow Noriega and the Panama Defense Forces (PDF).<sup>4</sup>

Guarding prisoners,  
Panama.



By summer 1989 relations between the countries had worsened. Dissatisfied with Woerner's incremental approach, President George Bush turned to the Chairman, Admiral William Crowe, who recommended Woerner be replaced by General Maxwell Thurman, USA. Thurman, with a reputation for toughness and efficiency, chose the commander of XVIII Airborne Corps, Lieutenant General Carl Stiner, USA, as primary joint warfighter with responsibility for planning and conducting the operation. Thurman instructed the SOUTHCOM operations director, Brigadier General William Hartzog, USA, to revise Blue Spoon to reflect a strategy of *coup de main* rather than escalation. By October Hartzog had expanded the overall force to 27,000 and compressed the time to move reinforcements to Panama from three weeks to five days.

Rather than asking Thurman to cobble together a force of equal parts from each service—a frequent practice in earlier operations—the new Chairman, General Colin Powell, USA, supported Thurman's decision to place an Army general in charge of a predominantly Army joint task force. The 22,000 soldiers would be augmented with 700 sailors, 900 marines, and 3,400 airmen.<sup>5</sup> Hartzog gave 27 specific objectives to five special operations and four conventional operations task

forces (TFs). Although each TF was composed largely of troops from a single service, nearly all were supported by elements from others. For example, Rangers comprising TF Red included Air Force special tactics and Marine/Naval gunfire liaison teams, and all TFs depended on Air Force fixed-wing airlift and close air support.

In late September 1989 Powell met with Thurman and Stiner to discuss plans. He agreed to compress the flow of forces into Panama from three weeks to three days, seize Noriega, and dismantle the PDF. Stiner would report through Thurman and Powell to Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney and the President. In strictly tactical matters during the first few days, Powell, Cheney, and Bush would avoid the micromanagement that had characterized the Iranian hostage rescue attempt and Urgent Fury.

On December 20, four days after Panamanian soldiers killed a marine and molested a Navy officer and his wife, General Thurman executed the plan that SOUTHCOM and its subordinate commands had been revising and rehearsing for six weeks. The plan included rules of engagement that carefully restricted heavy firepower. Neither Powell, Thurman, nor Stiner wished to needlessly risk lives or property.

Shortly after midnight, Rangers of TF Red and troops of the 82<sup>d</sup> jumped over targets from Rio Hato in the west to Fort Cimarron in the east. Their primary mission was to isolate Panama City

while TF Bayonet encircled and neutralized the PDF headquarters at the *Comandancia*. After a three-hour fight the headquarters was in U.S. hands. Meanwhile TF Atlantic secured the canal;

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and in the western suburbs of Panama City Marine TF Semper Paratus blocked approaches to the Bridge of the Americas to prevent PDF forces fleeing Rio Hato from reinforcing the *Comandancia*. With

key installations taken and Noriega in hiding, central control of PDF collapsed the first day. Fighting flared sporadically as U.S. forces overcame pockets of resistance.

As Stiner's force attained its objectives, General Powell became directly involved in military operations to ensure that actions in Panama meshed with the administration's political and diplomatic goals. Goldwater-Nichols permitted the Secretary to use the Chairman to transmit operational directions and the Chairman to act decisively without consulting the Joint Chiefs.

Powell told Thurman to accelerate the drive to liberate the Marriott Hotel, which held Americans who could become hostages. He also encouraged Thurman to quickly install the legally elected government to discredit claims that Noriega still held office or that U.S. military rule was imminent. After Noriega fled to the papal *Nunciatura*, U.S. troops played loud rock music outside the residence. When the Vatican and the diplomatic community complained to President Bush, the Chairman ordered Thurman to stop the noise. Powell then urged Thurman to have the new Panamanian government appeal to church officials in Panama and Rome for help in dislodging Noriega from the *Nunciatura*.

Noriega's surrender on January 3 ended resistance, but U.S. troops remained until the new government could take over police and security operations. Finished officially on January 31, 1990, Just Cause used 27,000 troops against an enemy force estimated at 12,000. U.S. casualties were 26 killed and 324 wounded. Some 65 PDF soldiers were killed.

If proportionally lower friendly casualties mark operational success, Just Cause was more successful than Urgent Fury. It showed substantial improvement in joint planning and execution. Part of that stemmed from the Goldwater-Nichols Act, part from the time available and forces already in place, and part from the close working relationship of top political and military leaders before and during the operation.



U.S. soldiers with Haitian policeman, Port-au-Prince.

Fleet Imaging Command Norfolk (Charles Wharton)

**Haiti**

Our third military intervention in the Caribbean since 1982, Operation Uphold Democracy featured flexible planning and execution of entry and operations ashore. A diplomatic breakthrough enabled peaceful entry to Haiti. However, once ashore U.S. forces had to cooperate with the military and police they were sent to replace. The JTF commander was able to perform these tasks with periodic refinement of the rules of engagement by the Chairman and CINC. Civilian agencies lacked sufficient planning time and resources and were inexperienced with military operations. Consequently their efforts to reconstruct the government and democratize the police and military were delayed. Waiting for greater civilian participation, U.S. forces assisted in civil affairs. They filled advisory roles in ministries, coordinated delivery of relief supplies, and assisted in civil administration in rural areas where local authority had collapsed.

Uphold Democracy took place principally in 1994-95. An island country, Haiti fell within the operational area of U.S. Atlantic Command. This was not the same command that had presided over Urgent Fury. General Powell had persuaded Secretary of Defense Les Aspin to transform the



Soldiers from 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division in Haiti.



General Shelton arriving in Haiti during Uphold Democracy.

21 Marine Division (M.T. Huff)

Fleet Imaging Command Norfolk (James Lotz)

“blue-water” Atlantic Command into one where service components would, in Powell’s words, “operate jointly as a way of life and not just for occasional exercises.”<sup>6</sup>

Aspin combined Army and combat air forces based in the continental United States with the Atlantic Fleet and its marines under Admiral Paul David Miller and directed him to focus on joint training and deployment. Enlarged and given a new mission, the Atlantic Command became ACOM, commanded by CINCLANT. Events in Haiti would quickly test its operational competence.

The overthrow of democratically-elected Jean-Bertrand Aristide on September 30, 1991 led to brutal repression, economic chaos, and a flow of Haitian refugees into the United States. During the next two years diplomats attempted to negotiate Aristide’s return. On October 11, 1993 Haitian

thugs blocked the docking of *USS Harlan County*, carrying a military assistance group to help democratize and professionalize the Haitian armed forces. Three days later, gunmen murdered the pro-Aristide minister of justice. Both acts signaled the junta’s determination to scuttle U.S. diplomatic efforts. Undeterred, President Bill Clinton charged his national security planners to develop new options, which would come to include military intervention and peacekeeping operations.

General John Shalikashvili, USA, replaced Powell as Chairman on October 25, 1993. Having observed *Urgent Fury* ten years earlier, the new Chairman knew its planners had only a few days to cobble together forces for a ground campaign that lacked tactical coordination, mutual fire support, and interoperable communications. He did not want those mistakes repeated. During the first half of 1994 he closely reviewed ACOM contingency planning for joint operations in Haiti.

In preparing operational plans, the ACOM deputy commander in chief, now Lieutenant General Hartzog, drew heavily on his background

as a planner for Operation Just Cause. He also relied on the experience of the ACOM J-5, Major General Michael Byron, USMC, and Byron's predecessor, Lieutenant General John Sheehan, USMC, now serving as the Joint Staff director of operations (J-3) and the Chairman's resident expert on Haiti.

Hartzog saw parallels between Panama and Haiti. Both were dictatorships maintained by corrupt and brutal military forces. Both offered great

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potential for civil unrest and violence. Both were close enough to the United States for rapid deployment of large joint task forces. He directed planners at ACOM and tactical planners at XVIII Airborne Corps and the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division

to avoid surgical solutions and silver bullets. They were to rely on overwhelming force applied simultaneously against multiple objectives—the *coup de main* used in Panama.

Published May 20, 1994, ACOM operational plan 2370-95 called for forced entry by the 82<sup>d</sup> Airborne Division, peaceful follow-on by the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, and eventual transition to a U.N. operation—all under JTF 180 led by Lieutenant General Hugh Shelton, USA, XVIII Airborne Corps. As in Just Cause the Army would be the lead force. However, 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division and the Joint Special Operations Task Force would deploy on the carriers *USS Eisenhower* and *USS America*.

During the next several weeks a plan was developed for peaceful entry, ACOM operation order 2380-95. After approving it in August, General Shalikashvili insisted that preparations be carried forward for both 2370 and 2380. While he anticipated a forced entry, he recognized the possibility of a diplomatic breakthrough or collapse of the junta. Events would vindicate his flexibility. Uneasy with two sharply different entry phases, Hartzog and Byron produced a hybrid "2380+" which planned for entry with a small vanguard force from the 82<sup>d</sup> Airborne to secure key airfields and seaports for landings by JTF 190.

Satisfied with the operational planning, the Chairman turned to political aspects. He and his director for strategic plans and policy (J-5), Lieutenant General Wesley Clark, USA, worked with the U.S. interagency community, President Aristide, and the United Nations on measures to build the political and economic structures needed to ensure long-term progress and stability in Haiti. Economic and political headway would end the refugee crisis and encourage cooperation with U.S. forces.

On September 11, 1994 ACOM conducted an interagency dress rehearsal of the civil-military parts of Uphold Democracy. During the drill it became evident that some civilian agencies lacked the experience, manpower, and funding to participate vigorously during the first weeks. The Chairman directed Clark to work with the United Nations, Aristide, and U.S. civil agencies until they could assume full responsibility for rebuilding the government and economy. However, D-day would arrive before broad agreements reached on the national level could become specific steps in operational and tactical plans.<sup>7</sup>

Nearly a week later President Clinton sent former President Jimmy Carter, Senator Sam Nunn, and retired General Colin Powell to Port-au-Prince to negotiate for the peaceful arrival of the task force. At the last moment the leader of the junta, Lieutenant General Raoul Cedras, assured the U.S. delegation that the *Forces Armée d'Haiti* (FAd'H) would cooperate in a peaceful transition to Aristide's rule. Shalikashvili's insistence on continued planning for peaceful entry would now bear fruit.

With airborne troops flying toward Haiti, the Chairman directed CINCLANT to switch from an invasion to semi-peaceful entry, ACOM 2380+. Planners at ACOM and JTF 180 changed the force list and arrival sequence. On September 19 JTF 180—XVIII Corps headquarters, a 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division brigade, a special Marine air-ground task force, and the Joint Special Operations Task Force—landed without incident. Troops of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division and the Marines were stationed in urban centers with special operations forces in the countryside. The number of troops participating in Uphold Democracy would peak at over 20,000.

Working with FAd'H proved problematical. The Chairman instructed the joint task force to both help FAd'H prevent violence against the junta and stop it from attacking followers of Aristide. Shalikashvili also insisted that Shelton's troops not perform routine police work. With the aid of U.S. civil agencies, Shelton was to recruit a new police force from FAd'H after screening out criminals and human rights abusers. When finding members with clean records proved almost impossible, ACOM and JTF 180 developed a plan for using international police monitors to supervise existing police until a new national police force could be trained. As it became evident that not all FAd'H members would retain their jobs or freedom under the new administration, some attacked Aristide's followers and U.S. special operations troops. To send a clear message that neither violence nor a return to the status quo would be tolerated, Rangers suppressed all known loyalist strongholds.



DOD

Marine road block,  
Just Cause.

Despite attempts to replace U.S. security and stability operations with civil-military and economic measures, neither the interagency community, the U.N. Secretary General, nor President Aristide could be rushed. Civilian agencies and the United Nations continued to lag in providing humanitarian and nation building assistance. Aristide delayed signing a status of forces agreement pending resolution of differences with CINCLANT on three side letter issues: Aristide's refusal to accept U.S.-trained security guards for himself, his cabinet, and the parliament; his reluctance to develop separate military and police forces; and U.S. screening of FAd'H members for service with the interim public security force. The Chairman wanted Aristide to establish a small army under a separate ministry to check the power of the police. However, the Department of State and Aristide successfully opposed it, viewing the army as a seedbed for juntas.

Aristide returned to Haiti on October 15, 1994. Ten days later, General Shelton turned over the operation to JTF 190, the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division commanded by Major General David Meade, USA. During the next three months JTF 190 extended its operations to assisting civilian organizations in building a new police force and improving the infrastructure. When the U.N. Security Council certified in late January 1995 that Haiti was safe for transition on March 31, JTF 190 progressively relinquished such civil-military activities to civilian agencies.

Operational successes in Panama and Haiti rewarded efforts by Congress and the Bush and Clinton administrations to avoid the mistakes in

Grenada. The determination of two Presidents and the enhanced authority of the Chairman and unified commanders under the Goldwater-Nichols Act combined to provide specific, attainable objectives and responsive, effective command and control. Commanders benefitted from maximum autonomy on the tactical and operational levels. However, when necessary, both Powell and Shalikashvili intervened to ensure the political success of these operations.

Defense reform and strong leadership have gone far in solving the strictly military problems that marred earlier joint operations. Yet neither a streamlined chain of command nor strong military leadership can compensate for the inadequacy of non-DOD agencies' resources for and inexperience with post-Cold War contingency operations. If that situation persists, the CINCs and their joint warfighters will repeatedly be asked to provide DOD resources to accomplish the political-military activities traditionally performed by domestic and international civilian organizations. **JFQ**

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> David C. Jones, "Past Organizational Problems," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 13 (Autumn 1996), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Parts of these accounts are based on interviews with DOD officials. The Grenada section draws heavily on Ronald H. Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Grenada* (Washington: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint History Office, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury*, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald H. Cole, *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama* (Washington: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint History Office, 1995), pp. 1–2, 7–10. Much of this section is taken from this book as well as testimonies provided by and interviews with DOD officials.

<sup>5</sup> Cole, *Just Cause*, pp. 12–14, 17–23, 76 (footnote 19); Thomas Donnelly et al., *Operation Just Cause: The Storming of Panama* (New York: Lexington Books, 1991), pp. 44–51.

<sup>6</sup> Ronald H. Cole et al., *The History of the Unified Command Plan, 1946–1993* (Washington: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint History Office, 1997), pp. 114–15.

<sup>7</sup> Adam B. Siegel, *The Intervention of Haiti* (Alexandria, Va.: Center for Naval Analyses, August 1996), pp. 35–36.