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# Leatherneck

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## Bitter Beirut

A Lesson Learned  
30 Years Ago

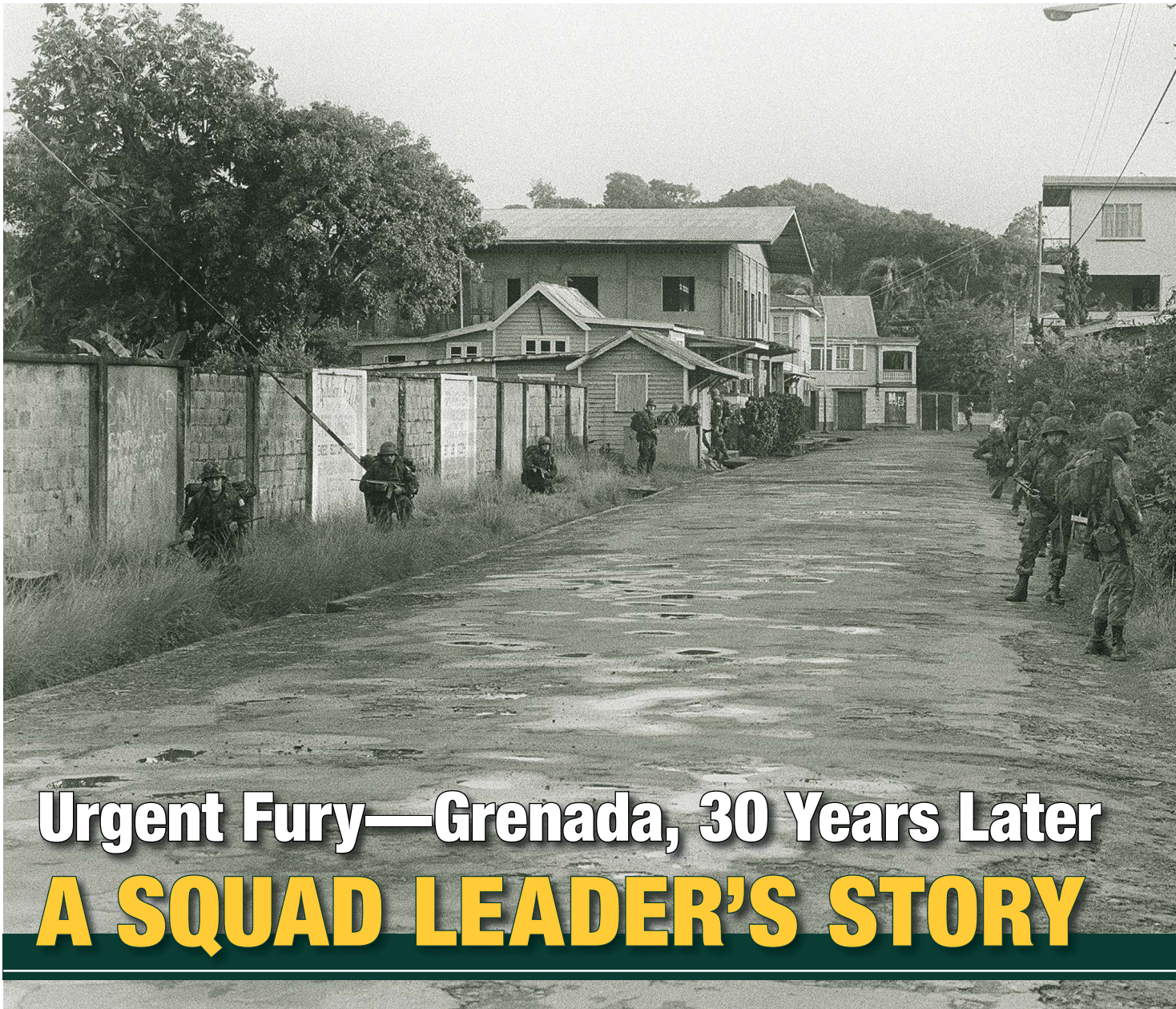
Urgent Fury, 1983:  
Global Communism  
Stopped Cold  
By U.S. Marines

A Warhorse  
Named "Reckless"  
Goes Bronze

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& Foundation







# Urgent Fury—Grenada, 30 Years Later

## A SQUAD LEADER'S STORY

By Maj Robert T. Jordan, USMC (Ret)

**P**olitical strife and intrigue in the small country of Grenada erupted 30 years ago, sparked by Cuba's grand plans of exporting its communist revolution globally by using the country's 133 square miles as a strategic marshaling and launching point.

The larger story of that event detailing U.S. military intervention by launching Operation Urgent Fury to rescue U.S. citizens trapped amidst the turmoil has been told over the years and entered into Marine Corps history.

What's missing is a grunt's-eye view of how that mission unfolded. Soldiers, sailors and Marines worked together to dig Cuban military forces out of hiding, then engaged them in combat when necessary as they located and destroyed huge stores of arms, ammunition and equipment

before returning the idyllic island back to the Grenadian people.

When U.S. military forces were mobilized in October 1983, the Marines of the 22d Marine Amphibious Unit were diverted from their original mission (to relieve the 24th MAU in Beirut, Lebanon) to assist in the evacuation of American medical students. A secondary mission was to help stabilize the country by restoring law and order.

For Marine Sergeant Manuel Antonio Cox, born in Havana, Cuba, on 20 Jan. 1963, the unexpected diversion was an answer to his belief that he had a date with destiny to avenge his father's death at the hands of the Cuban regime. Cox, who came to the United States when he was just 1 year old with his mother, Maria Azucena Martinez y Seisdedos, had been told that his father, Guillermo Antonio Cox y Roose, a Peruvian geologist, had been assassi-

nated by the Castro regime. Cox was orphaned at 14 when his mother died of cancer. He fended for himself until he joined the Marines at 17.

Among his peers, Cox was highly respected because of his record and his reputation as an outstanding instructor at the Second Marine Division Squad Leaders School. Ironically, he was not supposed to be returning to Lebanon because he had been selected to instruct Peruvian Marines in his father's native country. But his company commander had other ideas.

Retired Marine Colonel (then-Captain) Robert K. Dobson Jr. commanded "Guts Golf" Company—Company G, Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 2d Bn, Eighth Marine Regiment. "I was impressed by his personal and professional competence, can-do attitude that was genuine and a healthy respect for others. He was in 3d Platoon when we went to Lebanon in 1982





JOE PETER D. SUNDBERG, USN

**Left:** Marines of BLT 2/8 were inserted into the port city of Grenville, Grenada, in October 1983 to assist in the evacuation of American medical students and restore law and order. The Marines were welcomed as liberators.

**Below:** A squad of leathernecks, backed by jeep-mounted .50-cal. machine guns, close in on a private home that was identified by intelligence sources as containing important documents, enemy combatants and collaborators.



SSGT CHRISTOPHER GREY



COURTESY OF EMI COX-JORDAN

**Sgt Manny Cox double-checks a compass bearing during a training exercise.**

[to remove the Palestine Liberation Organization]. When I moved him to the 1st Platoon, it immediately improved the tactical ability of the entire platoon, which gave me, as company commander, more task organizational options.”

Cox’s superior performance was rewarded by meritorious promotions, first to lance corporal on 2 Oct. 1980, then to corporal on 2 April 1981, and finally to sergeant on 2 Nov. 1982, when he was just 19. But his fellow Marines thought he was much older than that.

Dobson said that Cox was in excellent shape and was admired by the men of the company. “He was a previous instructor at Second Marine Division Squad Leaders School and, as a result, was known by a number of men in the company,” Dobson explained. “I recall him telling me late one week that the upcoming squad leaders’ course was short of [students] and that

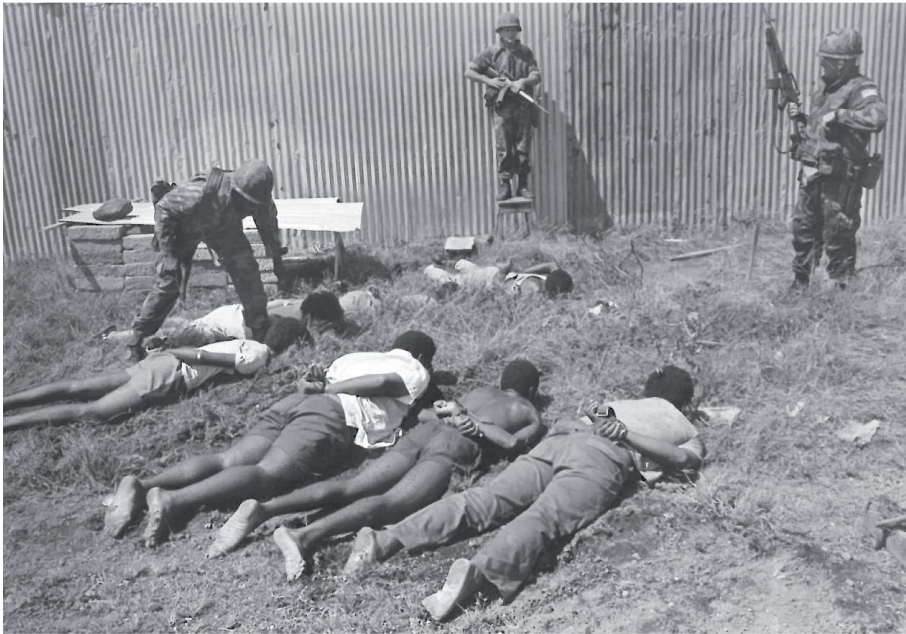
we could get some eight-to-10 school seats if we could get personnel there by Saturday morning. I did so without battalion permission and got many of the fire-team leaders a good training experience.”

That was important since BLT 2/8 recently had undergone reorganization to conform to a new infantry battalion structure adopted by the Marine Corps. In its new incarnation the basic infantry battalion had 43 officers and 779 enlisted men, 10 percent fewer than under the old structure, but with an increase in firepower provided by such weapons as 24 additional

grenade launchers, bringing the grand total to 134; eight additional Dragon anti-tank weapons for a new total of 32; and eight M2 .50-caliber machine guns.

Small-unit leadership would be critical to success since tactical units were correspondingly smaller in the new battalion. A rifle platoon, which previously contained 45 Marines, had 36 men (including the platoon leader), organized into three 11-man squads, each composed of two five-man fire teams and a squad leader. Proportional reductions also occurred in the rifle companies’ weapons platoons and in the weap-





SSGT CHRISTOPHER GREY

**Marines secure captured Grenadian People's Revolutionary Army suspects.**

ons company of the battalion.

Dobson said he doesn't recall the specific conversation he had with Cox to dissuade him from accepting the Peruvian instructor assignment, but that it may have included three elements—first, Cox's wife's pregnancy (Evi, then in her sixth month of pregnancy, also had a son, Yervant, and a daughter, Yvette, from a previous marriage) and the unknown status of medical services for enlisted Marines in Peru. "I may have played on his importance to his company, platoon and squad. And I may have discussed about the downside of getting out of the mainstream Marine Corps for assignment purposes when it might be best to remain in the operating forces and perhaps take a follow-on tour to the drill field," said Dobson.

### **Date With Destiny**

Evi Cox emigrated from Cuba when she was 10. She recalled her husband, known as "Manny" to his family and friends, telling her after returning from his first deployment to Beirut in 1982, that he had a feeling that the United States and Cuba would be engaged in combat one day. "If that happens, I want you to know that I will want to go and fight to avenge my father," he said. "I don't want to leave you and our children, but if it happens, I want you to be strong, because it is something that I will have to do."

He was unaware that he would fulfill that destiny when he and his fellow Marines and Navy corpsmen boarded ships at

Moorhead City, N.C., on 17-18 Oct. 1983.

In a letter dated 19 Oct. 1983, Cox complained that "we are cramped around here. We are like sardines." He then informed his wife that his unit expected to participate in a training exercise in Spain from 31 Oct. to 8 Nov. before heading to Beirut.

That changed two days later when Cox wrote: "Well, love, today we went 800 miles out of our way to go to Grenada." He went on to write, "They told us that the president of Grenada is dead and the army has taken over, so they want us to evacuate the American citizens. Ain't that a trip!!! I think the United States thinks we are Supermen. How many places do they want us to be at the same time? Well, don't worry. This is a small little country and I don't think we'll do anything there. I thought I'd tell you so when I get back

home you won't tell me that I didn't keep you informed. My love, you probably know more than I do."

Meanwhile, the Marines were keeping up with their physical training, reviewing map reading, cleaning weapons and preparing for what Marines do best—an amphibious landing. It appears that Cox was unaware of the Cuban military involvement at that time.

Prime Minister Maurice Bishop's New Jewel Movement overthrew the previous Grenadian government in 1974, then adopted Cuba's communist model of "revolutionary government." Cuba, recognizing Grenada's strategic location, decided to use the small nation as an arsenal and prospective marshaling point for Soviet forces from which they could launch troops, weapons, military equipment and ammunition for which the Cubans were building a major airport.

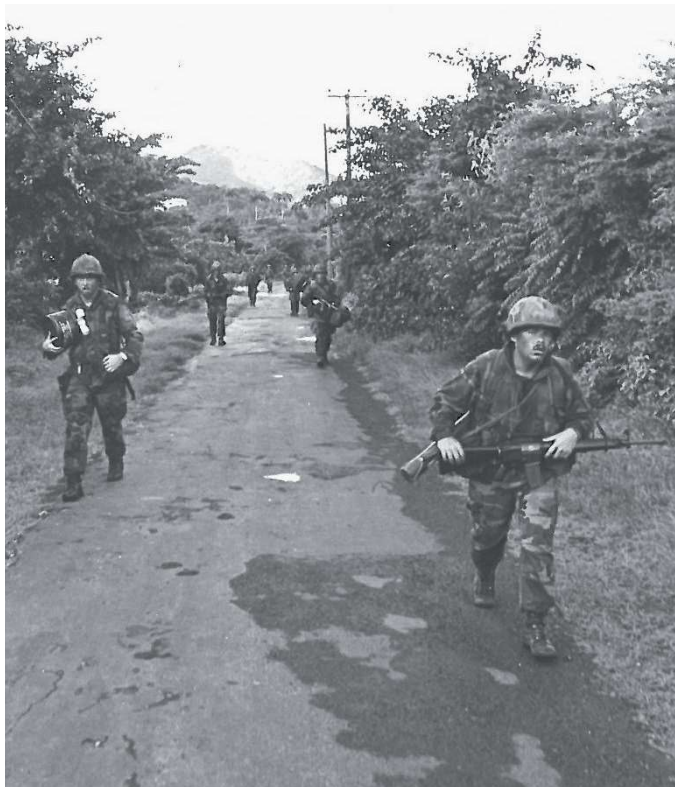
Bishop's deputy, Bernard Coard, wanted to embrace a broader form of socialism and objected to Bishop wanting to hold elections. On 13 Oct., Coard moved to take control of the government. He placed Bishop under house arrest. When Bishop's supporters freed him, police were dispatched to arrest him. Bishop later was caught and then executed.

On 23 Oct. 1983, Cox wrote: "Hello love. How's the most beautiful woman in the world doing? How are my adorable children? [Cox had adopted Yervant, 6, and was in the process of adopting Yvette, 4.] I hope all is well. Darling, we are all very sad today ... because we just found out that 140 or more Marines [later confirmed to be 241] were killed in Lebanon. This is terrible, we all had friends there. But you my darling must not worry. All this that happens makes us stronger. I will be alright. I promise you!"

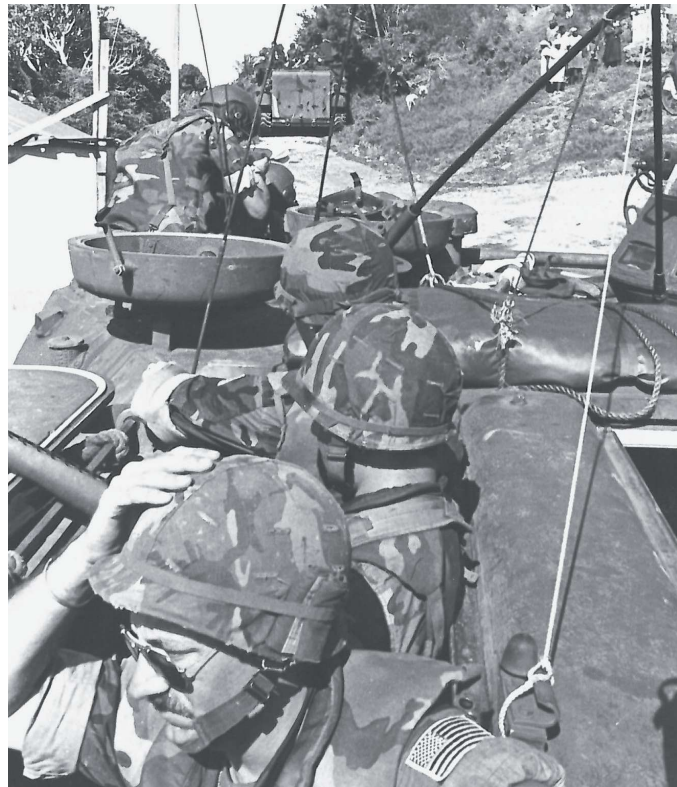


**Soldier and students: American students at St. George's University on Grenada thank a U.S. soldier after his arrival at the campus with peacekeeping forces. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Southern Command)**





SSGT CHRISTOPHER GREY



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**Above left: Marines with BLT 2/8 search for an alleged Korean radio transmitter on the island of Carriacou, just north of Grenada, on 31 Oct. 1983, two days after securing Grenada.**

**Above right: After changing the mode of transportation for landing on Grenada back and forth between helicopter and AAV, leathernecks with Co G, BLT 2/8 landed in AAVs as originally planned.**

Cox then wrote that the ship was still sailing toward Grenada and would arrive “sometime tomorrow” and that they would launch the evacuation the next morning, by bringing the U.S. citizens aboard ship and then would take them to Venezuela where they would board aircraft back to the United States.

Cox continued: “Darling, I really thought that with all of this going on all over the world my squad would begin to get nervous and jumpy, but they haven’t, in fact it’s the opposite. They have taken this like true professional Marines, like true men. I’m proud to be their squad leader, but more than anything, I’m proud to be your husband.”

Cox signed off by sending his love to his son, Yervant, who would turn 7 the next day. “Make sure and tell him that Papa hasn’t forgotten him on his birthday ... and tell my beautiful little girl [Yvette] that Papa can’t wait to hug and kiss her again.” Included was a special birthday letter to Yervant.

Meanwhile, Capt Dobson had flown via helicopter to USS *Guam* (LPH-9) to meet with the BLT commander, Lieutenant Colonel Ray Smith, and his staff. “I received an operations briefing and got a map of Grenada from S-2. I was the only company commander with a map,” Dobson recalled.

The plan called for “Golf” Co to land at first light on 25 Oct. on the northeast coast of the island. An unknown coral reef changed that plan, and the company was forced to wait aboard ship most of the day for the word to land somewhere else.

“Shortly after lunch we were instructed to get to the flight deck and we would be helo’d ashore,” Dobson explained. “You can imagine the challenge of getting combat-loaded Marines through the watertight passages under condition zebra. It took us some time. I had just got the company to the flight deck when we were instructed to get back into the AAVs.”

**A**round 1400, Dobson instructed the company “gunny” to have the men return to their racks, leaving their weapons and ammo aboard the amphibious assault vehicles and to post a sentry with each AAV. As darkness fell, Dobson told the platoon commanders that they would likely spend the night aboard ship as the Marine Corps probably would not do a night operation. He was wrong.

“At about 1445, we got the word to land the landing force at 1730 in the area of the fuel tanks, which became known as LZ Fuel. Understand we had no [communication], no mission for this side of the island and no orders. Moreover, we were landing in the [U.S.] Army zone per my meeting on the LPH several days before.

It became the classic case of get ashore and figure it out,” said Dobson.

The troops were quickly loaded again into the AAVs, then the company debarked from USS *Manitowoc* (LST-1180) around 1700.

“It was pitch-black,” Dobson recalled. “I had previously decided to come ashore in column. When we encountered a rock seawall, I had to send AAVs right and left until a beach exit was found,” said Dobson.

The company quickly formed a defensive perimeter around the landing site, from the water’s edge to the coast road. From the road, the inland area was all mountains. Dobson assumed that since he had landed in the Army zone that the company would be moving south.

“I pushed the recon platoon reinforced with some heavy machine guns south to the bridge located at the racetrack area and directed them to cover the company from that position, get to the far side of the bridge and then carefully scope out the racetrack area,” Dobson explained. “I also directed the 2d Platoon to move north along the coast road to cover the landing area from there.”

Sometime near midnight LtCol Smith’s helo landed near the water’s edge to receive a briefing from Dobson on his tactical disposition ashore. Smith updated Dobson on the events as they unfolded



earlier that day. “He informed me we landed between an enemy battalion- and regiment-sized forces and gave us the mission to attack at first light to the vicinity of the governor general’s house and to recover the governor general and his official party as well as SEAL Team 6, which had been protecting them.

“We attacked at first light and got to the racetrack area in short order,” said Dobson. After moving to the southeastern-most point, the company dismounted from the AAVs and, after the arrival of 2d Platoon, began a dismounted movement to the governor general’s house.

“I decided to take a little-used path from the main road to the governor general’s house as I was concerned with the enemy’s BTR-60 wheeled armored vehicles. Near the top of the hill we located the covered road and the anti-aircraft weapons used to shoot down the Cobra helicopters the previous day. We quickly linked up with the SEALs and the governor general—reversed course and took them back to the racetrack where the battalion had located its command post.”

Around 0830, Dobson was directed to return to the governor general’s house and await further instructions.

Cox described the event in detail in a letter to Evi dated 2 Nov. 1983: “Well, love, I’m back onboard ship from Grenada. Boy have I got stories to tell you. Our original mission was to take all the arms from the

public, and get rid of the Cubans there and any PRA (People’s Revolutionary Army). The PRA are Revolutionaries trained by the Cubans to take over the country of Grenada and to turn it into Communism.

“**T**his is what we did: On the evening of the 25th of Oct., we made an amphibious landing on Grenada. Before we left the ship everybody shook hands with everyone else and promised to buy them a beer when they got back. It was kind of a sentimental sight. Friends saying ‘goodbye’ to each other just in case they didn’t return. Then we got the word to load up on the AmTracs, we’re attacking the beach. I wished my squad luck and I told them God is on our side. They were very scared. So was I, but I knew I would be O.K. Just as I got in the [trac], I saw Schubert in the [trac] next to me. We both shook hands and said our goodbyes. I could tell he was very scared. We stayed on the beach that night.”

Cox continued the letter, describing how the company awoke at 0400 and then moved out to rescue “some hostages.” He described the torturous climb up a stairway leading to “the top of the mountain” where the hostages were being kept. Capt Dobson ordered 1st Squad to rescue the hostages. With mouths dry and canteens empty from the long climb up the stairs, Cox led his men to the designated building, broke into it and safely retrieved the hostages. Then, finding two trucks full of

Russian and Cuban weapons, Cox ordered one of his squad members to blow the cache of weapons up with a LAW rocket. The Marines were so dehydrated and busy searching for water that it took them a while to realize where they were.

Cox wrote: “I finally realized that this was the President’s Palace I was in. My god love, if you could see this house (mansion). There were paintings of the King and Queen of England, there was silver, there was crystal. I couldn’t believe it.”

“At about noon [Oct. 27] we were directed to attack and seize Fort Frederick, the dominating old fort located on the highest ground on the island. I decided to move in company column along a series of roads and adjust our attack based on actions of the enemy. I recall coming to a T-intersection where left [fork] took us to the fort and right took us downhill to the Richmond Hill prison,” explained Dobson.

“We could see a flurry of enemy moving about the rampart of the fort. I ordered all machine guns forward and was going to establish a base of fire while the company attacked in column of platoons. As we were deploying the machine guns, the enemy disappeared. I immediately ordered 2d Platoon to attack. The enemy had taken off their uniforms and disappeared off the back side of the fort.”

Cox detailed the event in his letter dated 27 Oct. 1983: “From there we were told



**A U.S. Marine Corps Sikorsky CH-53D Sea Stallion with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron (HMM) 261 (Rein) transports wounded during Operation Urgent Fury, the U.S. invasion of Grenada in October 1983. The 22d MAU squadron deployed aboard USS *Guam* (LPH-9).**



to attack and seize an old fort known as Fort Frederick. As we were marching over there we started receiving fire from the fort. We were told there might be civilians there and there were. The entire company charged. The Cubans that were there got so scared that they dropped their weapons and ran.”

The company found 500 weapons of various calibers, 16 Russian radios, tons of ammunition, top-secret documents, three 82 mm mortars, uniforms and other miscellaneous supplies that indicated that it was a PRA regimental headquarters.

“I recall Sergeant Cox and another corporal bringing me documents and papers they found and believed to be important,” Dobson said. “These included a leather-bound set of formal papers that turned out to be an agreement between USSR, Cuba, Nicaragua and Grenada for large-scale arms shipments to Grenada. We delivered the papers to Battalion S-2. I believe President [Ronald] Reagan referred to these documents several days later in his televised speech to the nation.”

Two days later Co G leathernecks headed for Victoria in their AAVs. Their mission was to “take, kill or capture any Cubans or PRA” they found. As they entered the town, Cox said that “the people were so happy to see us they went crazy.” But when he began asking where they might find the communist soldiers, they became reluctant to talk.

Cox wrote: “You see, love, before we came in[,] the people would be terrorized and beaten by the PRA’s. They were scared to talk. But then one woman came up to me and told me she knew where a top leader of the PRA lived. I told her to show me and she did. I took my squad with me. All the people in the town were following us and whispering behind us. I knew they were scared.”

After the lady pointed out the PRA leader’s house, Cox deployed his squad around it, then broke into the building. Upon seeing the PRA leader, Cox moved in behind him, placed the muzzle of his rifle on the back of his neck and ordered him to lie down on his face, which he did. Nearby his wife and daughter were weeping. The prisoner was tied as the squad searched the residence for weapons, then they began marching the prisoner back to headquarters as the townspeople began singing and shouting, “God bless America; we are free!” Then they began offering the Marines gifts of fresh fruits, coconuts and sodas.

Dobson said he then moved 2d Plt to the Richmond Hill prison. The company began local patrolling, talked with numerous civilians, many of whom warned of an impending attack.



SSGT CHRISTOPHER GREY

**Above: Leathernecks with BLT 2/8 display some of the weapons captured and stored on Carriacou during Operation Urgent Fury.**

**Below: Sgt Manuel A. Cox made his first deployment to Beirut aboard USS Guam (LPH-9) in 1982 to help ensure the safe evacuation of Palestine Liberation Organization forces.**



COURTESY OF FVI GOV. JORDAN

“We were ready, but it never came,” said Dobson.

Several days later, Golf Co was relieved by members of the St. Lucian Security Forces. At that time the Marines were directed to move to the town of Gouyave, on the northwest coast of the island. “We spent the night in Gouyave, and early the next morning loaded back into AAVs, returned to the LST and got ready to land the next morning on a small island north of Grenada named Carriacou,” said Dobson.

“Allegedly, a North Korean radio transmitter was located somewhere on the island. It was a small island; we scoured it thoroughly, but never found a radio

transmitter. We returned to the ship later that same day [Nov. 1] . . . and then steamed away with all colors flying.”

Sgt Cox had the satisfaction of fulfilling his destiny of engaging Castro’s army. He was instrumental in rescuing the governor general, capturing two senior PRA officers and discovering important Russian and PRA documents and destroying a huge cache of weapons. For that, he posthumously was awarded the Navy Achievement Medal.

Later, Cox and seven members of his squad died defending Check Point 76 on the east side of the Beirut International Airport on 4 Dec. 1983, during a 3½-hour battle, which is detailed in Charles Jones’ book, “Boys of ‘67.” For that, he was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with combat “V” for valor, and the former Instructor Headquarters Building at The Basic School in Quantico, Va., was named in his honor.

Cox had called his wife the morning of 4 Dec. to thank her for giving birth to his son, Anthony William Cox, two days before. He explained that he could have gone home, but that he was staying with his men who were under fire. Later, he told Capt Dobson that his wife and baby were fine. He presented the captain with a cigar and then said that he was returning to his men, explaining, “My men are here—my duty is here.”

*Editor’s note: Bob Jordan is a former Leatherneck associate editor. He was the DOD/Marine Corps spokesman in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1983; founding president of the Beirut Veterans of America; and currently teaches military public affairs at the Defense Information School at Fort Meade, Md.*

