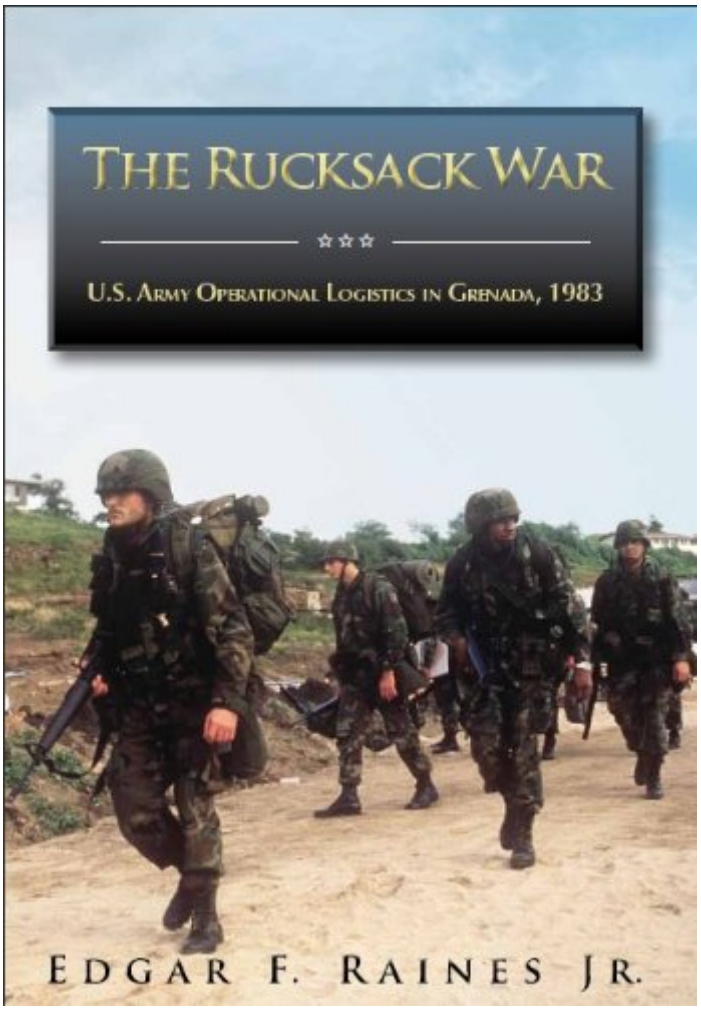
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THE RUCKSACK WAR: U.S. ARMY OPERATIONAL LOGISTICS IN GRENADA, 1983



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Synopsis

Edgar F. Raines Jr.’s The Rucksack War: U.S. Army Operational Logistics in Grenada, 1983, the second volume in the U.S. Army Center of Military History’s Contingency Operations Series, provides an account of how Army logistics affected ground operations during the Grenada intervention and, in turn, how combat influenced logistical performance. Noteworthy is the book’s emphasis on the role of individuals and of the decisions they made based on the necessarily incomplete and sometimes misleading information available at the time. The narrative ranges through all levels of war-from the meetings of the National Security Council, where the president grappled with the question of whether to intervene in the wake of a bloody coup, to the jungles of Grenada, where a sergeant in combat coped successfully with a Cuban ambush despite a lack of hand grenades. Raines is careful to place Army logistical planning and operations in a joint context as well as grounding them in the Army’s post-Vietnam reform of logistical organization and doctrine. In addition to furnishing a fascinating account of a complex operation, The Rucksack War identifies many issues that may well influence the conduct of U.S. forces in future short-notice contingency operations.

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Customer Reviews

Napoleon observed that an Army marches on its stomach which was his way of pointing out how important logistics are to any military campaign. This book is about what took place on the logistics front during Operation Urgent Fury which was the U.S. Army's invasion of the island of Grenada in 1983. While most books of wars and campaigns focus on the movements of the various units and their clashes, this book is remarkably absent of things like that. There are a few descriptions of the various operations, but they are intended to give you the background of the main storyline, rather than being the storyline. This book is very much an attempt made by the U.S. Army to examine what happened during this operation and learn from it for future events. As such it is a mixed bag of offerings, but overall an important read for those interested in Military affairs.The book is organized into 12 chapters that cover each of the basic elements of the operation from background material on Grenada and why the U.S. invaded it; to an explanation of the U.S. Military system and units that were involved; to events on the island and surrounding areas during the operation; to a recap and a section of recommendations and background on how this book came about to be written. The book was obviously written as a study and for professional study so the lay reader may have some trouble with the concepts and the jargon used - although it was obvious that attempts were made to minimize it.The overall message of the book was to show how some early mistakes in planning the operation created a difficult situation for the troops on the ground, but also how hard most of the troops involved worked to give all the necessary support to the fighting personnel. This is essentially the story of the 82nd Airborne division's logistics efforts. While the paratroopers were not the only ones involved in the operation, they provided the bulk of the troops and were there for the longest time, so their logistics story is what this book focuses on.The authors do not mince many words about the mistakes that were made: the overall command for the operation belonged to the Navy which did not understand Army operations; The Navy commanders had a conceptual plan for situations like Grenada, but because of their unfamiliarity with it, they chose not to use it; the Army somehow managed to eliminate a major command element that was supposed to provide support to the 82nd Division; The division commander was not aware of the logistical issues involved and made several decisions that only made the situation worse; the Air Force provided transport planes, but seemingly had no other involvement even thought the main base of operations, and the only resupply options, were through the air. All in all, a set of mistakes that would have completely destroyed an operation mounted against a more formidable foe than the Grenadians proved to be.However, do not get the wrong impression; the majority of the 600+ pages of this book is devoted to the efforts of the people who made it work - despite those mistakes. Because this book

focuses on Army units, there is quite a bit of tedium as each unit is identified from its divisional affiliation, through Brigade, Regiment, Battalion, Company, and sometimes even Platoon. This continuous repetition is difficult to follow at times. Also, the authors make conscious decisions to highlight the majority of events and actions that were positive in nature. You can always tell this when you read an anecdote - if the person is not identified by name, then he is about to become very difficult, or make the wrong decision! I suppose this was done to ensure that no one who was guilty of bad decisions have that reputation dog him for the rest of his career, but it was kind of obvious during my reading of the book and conveyed a sense of protecting the guilty.Would I recommend that you read this book? It depends. If you are interested in all the details of the Grenada operation; or are particularly interested in the logistical side of warfare; or are a staff officer looking to understand some of the issues surrounding division-level operations; then this book will fill a role for you. If you are looking for an exciting read; or one that tells the glory of the U.S. Army, then this is definitely not the book for you. Because it is a rather specialized volume, I gave it four stars - especially because I thought a better editing job could have been done in reducing the unnecessary repetitiveness of some of the descriptions as well as the sheer drudgery in getting explanations of each action for each day - even when they were no different than the previous day.

Coherent, easily linked, and with enough personal stories that this book was an easy read. Solid lessons to be learned and hopefully they will save lives and keep the US victorious in future efforts because our military planners will have read them and learned from them

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