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PROGRAM The Big Story STATION CNN-TV

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SUBJECT CIA/Nicaragua

DON MILLER: Central America is a quagmire for the United States. That's what Uncle Sam is learning at heavy cost. American troops are still stationed in Grenada one year after the invasion. In December, U.S. troops plan to join Honduran and Salvadoran units in a military maneuver. One exercise is expected to send American forces into El Salvador. And Nicaragua has protested to the United Nations that the United States is teaching rebels how to kill officials.

The Big Story this week, U.S. troubles to the South.

The CIA manual prepared for Nicaragua's rebels has since been withdrawn. But that hasn't stopped the U.N.

REPORTER: U.N. sources say about 4200 copies of the CIA manual and the Nicaraguan letter have been printed in English alone. The document is being translated by the U.N. into five other languages. Copies will eventually find their way into public libraries and other U.N. offices around the world.

REPORTER: American officials in Washington are noting the twist irony in the U.N.'s publication of the CIA manual. The United States funds about 25 percent of the U.N. budget, including publication costs.

MILLER: Last Tuesday, four officers of the high command of El Salvador's Army were aboard a helicopter when it exploded in flight. They were all killed.

REPORTER: The soldiers still patrol Morazon province. The war still goes on there. This despite the loss in a helicopter crash of El Salvador's best-known soldier, Colonel Domingo

Monterrosa, and several of his top assistants. But while those commemorating their deaths could philosophically accept it as almost an inevitability in a war that has gone on for five years now, the Salvadoran Army is faced with its biggest setback in years.

MILLER: Last weekend a small plane carrying four American employees of the CIA crashed in El Salvador.

REPORTER: He died suddenly. That was Curtis Wood's epitaph in a paid obituary in Tuesday's Atlanta Constitution newspaper. There are reports that Wood worked for the Central Intelligence Agency, that he was one of the four CIA employees killed in a fiery plane crash last weekend in El Salvador. The CIA isn't saying anything about Wood.

Richard Spicer's family and friends buried him Monday in Warren, Pennsylvania. The local paper said Spicer died in southern Florida. But the New York Times reports Spicer worked for the CIA. At the funeral, no one mentioned how Richard Spicer died. The CIA had no comment.

It was no secret Scott van Leeshout (?) worked for the CIA. Nonetheless, his mother was shocked when a man from the agency knocked on the door of the Van Leeshout home in Cudahy, Wisconsin. He said Scott had been killed in a car crash in Miami. But a local TV station had a different story. They said Scott van Leeshout had been killed when the CIA plane crashed into a volcano in El Salvador. The CIA would not comment.

There were four men on the plane. Perhaps three are accounted for. Perhaps the fourth never will be publicly. But he will be remembered.

In the lobby of the Central Intelligence Agency's Headquarters in Langley, Virginia there is a memorial to the agency's fallen warriors. "In honor of the members of the CIA," it reads, "who gave their life in the service of their country." There are stars carved in the marble beneath the inscription, one star for each CIA employee killed in the line of duty. There are 46 stars on the wall now. But no one knows if there were 42 last Friday or if there will soon be 50. The CIA has no comment.

MILLER: In Grenada, an anniversary.

REPORTER: The beels pealed out from the capital's cathedral high above St. George's marking the first anniversary of liberation day in Grenada.

The American forces here on Grenada marked this day with a special service of their own at their base across town, where

they remembered their fallen comrades. The ceremony was restrained. The highest-ranking American dignitaries in attendance were U.S. Ambassador Loren Loretz (?) and the chief of U.S. forces in the Caribbean, Commander R.R. Hedges.

COMMANDER R.R. HEDGES: It is indeed fitting and proper that we join here today to pay tribute to our 19 comrades in arms who made the ultimate sacrifice one year ago today.

REPORTER: According to Commander Hedges, the 300 or so American troops in Grenada can expect to remain here until the middle of next year, long enough to guarantee the elections in December and long enough to insure that 19 American soldiers didn't die in vain.

MILLER: Still to come, an inside look at how the invasion was planned.

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MILLER: This past week marked the first anniversary of the American invasion of Grenada, but the Pentagon still is reluctant to discuss details of that operation.

REPORTER: A year after the invasion, all is quiet in Grenada. Only about 250 military personnel are still on the island liberated a year ago by a U.S. military operation that the Pentagon pointed to with pride as an example of a successful military operation. But in the United States, the Grenada invasion is a very hot topic. The operation, in which 19 Americans died, has come under increasing criticism in recent days. Among the critics, retired Admiral Gene LaRocque.

ADMIRAL GENE LAROCQUE: The whole military affair was pretty well botched up. We needlessly killed civilians, had many of our own men killed needlessly. And the problems basically stem from the fact that we tried to do it in a big hurry and, secondly, in great secrecy.

REPORTER: One criticism is that it took more than 5000 men to subdue a force of roughly 700 Cubans and a Grenadian Army that hardly fought at all. Another was that all branches of the military wanted to get into the act, and that what should have been a simple task was complicated by participation of all the services.

ADMIRAL LAROCQUE: I think the big lesson in Grenada, in my view, is that if we're going to conduct a surprise operation of that kind somewhere, it ought to be put under the aegis of one service. The United States Marine Corps, in my view, with 200,000 people, could more easily have handled that operation

coherently, and they would have understood what the other groups were doing.

REPORTER: Other critics share that view, including William Lynn, President of the Military Reform Institute, who authored a report critical of the operation. Still critical, Lynn told CNN, "It seems the main lesson from Grenada is the military's refusal to learn lessons."

In his regular briefing, Pentagon spokesman Michael Burch addressed the question this way:

MICHAEL BURCH: Most of the documents that would be meaningful to you are classified. We have had an effort underway to see if portions or an unclassified version can be put out.

REPORTER: But the Pentagon and its critics agree that the operation did provide a valuable combat test for some of its special forces and gave the military a badly needed boost in morale.

Burch defended the operation.

BURCH: There seems to be an effort to draw away from the bottom line on Grenada, which is that it was a military success. The U.S. military is proud of that accomplishment. The fact that lives were lost and men were wounded is always regrettable, but it was a dangerous mission, one accomplished with daring, professionalism and efficiency.

REPORTER: There can be litle question that the operation in Grenada was a success, in the sense that it accomplished the objectives set out for it: the rescue of the medical students and freeing of the island's political leaders.

And there was a report that Special Force units attempting to land before the Rangers parachuted in to clear the airfield had botched their operation.

BURCH: The authors of these latest reports must have some other motivation. And a serious unfounded claim is that Americans died -- that more Americans died than what we reported. That's not true, and in fact it's a lie.

REPORTER: Burch admitted there were Special Forces operations on Grenada before the Rangers parachuted in. There wer no casualties, he said, but other details of the operation are still classified. He said published reports of cowardice under fire during the operation had been thoroughly investigated, and there was no substantiation to the charges..

REPORTER: At least 19 U.S. troops were killed, 116

wounded, many of them part of America's elite Special Operations troops. Sources within Special Operations have told CNN that differences in tactics and operating philosophies may have been the cause of the unexpected casualty rate. According to these sources, the overall commander of the Grenada operation, Admiral Wesley MacDonald, initially proposed an all-Navy-and-Marine operation. But General John Vessey, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, felt that MacDonald's proposed force would be inadequate for the task. Vessey ordered in Army Major General Richard Schultes' supersecret Special Operations forces.

According to the sources, during the weekend of the 22nd and 23rd of October, secret meetings were held to plan the invasion. MacDonald proposed a coordinated attack just prior to dawn on Tuesday, the 25th. According to sources, General Schultes clashed bitterly with Admiral MacDonald. Schultes argued that his men, Army Rangers and direct-action Special Forces Delta Teams, along with Navy Seals and Air Force teams, were small, highly trained units designed for swift, vicious night assaults. A daylight attack would deprive them of their stealth and much of their effectiveness. Schultes wanted to infiltrate by at least 2:00 A.M., giving his men the maximum cover of darkness. MacDonald, a Navy aviator whose expertise was that of a conventional commander, say the sources, overruled General Schultes and ordered a 5:00 A.M. attack, 58 minutes before dawn.

On Tuesday morning an aircraft navigation problem and a thunderstorm off their intended target, the Point Salines airfield on the island's southern tip, delayed the Ranger attack by 27 minutes. Worse, antiaircraft fire drove off two of the three C-130s in the first attack wave, leaving only about 40 Rangers on the ground to fight it out by themselves. Almost half an hour later, the rest of the Rangers jumped, assaulting in daylight and without surprise. The Rangers took the airfield, but lost five men in the process.

Special Operations sources say that if the Rangers had gone in at 2:00 A.M., the delay would have been covered by darkness, and casualties would have been lower. According to the sources, other failures are also linked to the 5:00 A.M. attack decision. A delay forced Delta commandos to attack mountaintop Richmond Hill prison in broad daylight. One pilot was killed, a chopper destroyed, and several commandos were wounded. The mission failed.

At about the same time, another unplanned daylight raid by Delta against the fortified Calavigny Barracks was driven off.

A Seal team, also delayed, attempted to rescue Governor General Scoon. One of two choppers was driven off, and only half

the team was landed. The Seals and Scoon were surrounded. With dying radios, they used the local phone to contact the Rangers. An AC-130 was able to lay down cannon fire until they were rescued.

A Seal raid on Radio Grenada put the station out of action, but the Seals had to hastily retreat, escaping to the sea. They swam for nine hours until they were picked up.

Both Admiral MacDonald and General Schultes have declined interviews. However, sources within Special Operations have told CNN that the kinds of failures that occurred in Grenada will occur again in the future until a real undestanding of how to employ these elite, highly skilled units penetrates the mind-set of the conventional military.

REPORTER: The threat of Castro's communism in bed with the island's political leaders was wiped out by the American military action. Beyond that, Grenada has changed little in the year since. Forty percent of the 120,000 inhabitants remain unemployed.

While the signs of America's military rescue remain graffiti on many a stone wall, the sense one gets from the young people is that they would just as soon all the foreigners left. The emotions on the island are as mixed as the beliefs of its political parties. The promised rebuilding of the economy has not happened. Fifty-seven million dollars in U.S. aid is slow in coming, much of the money earmarked to build roads and sewers and a water system. Tourism remains at a trickle. Some people remain optimistic. Others don't.

Any better now than it was a year ago?

MAN: I haven't seen it yet at all. I'll have to wait and see. I, personally, haven't seen anything yet. I suppose it will take some time before anything has been, you know, like development and so will take place.

REPORTER: The American military remains an ever-present sight, a reminder that Grenada is still an island without its own elected government. In the capital city, St. George's, troops and jeeps patrol the streets.

For an island of 130 square miles, Grenada is in the midst of an agonizing transition, wrestling with more problems than it can hope to handle on its own.

WOMAN: The fact is that at no moment were the American lives ever threatened. In fact, the then four-day-old military regime, whom I certainly do not agree with, but it must be stated

for the record, and the Administration knows this, that they telexed a communication to the U.S. Embassy in Barbados indicating that, almost over and above the lives of the Grenadian citizens, the lives of all foreigners would be protected. And there was absolutely no justification in terms of the political or physical threat.

NEWSMAN:: The Americans have already committed $57 million to the country, six million in a revitalization project now and another six million in a public works program to help ease the jobless situation there. Would you say that Grenada is better off now than it was before the American invasion, under those circumstances?

WOMAN: Not at all. Grenada -- there is a small section of the Grenadian population who may be in a position to take advantage of the U.S. invstment, the small business elite. And they're very small. We have a very small indigenous capitalistic class. By and large, the vast majority of the Grenadian people, their conditions have been worsened.

You mentioned unemployment. Unemployment has gone from 14 percent a year ago to anywhere between 33 to 60 percent. People are not better off.

MAN: I think Grenada is a great deal better off. I think it's better off not because we've solved all its problems for it, which is something we never set out to do and nothing we really can do for another people. I think it's better off because we've turned control of Grenada back to the Grenadians themselves, because we've given them the opportunity to build on the institutions, the democratic institutions which are very much a part of their tradition and which are going to allow them to hold their first free election in a long time on December 3rd.

MILLER: In Washington Thursday, it was a day of tribute, not only to those who rescued the American students, but, it seemed, to the students themselves.

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: Together, we celebrate today, with joy, an anniversary of honor for America.

REPORTER: For President Reagan's first anniversary celebration of the U.S. invasion of Grenada, the White House staged a ceremony with 90 of the several hundred American medical students who were evacuated from Grenada after the Marines landed.

PRESIDENT REAGAN: Many questioned our will to continue as a leader of the Western Alliance and to remain a force for good in the world. But I believe this period of self-doubt is

over. History will record that one of the turning points came on a small island in the Caribbean where America went to take care of her own.

REPORTER: Kathleen Major, a 30-year-old nurse-turned-medical-student, was among the evacuees from Grenada a year ago. She gave President Reagan a plaque expressing the students' gratitude for the invasion. At a Capitol Hill luncheon earlier, she talked about her gratitude to the 19 servicemen who died on Grenada.

KATHLEEN MAJOR: I said to a soldier, "You just risked your life for me."

And he said, "I'm a Ranger, ma'am." He said, "That's my job." He says, "There will never be another American hostage as long as we can do something about it."

REPORTER: There was a wreath-laying ceremony Wednesday for the one serviceman killed on Grenada and buried at Arlington National Cemetery, Army paratrooper Shawn Lucatina (?). Lucatina was fatally wounded on his 23rd birthday. His father, Robin Lucatina, is a retired military officer.

ROBIN LUCATINA: No one likes to lose a son. I'm glad he died in a just cause, helping people who wanted to be helped.

PRESIDENT REAGAN: Shawn Lucatina gave his life in the cause of freedom. This courage and love of country is also what we saw in Beirut at virtually the same time. And we will always honor those brave Americans. Let no one doubt that those brave men were heroes, every bit as much, in their peace-keeping mission as were our men in the rescue mission in Grenada.

REPORTER: There has been no White House ceremony this week, less than two weeks before the election, to remind voters of Beirut.

MAN: Grenada today is back on the democratic path. The press is free. There are no political prisoners.

REPORTER: An enormous new airport begun by Cuban construction workers and denounced by President Reagan as a military threat to the United States has now been completed with American aid. And Reagan Administration officials now admit the airport could be militarily useful to the U.S. They say it was only a threat when it was being used by Soviet clients.

Even opponents of the Grenada invasion concede it has had some foreign policy benefits. It gave Grenada a chance to reestablish democracy. It demonstrated U.S. readiness to respond

to Caribbean requests for help. And it traded a loss of prestige for Cuba and the Soviets for a gain in American credibility in Latin America. The gain in U.S. credibility has also put fear in the hearts of others Soviet clients in the region. Nicaragua's Marxist government has prepared its people for an American invasion and has, since Grenada, joined in negotiations with the Reagan Administration on Central American peace.

MILLER: On Thursday night, Decima (?) Williams was arrested in Washington as an illegal alien. This after the U.S.-supported government in Grenada revoked her diplomatic passport.

Still to come, the CIA's secret activity.

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MILLER: A big question for the United States is just how far should the CIA go in secretly and illegally helping our friends abroad.

REPORTER: Former CIA Director William Colby acknowledges there is a need to keep an eye on the agency, that congressional oversight is the way.

WILLIAM COLBY: The benefits that it gives, I think, is that if something happens abroad and it turns out not to have been all the wisest of actions -- and sometimes intelligence opeations are high-risk and sometimes they fail -- then the question is not whether CIA was some rogue elephant, which it never has been, but rather that we Americans made a mistake, through our constitutional system.

REPORTER: The CIA mining of the Nicaraguan harbors of Corinto, Porto Sandino and El Bluff, and the earlier raid on the oil storage tanks at Corinto showed oversight is far from perfect, not nearly as smooth a process as the handling of the recommendation for the covert action itself, from the National Security Council's senior inter-agency group to the President. His signature authorizes the operation.

Author and intelligence community analyst David Wise.

DAVID WISE: Oversight has not worked sufficiently to please, I think, anyone watching the process. And the mining of the harbors of Nicaragua was not an aberration, it was an example of why it hasn't worked. And I think it has to be tightened up.

REPORTER: Congressman Dave McCurdy of Oklahoma, a member of the House Intelligence Committee:

REP. DAVE MCCURDY: The operations are many times begun

by the presidential directive, and then we are later informed. The only true key that we have to any of this or any hammer, if you will, is the appropriations process.

REPORTER: On the scope of U.S. covert action in Central America:

REP. MCCURDY: A lot of people are now trying to put blame on us or make issue of the blame. But that's not the case. We've stated it clearly along the way, tried to stop it every way that we had to. And it still is continuing.

REPORTER: Describing its own role, the CIA claims it walks a new and fine line between an openness in government Americans have come to expect and the secrecy that intelligence, by its very nature, demands.

MAN: It's just a different animal. And because it's covert and secret to begin with, and you've got people who spend their lifetime and are highly skilled at deception, one of the groups they're going to deceive from time to time will be the Congress.

REPORTER: There are those who say the image of the Central Intelligence Agency now is as bad as it's been at any time since the investigations of the mid-'70s, that the glare of publicity not only erodes the agency's credibility, but also interferes with the CIA's major function: gathering and analyzing foreign intelligence.

MILLER: Producing democracy in Central America and on the Caribbean island of Grenada is no easy task. As we have seen, there are some signs of progress. Nicaragua will hold an election two days before our own. But the government's opposition has cried foul and won't participate. Grenadans will vote a month later; yet the people are running low on enthusiasm for their future. And in El Salvador, President Duarte met with rebel leaders to find some basis for peace, but they could agree only to meet again. In the past five years of civil war, that small country has buried 50,000 casualties.

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