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## Mystery of the Grenadian Choppers

**A** year ago today American troops landed on the Caribbean island of Grenada, yet the public still doesn't know the full story of the invasion.

Not only were reporters barred from Grenada for three days, but the Pentagon has yet to release after-action reports on the operation.

How did the Marines and Rangers perform in combat? Were they properly led, or were they hampered by poor intelligence and command confusion? Did their weapons work the way they were supposed to?

The American public may never know. All we have to go on, even after a year, is the Pentagon's assurance that the Grenada operation was carried off brilliantly in every respect.

One illustration of the military's secretiveness is the case of the mysterious helicopters used in the invasion. Eyewitness accounts—confirmed by photographs—told of several Hughes 500-MD scout helicopters used extensively on Grenada. Film footage shows one of the choppers crashing and exploding.

The mystery is this: the Hughes 500-MD helicopter is not part of the Army's inventory. In response to a congressional inquiry, Gen. John W. Vessey Jr., chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, did not list the Hughes craft as part of the Grenada invasion force, despite the eyewitness and photographic proof that some were indeed used.

Officially, the Pentagon hasn't bought any Hughes helicopters since 1969, and those were the older OH6 model. But my associates Donald

Goldberg and John Dillon found the Hughes choppers listed on the Army's internal master inventory. They include the OH6 and newer, improved versions as well.

There are at least three different, specially equipped models of the Hughes helicopter, loaded with classified electronic surveillance equipment, as well as three MH6 versions believed to be modified for night missions.

According to sources, the mysterious helicopters used in Grenada were based at Fort Bragg, N.C., home of the Army's Special Forces.

The Hughes choppers have roamed farther afield. They have shown up in Central America in the hands of CIA-backed contra guerrillas fighting the Sandinista government of Nicaragua. Eden Pastora, leader of one anti-Sandinista faction, had three of the helicopters.

More recently, two Alabama National Guard volunteers died in the crash of a Hughes helicopter during a raid over Nicaragua. It was the same type that was on Grenada.

Congressional sources suspect that the CIA supplied the Hughes helicopters to the contras. If so, this might have violated congressional restrictions on aid to the guerrillas. The fact that the aircraft isn't listed in the official inventory makes it difficult to tell whether there was a violation.

Did the CIA supply the Hughes choppers seen on Grenada? If so, why? Or does the Army have helicopters that aren't listed on the inventory?

My office put these questions to the Pentagon, but a spokesman declined to comment.