



THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

9 DEC 1983

Grenada

Ms. June L. Farmer
President
Women's City Club
of New York, Inc.
25 West 45th Street
New York, New York 10036

Dear Ms. Farmer:

Thank you for your November 14 letter expressing your views regarding press coverage of the Grenada rescue mission. I appreciate your comments and certainly agree with your thesis that "an informed public is essential to a strong democracy."

The need for secrecy dictated the procedures we followed in the Grenada rescue mission. It was planned on very short notice and in strictest secrecy to ensure the safety of the American citizens on the island and the military forces participating. Our plans called for the press representatives from Barbados to be placed on the ground in Grenada not later than the morning of the second day of the operation. Resistance, however, was more determined than expected, and the initial objective of locating and protecting all of the American students was not achieved on the first day. As a result, the military commander directing the operation determined that essential resources could not be devoted to assist the press on the second day. From the third day on, however, a number of press representatives were taken in to cover the activities on the island.


You commented that the American press has freely covered all wars in which the United States has been involved. This is not completely true. In both World Wars I and II censorship was imposed even though the media could cover most of the military operations. Every word written and every picture taken were reviewed and censored by military officials. The freedom allowed the press during the Vietnam conflict did not exist in earlier wars.

Regarding the Grenada mission, no censorship was exercised. The laws of our country do not permit censorship now, and the Defense Department does not advocate it. In the early stages of this operation, it was absolutely necessary to maintain secrecy, which could only be ensured by concealing its execution. To have told the press in advance of the operation on some kind of embargo basis could have risked the lives of the American students and our military personnel. This was a risk we were not willing to take.

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I hope this explanation puts the matter in a better perspective and helps you to understand that under the circumstances we did not disregard the First Amendment to the Constitution.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joseph W. Keenan". The signature is fluid and extends to the right with a long tail.