

Cuban ambassador's American wife faced Marines on Grenada

U.S. troops ringed Havana's envoys during standoff.

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HAVANA — It was a strange, awkward situation.

Here she was, the American wife of Cuba's ambassador to Grenada, hemmed in for 15 days at the Cuban Embassy in that country, surrounded by heavily armed U.S. Marines.

Gail Reed, the 35-year-old Chicago-born wife of Cuban Ambassador Julian Torres Rizo, said U.S. troops were nervous and "literally had their fingers on the triggers" of their weapons.

"I felt terrible," she said Thursday in her first conversation with reporters since her arrival from Grenada two days earlier. "Those guns were pointed at my son."

Reed, a slim, blue-eyed woman of low-keyed elegance and strong convictions, was one of the more than 700 Cuban construction workers, military men and diplomatic per-

sonnel who arrived from Grenada in recent days to a hero's welcome by President Fidel Castro and top government officials.

All of the returning Cubans were greeted here as "heroes of the revolution" for putting up a strong — if brief — resistance to the U.S.-led troops that invaded Grenada Oct. 25.

Most of them were taken prisoner and held in what Cuba has described as a "Yankee concentration camp" in Grenada. A few others, including the ambassador and his family, remained inside the embassy throughout the crisis, encircled by U.S. troops.

Reed feels she was on the right side of the fence.

"I feel I have a very strong identification with the Cuban revolution," she said.

But she added that this does not preclude her from regarding herself as a good American. "I would never consider myself a traitor to the United States," she said.

She indicated that only people who see the United States "in terms



United Press International

Cuban official greets Gail Reed at Barbados airport.

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Wife of Cuban diplomat still proud of being American

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of Ronald Reagan" would refer to her in that way. "But I don't believe in the United States Ronald Reagan believes in," she said. "I believe in the United States that has some justice for its own citizens, including poor people, including blacks."

Reed said the road that took her from a middle-class upbringing in Chicago to the embattled Cuban Embassy in Grenada started in 1970, when she first visited Cuba as a member of one of the "Venceremos" Brigades of American sympathizers of Castro's revolution who visited the island to do volunteer work — mostly cane-cutting.

"When I first came to Cuba in the '70s, I was very impressed by their efforts in building a new kind of society," she said.

Reed then enrolled at the University of Illinois, where she was a member of the leftist Students for a Democratic Society. "Like many other people, I was active in the movement against the Vietnam war," she said.

It was on one of her first trips to Cuba that she met her future husband. He was a Ministry of Foreign Relations official involved in working with the Venceremos Brigades.

They got closer in the mid-1970s, when Torres Rizo, now 39, was sent to Cuba's mission to the United Nations as a first secretary. Reed was studying at Columbia University's graduate school of journalism in New York, where she graduated with a master's degree in journalism in 1976, she said.

She then held several journalism-related jobs including one with the National Council of Churches, she said.

In 1978, when Torres Rizo's assignment at the United Nations expired, the couple returned to Cuba. They got married. Soon, Torres Rizo was named ambassador to Grenada.

"I spent four years in Grenada," Reed said. "I was working at the embassy's press office and helping organize cultural activities."

The embassy put out an eight-page mimeographed newsletter every two months, and also organized "cultural exchanges" involving Cuban performing artists.

It all ended abruptly on Oct. 25.

"At 4 a.m., I was awakened by the sound of dozens of aircraft," Reed said as she started telling the story of the invasion, echoing to the last detail the Cuban government's version of the events. "After spending some time looking for a place to land, they landed at about 5:30 a.m. That's how we first knew of the invasion."

Reed said the embassy made it quite clear to the Americans that it would not hinder the evacuation of American students at the school near the airport Cuban workers were building at Point Salines.

"There was no firing from us," she said. "Our instructions were not to shoot unless they attacked our dormitories."

In statements first issued by Castro and then repeated by Cuban prisoners arriving from Grenada, the government has sought to convey the impression that the United States could have safely evacuated its medical students from Grenada without the need of assuming control of the country.

Around the Americas

Reed said the Cuban Embassy was soon surrounded by U.S. troops. She said she, her husband and several other members of the embassy staff had moved to the building five days earlier after the death of Grenada's Prime Minister Maurice Bishop in a military coup.

Reed rejected speculation by some U.S. officials that Cuba could have been behind the coup that toppled Bishop, a friend of Castro who was believed to be moving closer to the United States.

"We were flabbergasted by Bishop's death," she said. "We didn't know what to expect."

She said she was terrified by the siege of the embassy.

"Put yourself in my situation," she said. "Having your house surrounded by soldiers standing only 10 feet apart and holding AR15 rifles pointing directly at us."

During the first few days, she said, U.S. Marines appeared to be very nervous.

"We tried to avoid contact with them, to avoid any incident. We kept the children inside and only went out when people came to us."

A few days later, U.S. troops were more relaxed. "Several of them approached me, I believe against the orders of their superiors," she said.

They engaged in small talk, she said. "They said things like 'My son

is three years old,' and that the only thing they wanted to do was to go home."

Reed said she will now live with her husband and their three-year-

old son at the couple's three-bedroom apartment in Alamar, a suburban Havana apartment complex that houses some 50,000 people.

"I plan to go back to work with a Cuban publication," she said, without elaborating. Reed, who speaks flawless Spanish, used to work for the weekly English-language version of Granma, the official organ

of Cuba's Communist Party, fellow journalists here said.

As she left the meeting ushered by government officials, Reed said she was proud of having been "adopted" by Castro's Communist revolution.

And is she still proud of being an American?

"Yes, of course."