25 years later

On anniversary, veterans remember Kuwait liberation

After years of escalating tensions in the Persian Gulf region, Iraq launched an invasion against its oil-rich and smaller neighbor, Kuwait, on Aug. 2, 1990. Within 12 hours, the bulk of the fighting was over. The Kuwaiti royal family had fled, and most of the country’s military forces had been overrun by the Iraqi army.

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein declared Kuwait was annexed and part of Iraq. The United Nations promptly condemned the invasion and demanded the Iraqi forces withdraw, and George H.W. Bush deployed forces to Saudi Arabia and began to form a coalition.

Operation Desert Storm began on Jan. 17, 1991, as Iraq refused to withdraw its forces. More than 500,000 allied military personnel deployed to the region, launching an intense aerial campaign and series of ground attacks.

On Feb. 27, 1991, Hussein ordered his forces to retreat and President Bush declared Kuwait’s liberation.

Now, 25 years after the liberation of Kuwait, several of DAV’s Gulf War-era members have reflected on their experiences from this pivotal point in history, discussing differences in the conflict itself and reintegration into civilian life as compared to veterans returning from the current wars.

Heath Prater, of Chapter 98, Anniston, Ala., said he was “either too tired or too busy to remember a lot.”

“There isn’t a lot of change or difference [between Desert Storm and what] service members face today,” added Prater, who went on to deploy to Iraq both in 2004 and 2010. “It’s all about shoot, move and communicate.”
Richard Kennon, of Chapter 7, Jacksonville, Ark., was responsible for training Marines to defend against nuclear, biological and chemical attacks during the war.

"Many military personnel have experienced multiple deployments, which has led to an increase in mental health issues and difficulties with transitioning to the civilian world," he said.

Jan A. Hagashi, of Chapter 1, Tuscaloosa, Ala., said a difference he noticed was the way service members were received by the public when they arrived home and the support resources available to veterans.

"As a Vietnam- and Desert Storm-era Air Force vet, I definitely saw the contrast in the homecoming of military members from both [conflicts]," he said. "I can say DAV and other veteran nongovernmental advocacy groups have supported the quality-of-life issues of all our veterans along with community service throughout the years."


"Desert Storm ended and soon left the public consciousness and discourse," he said. "The two protracted post-9/11 wars have kept veterans affairs on the front burner. The valiant work the DAV does is ongoing."

More than 4,000 DAV members, their families and veteran supporters took part in a discussion on DAV’s Facebook page concerning the 25th anniversary of Operation Desert Storm.