

Persian Gulf War Vets Not Forgotten

On this 20th anniversary, let's remember the nearly 700,000 vets of 1991's Operation Desert Storm

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Often in history, one war tends to overshadow another. To a certain extent, this has been the case with the Persian Gulf War. Sandwiched between Vietnam and the Iraq/Afghanistan wars, vets of 1991 are sometimes forgotten.

On the war's 20th anniversary it is only appropriate that we commemorate the service and sacrifices of the Americans who evicted Saddam Hussein's Iraq from Kuwait. No one questions the superb welcome home they received in the summer of 1991. But memories of that swift victory in Kuwait have faded over time.

Yet at VFW, this has never been the situation. Besides the 17 articles VFW magazine published in 1991, seven major features since have tracked developments regarding Gulf War illnesses. Two pieces provided a combat overview of the war and a review of its veterans. And a 10th anniversary special was published in 2001. Numerous items of relevant interest have appeared on the pages of Washington Wire.

After the homecoming events sponsored by VFW in Kansas City in 1991, VFW's National Veterans Service continued to pursue answers to the questions surrounding what became known as "Gulf War Syndrome." Without question, these mysterious medical maladies constitute the war's enduring legacy for a significant number of veterans.

While pressing health concerns always take priority along with essential VA benefits, intangibles such as recognition are important, too. Medals, parades and memorials are all

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part of the package, but so is a proper place in history. Rightfully so, like all of their predecessors, Persian Gulf War vets want to be remembered for achieving something meaningful.

Whether in the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force or Coast Guard, each and every veteran of Desert Storm played a part in a history-making event. Some 695,000 Americans served in the Kuwait Theater of Operations during the buildup and war. A total of 146 died by hostile action and another 228 from accidental causes, with 467 wounded.

Despite its mercifully short duration, the war was a model military operation. Political decisions bearing on the ultimate outcome are no reflection on the troops. They accomplished their objectives without fail and on schedule. That is what should be remembered 20 years later and into the future.

This month's commemorative issue of *VFW* magazine provides a glimpse of what took place in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, their offshore waters and airspace. A few units, actions and individuals have been selected to represent the whole. A book or books only can present the full picture. Nonetheless, this issue will provide a feel for the service of yet another generation of war vets.

Persian Gulf War veterans have long since joined VFW ranks. They are Post and Department commanders, as well as full-time VFW employees (see page 26 of *VFW* magazine). They are destined to leave their mark on the organization.