

THE CANADIAN FORCES AND THE PERSIAN GULF WAR

DND Photo APD03-0659-50. June 3, 2003/Arabian Gulf Region. Photo by Corporal Henry Wall

Canada has participated in overseas peace efforts with international organizations like the United Nations (UN). However, not all of Canada's international military efforts over the last 50 years have been peacekeeping missions. At times, Canada has also responded by participating in military actions against aggressive nations who would deny basic human rights to others.

The Persian Gulf War of the early 1990s was a struggle that is well-known to many Canadians. More than 4,000 Canadian Forces personnel served in the tense Persian Gulf region in 1990-91, as part of the international coalition of countries that came together to force the invading forces of Iraq out of neighbouring Kuwait. In the aftermath of the conflict, Canadians continued to serve in peacekeeping and embargo-enforcement efforts in the region.

THE PERSIAN GULF

Iraq and Kuwait are Arab countries located next to each other in the heart of the oil-rich Middle East, a region of the world steeped in history. In fact, many archeologists would say that civilization itself was born in the 'Fertile Crescent,' the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in modern-day Iraq.

In the 20th century, both Iraq and Kuwait achieved independence. However, the relationship between these two countries has not been smooth. Iraq had long felt that Kuwait was really a part of Iraq and that Kuwaiti oil rigs were illegally tapping into Iraqi oil fields. In the late 1980s, tensions grew and relations

between Iraq and Kuwait became much worse. On August 2, 1990, the situation came to a head when Iraq invaded Kuwait, quickly taking control of its smaller neighbour.

THE WORLD RESPONDS

The UN, along with many individual countries, condemned this bold and aggressive act. Canada joined a 35-country, American-led international coalition to liberate Kuwait. The coalition was operating under the mandate of a UN resolution that approved the use of force. In late 1990 and early 1991, the Canadian Forces and the military of other coalition countries moved into the region and prepared for the showdown.

The coalition forces began a devastating air campaign after a UN-set deadline for Iraqi withdrawal was ignored. This was followed by an armour and infantry offensive that rapidly pushed the Iraqis out of Kuwait and well back into their own country. This fulfilled the coalition's mandate to liberate Kuwait. The coalition suspended the fighting and offered a cease-fire which Iraq accepted on March 3, 1991. The official end of the war left Iraq's leader, Saddam Hussein, and his military, defeated – but Hussein retained power in Iraq. He would remain in control for more than 12 years until the second Gulf War of 2003 finally swept him from power.

After the Gulf War ended, Canadian troops remained in the region as part of the UN peacekeeping mission along the Iraq-Kuwait border, monitoring the demilitarized zone between the two countries,



investigating cease-fire violations and clearing land mines. Canada also had a role in the special commission to seek out Iraq's biological, chemical and nuclear weapons production facilities. On the water, Canadian warships participated in Multinational Interception Force operations and helped to enforce the economic sanctions imposed against Iraq after the Gulf War.

FACTS AND FIGURES

- The Canadian Naval Task Group, consisting of the destroyers HMCS *Terra Nova* and HMCS *Athabaskan*, and the supply ship HMCS *Protecteur*, intercepted suspicious shipping in the area.
- CF-18 jet squadrons with approximately 500 personnel, operating out of the 'Canada Dry' bases on the Persian Gulf nation of Qatar, performed combat air control, escort and reconnaissance missions. For the first time since the Korean War, Canadian air-to-surface attacks took place during the conflict.
- A Canadian field hospital with 530 personnel operated with the British division, caring for both British and Iraqi wounded.
- The Air Command Transport Group provided air transport of personnel and cargo.

HEROES AND BRAVERY

On a searing hot afternoon in Kuwait City, an overheated convoy truck caught fire suddenly, setting off a series of explosions that injured many American soldiers and caused widespread panic. Captain Fred Kaustinen, acting commander of 1 Combat Engineer Regiment, and 50 of his troops took immediate action, remaining on the scene to provide emergency treatment and medical evacuation for the wounded.

Maintaining the post-war embargo against Iraq could also be dangerous. In 2001, when HMCS *Winnipeg* stopped an oil tanker to check it for illegal activity, Petty Officer 2nd Class Richard Swann led a four-man boarding party that forced its way onto the boat. On board the tanker, he and his team were confronted by angry and uncooperative smugglers. However, PO2 Swann quickly took charge of the tense situation. The ship and its cargo of 7,000 tonnes of smuggled oil was successfully seized.

The Gulf War marked the first time that female enlisted soldiers operated in combat. It was especially challenging for these trail-blazing Canadian women because they were serving in orthodox Muslim countries in the Middle East where traditional gender roles are very different than in Canada.



SACRIFICE

Theatres of war, like the Persian Gulf in the early 1990s, are dangerous places. There are many risks for soldiers in a modern war zone that go beyond the obvious ones of enemy fire or landmines. Friendly fire incidents, vehicle accidents, mysterious illnesses and the psychological stress of serving in such stressful conditions can take a terrible and life-long toll.

Fortunately, no Canadian Forces members died in the course of the Gulf War. However, about 125 Canadian personnel have died in the course of international military and peace efforts since the end of the Korean War. These people take their honoured place with their fellow service members from the First World War, the Second World War and Korean War as people who paid the ultimate price for their country.

CANADA REMEMBERS PROGRAM

The Canada Remembers Program of Veterans Affairs Canada encourages all Canadians to learn about the sacrifices and achievements made by Canada's Veterans during times of war, military conflict and peace, and to become involved in remembrance activities that will help to preserve their legacy for future generations of Canadians.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Veterans Affairs Canada:
www.vac-acc.gc.ca
- Canadian Military History Gateway:
www.cmhg.gc.ca
- Gulf War Veterans Association of Canada:
www.jetnet.ab.ca/gulfwarva
- Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association:
www.cpva.ca/home
- Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping:
www.cavunp.org
- The Royal Canadian Legion:
www.legion.ca

