

# This Day in History... January 17, 1991

## Start of Operation Desert Storm

On January 17, 1991, the United States led coalition of 42 countries in Operation Desert Storm, the aerial bombardment of Iraq in the Gulf War. It was the largest air campaign since World War II.

The Persian Gulf War was the first major international encounter since the end of the Cold War. It tested the cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union. The war was fought between Iraq and a coalition of 42 countries, organized mainly by the United States and the United Nations. The war took place in Iraq and the tiny, oil-rich nation of Kuwait.

On August 2, 1990, Iraq's President Saddam Hussein invaded neighboring Kuwait because of disputes over oil production and debts Iraq owed its neighbor. Iraq quickly gained control of Kuwait and established a puppet government. Iraq's actions were internationally condemned.

The United Nations Security Council imposed sanctions and an embargo, but Hussein refused to withdraw from Kuwait. At Saudi Arabia's request, more than 700,000 American troops were deployed there in a mission named Operation Desert Shield. In the following months, the US was joined by a coalition of 42 countries, including NATO members and Arab states. It was the largest military alliance since World War II.

On January 17, 1991, the coalition launched Operation Desert Storm. Aerial and naval bombardments on Iraqi military and industrial targets lasted for 42 straight days and nights. The coalition launched more than 100,000 sorties, dropping over 88,500 tons of bombs on Iraq. Iraq sent missiles toward the coalition forces in Saudi Arabia, as well as over Israel, hoping to discourage the participation of other Arab states, but without success.

In the opening weeks of Operation Desert Storm, US forces launched regular air attacks on the Iraqi military. These air attacks were accompanied by 12 Marine artillery raids. American intelligence recognized that air bombings alone would not destroy most of the Iraqi defenses. So, they planned a series of artillery raids, the first of which occurred on January 21, 1991. These raids were part of a deception campaign and each was launched from a different location.

The Marines would move towed and self-propelled howitzers into isolated positions a mile from the border. Once in position, they fired 10 to 15 rounds per gun, then quickly packed up and moved out before the Iraqi forces could locate them and fire back. These raids succeeded in scattering enemy military units along the border, confusing and demoralizing them, and helping prevent the Iraqis from figuring out the time and locations of the ground assault. These Marines worked with air forces to locate targets, and when needed, the air forces offered close support fire.

The ground assault into Kuwait began on February 24, 1991. One of their greatest obstacles were a pair of mine fields across southern Kuwait filled with over seven million landmines. In less than a month, the Army's Countermine Systems Directorate had developed mine-clearing rake attached to an M-728 combat engineer vehicle. A new invention specifically for this conflict, the Rake could clear a large path through the minefield – wider than an Abrams tank. The coalition's mine clearing techniques are considered one of the greatest successes of the Gulf War.

Within 100 hours of the start of the ground assault, coalition forces liberated Kuwait and were at the Iraqi border. Many of Iraq's soldiers surrendered. Within days, Kuwait was freed, and Iraq's army was virtually destroyed by February 27. A ceasefire was declared the following day. The unlikely coalition was able to work together to defeat Saddam Hussein.



Booklet version of the stamp above.



Desert Storm was Bob Hope's final USO trip.



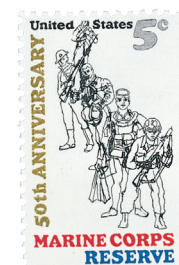
USS Missouri fired cruise missiles and 16-inch rounds on Iraq and Kuwait.



The Army's 101st Airborne Division Aviation Regiment fired the first shots of the war, destroying two Iraqi radar sites.



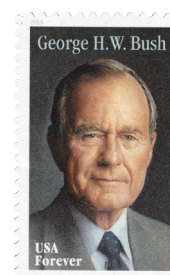
Issued just five months after the war ended.



Desert Storm was the largest deployment of Marines since the Vietnam War.



Gulf War stamp pictures a soldier with flames and smoke behind him and helicopters in the distance.



Bush earned one of the highest presidential approval ratings in history (89%) for his handling of the Gulf War.

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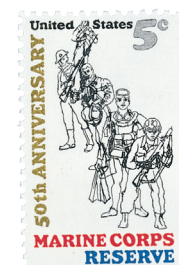
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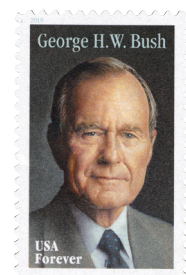
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