

Wright-Patterson's Support to Operation DESERT STORM

By: Aeronautical Systems Center History Office (2004)



Paths to the Present
FLASHBACK

From *Home Field Advantage: A Century of Partnership Between Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and Dayton, Ohio in the Pursuit of Aeronautical Excellence*

The Persian Gulf War began in August 1990 when Saddam Hussein, president of Iraq, ordered his army to invade Kuwait. Within days, a coalition of 32 nations led by the United States moved to protect the Middle East's oil reserves and liberate Kuwait. On 7 August, President George H.W. Bush ordered U.S. forces to the Persian Gulf and announced the beginning of Operation DESERT SHIELD, defense of the Middle East. When Saddam Hussein refused to withdraw from Kuwait, the United States-led coalition launched Operation DESERT STORM, liberation of Kuwait. A massive air campaign against Iraq began on 16 January 1991. Main coalition ground forces invaded Kuwait and southern Iraq on 24 February. Within four days, they encircled and defeated Iraqi forces, liberating Kuwait. President Bush declared a cease-fire on 28 February.

From August 1990 to April 1991, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base performed its wartime mission as an aerial port of embarkation for the first time. The 2750th Air Base Wing processed and deployed troops and cargo. Thirty-one Wright-Patterson units received deployment taskings. The air base wing, which mobilized all base personnel, deployed 606



Air base wing cargo specialists handle Desert Storm equipment on the Wright-Patterson AFB flightline.

Wright-Patterson personnel in 84 separate deployments. Its initial foray into this wartime mission came on September 22, when the 64th Ordnance Detachment from Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana, deployed 14 soldiers and 34.5 short tons of cargo through the base. More than 2,300 soldiers from 21 Army units, representing 33 separate taskings, eventually passed through Wright-Patterson. Air base wing personnel also handled 2,267 short tons of cargo for the Army, Air Force, and Marines. At the conclusion of Desert Storm, the wing redeployed 331 Air Force and 1,916 Army personnel and handled an additional 54 short tons of Air Force cargo. In all, 153 aircraft arrived and departed the base in support of contingency operations. Another wing activity included processing and shipping more than 10,500 tires by the wing's Aircraft Tire and Storage Distribution Point.

The U.S. Air Force Medical Center Wright-Patterson supplied the largest contingent of base individuals deployed during the war. It sent 207 medical staff members to the Persian Gulf and the European theater of operations, and another 17 to support medical operations at four stateside bases. The medical center received 265 replacements, primarily reservists called to active duty, to continue delivering medical

services at Wright-Patterson. The 111 Individual Ready Reservists (IRR) assigned to the Medical Center were part of the nation's first IRR mobilization since the 1961 Berlin Wall crisis (during which the United States and



Army vehicles in desert camouflage line up on the Wright-Patterson AFB flightline for loading.

Soviet Union were on the brink of war over reunification of Germany and Soviet construction of the wall between the two halves of the city). The Air Force also selected the medical center as a primary, casualty-flow location. This required the center to activate its war plans and prepare an initial, casualty-flow triage site. Fortunately, the conflict produced few U.S. casualties. The Gulf War's first casualty, a soldier wounded on 13 March during a Scud missile attack on American barracks in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, received care at the medical center. Finally, the center's blood-donor facility collected and processed more than 1,000 units of blood for the area of operations.

Other tenant organizations actively participated in the operations as well. All members of the Army's 71st Ordnance Detachment (EOD) at Wright-Patterson deployed. The 401st Combat Logistics Support Squadron, a reserve unit assigned to the 906th Tactical Fighter Group, sent volunteers to Saudi Arabia on August 20, 1990, where they formed a C-130 battledamage repair team. Although the 906th Tactical Fighter Group did not get the call, its F-16s were ready to deploy within 72 hours of notification. Upon initiation of the air war, the 4950th Test Wing volunteered its fleet of test transport planes and pilots to supply and restock air bases whose supplies had been sent to the Persian Gulf. From 17 January to 6 May 1991, the test wing flew 181 sorties, transported 1,400 tons of cargo, and logged 768 flying hours in this effort.

Air Force Logistics Command and Aeronautical Systems Division played major roles in the Gulf War. Headquarters AFLC directed the Air Force's logistics effort. It procured supplies and spare parts, distributed them to units, and supervised repair and modification work. ASD's Wright Laboratory and system program offices had developed many of the frontline aircraft flown in the war, among them the F-15, F-16, A-10, and F-117. They also had expanded the capabilities of those and other aircraft. Advanced technologies developed by Wright-Patterson's laboratories and program offices allowed Air Force pilots to operate day or night, in high-threat environments, and to precisely place munitions on target. Among the technologies that proved both successful and crucial during Operation Desert Storm were the Low Altitude Navigation and Targeting Infrared system for Night (LANTIRN), the APG-68 and APG-70 attack radar with advanced cockpit displays, digital flight control technologies, improved fuels and engines, and the stealth technology embodied in the F-117 fighter. Pilots later claimed the APG-70 attack radar in the F-15E and the APG-68 in the F-16 offered "phenomenal" range and resolution. In interviews, they proclaimed "if it had metal in it, we could find it," and "with the APG-70, you could tell from 30 miles away whether a MiG-sized target had weapons or fuel tanks on it." These radar systems were an outgrowth of the Forward Looking Advanced Multi-mode Radar program overseen by Wright Laboratory's Avionics Directorate in the 1970s.

Other ASD innovations added to the U.S. Air Force's stunning technological superiority, including advanced cockpit displays with digital processing technology. A-10 tank killers were able to take severe punishment and keep flying thanks to protective materials like titanium armor cockpits. Even the JP-8A fuel that powered the aircraft of Desert Storm was less explosive and more combat-safe.

While the advanced aircraft and avionics developed at Wright-Patterson received the most media attention, other less exotic technologies played vital supporting roles. For example, ASD procured a variety of concealment and decoy products, lightweight camouflage nets large enough to cover F-15s, and the Protective Integrated Hood/Masks for improved protection against chemical warfare. Advanced technology gave the United States and its allies a decisive advantage in Desert Storm, an edge honed over several decades by scientists and engineers working at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.



Desert Storm marked a beginning rather than an end to military operations in the 1990s. Contingency operations continued throughout the decade as the United States responded to a continuing Iraqi threat, as well as new dangers in the Balkans and other areas of the world. Wright-Patterson organizations

sustained these operations with personnel, supplies, equipment, weapons, technology, and airlift flights. They supported ongoing operations enforcing the United Nations' ban on Iraqi military flights north of the 36th parallel and below the 32nd parallel. In December 1998, Wright-Patterson units aided Operation Desert Fox air strikes against military and strategic targets in Iraq intended to counter that nation's continued buildup of weapons of mass destruction.

A B-52H delivering 750-pound M-117 bombs during Operation DESERT STORM. B-52s delivered 40 percent of all munitions dropped by coalition forces. (U.S. Air Force photo by MSgt Ralph Hallmon)

Aeronautical Systems Center History Office, *Home Field Advantage: A Century of Partnership Between Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and Dayton, Ohio, in the Pursuit of Aeronautical Excellence*, Wright-Patterson AFB: Air Force Materiel Command, 2004, pp. 177-181.

For more information on Air Force Materiel Command, and its antecedents, support during Operation DESERT SHIELD/STORM, see:

Dr. William Suit, HQ AFMC/HO, *Role of Air Force Logistics Command and Air Force Systems Command in the Gulf War*, Wright-Patterson AFB: HQ AFMC/HO, September 1993.

Dr. William Suit, "The Logistics of Air Power Projection," *Air Power History*, Vol. 38 No. 3 (Fall 1991), pp. 9-10.

Dr. Ronald Hartzler, "Engineering and Services in Operation DESERT SHIELD," *Air Power History*, Vol. 38 No. 3 (Fall 1991), pp. 20-27.

Dr. Charles Lloyd, "A Technological Success Story: Joint STARS and Operation DESERT STORM," *Air Power History*, Vol. 38 No. 3 (Fall 1991), pp. 27-35.



AFMC History & Museums Program

HQ AFMC/HO

4225 Logistics Ave., RM S133 • Wright-Patterson AFB 45433-5006 • DSN: 713-1797 • Comm: (937) 713-1797

For general inquiries, archives, and/or research questions, contact: R. Ray Ortensie

For heritage and exhibit questions, contact: Jack Waid

HQAFMC.HO@us.af.mil