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John A. Scocos Column: Operation Desert Storm +25

It was the first major conflict watched by millions on live television – a “prime time” war brought into the houses of Americans who watched everything unfold in real time. As the first large-scale operation since Vietnam, it was markedly different – both in public perception and strategically.

While Vietnam was a drawn out conflict, Operation Desert Storm was more focused and immediately decisive. A total of 694,550 Americans deployed for either Desert Storm or the immediately preceding Desert Shield.

The stage was set Iraq invaded Kuwait in August of 1990, ignoring the warnings of the United States and the international community. U.S. forces were soon deployed to the Middle East to maintain stability, and on January 17, 1991, Operation Desert Shield turned into Operation Desert Storm with aerial and naval bombardment of Iraqi positions and after five weeks, the United States led a large coalition to liberate Kuwait from control of Iraqi forces.

The “first Gulf War” was only four days of active ground combat, 100 hours, but veterans returned home to welcome arms, parades and immense public support. This was a needed shift from the days of Vietnam when troops were scorned for their service in an unpopular war. Ten years after the renewed patriotism of Operation Desert Storm, September 11, 2001 again galvanized the American people and they showed great support for the troops who fought in the Afghanistan and Iraq campaigns.

More than 10,000 Wisconsinites served in the Persian Gulf War. It is our mission at the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs to support them, and every other veteran, in every way possible. This January 17, on the 25th anniversary of Operation Desert Storm, please remember those veterans who served when their nation called 25 years ago.

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(John A. Scocos is the Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. He is an Iraq War veteran.)