

Howard Marklein: Special recognition for Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield veterans

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This is the time of year when we take a moment to recognize, remember and appreciate the veterans in our communities. Thank you to all of the men and women who have served our nation in our armed forces.

As the State Senator for the 17th Senate District, I have the privilege of serving all or parts of eight counties. Our part of the state has a strong heritage of service to our country. According to the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) and our County Veteran Service Officers, nearly 6% of Wisconsin's veterans live in the counties of the 17th Senate District. We have nearly 20,000 living residents who have served in the military in our own communities! Following is a breakdown of veterans who reside in each of our counties:

Veterans in the 17th Senate District

Counties Veterans

Grant	3,100
Green	2,101
Iowa	1,429
Juneau	2,187
Lafayette	850
Richland	1,124
Sauk	7,000
Vernon	1,708
Total	19,499

One of these veterans is my colleague, State Representative Tony Kurtz who lives in Wonewoc and represents the 50th Assembly District. This part of the 17th Senate District stretches from Richland County to Reedsburg and north through Juneau County. Rep. Kurtz spent two decades in the US Army.

Earlier this year, Rep. Kurtz asked me to work with him to co-sponsor a bill to designate and mark State Highway 80 as the Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield Memorial Highway. State Highway 80 traverses the entire 17th Senate District from Finley in northern Juneau County all of the way to Hazel Green in southern Grant County.

On August 7, 1990, President George H. W. Bush issued the order to coordinate Operation Desert Shield as a response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. As a result, U.S. troops and resources were sent to the Persian Gulf alongside a coalition of 35 nations to defend Saudi Arabia and liberate Kuwait. On November 29, 1990, the United Nations Security Council authorized the use of "all means necessary" and after negotiations broke down between the U.S. and Iraq, Congress authorized President H. W. Bush to use American troops in the conflict.

Wisconsin mobilized an estimated 10,400 personnel that came from Active Duty, Reserve and National Guard components. Units from Appleton, Green Bay, Beloit, and Wausau were staged at Fort McCoy and Volk Field, and then departed throughout the fall and winter of 1990 to 1991.

On January 17, 1991, U.S. forces moved into the combat phase, dubbed Operation Desert Storm. This consisted of a naval and aerial bombardment, followed by a ground assault on February 24, 1991. This decisive action led to a ceasefire 100 hours after the ground campaign had begun. With the invaders repelled, U.S. forces shifted again. This time, it was for humanitarian missions, such as sorting out refugees and assisting with the Kuwaitis' reoccupation.

Historically, Wisconsin has honored its veterans by designating a highway or bridge to be commemorated in their honor. Currently, the state has dedicated highways for veterans of WWI, WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and Purple Heart recipients. We even have a bridge honoring veterans of the American Revolution. It is time that we extend the same honor to our veterans of Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm.

Senate Bill (SB) 249 passed the State Senate in June and just passed the State Assembly on November 9, 2023. It is now headed to the Governor's desk for signature. This proposal received bi-partisan support in both houses of the Legislature.

Again, thank you to all of the men and women who served throughout peace time and conflict. We appreciate your sacrifices. You have protected and spread democracy and freedom all over the world and we owe you a debt of gratitude. Thank you.

-Marklein, R-Spring Green, is co-chair of the Joint Finance Committee and represents the 17th Senate District.

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