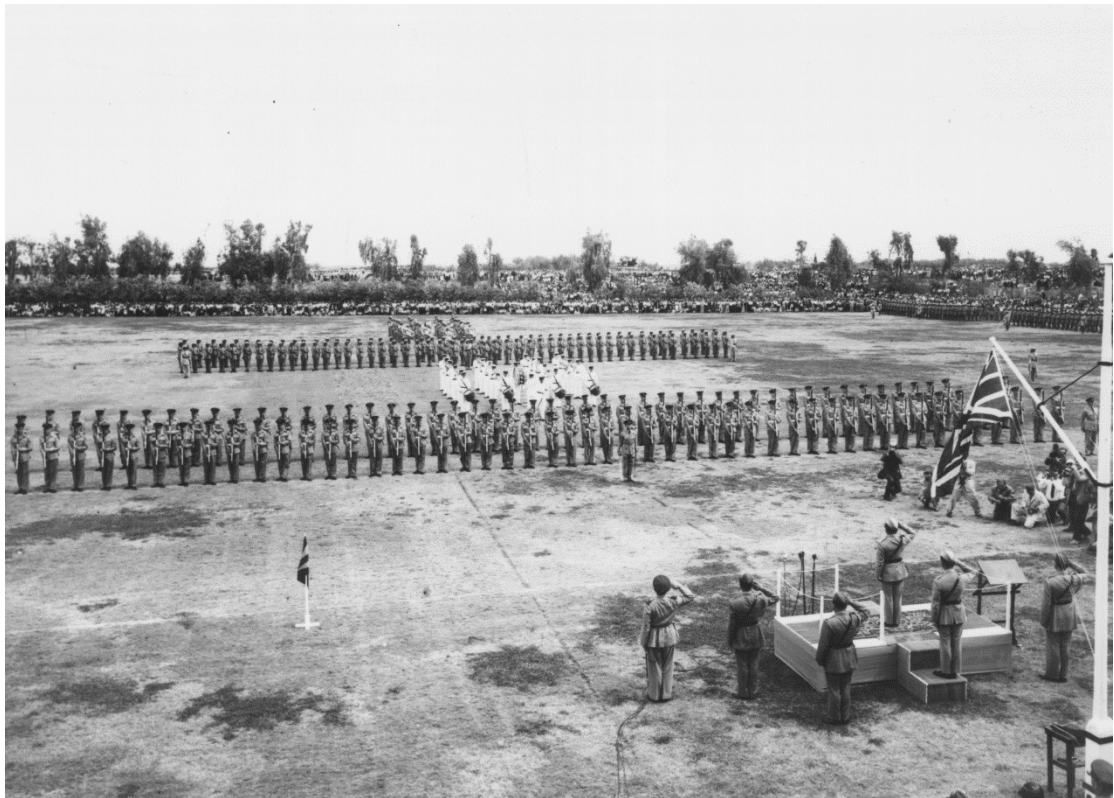




Before the RAF withdrew from Iraq it helped train the Iraqi Air Force which was re-equipped with modern aircraft including the Venom



The handover ceremony at RAF Habbaniya, July 1955



The De Havilland Venoms of 6 Squadron moved to Cyprus when RAF Habbaniya closed; Kuwait remained dependent on the RAF

### **Operation Vantage**

Vantage was originally the name for a Reinforced Theatre Plan which was prepared in November 1960. Changes in UK forces in the region required that the plan was constantly updated. A new edition, Bellringer, was in preparation when Qassim made his claim on Kuwait. The British felt unable to act immediately when the threat first became apparent. The forces which would be required, however, were put on alert and preparations made. On 29 June HMS Bulwark sailed from Karachi with 42 Commando Royal Marines on board and 8 and 208 Squadrons flew their Hunters to Bahrain on the following day. HQ 24 Brigade in Kenya was put on alert. Four Canberras of 88 Squadron and eight from 213 Squadron were moved to Sharjah from West Germany and two Shackletons of 37 Squadron moved to Bahrain. A Britannia was commandeered to supplement the Beverleys and Valettas available and two aircraft of East African Airways were leased, ready to assist with the move of 24 Brigade.

On 30 June the request for assistance from Kuwait was received and Operation Vantage began in earnest. On 1 July 42 Commando disembarked from HMS Bulwark, a squadron of Centurion tanks were put ashore from landing craft and 8 Squadron Hunters flew into Kuwait. It had been planned to fly in reinforcements from Cyprus but this plan had to be changed. 45 Commando Royal Marines were flown in from Aden by five Britannias. The Royal Rhodesian Air Force Canadair transports assisted with the airlift of 24 Brigade from Kenya. As soon as conditions allowed 2 Parachute Regiment was flown in from Cyprus. The long-range aircraft flew the troops first to Bahrain, from where the shorter-range aircraft flew them into Kuwait. The build-up of British forces was completed by 9 July, including the arrival of the aircraft carrier HMS Victorious.

The troops remained in place, awaiting an Iraqi response. The Iraqi claim to Kuwait was repeated during the parade on 14 July, Iraq National Day. Once it became apparent that the threat of invasion had passed, however, gradual withdrawals began. Between 20 and 22 July 42 Commando rejoined Bulwark, 45 Commando returned to Aden and 2 Parachute Regiment withdrew to Bahrain, leaving 24 Brigade and armoured units on the ground in Kuwait. Initially 8 Squadron remained in Kuwait but 208 Squadron withdrew to Bahrain. The Canberras at

Sharjah returned to Germany but Canberras in Cyprus were placed on standby. Slowly the remaining units withdrew to their normal locations and the Arab League introduced a small force to Kuwait. Steps were also taken to strengthen the Kuwaiti Army and create an Air Force of its own.



Hunters of 208 Squadron; 8 and 208 Squadron arrived in Kuwait on 30 June



Bristol Britannia transports flew the men of 45 Commando to Bahrain from where smaller transport aircraft took them to Kuwait



2 Para arrived in Bahrain from Cyprus; the airport lacked suitable steps so the troops had to slide down from the aircraft door



The Blackburn Beverley was used to fly troops and heavier equipment into Kuwait



Kuwaiti authorities provided cars, lorries and cranes to assist the RAF unload and move stores and equipment



While troops unload this Hastings transport it has to keep two engines running because of the lack of ground equipment to restart the engines



Four Kuwaiti Westland Whirlwind helicopters helped in the move of troops and equipment



RAF personnel at a field kitchen; British forces had to provide their own facilities



Communications between the British Headquarters in Bahrain and the forces in Kuwait was difficult



A Whirlwind helicopter from HMS Bulwark next to a RAF Landrover ambulance; the main cause of British casualties was the heat



The first aircraft received by the Kuwaiti Air Force were six Jet Provost training aircraft in 1961

### **British Withdrawal from the Arabian Gulf**

In February 1963 Qassim was killed during another coup. The new Iraqi Government reaffirmed its acceptance of Kuwaiti sovereignty and the boundary of 1932; the independence of Kuwait appeared secure. Despite this there were cross-border incidents in 1967 involving the Iraqi Army and Air Force. The Iraqi Government claimed it was due to a mistake but the RAF in Bahrain had been placed on immediate readiness.

In 1967 British forces withdrew from Aden and in February 1968 the British Government announced its intention to withdraw British forces from the Arabian Gulf by the end of 1971. The Defence Agreement between Kuwait and the United Kingdom was cancelled by mutual consent. Some of the equipment in the area was transferred to the gulf states, including Kuwait, and the remainder returned to Britain. On 14 December 1971 the RAF Ensign was lowered at RAF Sharjah in a simple ceremony and on 15 December a similar ceremony was held at RAF Muharraq in Bahrain. By January 1972 the only remaining RAF station in the Arabian Gulf was the staging post at RAF Masirah in Oman, but it too closed in 1977.

No sooner had British forces withdrawn from the Arabian Gulf but they had to return. In 1979 a revolution ousted the Shah of Iran and in the same year Saddam Hussein seized power in Iraq. In 1980 Iraqi forces invaded Iran, the start of a long war. In order to protect British interests warships were sent to the Gulf to form the Armilla Patrol, with assistance provided by RAF Nimrod aircraft from Oman. In 1988 the Iran-Iraq war ended but tension in the region continued to be high and British forces remained in the region.





The Kuwaiti Air Force received its first Hawker Hunter aircraft in 1964



The Strikemaster was used in the ground attack role



The handover of one of the first Lightning T.55 aircraft for the Kuwaiti Air Force in 1969



RAF Nimrod aircraft patrolled the Arabian Gulf during the Iran-Iraq War

### The Invasion of Kuwait 1990

When Iraq's war with Iran ended in 1988 the country was left with a massive debt. By July 1990 it sought compensation from Kuwait for what it claimed was illegal oil extraction from an oilfield under the Iraq/Kuwait border. Kuwait denied the claim so Iraq cancelled loans which it had received during the Iran-Iraq War. Iraq agreed to talks in Saudi Arabia to resolve the situation but was making secret preparations for the invasion of Kuwait.

Despite losses incurred during the Iran-Iraq War Iraq still had the largest army in the Arab world. A build-up along the Iraq-Kuwait border was noticed but it was assumed this was just a show of force. On 1 August the Iraqi delegation left the talks in Saudi Arabia and the Iraqi Army invaded Kuwait at 0200 hours on 2 August. The Kuwaiti forces were overwhelmed, though some succeeded in escaping to Saudi Arabia. The invasion was denounced in the United Nations Security Council and the first of a number of resolutions passed, calling for an end to the illegal occupation of Kuwait. Instead of withdrawing Iraqi forces began to approach the Saudi border. On 6 August the government of Saudi Arabia made a request for assistance in defending its territory and on 8 August the Iraqi Government declared that Kuwait had become the 19<sup>th</sup> Province of Iraq, the same day that Britain announced it would be sending forces to the Gulf to join the United States. Saddam Hussein assumed the Arab world would support him but instead found most joined with the western nations and wanted Iraqi forces to leave Kuwait.



Kuwait was invaded on 2 August 1990



A Lightning gate guardian; by 1990 most of the British aircraft in the Kuwaiti Air Force had been replaced by French and American types



On 2 August a British Airways Boeing 747 landed at Kuwait International Airport hours after the invasion had started; its crew and passengers were taken hostage by the Iraqi Army



The first RAF aircraft to arrive in Saudi Arabia were Tornado F.3 air defence fighters which had been on exercise in Cyprus



RAF Jaguar aircraft were first sent to Thumrait in Oman

#### **Operation Granby/Desert Shield**

The first RAF aircraft arrived in Saudi Arabia on 10 August to start Operation Granby, the RAF contribution to the multi-national coalition. Gradually over the next few months the size of the force grew, with Tornado and Jaguar ground attack aircraft in Bahrain and Tornado air defence and ground attack aircraft in Saudi Arabia. Hercules transport aircraft and battlefield support helicopters were also based in Saudi Arabia, ready to support the ground forces preparing to liberate Kuwait. On 29 November the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 678, authorising the use of all necessary means to liberate Kuwait if Iraq didn't withdraw its forces by 15 January 1991.



At the end of August 1990 replacement Tornado F.3 aircraft and crews arrived in Saudi Arabia, replacing the original detachment



Tornado GR.1 and replacement Jaguar aircraft were flown to Bahrain and Saudi Arabia



RAF helicopters were ferried to the Arabian Gulf in C-5 Galaxy transport aircraft of the US Air Force; others arrived by sea



Tornado GR.1 aircraft; most of the early part of Operation Granby was spent training

### **Operation Granby/Desert Storm**

At about 0130 hours local time on 17 January 1991 the first RAF Tornado aircraft took off to attack Iraqi airfields, marking the start of a long and sustained campaign to reduce the capability of the Iraqi forces. The JP233 airfield denial weapons they used meant that they had to attack at low level, making them vulnerable to anti-aircraft artillery. It soon became apparent, however, that the Iraqi Air Force was not the threat that had been feared; many Iraqi pilots flew their aircraft to Iran to avoid them being destroyed.

The ALARM anti-radar missile carried by the Tornado helped reduce the threat from surface-to-air missiles, allowing attacks to be flown from higher altitudes. The arrival of Buccaneer aircraft enabled the RAF to use laser-guided bombs against precision targets. Two prototype TIALD laser designator pods were also rushed into service which allowed the RAF to resume night attacks, something that wasn't possible with the Pave Spike designator on the Buccaneer. Another important role for the Tornado was that of reconnaissance, searching for the SCUD missiles which were being fired at Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The Jaguars in Bahrain were used to attack Iraqi forces in Kuwait, coastal defences and Iraqi patrol boats. They also undertook reconnaissance missions over Kuwait while the Nimrod aircraft in Oman undertook maritime patrols over the Arabian Gulf. All RAF operations were supported by tanker aircraft from Bahrain and Saudi Arabia which also refuelled US Navy, Canadian and Saudi Arabian aircraft.

On 22 February the Iraqis began destroying the Kuwaiti oil wells and they were given an ultimatum to withdraw. They failed to do so and at 0400 hours on 24 February coalition ground forces crossed the Saudi border into Iraq and Kuwait. While Saudi and Kuwaiti forces liberated Kuwait City the others forced the Iraqi army back into Iraq; 100 hours after the ground offensive had started a ceasefire was declared and Operation Granby was at an end.



A Tornado at Muharraq, ready for a night sortie, armed with 1000lb bombs



The arrival of the Buccaneer with the Pave Spike targeting pod enabled the RAF to use laser-guided bombs





Jaguar aircraft attacked Iraqi forces in Kuwait; these are armed with Canadian CVR-7 rockets



Corporal Paul Robins with an example of his handiwork; by the time Operation Granby was over most RAF combat aircraft had received some form of nose artwork



Chinook helicopters at a forward operating base; RAF helicopters supported the British Army on the battlefield



Three RAF Hercules aircraft were the first fixed-wing aircraft to land at Kuwait International Airport after its liberation

### Post Granby

The end of Operation Granby didn't see an end to military operations. The Kurds in the north of Iraq and the Marsh Arabs in the south took the opportunity to try and free themselves from Saddam Hussein's control. He sent the army to impose his authority, supported by what remained of the Iraqi Air Force. The coalition had to quickly establish safe havens and no-fly zones to protect the civilian population of the north and south of Iraq.

It was known that Saddam Hussein had ordered the use of chemical weapons during the Iran-Iraq War and had been developing biological weapons. It was feared that he would use them against his neighbours in a new war so the United Nations sent teams to Iraq to locate and destroy existing stocks and prevent the manufacture of any more. Despite their defeat the Iraqi Government repeatedly failed to obey United Nations Resolutions and constantly blocked the work of the weapons inspectors. Although the Iraqi armed forces had suffered at the hands of the coalition they remained a threat to the people of Kuwait. By 1994 the Iraqi Army was moving towards the Kuwait border once more and the RAF airlifted Royal Marines into Kuwait. The RAF joined in attempts to enforce UN Resolutions and sanctions against the Iraqi Government which meant they based aircraft in Kuwait for the first time.

The international community grew tired of the actions of the Iraqi Government, towards both their neighbours and own people. Calls for Hussein's removal from power grew stronger until an American-led force entered Iraq in 2003 and captured him. British participation in these operations was codenamed Operation Telic. It ended in 2009 and was replaced by Operation Kipion, the withdrawal of British forces from Iraq. Soon after the invasion was completed the RAF was able to withdraw from Kuwait to a new base in Qatar. Although the RAF has gone it remains committed to protect the freedom of the people of Kuwait.



Tornado F.3 aircraft helped patrol the Southern No Fly Zone



A Harrier taxis past a Tristar at Ali Al Salem Air Base in 1998, the first time RAF aircraft were permanently based in Kuwait



The Tornado GR.4 had replaced the Tornado GR.1 by the start of Operation Telic; this aircraft is carrying reconnaissance and targeting pods and a Paveway laser-guided bomb