

THE GULF WAR

Overhead 1

The NBTS and the SNBTS began to supply red cells via the Army Blood Supply Depot to the Gulf from 30th October 1990. This was done without publicity from existing stocks. Between this date and 17th January 1991 a total of approximately 10,000 units were sent. Based upon the expiry dates, providing this blood had not been used (we had no information concerning usage) there were approximately 1,800 units available on 16th January.

Overhead 2

Early in January 1991 it was agreed with ABSD that should war be declared, 20,000 units of red cells would be required during the first 5 days of the war. It was intended that a stock of 8,000 units should be maintained in the Gulf and a further 8,000 units should be available at 24 hours notice. The 20,000 additional units represented an increased blood collection of 40%.

It was stressed that we should consider that maximum casualties could occur from day 1 of the war and not only may supplies be required for the Gulf, but there may be requirements for casualties returned to the U.K. and for the normal usage in the U.K.

This situation was a new one for the Transfusion Services in the U.K. There was close co-operation between the NBTS and SNBTS and the following campaign for blood donors was put into effect from day 1 after declaration of war.

Overhead 3

Contacts with the media had been built-up carefully in the three month period prior to declaration of war. Press and television were told that plans had been made and premature disclosure of the need for additional blood donors may prejudice supply when it was required.

The first coverage was on national television and radio by 09.00 hours following the declaration of war some 10 hours earlier. The media were very helpful and the headlines reflected the desire to assist.

Overhead 4

Of course, we were successful in increasing the blood supply. The normal collection level in England and Wales is approximately 9,000 donations per day. On 18th January this rose to 30,000 and did not return to normal collection levels until the beginning of February 1991. Because of the resulting high stock levels some RTCs deliberately reduced blood collection at the end of the first week of February.

Overhead 5

Of course, we were unaware of the battle plans of General Schwarzkoff. There were virtually no casualties and we estimated that by the 24th January 1991, one week after the war started, stocks of red cells in the Gulf approached 20,000. Thereafter this stock remained relatively static with continuing deliveries due to out-dating.

Of course, every person working in the Transfusion Services were thankful that casualties were so low. However, had the course of the war been different we could have been confident that sufficient supplies of blood would have been available to meet any contingency.

Supplies to the Gulf ceased on 27th February 1991. By April 1991 there was still a stock of almost 55,000 units in England and Wales of blood compared with 30,000 in the previous year. Careful management of these increased supplies has enabled us to maintain supplies through the usually difficult period of April to June when the Easter and May Holidays tend to reduce blood collection. By September 1991 the dividend from the Gulf collection of blood had disappeared. However, the lessons learned in blood stock management still remain.

The Regional Transfusion Centres had serious difficulties in coping with the workload during the first week after the commencement of hostilities. In retrospect there was criticism of the intense media campaign which resulted in so many persons coming forward to donate blood. Once started, however, media campaigns tend to gather pace and relatively little control can be exerted. After four days we were trying to reduce blood collection by asking donors to hold themselves in reserve against further needs.

This experience shows, however, that motivation will encourage voluntary, unpaid donors to come forward to help others.