

# War impacts students' lives

## Teens have loved ones in Operation Desert Storm

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**E**verybody seems to be talking about the war in the Middle East, including Charles County students. For many of

me."

"I can't believe what is happening," said Lewis Golladay, who also has a brother stationed there. "It is sort of hard for me to watch prisoners of war on television and people being beaten up. It is just weird."

The students also said that the presence of their loved ones in the Middle East has raised their own



Photo by Clícia Antunes

From left, Megan Simpson, Jennifer Anderson, Eddie Mottley, Krista King, Kamesa Johnson, Howard Johnson and Christopher Cole, students at La Plata High School, attended an informal school forum to discuss the Persian Gulf war and loved ones they have in that region.

there," said Jennifer Anderson, "I only knew where the big countries were." Her family has since acquired a large world map and posted it on the wall.

Today, places like Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Israel have become an important part of the students' vocabularies. Social studies classes keep a dateline of events. Teachers discuss current events daily, and Cable News Network has probably become the staple of their television-watching routine.

"You really can't get any information out of the people over there because they are not allowed to say anything," said Anderson. "All that (relatives) are going to tell you is not to worry; everything is OK. They can't tell you any information."

Therefore, students do as much as they can on their own. They watch the news more attentively, have researched the area more thoroughly and periodically use maps and encyclopedias to identify this part of the world.

"The question that people basically want to know is, first of all, why Iraq invaded Kuwait," said Christopher Cole, whose brother-in-law is in the region. "Second of all, why hasn't Saddam Hussein given up?"

"What is it all about? What is the purpose of this war?" asked Lewis.

Maps have also aided students. "It becomes a tie between you and the people over there," said Badgero. As soon as Iraq invaded Kuwait last August and loved ones were deployed, families obtained maps to locate places where their relatives were being assigned.

The group said that charts help them visualize where attacks take place and how close to those areas their loved ones might be. "It is a comfort to know that nothing is going to happen to your special person," said Anderson.

Golladay added, "It is interesting to see where my brother would be at, but I would feel more secure if he wrote me a letter to say that he is all right."

"A map is not necessarily the key to understanding what is going on in the region," pointed out Cole. "Now as we get closer

and as we destroy things, maps become more important. To me the more we destroy, the more power you take away from Saddam Hussein. It is a benefit to us.

Then again," added Cole, "that is by air (attacks), we don't know how many people we are going to lose when the Army goes in."

Most of the students said that they never expected to be witnessing this sort of conflict. "I never really thought that I'd be in a situation like this," said Danny Coen, whose uncle is over there.

"To see a lot of people that I know there scares me," said Johnson. "After Vietnam, I don't think anybody expected a war," said Cole.

School officials are trying to deal with the students' concerns about the war. A team of educators at La Plata is available for those who find the need to talk, said John Sams, a vice principal. And students rely on one another for solace.

Although the war has been emotionally draining for the students, Sams said it has also been educational. "They," Sams said, "have gained a lot of education."

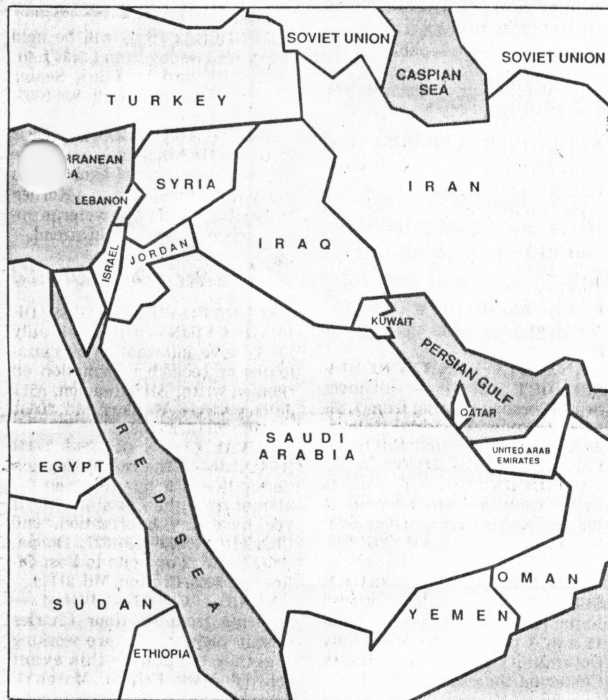
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Like their counterparts at La Plata High School, Susan Wilson's social studies students at Thomas Stone in Waldorf are experiencing an extraordinary moment in their lives.

The Middle East region is longer a foreign place for them because the class has been studying the area since last September, as part of their syllabus. However, as students sit in their classrooms discussing current events, they witness history in the making.

As a history teacher, Wilson said that it is fascinating being able to teach about a topic as it unfolds. The experience also

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Graphic by Sandy Ondrejcek

them the conflict has been a personal odyssey, a lesson in life.

About 30 La Plata High School students, ninth- through 12th-graders, recently gathered to discuss the war in an informal forum held at the school. All of them either have loved ones stationed in the Persian Gulf or who might soon be deployed there.

The war has become a rite of passage of sorts for them. In the next months, they have had to experience long-term separations and the possibility of losing friends or relatives. These events have made them grow up.

"I am really emotional," said Tammy Badgero, whose brother is over there. "It has been hard on

awarenesses about that region.

The majority said they were unfamiliar with the territory prior to the war and some agreed they were not previously interested in international affairs.

Latilya Lewis, who has a lot of friends there, said she knew the area was an old place and was familiar with the Iran/Iraq war. Lewis has also been doing additional research on her own.

At first Kamesa Johnson, who has relatives and friends in the Persian Gulf, said that she was confused about the issues. "Now I understand (them) better because I understand about the Middle East," she said.

"Before my dad went over

## Residents learn about Persian Gulf region

Many Charles countians have friends and relatives stationed or about to go "over there."

"Over there," or the Middle East, is a region which covers parts of northern Africa, southwestern Asia and southeastern Europe. The landscape extends about 3.7 million square miles and has about 262 million inhabitants, according to "The World Book Encyclopedia."

The area houses, among other countries, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Israel, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. The predominant language is Arabic.

Three chief religions originate there, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, according to the encyclopedia. The majority of the population is Muslim Arabs.

The terrain is mainly semi-arid (deserts), but the area is

also one of the world's major oil-producing regions.

People's knowledge of other parts of the world is generally quite limited, said Christopher Nagle, a part-time geography professor at Charles County Community College.

He said that people are usually surprised when they locate countries on a map because the places seem a lot smaller or larger than people expected.

Saudi Arabia, for example, envelops quite a large portion of the Middle East while Israel, a non-Arab state, occupies a rather small spot in the region.

Iraq borders a few countries including Iran, Turkey, S. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Nagle said that the Gulf conflict, along with the presence of locals' loved ones in the Gulf, has provided the public with the motivation to learn about another area of the world.



# Students

Cont'd from C-1

shows her that eyewitnesses can have different accounts.

At the end of a geography class, Wilson refers to a dateline printed on the blackboard which outlines the happenings in the Persian Gulf. She points out to students that 25 years from now their children might be asking them about this war.

But the approximately 17-student class, mostly seniors, has more than a passing interest in the developments in the Middle East. Students have friends, acquaintances and relatives stationed over there.

They also had strong reactions about the war and the involvement of their loved ones.

"You can't leave those people over there," said James Nobles. "When you are here, you've got to support them as much as you can."

Nobles added, "You wonder what they are going through; what they are dealing with."

"I felt scared after Israel got attacked," said one student. "I don't know what everybody else thinks, but from what I hear Israel has nuclear capabilities. It is kind of freaky. We don't know what they are going to do."

The group agreed that the scariest part will come when the ground attack starts and casualties begin to mount on both sides.

One of their classmates, Rob Diehl, enlisted in the Army a few days prior to the Kuwait invasion last year. If the war continues past graduation, he might be sent to the Middle East. Diehl said that if that happens, he feels ready to go.

Studying the region in classes has been helpful to him. "It is going to help me understand the cultural differences a little bit more," said Diehl in case he is deployed.

"It helps a lot to understand the position of certain countries and the difficulties that they are having," he added, referring to Jordan's unwillingness to join the conflict.

Wilson's lectures are multi-faceted. She discusses a variety of issues about the countries, including the

physical, social, cultural, political, historical and economics aspects.

The teacher draws from the students, basing discussions on their answers and comments. This approach offers them a broad view. "It is a good way to become an adult if you learn how to analyze as a teen-ager," said Wilson, who has been teaching since 1973.

Regarding the conflict, she explained, "I want them to look at all angles as to why we are involved and what is happening, so they can make reasonably intelligent estimates as to what could happen."

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County high schools are not the only county settings where residents are getting their information about the war. The Middle East conflict has also kept local bookstores and libraries busy.

Julian Harley, assistant manager at Waldenbooks in Waldorf, said customers have been buying a lot of maps lately. Military families particularly acquire them to locate where their loved ones are stationed.

One mother bought a map to show her children — who were afraid that the war was taking place in this country — the exact location of combat, said Susan Arnold, a spokesperson for Waldenbooks.

Charles County libraries have also been busy and the interest seems varied.

Linda Gateau, public services liaison for the Charles County Public Library, said that parents want something to show their children about the geography of the Middle East. Adults and teen-agers seek information on Saddam Hussein, president of Iraq. Middle schoolers want pictures of missiles, tanks and aircraft.

"People of all ages want to locate a friend or loved one on a map," said Gateau.

And as the war progresses, she said, patrons commented that they were thankful for the library. "They were checking out recreational books and videos to relax, needing an emotional respite from the war."



Photo by Kimberly Garn

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## Host fami

The ASSE (American Student Exchange) is seeking local families to host boys and girls from Scotland, France, Italy, Spain, Holland, Great Britain, Ireland, Japan, Canada and New Zealand.