This literature review, one of eight commissioned by the Special Assistant to the Deputy Secretary of Defense for Gulf War Illnesses, summarizes the existing scientific literature on the health effects of stress that may have affected military personnel who served in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. The eight RAND reviews are intended to complement efforts by the Defense Department and other federal agencies in their attempt to understand the full range of health implications of service in that conflict.

Many veterans have reported an array of physical and mental health complaints since the war. Whether veterans are experiencing either higher-than-expected rates of identifiable illnesses with known etiologies or other illnesses from unidentified origins is not yet clear.

The other seven RAND literature reviews deal with chemical and biological warfare agents, depleted uranium, pesticides, pyridostigmine bromide, immunizations, oil well fires, and infectious diseases. These represent plausible causes of some of the illnesses Gulf War veterans have reported.

The reviews are intended principally to summarize the scientific literature on the known health effects of given exposures to these risk factors. Where available evidence permits, the reviews also summarize what is known about the range of actual exposures in the Gulf and assess the plausibility of the risk factor at hand as a cause of illnesses. Statements related to the Gulf War experience should be regarded as suggestive rather than definitive, for more research on health effects and exposures remains to be completed before definitive statements can be made. Recommendations for additional research where appropriate are included.

These reviews are limited to literature published or accepted for publication in peer-reviewed journals, books, government publications, and conference proceedings. Unpublished information was occasionally used, but only to develop hypotheses.
A draft of this monograph was submitted for editorial review in October 1997. A few articles that appeared in the literature after that date were included in the monograph, principally to accommodate reviewer recommendations.

This work is sponsored by the Office of the Special Assistant and was carried out jointly by RAND Health’s Center for Military Health Policy Research and the Forces and Resources Policy Center of the National Defense Research Institute. The latter is a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the unified commands, and the defense agencies.