

# Repairing the damage

**Despite having its fleet scattered or destroyed during the Gulf War, Kuwait Airways has resumed successful operations.**

ALAN GEORGE/LONDON

**A**S KUWAIT AIRWAYS continues to expand its route network with new services to Chicago, Copenhagen and Malaga, using new Airbus Industrie and Boeing aircraft, it is hard to believe that five years ago the airline was on its knees.

When Iraq invaded Kuwait on 2 August, 1990, Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) was operating a fleet of 23 aircraft, flying to 42 destinations in 35 countries in Asia, Africa, Europe and North America. It was carrying more than 1.5 million passengers a year, plus more than 50,000t of freight.

The airline's operations were supported by a strong infrastructure which included comprehensive engineering, training, reservation and catering.

## OVERNIGHT CHANGE

With the Iraqi invasion, everything changed overnight. The Iraqi occupiers located and destroyed the airline's premises in the emirate and stole 15 of its airliners — three Airbus A300-600Cs, five A310-200s, two Boeing 767-200ERs, one 727 and plus four British Aerospace 125s, and four Gulfstream III executive jets.

The airline's four Boeing 747-200s were all outside the country at the time of the invasion, as were three 727s and one 767-200ER.

KAC established temporary managerial bases, first in London and then in Cairo, and operational bases in London, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. During the crisis, it had a single objective: survival as a company.

Following Kuwait's liberation on 26 February, 1991, KAC was relaunched as Kuwait Airways (KA). The key tasks were to replace the lost aircraft and to upgrade the existing fleet. In 1991, KA leased five Airbuses, and orders were placed for three Airbus A320-200s, three A310-



*New Airbuses are a vital part of the new Kuwait Airways — now it wants more Kuwaiti pilots*

300s and five A300-600Rs.

During the Gulf hostilities, Iraq flew Kuwait's five A310-200s and one of the seized A300-600s to Iran for safe keeping. The Iraqis flew the seized 727 to Oman for the same reason, and KA recovered it soon after liberation. Iran returned the six A310-200s in the autumn of 1992 and these were traded in to Airbus as part payment for new aircraft.

In all, Kuwait ultimately lost seven aircraft because of the Iraqi aggression. Two 767s, two A300-600s, one BAe 125 and two GIIIs were destroyed on the ground at Iraqi airfields during the hostilities.

Since the Gulf crisis, KA has taken delivery of 19 brand new aircraft: three A310-300s, five A300-600Rs, two A300-600RCs, three A320-200s and four A340s. The first of two 747-400s arrived in April 1995 and the second was scheduled for delivery in September.

In addition, two Boeing 707 cargo aircraft have been leased from Lebanon's Trans Mediterranean Airlines.

As the new aircraft have arrived, KA has disposed of its older aircraft. Two 747-200s (which have been replaced by the new A340s) were sold earlier this year to American International Airways, for conversion to American freighters. The two other 747-200s are expected to be put up for sale in 1996. The 727s are being replaced by the A320s, and KA's sole remaining 767 is now on lease to a Turkish company, Birgenair.

Further acquisitions are in prospect. A third 747-400 is scheduled for delivery in 1996, and KA has options on one A300-600R, two A321s and four A340s.

While moving to modernise its fleet, KA has also had to replace many key personnel who left

the airline during the crisis. In 1992, KA contracted the UK's CSE Aviation to train up to 30 students at its Oxford Air Training School.

A senior airline official, Capt Jassim al Anjari, was quoted as saying that the company was "very short of Kuwaiti pilots" and that it would take six months to restore its own in-house training programmes.

Already, KA's route system extends from Chicago and New York in the West to Manila and Jakarta in the East. Before long, KA hopes that it will be serving destinations in 45 countries — ten more than before the Iraqi tanks rolled in.

Although the airline has made a remarkable recovery, echoes of the dark days of the Iraqi occupation persist. KA has been doggedly seeking \$500 million compensation via the UK courts for the damage to its fleet and the lost operating revenues suffered at Iraq's hands.

## COURT RULING

The latest move came on 24 July, when the House of Lords rejected a submission from Iraqi Airways (IAC) that it was immune from civil proceedings in respect of its treatment of Kuwait's aircraft in 1990-1. The Court of Appeal had previously upheld IAC's contention that the company was immune from prosecution.

KA is also hoping for compensation via the United Nations. The Security Council has resolved that up to one-third of Iraq's future oil revenues should be earmarked to compensate the victims of the occupation, and a UN Compensation Commission has been established in Geneva to administer the reparations, but no large pay-outs will be possible until Iraq is permitted to resume oil exports. □