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By 2nd Lt. Marisa Lindsay

Alaska National Guard members conclude humanitarian relief mission to Puerto Rico

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska – It has been more than six weeks since 155 mph winds from Hurricane Maria savaged Puerto Rico, and almost one month since Soldiers and Airmen of the Alaska National Guard arrived to assist with much-needed humanitarian relief.

Guard members from the Alaska Air National Guard's 168th and 176th Wings and the Alaska Army National Guard's 38th Troop Command and 297th Regional Support Group arrived in Puerto Rico on October 6 for a 45-day rotation, joining more than four thousand Guard members from approximately 20 states who are helping to rebuild and resupply the territory.

Although the Alaskans are supporting elements in two separate locations more than 40 miles apart, their missions each provide support for logistical resupply on the island.

Half of the Alaska National Guard crew is a ten-person network communications team. The Air and Army Guard members have been working out of Roosevelt Roads Naval Station, located in the hard-hit coastal town of Ceiba in eastern Puerto Rico. The Naval Station was closed in 2004, however the air strip was selected to reopen after the hurricane to support 24-hour logistical operations and to provide relief for Puerto Rico's main hub, San Juan International Airport.

At Roosevelt Roads, they are managing the Joint Incident Site Communications Capability system, a transportable 20-foot mobile communications system used during domestic emergencies. There are currently 15 National Guard JISCCs operating on the island; each one is capable of establishing remote internet, telephone and radio capabilities at localities with damaged or absent communications infrastructure.

"We are primarily supporting the mobile air traffic control tower, run by the Louisiana Air National Guard's 259th Air Traffic Control Squadron, here at Roosevelt Roads Airport," said Sgt. 1st Class Michael Dennis, an information systems sergeant for Joint Forces Headquarters, Alaska Army National Guard. "Our JISCC is specifically providing their air control tower with voice over IP phones—which are phones that use an internet network to operate—providing them control of planes through their air space."

With its ability to support the military's largest aircraft, the C-5 Galaxy, Roosevelt Roads Airport has proven itself as a key player in the resupply of Puerto Rico. During October, the airport hosted more than 3,000 arrivals and departures. The presence of an operating JISCC system has been essential to the successes of resupplying the island.

Thirty-seven miles northeast of Roosevelt Roads is Luis-Muniz Puerto Rico Air National Guard Base Airport, where it sits seaside on the outskirts of Puerto Rico's capital, San Juan. The majority of the island's resupply is delivered through this hub, where 14 Air Guard members, assigned to Alaska's 176th Logistics Readiness Squadron, Aerial Port Flight, have been operating.

"We have been working directly with our Puerto Rico National Guard counterparts at their facilities, which has been wonderful," said Senior Master Sgt. Naomi Groom-Collison, operations superintendent for the 176th LRS. "Our mission in Puerto Rico has been to receive, organize, and disseminate relief

supplies, troops and equipment as they arrive, and to help redeploy troops and equipment back home as they complete their mission or are replaced.”

The Airmen have been industrious, working 12-hour shifts with limited down-time while building partnerships between various service branches and states that have united in bringing Puerto Rico back to life.

“We have operated hand-in-hand with Air and Army Guard units from Wisconsin, Nevada, Puerto Rico and Kentucky, in addition to working with the active Army, Navy and Marines,” stated Groom-Collison. “This mission has been a true reflection of Air National Guard and active duty components coming together, particularly in delivering relief supplies to several communities in need throughout the island.”

The Alaskans housed in the San Juan area are scheduled to return at the end of the month, while the team working out of Roosevelt Roads returned during Veteran’s Day weekend.

The Alaska Army Guard also deployed 57 Soldiers to support logistical and debris clean-up on St. Croix, and four members of the Alaska State Defense Force deployed last weekend to provide communications support to Puerto Rico.

Additional Guard members are on duty in the AKNG’s Joint Operation Center at the Alaska National Guard Armory here. The JOC maintains continuous communications with the National Guard Bureau in order to anticipate further relief operations requirements.

In the last two months, Alaska National Guard Airmen and Soldiers have deployed to support Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands after Hurricanes Irma and Maria; Florida after Hurricane Irma; and to Texas during the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey.

The Alaska National Guard stands ready for subsequent requests, while continuing to protect our communities, state and nation and to support worldwide contingency operations.

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Airmen assigned to the 176th Aerial Port Flight, Alaska Air National Guard, prepare to load palletized commodities onto a C-130J aircraft during their humanitarian relief mission to Luis-Muniz Puerto Rico Air National Guard Base in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Oct. 25, 2017. A team of Air and Army Guard members deployed to Puerto Rico to support logistical resupply on the island after the devastating winds of Hurricane Maria crippled the island. (U.S. Air Force National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Naomi Groom-Collison/Released)



171031-A-AF730-2002

Tech. Sgt. Tony Crank, assigned to the Alaska Air National Guard, operates a laptop from the Joint Incident Site Communications Capability System during the humanitarian relief mission to Puerto Rico, Oct. 31, 2017. There are currently 15 National Guard JISCCs operating on the island; each one is capable of establishing remote internet, telephone and radio capabilities at localities with damaged or absent communications infrastructure. (U.S. Army photo by Maj. Randy Stillinger/Released)



171025-Z-ZZ999-2000

Airmen assigned to the 176th Aerial Port Flight, Alaska Air National Guard, loads palletized commodities onto a C-130J aircraft during their humanitarian relief mission to Luis-Muniz Puerto Rico Air National Guard Base in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Oct. 25, 2017. A team of Air and Army Guard members deployed to Puerto Rico to support logistical resupply on the island after the devastating winds of Hurricane Maria crippled the island. (U.S. Air Force National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Naomi Groom-Collison/Released)