



Providing Behavioral Health Support After Maria: Performance Review of Puerto Rico's State Medical Command

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<https://emilms.fema.gov/IS0235c/EPsummary.htm>

STATE DEFENSE FORCES

- Military units under sole operational control of respective State governments
- Can not be federalized
- Generally, have homeland security and emergency management missions...varies among States
- A no-cost to minimal-cost professional, technical, emergency management, and military resource to provide planning, training, education, and consultation; surge staffing; emergency management/operations support, military support and liaison; and service delivery to the National Guard and Civil Authorities

STATE DEFENSE FORCES

32 U.S. Code § 109 - Maintenance of other troops

- (a) **In time of peace, a State, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, Guam, or the Virgin Islands may maintain no troops other than those of its National Guard and defense forces authorized by subsection (c).**
- (b) Nothing in this title limits the right of a State, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, Guam, or the Virgin Islands to use its National Guard or its defense forces authorized by subsection (c) within its borders in time of peace, or prevents it from organizing and maintaining police or constabulary.
- (c) In addition to its National Guard, if any, a State, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, Guam, or the Virgin Islands may, as provided by its laws, organize and maintain defense forces. A defense force established under this section may be used within the jurisdiction concerned, as its chief executive (or commanding general in the case of the District of Columbia) considers necessary, but it may not be called, ordered, or drafted into the armed forces.
- (d) A member of a defense force established under subsection (c) is not, because of that membership, exempt from service in the armed forces, nor is he entitled to pay, allowances, subsistence, transportation, or medical care or treatment, from funds of the United States.
- (e) A person may not become a member of a defense force established under subsection (c) if he is a member of a reserve component of the armed forces.

STATE DEFENSE FORCES

- NATIONAL GUARD INTERACTION WITH STATE DEFENSE FORCES

4. Policy. It is NG policy that the NG may interact with SDFs to train and conduct exercises and maneuvers in support of domestic or civil support operations, as appropriate. The NG will consider the SDF as any other State entity with respect to preparation for and participation in domestic or civil support operations, and the related use of Federal equipment, with the exception of the specific restrictions in section 109 of reference a.

- a. The **NG will not spend Federal funds**, to include pay and allowances, subsistence, transportation, medical care and treatment, or use of Federal equipment for activities with the primary purpose of training or otherwise for the support of SDFs IAW section 109 of reference a.
- b. The **NG may not extend to SDFs authorization to use facilities provided for members** of the United States (U.S.) Armed Forces and their dependents (for example, military clothing stores, commissary facilities, and nonappropriated fund facilities).

STATE DEFENSE FORCES

NATIONAL GUARD INTERACTION WITH STATE DEFENSE FORCES

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- c. **No one may wear the uniform of the U.S. Armed Forces** except members of the U.S. Armed Forces, IAW section 771 of reference b. The prohibition includes any distinctive part of the uniform or anything similar to a distinctive part of the uniform. However, States wishing to adopt a modified version of the Army service and utility uniforms for SDF use must change all insignia IAW paragraph 23-8 of reference c and register with the Chief of the National Guard Bureau (CNGB) through the Adjutant General (TAG) of that State or Territory, or the Commanding General of the District of Columbia (CG).
- d. SDF members are not authorized to receive Federal awards or decorations except IAW references d and e.
- e. **A person may not become a member of an SDF if he or she is a member of a reserve component of the U.S. Armed Forces**, per section 109(e) of reference a.

STATE DEFENSE FORCES

Two Examples of Integration:

- Maryland – Baltimore Riots & Operation Vigilant Guard
- Texas - Operation Lone Star



Puerto Rico State Guard

- The Puerto Rico State Guard (PRSG) is a voluntary professional military corps who offer support for security and medical services in Puerto Rico. The PRSG respond directly to the Adjutant General of Puerto Rico, is commanded by a Brigadier general and is composed of main units in San Juan Metropolitan Area and in the cities of Ponce (South), Mayagüez (West), and Caguas (Center).
- The Puerto Rico State Guard is among the most active and largest SDF's in the nation with almost **2,600 troops** organized in 6 Support Groups, a Separate SAR Company, a Military Institute, and HHQ's .

Puerto Rico State Guard

- The PRSG is direct offspring of the Spanish Volunteer Regiments created during Spanish Colonial which was later substitute by the US Volunteer Infantry in 1898. The PRSG was created in 1941 in response to WWII. It disbanded in 1946. The modern PRSG reformed in **1976 by the virtue of the Military Law of Puerto Rico it's considered the state controlled branch of the PRNG**. This group was formed to provide Puerto Rico a trained and organized military force in the event of a state security emergency or if the National Guard is deployed.
- The PRSG is the state's authorized militia and assumes the state mission of the Puerto Rico National Guard in the event the Guard is mobilized. The **PRSG comprises retired military personnel and selected professionals** who volunteer their time and talents in further service to their state.

Puerto Rico State Guard

- With the approved resources, the State Guard of Puerto Rico will be able to recruit and to train personnel to provide the **security and defense** with the armories; as well as to assist the civilian authorities in cases of **natural disasters, emergencies and serious disturbances of public order**. These volunteers will offer **support and provide services to the community by means of health clinics**.
- In the PRSG, there is a large representation of prior service soldiers with extensive combat and command experience as well as non-priors with significant professional and paramilitary backgrounds which greatly enhance the organization. A large proportion of PRSG soldiers are active members of State Guard Association of the United States (SGAUS) and a few senior officers and NCOs hold leadership positions in the organization.
- The PRSG have been a very active force multiplier for the PRNG, supporting Federal mobilizations (legal and medical support), and its current mission is to assist the National Guard especially in concern to homeland security and SAD duties (natural disasters, civil disturbances, communities service and facilities management).

Maria



What is the State Command?

- Is a state military force under the command of the Governor and under the direction of the Adjutant General.
- The main mission is to provide support to the National Guard.
- Assists the civil authorities in natural disasters, emergencies and other events that affect the public good.
- Among other duties, the 900th Medical Command provides health clinics.

Background to Activation

- Neither the local government or the National Guard made pronouncements on the activation of the State Command.
- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (**FEMA**) requested the activation of the State Command on the third day after María.
- Colonel Florencio Polanco, Commander of the medical unit was contacted to activate the soldiers.
- Camp Santiago y Fort Allen were severely affected.

Background to Activation

- Colonel Polanco contacts the commander of the 125th Military Policy (Colonel Josué Mercado).
- Colonel Mercado hosts the 900th Medical Command.
- Contacting process of the 900th Medical Command.
- **Priority: medics and nurses.**
- **Total: 56 soldiers activated.**

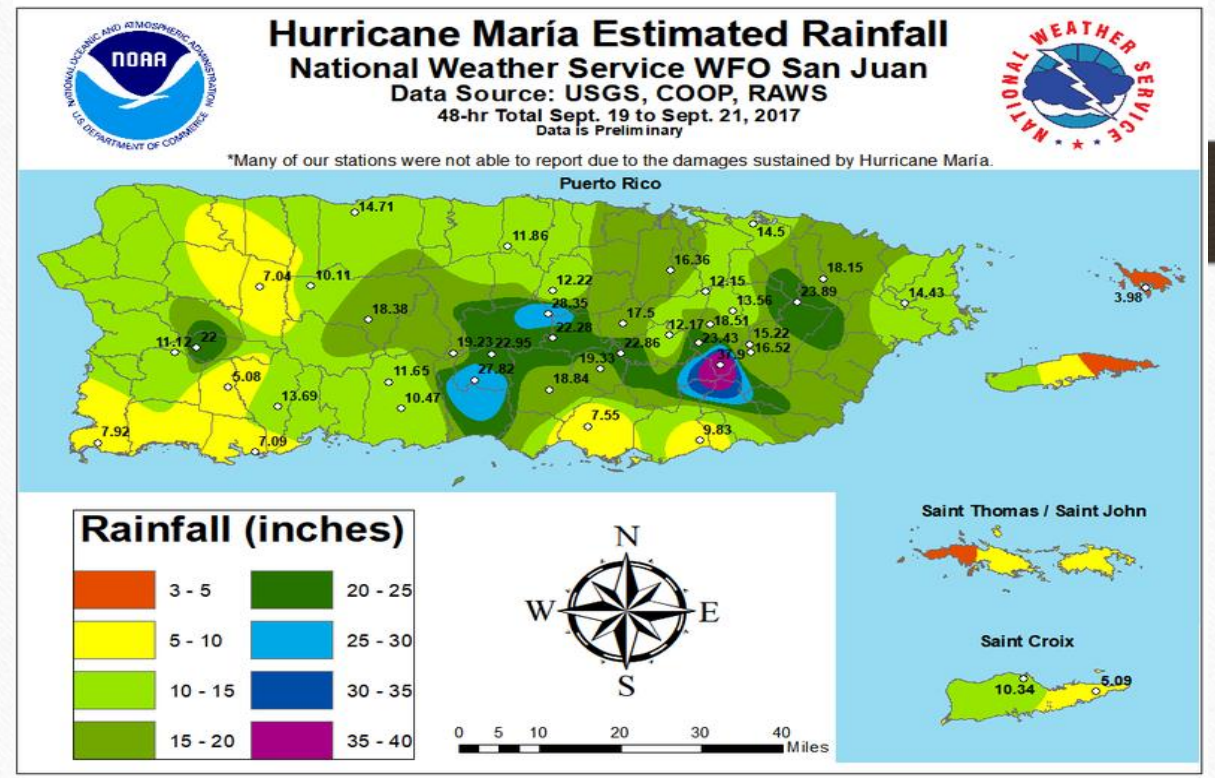
Background to Activation

- Soldier activated:
 - **5** Behavioral health professionals
 - **5** Medical doctors
 - **21** Nursing professionals
 - **15** Paramedics
- Other soldiers were activated for administrative and logistic support.

Municipalities Served

Nineteen municipalities were served by the 900th Medical Command. Among them:

- Yauco
- Coamo
- Guayama
- Gurabo
- Peñuelas
- Santa Isabel
- Castañer
- Guayanilla
- Jayuya
- Villalba
- Ponce
- Utuado
- Salinas
- Juana Díaz
- Adjuntas
- Cayey



Persons Served

- Around 7,240 persons received services from the 900th Medical.
- Deactivation of the soldiers began on January and continued through March.
- The last soldiers were deactivated in May 2018.

Units Activated

- 900th Medical Command
- 100th Military Police
- 200th Supply Services
- 300th Transportation
- 500th Engineer
- 700th Air Force

Challenges

- Insufficient resources.
- Communications.
- Limited access to government vehicles.
- Areas were hard to access.
- Little central government support.
- Capital metro area received main emphasis by central government.

Challenges for Evaluation

- Performance and Outcome Measures were never considered
- Lack of Behavioral Health IAP
- Access to information

Behavioral Health Professionals Goals (IAP)

- Immediately network with refugee center **personnel**.
- Establish partnerships with “**Informal leaders**”.
- Explorer if **basic needs** are been met.
- Promote and reinforce healthy and adaptative behaviors in the Survivors.

Behavioral Health Professionals Goals (IAP)

- Maximize **collaborative work** among Survivors (establish goals and action plans).
- Establish **confidentiality** safe spaces.
- Consider multiple modalities of therapeutic sessions (individual, couples, family, group).
- Establish and maintain healthy professional borders with clients.
- Never be alone (Security).

Lessons Learned: Behavioral Health

- Most common diagnosis encountered: Anxiety, PTS, Adjustment Disorder, Suicidal ideation.
- Emphasize the role of Survivor, not Victim.
- Be ready to deal with behavioral crisis at any moment.

Recommendations

- Develop a behavioral health NISM/ICS Incident Action Plan.
- Develop performance evaluation plan



Recommendations

- Continue community service events.
- Strengthen community partnerships.
- Foster cooperation with the National Guard and other government actors.
- Recruit, train and retain.





Gracias por su atención

