

Kansas Engineers Hard At Work In Puerto Rico

Soldiers of the Kansas National Guard's 242nd Engineer Company have kept busy over the past several weeks assisting authorities in Puerto Rico with recovery operations from Hurricane Maria.

The unit's first mission tasked 16 soldiers skilled in heavy hauling to support operations in Aguadilla on the western coast. Heavy rains during the hurricane caused water to overflow Guajataca Lake Dam and washed out the bottom of the earthen structure. Their mission, coordinated by the United States Army Corps of Engineers, moved rock from a nearby quarry to repair the dam and return its reservoir to service.

The remaining personnel began clearing the roadways in the mountainous region near Utuado and Aricebo. Rainfall and high winds caused mudslides, downed trees and power lines, and undermined roads. The 242nd engineers used heavy equipment to push debris off roadways, remove dangerous overhangs, and clear passage for locals and agencies providing service to remote areas.

Engineers have been working on debris removal and improvement along Route 111, a major highway in the western half of the island, and along Route 123, which leads into Ponce on the island's south central coast. The operation along Route 111 is expected to be completed within the next 48 hours and reconnaissance is being conducted of Route 157 in the central and eastern part of the island to make improvements to this route. Recon missions are also being conducted along Routes 608 and 615.

The soldiers are also supporting local schools with cleanup and debris removal from playgrounds, as time permits.

"To see a child playing there again, that would make my day," said Capt. Kevin Hubbard, company commander.

Approximately 60 soldiers of the 242nd Engineer Company, augmented by soldiers from other engineer units, departed Nov. 7 to relieve a National Guard unit from another state. They are expected to be in Puerto Rico for 30 days.

The mission was arranged by the Kansas Division of Emergency Management through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact, a multistate, mutual aid agreement that facilitates interstate assistance in response and recovery operations during a disaster.

Photos from their mission in Puerto Rico can be found on their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/242ndEngineerCompany/>