

# National Guard Contributes to COVID-19 Fight

*Military Review Staff*

National Guard soldiers from states across the Nation have mobilized to support local efforts in various capacities—working alongside healthcare professionals to screen, test, and treat patients; helping food banks package and distribute food; building and outfitting alternate care facilities; and sanitizing public safety vehicles, to name just a few of their endeavors. According to the National Guard Bureau, as of 28 April

2020, “nearly forty-five thousand Air and Army National Guard professionals were supporting the COVID-19 response at the direction of their governors.”

The National Guard has a long history of responding to public health crises. Sgt. 1st Class Whitney Hughes provides us with a short history of their efforts in “Guard Has Long Supported Local Officials in Health Emergencies,” republished here for the benefit of our readers.





# Guard Has Long Supported Local Officials in Health Emergencies

Sgt. 1st Class Whitney Hughes, National Guard Bureau

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**W**hile the National Guard is often called out by governors to respond to natural and man-made disasters, Guard members also have a long history of responding to public health emergencies.

Since the Guard's establishment in 1636, members have responded to outbreaks of smallpox, Spanish flu, yellow fever, cholera, hoof-and-mouth disease, and typhus, said Dr. Richard Clark, a historian with the National Guard Bureau.

"You would need a book to describe all the ways that they were employed [during national medical

emergencies]," said Clark. "But, the one consistency is that whenever they were employed, they were highly effective."

One of the earliest Guard responses to a public health crisis was in 1792 when members of the Massachusetts National Guard helped inoculate people from smallpox, said Clark. A year later, the Maryland National Guard was called upon to implement quarantine measures in response to a yellow fever outbreak. Guard members in Tennessee, Florida, and Louisiana also responded to yellow fever outbreaks throughout the mid-1800s.

In 1910, the Michigan National Guard supported similar quarantine efforts led by local officials in response to smallpox. Guard members in Georgia responded similarly to an outbreak of the disease in 1800.

**Previous page:** Florida National Guardsmen from Companies A and C, 53rd Brigade Support Battalion, test residents and staff 24 April 2020 at a rehabilitation facility as part of the COVID-19 response in Palm Beach County, Florida. (Photo by Sgt. Jacob Cherena, Army National Guard)

**Above:** Soldiers being treated for the Spanish flu in an emergency hospital at Camp Funston, Fort Riley, Kansas, in 1918. (Photo courtesy of the National Museum of Health and Medicine) **Right:** Medical and quartermaster corpsmen in connection with the U.S. Army Hospital Number 4, wear masks 19 November 1918 while at work around the hospital in Fort Porter, New York. (Photo courtesy of the National Archives)

“Prior to approximately 1920, the National Guard and the organized militia often generally supported [local officials] by enforcing quarantines and providing security,” said Clark.

The 1918 outbreak of the Spanish flu, which affected about one-third of the world’s population, also led to a change in public health response measures.

“Advances in public health, technology and medicine meant that the epidemics and plagues of the past became fewer and far between,” said Clark. “As we better understood the causes of disease, and how diseases are transferred, American public health professionals became proactive more than reactive.”

The National Guard also adjusted to respond with those changing approaches, said Clark.

In 1924, the governors of California and Arizona called out the Guard to help contain hoof-and-mouth disease. The Arizona Guard stopped all who arrived in the state by highway, said Clark. Before travelers could continue, they were required to bathe and their clothing and contents of their automobiles were fumigated by Guard members.

Florida National Guard members followed similar protocols in 1930 when they supported local authorities in establishing lines of defense against the Mediterranean fruit fly. Guard members were positioned in forty-two towns in the state to inspect train riders and their baggage. Those on baggage inspection checked more than 9.6 million pieces of luggage, said Clark, and found 19,863 hosts of the infectious flies.

When Hurricane Diane struck the east coast and New England in August 1955, the Connecticut National Guard responded to the immense flooding, and also worked with local health officials to administer thousands of typhus immunizations to flood victims to prevent the disease, said Clark.

“Since the 1920s, the National Guard has been most effective in public health emergencies in supporting first responders and local communities when no one else could help,” said Clark.

That’s similar to when the Guard is mobilized as part of overseas operations.

“Just as the National Guard augments active [component] forces in wartime and contingency operations, Guard [members] provide the same support to emergency services in the local community,” said Clark, adding that the support Guard members provide to local authorities during pandemic responses has continued to evolve.

As of Wednesday morning, approximately 2,000 Guard members in twenty-three states are on duty supporting civil authorities in response to COVID-19, the coronavirus. Rather than enforcing quarantines or stopping travelers, those on duty have been disinfecting public spaces, distributing food, assisting with transportation and logistical support of health officials, and coordinating with state and local health and emergency managers.

Guard members currently on duty are serving under state active duty—a status sourced and paid for by the state—with Guard members remaining under the control of their governor. ■



*Military Review* salutes the members of the U.S. Army National Guard as they fight on the front lines in the battle against COVID-19. While we cannot show you all the great work National Guard soldiers are doing across our country, we take this opportunity to highlight just a few of their remarkable efforts through photos.



Louisiana Guardsmen with the 205th Engineer Battalion and others help distribute food to local citizens 9 April 2020 for the Great Baton Rouge Food Bank in Walker, Louisiana. (Photo by Master Sgt. Toby M. Valadie, U.S. Air National Guard)



New York Army National Guard Pvt. 1st Class Brittany Flynn and Pvt. Linda Nguyen assemble novel coronavirus (COVID-19) specimen collection test kits 4 April 2020 at the New York State Department of Health's Wadsworth Center in Albany, New York. (Photo by Mike Wren, New York State Department of Health)



North Carolina National Guard soldiers assist volunteers at the Inter-Faith Food Shuttle Farm 30 April 2020 to ensure crops are planted and tended to for future harvests and distribution to the needy in Raleigh, North Carolina. (Photo courtesy of the North Carolina National Guard)



Louisiana National Guard medics from the 256th Infantry Brigade Combat Team administer COVID-19 nasal swab tests 26 March 2020 at a mobile testing site at Burton Coliseum in Lake Charles, Louisiana. (Photo by Master Sgt. Toby M. Valadie, U.S. Air National Guard)

U.S. Army National Guard soldiers from JTF 115th Regional Support Group assemble an antenna for radio communication 9 April 2020 during the COVID-19 humanitarian mission at the Roseville Armory, in Roseville, California. (Photo by Master Sgt. Forest Decker, U.S. Air National Guard)



U.S. Army Spc. Jonathon Hyde (*left*) and Spc. Casymn Harrison from the 1434th Engineer Company, Michigan National Guard, prepare patient rooms 9 April 2020 in advance of receiving COVID-19 patients at the TCF Regional Care Center in Detroit. (Photo by Master Sgt. Scott Thompson, U.S. Air National Guard)

Alabama National Guard Task Force 31 soldiers and airmen disinfect Bill Nichols State Veterans Home 18 April 2020 in Alexander City, Alabama. (Photo by Staff Sgt. William Frye, U.S. Army National Guard)

A Rhode Island National Guardsman assigned to the 56th Quartermaster Rigger Support Team sews face masks 6 April 2020 at Camp Fogarty, East Greenwich, Rhode Island. (Photo by Pvt. 1st Class David Connors, U.S. Army National Guard)