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NATIONAL GUARD ON-THE-RECORD TELEPHONIC MEDIA ROUNDTABLE

September 1, 2021

TOPIC	SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS
National Guard Hurricane Ida and Western States Wildfire Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Army Gen. Daniel R. Hokanson, Chief, National Guard Bureau.▪ Army Maj. Gen. David S. Baldwin, Adjutant General, California National Guard.▪ Army Maj. Gen. Lee W Hopkins, Assistant Adjutant General, Louisiana National Guard.▪ COL Greg G. St Romain, 225th Engineer Brigade Commander, Louisiana ARNG▪ Air Force Lt. Col. Chuck Steffens, MAFFS Pilot and Instructor, Nevada National Guard.▪ Air Force Lt. Col. Jon Holland, 187th Airlift Squadron Command, Wyoming ANG

Introduction:

Good afternoon. Thank you for joining us for today's media roundtable, focusing on the National Guard response efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Ida and the battle against wildfires in the western United States. Before we begin, I want to remind everyone that this event is on the record. This roundtable will last forty five minutes and begin with opening remarks from General Daniel Hokanson, Chief of the National Guard Bureau. He will be followed by remarks from Major General Lee Hopkins', the Assistant Adjutant General from the Louisiana National Guard, and Major General David Baldwin, the Adjutant General for the California National Guard. Also joining us today are Army Colonel Greg St Romain of the Louisiana Guard, Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Jon Holland of the Wyoming National Guard and Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Chuck Steffen's of the Nevada National Guard. With that, General Hokanson over to you, Sir.



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Opening Statement:

Army Gen. Daniel R. Hokanson, Chief, National Guard Bureau:

Thank you. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on National Guard operations around the world. First, in light of the events of this week, I would like to take a minute to acknowledge the National Guard soldiers and airmen who served and sacrificed over the past 20 years in Afghanistan. As a combat reserve with the Army, the Air Force, our presence in this war with significant. Our service includes efforts over the past several weeks in Kabul, where National Guard men and women served alongside their active duty reserve and State Department colleagues. Over the past two decades the National Guard has deployed more than two hundred and sixty five thousand times to Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Freedom Sentinel. And two hundred and twenty six Guard members gave their lives in Afghanistan. We remain forever grateful to those who serve so selflessly, their families, and especially our Gold Star families. Our hearts go out to the families of those killed and wounded in the past week and the people of Afghanistan. Here at home, the National Guard continues to live up to our promise of always ready, always there. Of the over fifty six thousand nine hundred guard men and women on duty today, more than sixty five hundred from eleven states are helping their communities respond to the aftermath of Hurricane Ida. In Louisiana alone, more than 5400 Guard members are working across thirty one parishes to save lives and expedite recovery efforts. We're expecting that number to increase over eight thousand by tomorrow. Equipped with more than one hundred and seventy five high water vehicles and 40 helicopters, they're conducting search and rescue sweeps, providing security and support of local law enforcement, establishing distribution locations for people to get food and water, and are clearing roads to allow crews to restore power to over one million residents. I've asked Major General Lee Hopkins', Louisiana's assistant adjutant general, and Colonel Greg St Romain, the Louisiana National Guard's two hundred and twenty fifth engineer brigade commander, to join us remotely. And in a few minutes, they will cover some of the conditions that they're facing there. Hurricane Ida is not the National Guard's only major effort. However, out west, where nearly five million acres have burned so far this year. Nearly twelve hundred and fifty citizen soldiers and airmen are battling wildfires. This includes three of our C-130 firefighting aircraft, 16 Black Hawk and Lakotah helicopters and three aerial systems that are mapping fire locations. I've asked Major General Dave Baldwin, adjutant general of California, and pilots, Lieutenant Colonel Chuck Steffen's from the Nevada National Guard, Lieutenant Colonel John Holland from the Wyoming National Guard. Both who fly our C-130 is equipped with a modular airborne firefighting system or MAFFS to join us. With respect to COVID operations, over twelve thousand seven hundred guard men and women continue to support their



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local hospitals and communities across the nation. In support of Operation Allies Welcome, we're working closely with the State Department, Department of Homeland Security, US Northern Command and US Transportation Command. Nearly eight hundred National Guard members are assisting with the relocation of Afghan nationals to six sites throughout the country. That's in addition to the air crews and support teams directly involved in the airlift operations. We do all of this and continue to meet every overseas deployment requirement with more than seventeen thousand seven hundred National Guardsmen and women providing assistance on the ground and in the air to our combatant commanders. As the combat reserve with the Army, the Air Force, we are trained and equipped to fight our nation's wars, but in times of emergency, those same people, training and equipment provide us the ability to respond to our communities when they need us most. At this time, I'd like to welcome Major General Lee Hopkins to give us an update on the recovery efforts in Louisiana. And he'll be followed by Major General Dave Baldwin to give us an update on the water situation in California. Lee, over to you.

MAJ GEN Lee Hopkins, Assistant Adjutant General, Louisiana National Guard:

Thank you very much, General Hokanson. And I thank you for the close cooperation and coordination with the NGB, with our staffs in Louisiana is very helpful. As we look back to 2020, we watched Hurricane Laura impact the state of Louisiana with the hurricane winds up to one hundred fifty miles per hour. And that was a record that had not been broken back to eighteen fifty six. And here we are today, almost to the day, one year later. And we're responding to Hurricane Ida, which match that same one hundred fifty mile per hour winds. So this is definitely one of those situations where the going gets tough, the tough have to get going. So several days prior to our hurricane landfall, our governor, Governor Edwards, and our adjutant general, Major General Keith Waddell, made the decision to really go all hands on deck. And we mobilized all of our available soldiers and airmen for the response. So and for the pre storm response, we kind of followed our playbook. We repositioned our search and rescue assets forward. We pushed our engineer around clearance assets to those affected parishes. And then we looked at how our communications assets were flowed across those parishes that were in the projected storm path. And as soon as landfall happened and the winds allowed, all those high water vehicles and helicopters you talked about, we launched them and we were out in thirty one parishes conducting search and rescue and looking for the people who were stranded in Louisiana. So far, we've rescued three hundred ninety three citizens and sixty pets and we continue making those search and rescue sweeps in the areas where the waters still remain. Those flood waters in support of four parishes at this point. We currently have over four hundred soldiers and airmen who are conducting security operations in six parishes, and as we kind of begin to taper down on our search and rescue missions, we anticipate that our security missions



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will grow, especially as parishes welcome their citizens back to their home so they can pick up the pieces after the storm. Our engineers and I know COL St. Romain is on the line to talk, but our engineers began assessing and clearing roads to support those first responders and emergency vehicles so they would have access throughout the areas. Today, they have cleared excuse me, they have assessed more than two hundred twenty miles and they've cleared four hundred and three miles of road to get debris out of the way to allow that access. Once those roads are cleared, our engineers will transition to working with the parishes to clear governmental buildings and municipal buildings to allow access so they can stand up their government and get back in working order. Engineers have done a lot, but we still have a lot left to do. We just began moving into one of our most manpower intensive missions, which is commodity distribution. During pre-storm, we relocated and moved hundreds of thousands of meals and hundreds of thousands of bottled water to our region staging area. We took the pre storm time to get all of our trucks loaded. We got our convoys lined up and we were fully prepared prior to the storm coming in and we hunkered down. Once the storm passed, we immediately pushed those convoys out to establish points of distribution or as we call them, pods. As of today, we're operating 17 pods in support of nine parishes. But we know in the coming days that's going to grow to over 40 pods. And we anticipate during this response we'll hand out millions of bottles of water and millions of meals to support the affected citizens of Louisiana. With that increase in manpower it's very important that we give a thank you to the EMAC partners that are coming to help. So on behalf of our governor and our adjutant general, I would like to thank the governors and the adjutant general in those states who are sending EMAC forces to help the citizens of Louisiana. So far, we have currently 15 states that have committed to help and they're on their way and we have many others that have offered support. So we thank them. These forces did begin arriving yesterday and are coming in today and the next day. And I can tell you they're coming just in time as our missions are increasing. Our soldiers and airmen have been doing remarkably hard work in support of this response. But we have a lot left to do to recover. And our EMAC partners will be a key role in that recovery. And I would like to take a quick moment, General Hokanson talked about the deployed soldiers and airmen. Louisiana currently has twenty four hundred soldiers and airmen who are deployed and one of the major units and the majority that units, the two five, six Infantry Brigade, which is the largest unit in state Louisiana. We are so extremely proud of all of our soldiers and airmen who deployed, who are supporting this nation and the great job that they're doing in that mission. And as a personal note, 16 years ago, I was deployed with the two, five, six overseas and we watch Hurricane Katrina, hit Louisiana. So I want to let the soldiers and airmen who deploy know that while they're taking care of their Federal mission and serving our nation, we're at home, we've got their backs, we're going to take care of the home front and we look forward to their safe return soon. And General Hokanson, thank you so much for inviting us in and allowing us to share our story.



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MAJ GEN David Baldwin, Adjutant General, California National Guard:

Good morning, everyone, from California. Good afternoon, if you're in the East Coast, thanks for taking the time to cover the great work that our National Guard and partners are doing across the nation, and in particular here in California, as we battle some pretty horrendous wildfires.

The fire situation here in California remains pretty dire. We have 16 major fires burning throughout the state. Now, that may not seem a lot, 20 or 30 years ago, we'd have many more fires burning. But the significant difference is these fires are huge. As a matter of fact, the fires are making runs of twenty and thirty thousand acres per day. And 20 or 30 years ago, a big fire was a 20 thousand acre fire that burned for several weeks. But now we're seeing in a single day that kind of massive growth in the big fires that we've got going. The other thing that's happening is the first time I've ever seen it in my career dealing with forest fires is fires will start on the west side of the Sierra and burn up and over the top and into the east side of the Sierra. That's never happened before. The fuel conditions remain pretty bad and our weather is not conducive for putting these fires out quickly. We currently have over twenty five hundred soldiers, airmen and sailors from the Cal Guard that are conducting emergency response operations and law enforcement operations throughout the state. Of those, one thousand three hundred and fifty eight are dedicated to fire support and fire suppression operations. Like Louisiana, we're getting a lot of help from outside states. We have 10 states that have contributed forces, mainly aviation units, to participate and assist us with putting out these fires. We're also getting help from the United States Air Force Reserve. And just last night, we got a battalion from the active army out of Fort Lewis that's coming in to provide additional type two hand crews for firefighting on the ground. This is particularly critical for us in California because like

Louisiana, having their brigade combat team deployed, our aviation brigade is from California, is currently deployed to the Middle East. So we really appreciate the help from the other states. And I especially am appreciative of Louisiana, who has sent this aviation support. And it's going to continue to send us aviation support here in California to deal with our fire as well. Concurrently, they're dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Ida. So

General Hopkins passed on to General Waddell my deep appreciation for that, that's really awesome. In California, we're providing a broad spectrum of military capability to support fire suppression and consequence management operations. This is goes from space based systems that we're leveraging to boots on the ground, putting out the fires. We have twenty three aircraft engaged. That includes water bucket equipped helicopters, medical evacuation helicopters, the modular airborne firefighting systems that General Hokanson mentioned and that Lieutenant Colonel Steffens and Holland will talk about later. And incident awareness aircraft that include both manned and unmanned surveillance platforms that are assisting with fire mapping and disaster assistance. A note on the medevac yesterday. Our medevac crews out of the 129th rescue



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wing saved a firefighter that was severely burned on the Caldor fire. And it happened to be the very first mission of our newest para rescue men, Senior Airman Keith Hughes, on his first mission, helped save the life of that firefighter and transport him to a burn unit in Sacramento. In addition to the air breathing aircraft that we have operating on this mission, we're also using satellite systems that we leverage for mapping and disaster assistance. On the ground we have twenty five Cal Guard hand crews from the National Guard and our State Guard, including nine very elite type one hand crews that we have trained up and are operating year round now for both fuel reduction and fire suppression activity. We have soldiers that are manning traffic control points in two counties working both the Dixie fire and the Caldor fire, and they are helping assist in evacuations and then securing areas that have been evacuated to prevent looters. We're also providing logistic support to Cal Fire in the form of fuel trucks and warehouse personnel that are helping them move the massive amount of commodities that are required to sustain all the firefighters and support personnel working these issues. We anticipate more missions here in California because the fuel conditions remain explosive. The weather is still hot and very, very dry, and it's going to be a problem for some time to come. But we're in this for the long haul and we're postured. And again, we appreciate all the help that we're getting from our outside partner states. Thank you.

COL Greg St. Romain, 225th Engineer Brigade Commander, Louisiana Army National Guard:

Thank you so much for this opportunity. I'm Colonel Greg St Romain, the 225th Engineer Brigade commander within the Louisiana Army National Guard. So in regards specifically to Hurricane Ida response, we're in support of search and rescue operations, engineer support and distribution of commodities. We continue to be versatile and adaptable to this emerging response. And again, thank you so much.

Lt Col Jon Holland, 187th Airlift Squadron Commander, Wyoming Air National Guard:

Good morning or afternoon, depending on where you are in the country. I'm Lieutenant Colonel John Holland from the Wyoming Air National Guard. I've been out here for the last week and a half flying on a crew with one of our MAFFS aircraft. I'm going to rotate out here shortly and then I'm sure I'll be back out in another week or so. But we can hear outside right now. Things are starting to spool up and air traffic start to go to work. But I'm happy to be out here and helping with the effort.

Lt Col Chuck Steffens, MAFFS Pilot and Instructor, Nevada National Guard



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Yes, I'm Lt Col Chuck Steffens, MAFFS pilot. I'm the mission planner that's going to be launching these airplanes off to go out and support our communities.

Dialogue:

[Name]

[QUESTION/RESPONSE]

Wayne Hall, NGB PA

[00:17:17]

Thank you, gentlemen. And with that, I would like to take this brief opportunity to remind folks to joined us late that this is an on the record event. We are on the record and being respectful of time. I'd like to ask the media to please stick to one question and we will allow for additional questions. If time permits, if we're unable to address your question, I'll take note of it and we will try to get you an answer as soon as we can. We are also putting member bios in a fact sheet into the chat window of the Zoom for media to be able to ensure that they have proper spellings of all the participants' names. With that, I'd like to open the floor to questions, starting with Travis Loller from Associated Press. Are you with us? Do you have a question?

Travis Loller, The Associated Press

[00:17:57]

I'm here. Just a quick clarification. Major General Hopkins. Did you say that the entire Louisiana National Guard was activated prior to the hurricane? Everyone.

MAJ GEN Lee Hopkins,

Assistant Adjutant General, LANG

[00:18:17]

Yes, we took the opportunity to to mobilize all available. Of course, we have some who are not available some of those who also first responders or are supporting other missions, such as the personnel who are supporting overseas operations.



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Wayne Hall, NGB PA

[00:18:35]

Thank you. We'll move on next to NBC, Courtney Kube or Mosheh Gains, are one of you on the line? Nothing heard moving on next to Stars and Stripes Rose Thayer. Are you with us?

Rose Thayer, Stars and Stripes

[00:18:52]

Yes, I am. Thank you for putting this together. I had a question, I guess, both in California and in Louisiana. Can you describe some of the conditions that service members are facing as they're conducting their work? I mean, I'm guessing in California it's hot and smoky and that in Louisiana. Whoever wants to go first just to paint a picture for people on what it's like to be doing this?

Wayne Hall, NGB PA

[00:19:30]

I think I'd like to offer this up to Colonel St Romain to start and then we will shift to California.

COL Greg St. Romain, 225th Engineer Brigade Commander, LA ARNG

[00:19:39]

OK, thank you very much. Well, as I continue to move around, impacted areas throughout the portions of the south and southeast of Louisiana that were impacted, there's no doubt there's quite a bit of infrastructure damage, a lot of homes that have been damaged, roadways that were closed off from traffic. But again, I know we'll likely maybe discuss that in further, but that's where a lot of our route clearance operations have taken place. And the engineers, including interagency partners, we're doing we're working together to clear the route. So we're allowing vehicles, emergency vehicles to continue to move in some of those impacted areas. Specifically, you're talking about power companies. A lot of power lines are down. So it's a lot of limited traffic ability throughout those areas. But it's been amazing to see the work. Everybody's everyone's working together to clear those routes and as efficient and effective



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as possible. Thank you.

Wayne Hall, NGB PA

[00:20:47]

Thank you, sir. I'd like to go to California now. General Baldwin or your pilots have some things that can offer up the operating conditions of California.

MAJ GEN David Baldwin, Adjutant General, CANG

[00:20:58]

So I'll defer to the pilots first to let them talk about it, what it's like flying in these very treacherous aviation conditions.

Lt Col Chuck Steffens, MAFFS Pilot and Instructor, Nevada National Guard

[00:21:08]

I think you saw it, so you hit the nail on the head. It's pretty hot. It's pretty smoky. Occasionally the smoke will clear out because the wind will pick up. But when the wind picks up, the fire tends to get up and run and spread quickly, as General Baldwin mentioned earlier. So getting in and out of the different air tanker bases to load the retardant to make sure that we've got enough fuel on board to get back to the fire, get on scene, and then work quickly enough to stay out in front of the movement of the fire so that some of those ground crews can really get to work and try and stand this thing up when they can. Is pretty key, especially with the Dixie fire, the Caldor fire being two of the big ones right now as they start to move into places where they threaten structures. There's a lot of air assets that are flying on those incidents. And so making sure that we are well coordinated and orchestrated with everybody that's in the airspace to get that effectively dealt with and try to mitigate as best as possible is kind of the picture for us.

Rose Thayer, Stars and Stripes

[00:22:28]

Thank you. I appreciate that.

Wayne Hall, NGB PA



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[00:22:32]

Anyone else have anything to add onto that question?

MAJ GEN David Baldwin, Adjutant General, CANG

[00:22:33]

It's General Baldwin. And then for our troops on the ground, beginning with our hand crews, the type one hand crews are operating in extremely treacherous terrain because a lot of these fires are burning way up high in the Sierra. So it's mountainous terrain. There's a lot of hazards with risk of fallen trees because they're working on active fire line. They're often faced with huge walls of flame. The smoke is choking, because it's extremely thick with air quality. Index is as high as four hundred or however high it goes there at it. It's very hot during the day. And this time of year it gets very cold at night. So temperatures are approaching freezing at night. Our hand crews work twenty four hour shifts. Which is very, very physically demanding. And it's tough on them. Our security force soldiers are operating in the same conditions where often they're flanked by fire. So they have to be very cognizant of their escape routes. And addition to dealing with smoke all during the day, they're sleeping outside in tents. So they're exposed to all of those hazards. In addition to for both the hand crews and the security force people being having to see all the destruction that's wrought by these fires, because unfortunately, we don't get very many damaged buildings. And in fires, all the buildings, almost all the buildings are destroyed. And it could be very heart wrenching to see entire communities like the town of Greenville that's just gone. And that takes a toll also. So what our soldiers and airmen are taking on stride and performing their missions magnificently.

Wayne Hall, NGB PA

[00:24:14]

Thank you, sir, General Hopkins, I believe you had a clarification you'd like to add.

MAJ GEN Lee Hopkins, Assistant Adjutant General, LANG

[00:24:20]



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I sure can. I mean, California has hot and smoky, I can tell you, Louisiana has hot and humid. And as Colonel St Romain discussed with the power outages, our soldiers and airmen operating in austere conditions. But we're doing everything we can to make life is good for them as possible as they serve the citizens of Louisiana. But as General Baldwin said, our soldiers and airmen take it all in stride. Our motto in Louisiana is protect what matters. And they're going to do everything they can to do that. And because it's just what we do in Louisiana and other states, we protect what matters.

Wayne Hall, NGB PA
[00:24:57]

Thank you, sir. I've just been made aware, apparently a point of clarification, too, that apparently the engineers, if your teams have assessed two hundred and two thousand one hundred and twelve miles of road in areas in Louisiana. Thank you, sir. So we'll move on next to CNN. Ellie Kaufman, are you on the line or do you have a question? Nothing heard. ABC News, Matt Seyler, are you on the line, you have a question. Nothing heard. We'll move on to Army Times, Davis Winkie are you on the line?

Davis Winkie, Army Times
[00:25:39]

Yes, I am. Wayne, thanks for organizing, putting this together. My question is for mainly General Hokanson, but the other GO's could probably chime in as well. It's really sticks out to me and, you know, I'm a guard officer myself, that for both the states most affected right now, the formations that would be most effective in this kind of state mission, that is the spirit of the guard are overseas deployed. And so are we at all concerned about the confluence of these op tempos, you know, the federal op tempo that's been relentless for two decades and then this increasing tempo upstate stuff as climate change seems to increase the frequency and intensity of stuff like these wildfires and like these hurricanes, are we at all worried about the effects of this cumulative op tempo on the soldiers as these things keep piling up? Thanks.

GEN Daniel Hokanson, Commander, NGB



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[00:26:53]

David, thanks for the question. And as regards when you're probably aware, as I led off with my statement, is the primary mission of our National Guard is to fight and win our nation's wars. And we're manned, trained and equipped to do so. And it's those capabilities that allow us the ability to really to respond to our communities when they need us most. And so when we look at the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade out of California and the two fifty six the Infantry Brigade Combat Team out of Louisiana being deployed, first and foremost, that's their federal mission, which is most important. The one thing that we do and we've done previously, particularly with our state's most prone to hurricanes, is we have an all hazards conference in the summer. And what we do is we take a look at each of the states and those units that are deployed, and then we really mitigate the risk by identifying units that could fill a lot of the capabilities that they would normally provide. So in this case, with the 256th that all hazards conference, they notify those capabilities that will be gone as they are right now. And those states then pony up or say, hey, I will provide this capability. And as Lee Hopkins' mentioned, those units are enroute. They'll get there today and tomorrow and provide that capability just in time. Now, the thing that we've learned about forest fires and wildfires is previously we kind of looked at a wildfire season. It started usually June, July and until October. But under the current conditions and the winds and the things that we're facing and the extended drought periods, those fire seasons literally go without end. They start early in the year. They go late into the year. And so it's more of what we call a fire year. And so this is the first year that we've really taken the opportunity similar to like hurricanes. And we met in March with the National Interagency Fire Center to talk about and really take a similar approach that we do as hurricanes to identify those capabilities. And in most cases, it's not just ground crews, but it's primarily air crews as well. We identified the fact that the 40th combat aviation brigade out of California would be gone. And so states across the country identified air crews trained them in advance so that as California needs them, that they can get there in a timely manner to make a difference. And so what we've really learned from this is we have to do our federal mission. That's the whole reason



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the guard exists. But we're also well aware of those natural disasters or recurring disasters we have to be ready for. So we're doing everything we can to look forward planned for these so that the states still have the capabilities they need in a timely manner. And with that, I'll hand it over to both Lee and Dave to add anything more. Thank you.

MAJ GEN Lee Hopkins, Assistant Adjutant General, LANG

[00:29:40]

Gen Hokanson, Lee Hopkins here, I can tell you that's exactly what we always play a role in the All Hazards Conference this year, we looked at the possibility of having an event while the 256th was deployed and we planned accordingly to ensure that we had the right assets available to be prepared to roll in. We've taken that plan and we're executing that plan. And as a result, 15 states have committed and they're rolling in to help and more are available if we need it. So, again, we plan for this. And it worked out as the plan comes through to help Louisiana.

MAJ GEN David Baldwin, Adjutant General, CANG

[00:30:22]

So we have historically gone to other states during fire season for rotary wing aircraft support and of course, MAFFS support and General Hokinson's led the way this year and doing using the hurricane model to prepare even further so we could bring in air crews quickly. So the EMAC model works. However, in California, we do have a problem in that across the nation there's one National Guardsman for every forty seven citizens of the United States. In California, that ratio is one to every one hundred and forty seven. So our guard is much smaller than per capita than what the average is across the United States. And we're in a state that is constantly in a state of emergency. So our demand signal is much, much higher. And we do see a strain on the formations that we have to go back to the well to time and time again to respond. So our military police units, our aviation units are MAFFS units and our combat arms units are the ones that we constantly are going to deploy. We've had military police companies last year doing non-COVID missions that were on duty, that had soldiers on duty for as many as one hundred



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and fifty days out of the year. It's a tremendous strain on the force and it's something that we're working with both the Congress and the National Guard Bureau to try to address this imbalance in the force ratios of where people are allocated. Frankly, California National Guard needs to be significantly bigger to meet the demands that are required for supporting a population of 40million people.

Wayne Hall, NGB PA
[00:31:55]

Thank you, sir. Lisa Kaplan from Fox News, are you on the line and you have a question? Nothing heard. Kevin McCarren from CBS, are you on the line, you have a question? Nothing heard. CNBC, Amanda Macias, are you on the line? Nothing heard Caitlin from Defense One, are you on line? Nothing heard. Alan Millhiser from Synopsis. Are you online? OK, is a reporter on the line here, Angie Simoneaux from KTK News. All right, KRCA News, are you online? Alan Mitchell from the Hill. OK, is there anybody else online with a question?

Patricia Kime, Military.com
[00:33:10]

Hi, Wayne, it's Patricia Kime with Military.com.

Wayne Hall, NGB PA
[00:33:13]

Thank you, Patricia, go ahead, please.

Patricia Kime, Military.com
[00:33:15]

Yes, you know, there was some discussion earlier this year and about restructuring the guard or at least more manpower. Could I get an update on whether that's going to be a possibility perhaps in the next couple of years, given what General Baldwin just said? And what are the thoughts on the right size of the National Guard?

GEN Daniel Hokanson, Commander, NGB
[00:33:45]

Patricia, Dan Hokanson here, I'll take the lead on that. So when we



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look at additional force structure, when the National Guard and this really goes back to the fact that all of our force structure is really designed to fight our nation's wars. And so we work very closely with the service secretaries, in this case, the secretary of the Air Force and the secretary of the Army. And we look for opportunities when there's growth in force structure to put that potentially in the National Guard. And the service secretaries have to look across all three components of both the Army and the Air Force and determine where the best place is to put that. We think obviously because of the ability to respond to our states in a state active duty for title thirty two status and also for the federal mission under Title 10, that we can really address a myriad of issues. And so we always, of course, want to put our best foot forward to to have those growth opportunities stationed in the National Guard.

Patricia Kime, Military.com
[00:34:44]

And if I may ask a follow up of a both General Hopkins and General Baldwin, my first question will be how long do you anticipate that the response to Ida may actually take? Can you project this far out how long it will take based on what you're seeing on the ground and then which are the fires that really are the guard highly concentrated at out in California?

MAJ GEN Lee Hopkins, Assistant Adjutant General, LANG
[00:35:15]

Because I appreciate the question, Patricia. We anticipate by some of the past responses we have, we figure that we're going to be at peak operations for about two to three weeks, and that will be closely tied into what some of the power is restored to a lot of the communities. But at that point, once we have power restored, we have running water, we have stores open that will give us the opportunity to begin right sizing our forces, that we're doing the right missions and begin a ramp. Now, this could go as long with a smaller force of another month or two months. But again, we peak operation to another two to three weeks before we see those triggers met that allow us to right size.



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Wayne Hall, NGB PA

[00:35:59]

Thank you, Sir.

General Baldwin.MAJ GEN David Baldwin, Adjutant General, CANG

[00:36:01]

And so in terms of length of the mission, last year, we had soldiers and airmen in California fighting fires on Christmas Eve. So we have many months ahead of us of this in terms of troop concentrations. We have if you include the active component, there's probably about a little over six hundred soldiers and airmen and sailors on the Dixie fire, which is now the largest single fire in California history. The largest fire was the August complex from last year, which is over a million acres. But that was a complex of several fires. The Dixie fire is the largest single fire and it's up over eight hundred thousand acres now. So we have about 600 military personnel on that fire. There's about three hundred military personnel on the Caldor fire. And then which is where most of our effort is, we have most of our effort. The exception is with our MAFFS flying on pretty much every fire in Northern California as conditions allow them to drop their launch and hit the Monument fire or the Antelope Fire, Dixie Fire or whatever US Forest Service or Cal Fire needs.

Wayne Hall, NGB PA

[00:37:15]

Thank you, sir. Are there any other reporters with a question?

Patricia Kime, Military.com

[00:37:19]

This is Gina Cavaleiro with Army magazine.

Wayne Hall, NGB PA

[00:37:22]

Welcome. Please go ahead.

Gina Cavaleiro, Army Magazine

[00:37:23]



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I chimed in a little bit late, but I'd like to follow up on Patricia Kime's question about the shape of the National Guard for General Hokanson. I think this is the realignment of the 8th Division headquarters with the brigade combat brigades to help be ready to look like the active duty army. Would that new configuration, as it takes shape, also help in these sorts of responses to domestic emergencies? Thank you.

GEN Daniel Hokanson, Commander, NGB

[00:37:55]

Thank you for that question. And you really hit on one of the founding principles behind this. Number one, we want to make sure that our divisions are structured exactly like those on the active Army. So that we did this we went from 10 divisions in the Army to 18 full divisions in the Army. When you include the eight from the National Guard. And when you look at the fact that previously we really were focused at the brigade level of anywhere from three to four thousand soldiers, but we align in divisions. We can be up to 15 and sometimes greater than 15 thousand soldiers in a single formation. And so what it provides us the capability when we have large scale combat operations, number one, they're trained and ready to do that. But if you look at the response in the homeland now, we actually have a two star headquarters with a significant number of personnel and equipment that could respond really as an organization to a large scale event. And so that is one of the sidelights and benefits of this whole organization.

Gina Cavaleiro, Army Magazine

[00:39:00]

And is that what do you project that that will look the way you want it to look? How long will that take?

GEN Daniel Hokanson, Commander, NGB

[00:39:07]

We're just over our first year into this. We've made a lot of great strides. And it really depends on the level of training and resourcing that we have. But I see probably within the next year or two and we'll work very closely with the division headquarters to the point



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where which they feel they've got the relationships and they're really lines of communications established well enough that they could operate as a division. And so it's kind of a conditions based. But we're hoping to get that with a first couple of units within the next year or two.

Gina Cavaleiro, Army Magazine

[00:39:38]

Thank you.

Wayne Hall, NGB PA

[00:39:40]

Thank you. Any other reporters with a question?

Davis Winkie, Army Times

[00:39:43]

Yeah, when I've got another line of questions.

Wayne Hall, NGB PA

[00:39:45]

OK, Davis, go ahead with your question, please.

Davis Winkie, Army Times

[00:39:49]

OK, this one is about the duty statuses in the respective missions. In the California missions at least you've got Guardsmen working alongside their title 10 counterparts. And in Louisiana, we've got a kind of massive EMAC response. Are these guys and gals in a state active duty status or is there a way to get them on the title 32 to ensure that they'll be able to get VA benefits should they be injured in these very hazardous conditions and maybe career some other benefits as well. Thanks.

GEN Daniel Hokanson, Commander, NGB

[00:40:35]

David, I'll start out Dan Hokanson, and then I hand it off to both Dave and Lee But when we look at the response under state active duty, they fall under pay and benefits from that specific state under



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which they are operating. And under an EMAC agreement, if somebody is coming from Mississippi to help Louisiana, they will be under a state active duty status and paid in benefits by the state of Louisiana. And this is unique under the governor's authority under which they do that. And you kind of contrast this with the Covid mission, where we have folks under title thirty two, but that's under a federal FEMA mission assignment under which they have been tasked. And so the one thing that we do is we work with the fifty four states territories in D.C. to try and at least get the benefits as close to comparable as possible. Some cases that are a little bit less than they would if they were under Title 32 status. In other states it's actually a better process or better pay. And I'll hand it off to both Dave Baldwin and Lee Hopkins to talk about their specific scenarios.

MAJ GEN David Baldwin,
Adjutant General , CANG
[00:41:43]

Thanks Sir, Steve Baldwin again. As you know, Davis the duty status is a tremendously complicated. So we do have Title 10 people that you mentioned. We have our type one hand crews that are on duty year round or on title thirty two. We're actually paying them out of a mission assignment from FEBA for covid response. The other troops that we have in the main are on state active duty. And then even then there's a delineation between those who are actively engaged in fire suppression get fire pay, which is the regular pay plus a bump forfor hazardous duty, whereas the security force people are just drawing their regular state active duty pay, which in California comports exactly to what you're paying allowances would be if you were in Title 32 on Title 10 status in terms of risk and benefits, benefits or coverage if you're injured in California, we have a state compensation insurance fund that covers injuries and cost of injuries incurred if a soldier or airman gets hurt out fighting a fire and then provides for long term care, it is by no means as comprehensive a coverage as what you would get through the VA. So if you're on title thirty two and you get injured and you become a hundred percent disabled, those benefits are far greater than what



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the state provides. So it is an issue, but it's one of the things, as you know, we have to deal with with operating in a state status versus a federal status.

MAJ GEN Lee Hopkins, Assistant Adjutant General, LANG

[00:43:19]

Yes, in Louisiana, we're very similar to California, how we operate our pay and benefits mirror that of an active duty person. But the key point is some of the benefits aren't the same as with California. Louisiana has a worker's compensation insurance that would cover any injury or illness that happens. But, you know, there is a benefits difference with the VA and with health insurance that would come with Title 32. Being that it's a short duration event normally for us. Those are things that we deal with, but it's what we have to work with right now.

GEN Daniel Hokanson, Commander, NGB

[00:43:58]

And, David, if I could add one last thing is also there's been a lot of significant work over the past couple of years on duty status reform, because when you look at the number of various statuses that service members could be in, and there was well over 20 of those, and there's been a significant effort within the Department of Defense to reduce that down to eight duty statuses that didn't make it through the legislative cycle this year. But I think it'll be a priority next year. And this is not specific to state active duty, but it really addresses a lot of those disparities that we've seen between folks in a different duty status in terms of title 32 or Title 10 that are working side by side. And the intent there is to make sure that they have equal benefits when we're asking them to do equal duties.

Wayne Hall, NGB PA

[00:44:47]

Sir, thank you very much and thank you the members of the media for joining us. We are up on our time. I'd like to turn things back over to General Hokanson for closing comments.

GEN Daniel Hokanson, Commander, NGB



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[00:45:01]

Great, thank you Wayne, and folks, for all those that were able to join us today. Thank you very much for doing this. And what we tried to highlight is just really the diversity of missions that our National Guard faces every day. And both Lee and Dave there, folks are doing incredible work. And when you look at John, Chuck and Greg, they're really representative of leaders performing a lot of these duties or supervising it. And they're doing a lot of great works out there. But all of this everything they're able to do is, is because our nation has it invested in the manning training and equipping of those units to fight when our nation's wars. And that gives us the capability to do this. And a lot of times we have to remind folks that the National Guard does exist for their federal war fight mission and that our ability to help the communities is just a great, great thing that we can do because we have that capability. But please, if you have questions beyond today, I know this is a short amount of time, but our public affairs team can reach out to anyone and get you in touch with folks. Actually, at this case, at the point of that hurricane response or at the point of wildfire response to get you any information or answer any questions that you would like. But once again, thanks for your time today. It was a pleasure speaking with all of you. And I know some folks are going to be able to stay a little bit longer, so we'll hand it back over to them.

Wayne Hall, NGB PA

[00:46:21]

Thank you, sir. Yeah, some of our folks are going to be able to stay on a little bit longer if we have additional questions from media, but I do know that most of them do have to get back out to the missions. So if there's any last minute questions for our folks remaining, I believe we have the California maybe staying on line. All right, sir, I don't know that we have any additional questions at this time. I appreciate you joining us. And for the rest of the media, if you have follow up questions after this, please feel free to reach out to us by phone or by email, and we'll do our best to try to get them answered. Thank you for joining us.

GEN Daniel Hokanson, Commander, NGB



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[00:47:00]

Thank you.

[End of Audio]

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