



# Ohio Adjutant General's Department

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## **Ohio National Guard sends signal company to help rebuild communications in Puerto Rico**

**Story by 1st Lt. Aaron Smith  
Ohio National Guard Public Affairs**

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Ohio National Guard has sent more than 40 communications specialists with a full array of equipment to Puerto Rico to help with recovery efforts following the widespread devastation caused by Hurricane Maria.

The Soldiers, from the 137th Signal Company, based out of Newark, Ohio, were transported on a C-17 Globemaster III from the Tennessee National Guard in two groups, one each on Oct. 12 and Oct. 13, to assist in improving the communications infrastructure across the U.S. territory.

“Our goal is to establish 100 percent communications across the island,” said Capt. Denise Stewart, commander of the 137th. “This is what we’ve been training for.”

The signal company will work with Joint Task Force Puerto Rico, which includes numerous government agencies as well as the Puerto Rico National Guard. The task force’s mission is to work at putting back the pieces blown apart by the hurricane and return Puerto Rico to a good enough state so the local government can take over the recovery efforts.

Pfc. Kyle McKay, an information technology specialist with the 137th, said he is excited to deploy to Puerto Rico with his brothers and sisters in uniform. “My favorite part of my job is working with people, (deploying to Puerto Rico) is like being able to travel with your family but to a place where we all can help others in some way.”

The signal company is bringing equipment uniquely suited for the challenging conditions they will face on the island, including four satellite transportable terminals. These terminals are systems used to establish two-way communications where infrastructure has been damaged, destroyed or is nonexistent. In addition, the company also brought generators to power critical pieces of equipment such as the satellite terminals so they will be unaffected by the island’s

limited power situation. As of mid-October, about 80 percent of the island was still without electricity.

Spc. Rachel Johnson, a signal support systems specialist with the 137th, said she is most looking forward to helping the people of Puerto Rico. “Just knowing that we can be there for the people that need help, knowing that we were there to help make a difference will be something really fulfilling to look back on,” she said.

The signal company will provide mobile satellite, telephone, internet, video conferencing and information technology services to other deployed military assets on the ground but also multiple government agencies, if needed, that are involved with hurricane relief efforts.

This is the first time the 137th Signal Company has deployed in response to a natural disaster. To date, more than 200 Ohio National Guard Soldiers and Airmen have deployed to support their brethren in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, answering the nationwide call to duty following a series of severe hurricanes and tropical storms this summer and fall.

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**EDITOR’S NOTE:** High resolution photos to support this story are available on the [Ohio National Guard Flickr page](#) and the Defense Video Imagery Distribution System (DVIDS) at:

- <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/3856985/air-national-guard-transport-army-equipment-puerto-rico>
- <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/3860385/ohio-national-guard-signal-company-deploys-puerto-rico>

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For current information and stories on the Ohio National Guard support to hurricane relief efforts:

<http://ong.ohio.gov/stories/2017/AID/20170830-AID.html>

The Buckeye Guard digital magazine and newscast: <http://ong.ohio.gov/BuckeyeGuard.html>  
<http://ong.ohio.gov>

<http://www.facebook.com/TheOhioNationalGuard>

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