



NEWS RELEASE
179th Airlift Wing Public Affairs Office

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Ohio Air National Guard's 200th RED HORSE Squadron Provides Hope and Water

MANSFIELD, Ohio – Members from the Ohio Air National Guard's 200th RED HORSE Squadron (RHS) have been in Comerio, Puerto Rico since Oct. 7, 2017, providing hope and water. The team is supplying potable water to the area with a Reverse Osmosis Water Purification Unit (ROWPU).

The ROWPU provides potable water from a variety of raw water sources such as wells, lakes, seas, lagoons, rivers, ocean and ice holes. The proper use of a the ROWPU can provide purified drinking water for thousands of people.

“We have been working hard to help anybody who comes our way” said Master Sgt. Isaac Strickler, a power production supervisor with the 200 RHS. “The area they placed us in has not had water or power since Hurricane Maria made landfall”.

The Airmen have been working alongside members from the 139 BSB, out of the South Dakota National Guard (NG) and Soldiers out of the 714 QMWP from the Puerto Rico National Guard, who brought an additional ROWPU.

Strickler and his team have been able to fill three city trucks during the work week that distribute water throughout the local communities. One other truck, which is a 4,000-gallon tanker, is strictly assigned for hospital use and is filled every two days for medical use.

“Our unit has been supplying approximately 9,000 gallons of potable water a day to civilians” said Strickler.

Even with the constant flow of tens-of-thousands of gallons of water each day, the team has not been untouched by the after effects of Hurricane Maria. The original site that was selected was a river that ran through Comerio. However, the team discovered after testing the water quality that it was not safe to use. The river had been contaminated with waste water from housing upstream.

Fortunately, the team was able to locate a stream coming from a nearby mountain and tap into it. Strickler and his team dammed the river at one point to make the water deep enough to pull from. Further down the river, they had to dig out a basin in the river and use an eight-foot steel drum to create a second collection point to allow both ROWPUs to operate.

In addition to locating a safe water source and providing the area with safe, drinkable water, the team brought with them an ice machine. The machine was donated by one of the team member's friend.

"We have been giving out ice to keep medical supplies cold and so that people can use it in their fridge" said Tech. Sgt. Brock Mowry, whose friend donated the ice machine.

Each day that passes brings with it new challenges and more opportunities to help the people in Puerto Rico to recover after this tragedy and the hard work this team provides does not go unnoticed by the locals.

"Everyone has been gracious and have even brought us some homemade meals, a welcomed changed from MREs or Meals Ready to Eat" said Stricker. "We have people stopping on the side of the road just to thank us and to take photos of us helping the community. There have been countless people coming to us, teary eyed, thanking us for coming down to help".

Strickler and his team have also been helping out in the local area. They have been able to help the locals by cleaning up debris and by removing trees, left from the flood waters.

Although the days are long and the work is hard, these Ohio Air National Guard Airmen have maintained a positive attitude.

"Being cut off from contact back home was difficult at first and communication is shaky at best, however, the smiles from the people we have been helping is a daily morale boost" said Strickler.

Based on numbers through Oct. 23, the team has produced over 71,000 gallons of water and has distributed more than 55,000 gallons. There is no doubt the training and commitment these Airmen have to their state and nation is unwavering as they are provide Comerio, Puerto Rico with hope and water.

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Photos and Story: <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/253245/providing-hope-and-water>