

Illinois Army National Guard ready for the call

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PARIS - The National Guard's motto is "Always Ready, Always There." Soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard's 1544th Transportation Company based in Paris,

Illinois, and 1644th Transportation Company based in Rock Falls, Illinois, lived that motto this week.



The units were notified they would potentially provide transportation support in response to Hurricane Irma. Upon being notified, nearly 160 Soldiers were ready with equipment, supplies and trucks in less than 24 hours for the two-day drive to Florida to provide assistance as early as Sept. 14.

The units were ultimately not needed to support and were released Sept. 12.

"We are all very thankful the situation in Florida is not as bad as it was predicted to be," said Maj. Gen. Richard J. Hayes, Jr. the Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard. "But at the same time we should all be very proud with how quickly and selflessly the 1544th and 1644th Soldiers responded and prepared to go."

Leaders at every level praised the 1544th and 1644th for being ready to deploy at a moment's notice.

"One word comes to mind: proud," said Cpt. Thomas Ferguson of Chatham, Illinois, commander of the 1544th Transportation Company. "Even though you weren't needed this time, you were ready to go help. That's what we do, and that's exactly what you did."

Ferguson told these soldiers that this was an exercise in preparedness and they excelled. He said even though they weren't called for support, they were ready to go.

"We couldn't be more proud of you," said Command Sgt. Maj. Lester Edwards of Mechanicsburg, Illinois, command sergeant major of the 108th Sustainment Brigade, the transportation companies' commanding brigade. "You stepped up and did exactly what was asked of you. You were called, and ready to go in less than 24 hours. It is a testament to your readiness and dedication, even though you didn't mobilize, you made us extremely proud."



Edwards told the soldiers even though they wanted to help, not being sent forward was a positive outcome.

"You were ready, but this time you weren't called," said Edwards. "That's not a bad thing. That means the civilian first responders, emergency recovery workers and our brothers and sisters in the Florida National Guard have the situation under control. That's great news."

Hurricane Irma was initially expected to make landfall in Florida as a stronger hurricane, prompting Florida to plan for the worst. Part of the planning before Irma made landfall was to initiate requests for support with states that could provide additional resources if necessary.

"We exercised our response plan from the highest level to the lowest level and now we have an opportunity to review our actions and be even better next time," said Hayes.

