



CAPTAIN PUERTO RICO

From a military annual training to an eternal humanitarian experience. As a former member of the 475th Engineer Company of the Army Reserve in Puerto Rico, I was doing my duties during an annual training, but right in the middle of it the Hurricane Maria hit our island (September 20, 2017). The day after of the disaster I wore my military uniform to continue with my duties, but as soon as I saw the surroundings and I tried to find a way to get to my unit station I realized how bad it would be. I stopped by my unit and there was barely two soldiers. The loss was unbelievable in the city of Ponce and entwined in those thoughts I wondered where are the rest of the soldiers.

After a couple of days my unit sent me with a squad to work in Adjuntas, Puerto Rico. That was another story, the accessibility was sealed by erosion and trees, the infrastructure was completely lost in some areas and the energy wouldn't last long. My squad started performing the orders of the commander, but we did not have our equipment on time. So we decided to use our engineer equipment to cut some trees, then pulling it to the cliffs and we were doing so for two weeks. Then the other support team arrived with our heavy equipment vehicles and that made us so happy because we knew we would get done our mission soon.

However, even of the hard work and laughs there was something else happening among us. We were exhausted from our previous deployment that finished three month before Hurricane Maria. Some of the soldiers had no money, others had to travel long distances to see their families. In my case I had to

continue studying in the school of architecture. I was getting tired after a long day of hard work, helping people to get their food and water and other duties, I had to clean my uniform to take at least two hours from my design class. I felt that the team was losing hope in so many things, but something else was about to ignite. It was the bond with our own blood and brotherhood of the team. For the first time the army did not separate us from us, but on the contrary, because we serve, we had to stay. We were apart living among civilians in an activity center, but that place became our new home.

After a year of deployment, when finally I go home, I had to switch from my military helmet to the old fashioned straw-hat (Pava de Jibaro) of my puertorican culture. The whole team was a good "Jibaro" with a green uniform on. They all were real heroes, the team represent the name of this poster "Captain Puerto Rico" because our mission did not end up in the middle east, but it continued in our beautiful island.

*Thank you for your service,
Jibaro!*



U.S. ARMY