

V.I.N.G. Soldiers Receive Corrected Pay For Service Rendered During 2017 Storms Through \$1.1 Million Allocation

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Gov. Albert Bryan Jr. (center) joined in issuing checks to service members as they received corrected rate payments on January 7, 2022. By. CAPT. MARCIA BRUNO

Four years after the devastating Cat. 5 storms of 2017, which led to 24-hour support operations, commodity transportation, debris removal, establishing and managing point of distribution sites, and regulating traffic control points, many members of the V.I. National Guard finally received corrected rate payments on January 7, V.I.N.G. announced Saturday.

According to the release, over 433 V.I.N.G. service members were activated on Territorial Active Duty (TAD) to support humanitarian missions after Hurricanes Irma and Maria on September 5,

2017, which lasted until November 3, 2017. During the operation, many service members experienced incorrect payment for their time served on status, which led to over four years of service members waiting for accurate compensation. Last December, Governor Albert Bryan provided the supplemental funds to the Office of the Adjutant General to issue checks to over 300 service members totaling over \$1,093,000, stated the release.

"Our men and women in the Virgin Islands National Guard are always there in our time of need. They answered the call in those dark and uncertain days after hurricanes Irma and Maria and are still there today in our fight against the COVID-19 pandemic," said Governor Bryan during a short ceremony held at the Joint Force Headquarters on St. Croix at the Estate Bethlehem Compound. "They are deserving of our gratitude and more than deserving of just compensation for their service. "That they were not adequately compensated for their service in 2017 is deeply disappointing. However, since taking office in 2019, our administration has prioritized paying our Guardsmen and Guardswomen what is owed to them, and I am proud that we have made them whole."

According to the release, under the direction of the Adjutant General Maj. Gen. Kodjo Knox-Limbacker, the Office of the Adjutant General, or OTAG, coordinated with the V.I. Division of Personnel, the Department of Finance, the Office of Disaster and Recovery, and the Office of Management and Budget to reconcile discrepancies and accurately compensate the force.

"This was one of the most challenging projects," said Ms. Nikita Ward, administrative and business manager for the Office of the Adjutant General. "We had to go through all the documentation for each person to see how much they were initially paid to determine the difference to calculate how much they were owed. Once we were able to get that established, we then coordinated with our partner agencies to work together to pay the service members."

Maj. Gen. Kodjo Knox-Limbacker remained postured to rectify any financial problems stemming from TAD from the beginning of his tenure as the Adjutant General in 2019, stated the release. V.I.N.G. said his steadfast leadership and unwavering dedication assisted in creating a permanent solution to redress this matter indefinitely.

"This is a great milestone for us to achieve in being able to pay out many of our Guardsmen and women for the services they completed over four years ago," stated Maj. Gen. Knox-Limbacker. "It wasn't an easy road. It took a lot of detailed analysis and deliberation to pay the Guardsmen and women for the services they provided during our Territory's time of need. The force remains resilient regardless of individual circumstances. I thank you all for your commitment, for your dedication, and your continued support to our Territory as you serve both the Army and Air Guard of the Virgin Islands."

He added, "Through it all, the VING soldiers and airmen continue to support the Virgin Islands Territory in its time of need. We will always be ready and always be there to provide exceptional professional support and expertise to the community in which we reside while being postured to fight and win our Nation's wars. The Guardians of the Eastern Front remain Ready, Relevant, and Responsive to our Virgin Islands."