

# 249th Engineer Battalion (Prime Power) Responds to Terrorist Attacks

By Captain Hans J. R. Pung

**O**n the morning of 11 September, terrorists launched a series of coordinated attacks against the United States that left our nation stunned. Both towers of the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan collapsed, killing and injuring thousands, and a fire raged in the Pentagon, the result of suicidal airline crashes. By the end of the day, the federal government had moved quickly to respond to the crisis, and the soldiers of the 249th Engineer Battalion (Prime Power) comprised a vital part of that response.

With President Bush declaring both New York City and Virginia federal disaster areas, the 249th moved into action. Working under the direction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), as part of the larger Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)-administered Federal Response Plan, the 249th provided liaison support between the local power company and FEMA and assisted with electrical assessments and generator installation in areas directly impacted by the terrorist attacks.

Early on 12 September, the battalion deployed a two-person Prime Power Action Team to Edison, New Jersey, to serve as action officers in the emergency power portion of the FEMA relief effort. The following day, the commander of the 249th led a team of prime power soldiers from both Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to New York to assist the North Atlantic Division (NAD) of USACE and to serve as subject-matter experts for any power-related issues.

After meeting with the NAD forward commander, representatives from FEMA, and the local power company (ConEdison), the 249th provided an additional 21 soldiers to assess power needs and install emergency generators in lower Manhattan. Soldiers deployed from both Fort Belvoir and Fort Bragg on 16 September and spent the next 3 days helping ConEdison perform various electrical tasks within New York City. Some of the significant missions included assessing power and installing generators at multiple financial buildings (to include the New York Mercantile Exchange and the NASDAQ Electrical Hub) to ensure that the financial district would be powered and ready to reopen less than 1 week after the terrorist attacks.

Soldiers from the 249th worked with ConEdison to set up generators at medical triage facilities and transient lodging centers in support of the relief effort. To accomplish these missions in a more efficient manner, the 249th split its assessment/installation teams into day and night shifts, enabling electrical repairs to continue around the clock. By 18 September, most of the city's power was restored, and FEMA determined that the 249th was no longer needed to augment



**Soldiers survey damage before emplacing a generator.**

the local infrastructure. Accordingly, the soldiers redeployed back to their home stations that evening.

The 249th also contributed to disaster relief efforts at the Pentagon. On 12 September, the battalion deployed a two-person Prime Power Action Team to Arlington, Virginia, to assist the FEMA Emergency Response Team with any power queries it might have. The USACE representative on-site asked the team to determine the Pentagon's power requirements and recommend how to meet those needs. Fortunately, the Pentagon's electrical systems were largely intact after the attack and needed no external assistance from FEMA.

Their mission accomplished, the 249th soldiers redeployed to Fort Belvoir later that day. However, just 5 days later, the Military District of Washington requested assets from the 249th to consolidate the power needs of the entire relief effort located just outside of the Pentagon. To support this, the battalion deployed two of its 500-kilowatt, low-voltage generators to the site, along with personnel to install and maintain the generators. This mission is still ongoing, and the 249th will continue to support the disaster relief efforts as long as necessary.

In reaction to the tragic events of 11 September, USACE has been at the forefront of federal efforts to respond to this crisis. The Black Lions of the 249th Engineer Battalion have been a major contributing factor in the Corps's efforts and will continue to be our Army's primary resource for emergency power. 

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