

Army Corps Battalion: Life Support For VA Hospital

By [Dr. JoAnne Castagna](#), viewed 2,925 times.

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James J. Peters VA Medical Center in Bronx, NY

Patients at the James J. Peters VA Medical Center in Bronx, New York were pleasantly surprised recently to see active duty soldiers walking in their hallways.

"It's so nice to see when they walk through the facility how the patients react to them. They look at their shoulders and see the rank and they ask 'How are you

Sarge?' And when they're going for coffee the patients stop them and talk with them," said Anthony DelVecchio, project manager, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District.

The soldiers were from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' 249th Engineer Battalion (Prime Power). Not only did they brighten the patient's mood, they made sure the hospital's lights stayed on.

The hospital needed to complete an electrical distribution system upgrade to maintain its accreditation and keep the facility operational for veterans.

This fall the 249th played a key role in getting this project completed, with minimal impact to patients and significant savings. The work included replacing up to 400 circuit breaker panels and installing five backup generators. The hospital already had two backup generators, but hospitals are now required to have more to keep critical portions operational in the event of a power outage.

To accomplish this work, the Corps realized that one fourth of the hospital's electricity needed to be turned off for significant periods of time, sometimes as long as 30 hours, in order to perform the work, meaning temporary power was needed.

Unfortunately, a plan for temporary power was not factored into the VA's project design, so alternatives had to be considered. That is when the Corps called on the 249th. The 249th is a versatile power generation battalion assigned to the Army Corps to provide commercial-level power to military units and federal relief organizations worldwide.

The battalion played a key role in the Corps' response mission following Hurricane Sandy, providing temporary emergency power to critical facilities, such as hospitals, police stations and public housing developments in the New York-New Jersey Metro Area.

"I called them and they agreed to help. They have their own men and equipment and provided us a cost estimate to provide temporary power for the entire project," said DelVecchio.

The project was completed in Fall 2013. The work was only performed on the weekends in order to have minimal impact to patients. The hospital is an out-patient facility where patients are typically not there on the weekends

and the hospital also has several clinics that are closed on the weekends.

"These guys were 100 percent professional," said DelVecchio. "They came in with all of their men, equipment and generators and worked round the clock. They are all about the mission."

The Army Corps and contractors had to swap out old circuit breaker panels and install 130 new ones on several of the patient floors. The five backup generators were installed earlier in the project.

Luis Rosado, project engineer, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District said, *"To install the new circuit breaker panels the project team had to disconnect the power connections, such as cable connections, from the old panels, remove the old panels, install the new panels and reconnect the power connections to the new panels. While this is being done the hospital's electric power needed to be turned off."*

Circuit breaker panels are devices that collect the electric power that comes into the hospital from the outside public power grid. The panels are what transmit the electrical power to the hospital rooms. The project was successfully completed and the hospital is very pleased with the work and how the 249th came to the rescue for their electrical distribution system upgrade project.

"The VA loves them!" said DelVecchio about the 249th. The hospital recently held a ceremony for the Battalion and presented them with certificates of commendation.

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Photo Captions & Credits:

Photo 1: James J. Peters VA Medical Center, Bronx, New York. Credit: James J. Peters VA Medical Center.

Photo 2: The 249th Engineer Battalion feeding cable through an access hole. Credit: James Holmes, electrical engineer, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District.

Photo 3: The 249th Engineer Battalion prepares cables for connection to generator. Credit: Anthony DelVecchio, project manager, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District.