

## I2: NE Soldier

- Tell me about your mission
  - Started in April
  - Called up, told to stay at an armory (1st couple nights) and didn't have beds (did have cots) or food (this is kind of typical)
  - She was put on test team #2
    - Sent to the middle of NE
    - Strong Hispanic population in this area and many meat packaging plants
    - See lots of numbers in this area
    - Started testing
    - Around Easter, it was snowing and cold "as shit"
    - A mix of Army and Air
      - Leader from each side
      - Air ran medical
      - Army ran logistics
  - 1st started was Decon NCOIC (decontamination noncommissioned officer in charge)
    - Ran decon zone until it switched to running registration
  - Registration
    - Checking IDs
    - Making sure that people showing up had appointments
  - Then switched over for free for alls - no appointments
    - Almost worked better
  - Many people hesitant to come to see them because they were in uniform and had state patrol with them
    - Fear of deportation
    - Others concerned with price and healthcare
    - Told them it was free and sent to Test Nebraska
      - Test Nebraska did all the patient contacting after soldiers collected information
      - Soldiers themselves never saw the information to know if they were positive or not unless they were watching the news
  - Spent about 5 weeks in central NE testing that Hispanic/meatpacking population area
  - Then became a mobile team and started bouncing around the state
    - Mostly central and some north
  - Once done with bouncing around came back to central NE and ran a "Task Force" mission
    - Run the main spot and then do a small outreach testing spots in the small towns around and come back to the main spot
    - Did until July-ish
- When the mission ended for you did it end for everyone or is there still an active team?
  - As of NOV. 6th
  - Still one team out that she knows of - doesn't know if still active

- Thinks this one team was doing more supply stuff than testing
- Who took over?
  - The last week or two were supposed to train civilians on how to do it
    - some nursing homes, hospitals, local people
- Did it stay free?
  - No, didn't stay free (researcher thoughts: this is interesting because another soldier mentioned that it wasn't free after mission was over too, but Test Nebraska website says it is all free testing)
- Decon NCOIC - did you decon the whole time?
  - Went with the theory at first that they didn't know what it was and what was going on so they were in Level C Hazmat Gear (CBRNs are Hazmat certified and it was their CERFP (CBRN Enhanced Response Force Package) activated)
  - Used bleach as decon solution
  - Decided it was too much and didn't need it
  - Dropped down to surgical gowns and later on, nothing unless directly testing and then it was choice
- Masks?
  - Did, most of the time
  - If people there
  - "It was mostly in case big brass is watching and not 'oh we really believe in masks'" (Big brass - higher ranking officers)
- So you don't think they were helping?
  - Shrugs
  - I don't know
  - "Maybe I'm not smart enough to know if they're helping but I'm not wearing a mask"
  - I don't have symptoms - yes could be asymptomatic but I could just be me
- Mostly rural areas?
  - Kind of - lots of rural areas
  - Some bigger towns - Green Island and Kearney and Lexington or "Mexington"
    - (Green Island is the 3rd largest city in Nebraska)
    - Kearney is a college town
- In the questionnaire asked, she talked about a town, not at all happy they were there
  - Kearney
  - "Assholes"
  - Mad they (National Guard) were there and trying to help them
  - Mad they were in the military
  - Told soldiers "fuck you"
  - Most other places they went they were giving them a ton of food or offering to pay for their meal and such, but Kearney was just not happy with it
- No weapons right?
  - No
  - "Bleach, wish I could have shot bleach in their fucking eye" (came out in a very joking and just annoyed tone)

- Why do you think Kearney was so mad?
  - IDK - they (state) picked 5 colleges that the state picked for Corona holding/quarantine areas if people wanted to stay there or get monitored or whatever
  - Kearney didn't seem to have an issue with that
  - Not sure why they had such a big issue with them
  - Her team didn't go into other college towns
  - Another team she talked to didn't have issues in other college towns
- They weren't violent at all right?
  - "No, just verbally abusive. They almost made one of my little boys cry." (- referring to a younger soldier under her)
    - "The nicest kid on the whole fucking team and they were telling him what a piece of shit he was and he just automatically took it to heart. It was sad."
- While testing?
  - Yes
- Were they forced to test or was it optional?
  - Some of them were forced but it was mostly optional
  - Forced by employers
  - If they didn't test she wasn't sure what happened
- Types of tests?
  - Didn't know what they were called but long Q Tips that went up the nose for 10 s then down (probably nasopharyngeal)
  - Brain tickler
- The questionnaire mentioned trial and error test kits
  - Had them try a gargle test
  - Had to drink a solution, gargle it for 11-15s and then spit it back into a tube
  - Also had their brain tickled because wasn't sure if it would work - must not have because never saw it again after one day
- Who was coordinating the mission and who did the testing site determination?
  - System was Test Nebraska
  - Governor was pushing it
  - People could pick where they wanted to get tested at by location and date and then the system would give a time to show up around
- How long did they use level C?
  - About 2 months
  - Kept trying to downgrade and then they were saying no they couldn't
  - Seemed openly frustrated but not surprised by this
- Team size?
  - 12-14 for one testing site
  - Would test on average about 300 a day
  - Days were not long
  - Very easy gig
  - Did depend on the place when they would have them come



- Didn't do it on 'refit days' (days off)
- Then moved to once a day and then no times a day (not sure if she meant this during refit days or all days)
- How many days a week did you work?
  - Started out 7, casually dropped off to 5
- Ever do any COVID tests?
  - She didn't and they didn't test any of the soldiers unless they thought they had symptoms
  - One person on her team they thought did but he ended up testing negative
  - Some people got tested when they got off mission but not all
- Did you quarantine at the end?
  - She did but because of her civilian job - boss made her and the county paid for it
  - Said she still went to the gym and such
- Were you upset that the guard didn't pay for a quarantine period?
  - Sad but mostly because she was about 12 days away from hitting her 90 days on active duty (so quarantine would have put her there)
  - But sadder about the loss of benefits and not that they didn't have her quarantine
  - She did ask about it though
  - Benefits lost are the Post 9/11 GI bill and the loss of veteran status with VA and disability and retirement stuff
- What orders were you on?
  - Title 10 for some of it and 32 for the rest of it
  - Supposed to go 32 within a week but didn't until a couple of weeks after
  - Researcher information on what different orders mean (not part of interview):
    - <https://www.military.com/benefits/reserve-and-guard-benefits/whats-difference-between-title-10-and-title-32-mobilization-orders.html>
    - 3 types of orders - all can be used for COVID
      - Title 10 - Federal
        - Funds and orders under federal control
        - Automatically have tricare - free treatment at military facilities, no cost, also covered in ED
        - National defense
        - Deployments usually
      - Title 32 - state
        - Under state control - called up by governor
        - This can be directed to send guard members to any state of US territory
        - If +30 days - same benefits at Title 10
        - Usually for national emergencies
      - State Active Duty - SAD
        - Different
        - Healthcare coverage less clear
        - Duty related should be covered
        - Depends on length and mission
        - Benefits not the same
- Did you think your mission made an impact on public health control of COVID?

- “Yeah probably”
- Didn’t know
- Could tell they were doing good things
- But could tell that people didn’t give a crap about it (not the service members)
  - Most of the populations (rural/small towns) clearly didn’t believe in the ‘rona
- Did your team believe it was real or an actual threat?
  - Yeah at first - “the longer it went on, the less threat it seemed”
  - Then everyone they were testing was appearing to come up negative according to the health department
    - Started questioning if it was a waste of time and resources - “definitely a waste of resources”
- Didn’t know about federal funds (researcher mentioned how Ohio has been short on money due to their activations)
- Did normal units in NE (ones not activated) stop drilling in person, like OH?
  - Hers did but there was like no one left to
  - Virtual IDT did happen for April and May
- They had Tricare the entire time
- If you could change anything about the mission, what would you change to make it better or feel more purposeful?
  - Besides giving 90 days and beds to sleep in at the start
  - “It did feel purposeful until it didn’t”
  - They did cut the teams off at the right point with numbers of cases
  - Thinks they played it right
- Are you scared of getting called back in with rising rates?
  - No, thinks they’ll let healthcare workers do it because then they can charge for it and they don’t have to pay soldiers
- But what about the Hispanic populations that you were testing that are illegals?
  - That is a problem - she doesn’t know how they are getting tested anymore
- Did the Hispanics seem scared of COVID?
  - No just super scared of being deported
  - There was a local health department lady that was Hispanic that helped to dissipate fears by telling everyone that no one would be deported and she helped calm fears
    - This was in Grand Island (probably highest hispanic population)
    - She would tell them the soldiers were trying to help
- Language barrier?
  - Yes it was rough
  - They had to charade it out
  - And only one of her for 300/400 people
  - They couldn't seem to find any others
- Talked about “mexington”
  - Said there were a lot of Somalians
  - First time there weren’t any translators and struggled

- The next time they found a couple - but wasn't very good
- Said she would improve with translators for every team
  - They did pass us the chain that they needed them and they didn't give any
- Did you do an AAR (after action review) for the mission?
  - She thinks so, like came up once
  - Does think the translator issue was mentioned
- Were you concerned about getting medical care
  - No not really
  - One new kid in new unit (post mission) - said she can tell he's a weird dude and that he's crazy scared of the 'rona but said he's scared of everything
- No one knows anyone that's had it and died?
  - Anyone she's known that has had it at most lost their taste and it took awhile to come back
  - Doesn't really know anyone high risk though
  - She did know one girl with she thinks Crohn's Disease that got it and didn't have an issue with it
    - Part of the reason she doesn't see it serious
    - She does see it bad in the nursing homes on rescue calls (she's also a firefighter/EMT) and they often have cancer or worse and expects to see issues with it