

USAMRIID Soldiers Recognized for Operation Warp Speed Support

--By Caree Vander Linden, USAMRIID PAO

Two Soldiers stationed at the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases were recently commended for their outstanding efforts in support of the U.S. government response to COVID-19, formerly known as Operation Warp Speed. SSG Jonathan Gadbilao and SGT Jahzeel Orozco, medical laboratory technicians at USAMRIID, received the Joint Service Commendation Medal and the Armed Forces Service Medal in a ceremony in Baltimore, Md.

OWS was created to deliver 300 million doses of a safe, effective vaccine for COVID-19 by January of this year, as part of a broader strategy to accelerate the development, manufacturing, and distribution of COVID-19 medical countermeasures for the nation.

“This unified response brought together unparalleled scientific and medical expertise from throughout the U.S. government,” said MAJ Brandon Robinson, who supervised the USAMRIID Soldiers during the project. “Combined with planning and logistics professionals from the Department of Defense, American industrial ingenuity, and innovation from the academic sector, these team members were able to synchronize and rapidly execute a vaccine acceleration strategy.”

From October 2020 through April 2021, Gadbilao and Orozco were detailed to Emergent BioSolutions to serve as Quality Control Analysts. They were responsible for the processing, delivery, and management of samples at Emergent and seven outside laboratories. In addition, they performed laboratory procedures, maintained documents and records in a data base in accordance with Standard Operating Procedures, and contributed to continuous improvement processes within the department.

According to Robinson, their efforts overall helped to ensure regulatory compliance with Food and Drug Administration quality assurance standards.

Orozco said the team worked 10-12 hour days, including weekend and evening shifts. Despite the long days, “it was a good experience overall,” he said. “Without this detail, I would not have been exposed to the inner workings of the [pharmaceutical] industry.”

Gadbilao agreed, saying, “Not only was it an honor for us to be part of the mission, but I also learned a lot. The training was a bonus.”

Both Soldiers thought their team of seven personnel (six Soldiers and one OIC) bonded well, despite coming from units all over the country.

“Everyone acted professionally and we worked well together,” Gadbilao said. “We were thankful to be part of the team.”

At its height, OWS had over 500 assigned personnel, according to Robinson, not including additional partnerships with Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institutes of Health, and the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority.

“The relentless dedication and patriotism of these Soldiers was a tremendous feat in support of the people of the United States of America,” Robinson added. “As the country emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, this generation—and future generations—will remember their efforts.”

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Caption:

SGT Jahzeel Orozco and SSG Jonathan Gadbilao of USAMRIID, flanked by MG Sharpsten (far L) and COL Post (far R), two members of the DoD COVID-19 prevention and treatment logistics program leadership team, received the Joint Service Commendation Medal and the Armed Forces Service Medal for work performed in support of Operation Warp Speed.

Credit:

Photo by SSG Katherine Scott, USAMRIID