

**Translational Research Group  
Marine Corps University  
Ebola 100 Project**

**Notice of Data Availability in Qualitative Data Repository  
June 2020**

**Project Location in Repository:** <https://doi.org/10.5064/F68PQFS8>

**Translational Research Group Background:**

The Translational Research Group (TRG) was a multidisciplinary group of social scientists within the U.S. Marine Corps' culture center that focused on providing cultural, regional, and language education and training. TRG operated from 2010 through June 2020. Its work was balanced between two core functions. Its primary function was to conduct social science research on Marines and Marine Corps organizations and provide scientific advising to Marine Corps leaders. It also supported the culture center by providing conceptual guidance for education and training and by running the center's assessment program to evaluate the effectiveness of the center's activities. The group's director was the cultural anthropologist, Kerry Foshier (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9421-9243>). Additional information about the group can be found in two articles:

- Foshier, K. 2018. Field Report: Implementing a Social Science Capability in a Marine Corps Organization. *Journal of Business Anthropology*. Spring. 7(1):133-152. <https://doi.org/10.22439/jba.v7i1.5495>.
- Foshier, K. et al. 2020. Translational Research in a Military Organization: The Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project. *Annals of Anthropological Practice*. May. 44(1):14-32. <https://doi.org/10.1111/napa.12130>.

**Qualitative Data Repository (QDR) Information:**

The [QDR](#) is an archive for storing and sharing data and associated materials from qualitative and mixed methods projects. It is hosted by the [Center for Qualitative and Multi-Method Inquiry](#), a unit of the [Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs](#) at [Syracuse University](#). Users do not have to have an institutional membership agreement to access materials on the QDR, but do need to sign up for a free account.

**Project Background:**

The Ebola 100 project was developed to contribute military voices to the larger Ebola 100 Project (<https://ebola100project.net/>), which was run by a consortium of individuals and institutions and had the goal of creating a public archive of interviews with individuals involved in the West Africa Ebola outbreak of 2014-2015. The project was conducted under Marine Corps Human Subjects Protection Protocol USMC.2015.0011. Additional detail is below. A more detailed project overview is included as an appendix to this document.

Lead Researcher: Kristin Post. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8747-7060>

Principal Investigator/Government Supervisor: Kerry Foshier. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9421-9243>

**Data and Supplementary Material Overview:**

This dataset consists of 8 interview transcripts from 7 participants (1 participant was interviewed twice). Interviews were with military officers and were conducted between 2015 and 2017. Also included in the archive are a project overview, an explanation of data sharing with the Ebola 100 archive, and the original human subjects protection protocol. Access to the transcripts requires a human subjects protection protocol that has been approved by an Institutional Review Board (detailed information on accessing data is available in the QDR at <https://doi.org/10.5064/F68PQFS8/EUKAJD>). Other project materials are publicly available in the QDR.

**Associated Publication:**

Post, Kristen. 2019. "The Ebola 100 Project: A Flexible Approach to Collaborative Research." *Practicing Anthropology*. Winter 41(1):12-14. (<https://doi.org/10.17730/0888-4552.41.1.12>).

**Methods:**

This project used semi-structured interviews to ensure participants were able to raise the issues they felt were most important. Two researchers conducted interviews, but each interview involved only one researcher. TRG researchers digitally recorded each interview. During the consent process, participants chose one of three options for how they wanted to participate: public/on-the-record, non-attribution/confidential, or anonymous/background information. Details regarding these options and the consent process are provided in the project materials.

**Recruitment and Sample:**

TRG researchers recruited participants among military personnel using the snowball sampling method based on the professional network of the lead researcher. The sample was opportunistic with no effort made in terms of representativeness on any set of characteristics.

Participants totaled eight male field grade officers (majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels). One participant withdrew from the research after the interview. Researchers deleted all files relevant to this individual (audio, contact information, email text, word documents) from computers and back-up hard drives.

**Interview Sites and Length:**

Interviews were conducted by telephone or in individually arranged settings outside of formal work spaces in the National Capitol Region.<sup>1</sup> Each interview was tentatively scheduled for one hour, but actual length varied based on the interviewees' preference.

**Dataset:**

This dataset consists of 8 transcripts from 7 participants. Three participants chose the public option during the consent process. Four chose the non-attribution option. One participant was interviewed twice (thus there are five public transcripts, though only four public participants). No participants chose the anonymous option. Interviews were conducted between 2015 and 2017.

**Data Processing:**

All audio files were transcribed by TRG researchers and processed according to the protocol. Given the small sample size, the lead researcher and PI made the decision to process all transcripts at the "non-attribution" level. For instance, all participant names, no matter which category the participant selected, were removed from all transcripts and replaced with a code. For additional details on data cleaning and scrubbing, please see the front matter included in the project transcripts. Data from this research was retained by TRG until its closure in June 2020. Transcripts, audio files, consent forms, and contact information have been stored according to the institutional review board protocol, and the processes described in the consent language (provided in Table 1). All raw data, code keys, and participant contact information have been destroyed.

**Topics:**

Discussions generally covered participant experiences with the Liberian Ebola outbreak before, during and after the crisis. Participants described experiences in the outbreak area, as well as activities that took place in the U.S. or at U.S. facilities and bases in other countries.

**Additional Materials:**

The documentation associated with this project includes the original protocol materials, information on the transition of files to the Ebola 100 archive, and a public domain project overview.

**Project Location in QDR:** <https://doi.org/10.5064/F68PQFS8>

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<sup>1</sup> The National Capitol Region includes Washington, D.C. and nearby counties in Virginia and Maryland.



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**Appendix 1**

Status Report: Lessons Learned from 2014 - 2015 Ebola Virus Disease Outbreak in West Africa  
Released 7 Dec 2016

Note: The Status Report is a public domain document.

**Note:** This status report is a public domain research outcome from the Translational Research Group.

**Additional materials from this project** are now available in the Qualitative Data Repository at <https://doi.org/10.5064/F68PQFS8>

**Additional information about the broader Ebola 100 Project** is available at <https://ebola100project.net/>

**An article based on this research** is now available: Post, K., 2019. "The Ebola 100 Project: A Flexible Approach to Collaborative Research" in *Practicing Anthropology*, Winter 41(1):12-14. (<https://doi.org/10.17730/0888-4552.41.1.12>).



## **Status Report: USMC.2015.0011: Lessons Learned from 2014 - 2015 Ebola Virus Disease Outbreak in West Africa**

Principal Investigator: Kerry Fosher, PhD  
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Publication Date: 07 December 2016

# Status Report: USMC.2015.0011: Lessons Learned from 2014-2015 Ebola Virus Disease Outbreak in West Africa

Principal Investigator: Kerry Fosher, PhD

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Publication Date: 07 December 2016

## INTRODUCTION

On 19 March 2014, the infectious disease communication service, ProMed, distributed a request for information regarding at least 35 cases of an undiagnosed hemorrhagic fever in Guinea.<sup>1</sup> By 22 March, laboratory tests confirmed that the outbreak was Ebola virus disease (EVD)<sup>2</sup>. The outbreak would be the most geographically widespread and deadliest since EVD was first discovered in 1976. The response was complex, involving government and non-government organizations from many countries and local organizations and populations, all interacting with each other. The US Department of Defense (DoD) also participated in the response effort, most visibly with Operation UNITED ASSISTANCE (OUA), which was launched in September 2015. This was the first US military operation to support a “disease-driven foreign humanitarian assistance mission.”<sup>3</sup> This EVD outbreak triggered significant shifts throughout the realm of humanitarian assistance, and DoD is one of many organizations adapting to a “new normal” as a result.

In April 2015, Dr. Sharon Abramowitz (formerly of the University of Florida<sup>4</sup>) launched an effort, entitled Ebola 100, to coordinate social science researchers to capture lessons learned. Ebola 100 was created to fill a critical need to capture knowledge developed during the West Africa EVD outbreak before the information was lost and the network of responders became attenuated. Members of CAOCL’s Translational Research Group (TRG) were invited to participate in this project and conduct interviews with non- government and government organizations, especially those in the Department of Defense. By September 2015, TRG had approval from the Marine Corps’ Institutional Review Board to launch this research project.<sup>5</sup> What follows is a report and summary of the research conducted through November 2016.

### Research purpose

This exploratory research is designed to create a pool of sharable transcripts that capture lessons learned about organizational responses, including that of the Department of Defense, to the EVD outbreak in West Africa. Written transcripts of the interviews will be available via an online open-source database to future researchers, practitioners, and policymakers interested in the development, dissemination, and use of social science knowledge and expertise during the outbreak.

### Research Plan

To capture lessons learned, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews using an opportunistic sample of individuals who were involved in the EVD response in West Africa (through the snowball method of recruiting, as described below). The use of semi-structured rather than structured interviews ensured that participants were able to raise important issues that the research team may not have identified in advance. It furthermore allowed researchers to tailor questions to the expertise and specific activities in which the interviewee was engaged. Interviews were conducted by phone or in person and were digitally recorded. On an intermittent basis and as resources allowed, interviews have been transcribed and scrubbed according to the designated level of Confidentiality determined by the interviewee (see below). When completed, these transcribed and scrubbed interviews will be archived on an open-source searchable digital database that is available via the Internet.

#### a. Participants

Participants include government and non-government individuals who were involved in the preparation and planning for, response to, and observation of the ongoing outbreak of EVD in Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone. Potential participants were initially contacted through email correspondence that included the purpose of the project, a sample list of interview questions, and the informed consent agreement. The informed consent document included three levels of data preservation: 1) public/on

<sup>1</sup> ProMED-mail [Internet]. Brookline (MA): Undiagnosed Viral Hemorrhagic Fever- Guinea: (Nzerekore) Request for Information. 2014 Mar 19– [cited 2016 Dec 07]. Available from: <http://www.promedmail.org/post/2342420>

<sup>2</sup> ProMED-mail [Internet]. Brookline (MA): Undiagnosed Viral Hemorrhagic Fever- Guinea (02): Ebola confirmed. 2014 Mar 22– [cited 2016 Dec 07]. Available from: <http://www.promedmail.org/post/2349696>

<sup>3</sup> Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis (2016). *Operation UNITED ASSISTANCE: the DOD response to Ebola in West Africa*. Retrieved on 25 November 2016 from: [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/ebola/OUA\\_report\\_jan2016.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/ebola/OUA_report_jan2016.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Abramowitz began the Ebola 100 Project under a human subjects research protocol authorized by her then-employer, the University of Florida (#2015-U-0412) in April 2015. Dr. Abramowitz subsequently left her position there and received an exemption determination on human subjects research from the Western Institutional Review Board (WIRB Work Order #1-948530-1) in June 2016.

<sup>5</sup> This research project is conducted under Human Subjects Research- Protocol #USMC.2015.0011-IR-EP7-A.

the record, 2) non-attribution/confidential, and 3) anonymous/background information.<sup>6</sup> These data preservation options were in place so that participants would feel comfortable providing candid responses to questions while minimizing risk to their financial standing, career, employability, insurability, reputation, etc. as a result of their participation.

As of the date of this report, TRG has conducted ten semi-structured interviews. Two interviews are with non-government personnel; the remaining eight are with servicemen from the Army, Air Force, or Marine Corps. One participant worked in the Pentagon, the remaining seven military personnel were stationed in Liberia on various missions prior to the outbreak. Some were part of Operation ONWARD LIBERTY, the Marine Corps Security Cooperation Mission. Others worked at the US Embassy in Liberia, or the United Nations mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Some participants continued under their original mission; others transitioned into supporting OUA, a joint service mission led by United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM). Participants played a variety of roles during the outbreak including administrative, logistical, legal, and advisory roles.

#### b. Process

Once participants confirmed their interest in participating in the research, the TRG researcher confirmed an interview time and/or place. Half of the interviews were conducted in person, the rest by phone. All of the interviews lasted a minimum of one hour. Some participants wished to continue beyond the minimum time requested, and the longest interview was just over two hours. At the conclusion of the interviews, interviewees confirmed their preferred level of data preservation. When transcriptions were completed, they were emailed to the participants for review, and, if requested by the participant, portions were scrubbed. Once all of the interviews are transcribed, scrubbed, and approved, they will be transferred to Dr. Abramowitz who is overseeing the construction and maintenance of the online database.

### Execution of the plan

- a. The majority of participants were recruited through snowball sampling.<sup>7</sup> The initial participant in the project was contacted through a personal connection to a TRG researcher, and that person identified additional potential interviewees. Subsequent interviewees added people they knew to the list of potential participants. Often, the participant would personally email other potential participants, while cc'ing the TRG researcher.
- b. All willing military personnel contacted through this snowball sampling process have been interviewed.
- c. Four of the eight military interviews have not yet been transcribed due to limited transcription resources. Once recently-hired TRG personnel are added to the human subjects research protocol, this backlog will be addressed. Until that time, additional interviews are not prudent, and thorough data analysis is not yet possible.
  - i. One TRG researcher has participated in an Ebola 100 technical working group formed by Dr. Abramowitz. The two interviews with non-government personnel were an outgrowth of this collaboration and are not
- d. Though a formal analysis of the interview data has not been conducted, potential themes have already emerged. What follows is a list of themes from the eight military interviews that can be explored during the data analysis phase:
  - i. Many participants described the conflict between scientific knowledge about the contagious nature of Ebola and perceived fears (often US-based) about the potential spread of the disease.
    1. In Liberia, there appears to have been a rapid and relatively smooth transition after the outbreak was identified into training and education about the disease. Within a few months, in their description, people were taking many precautionary measures to halt the spread of the virus. All of the military participants interviewed said they felt comfortable with the risk they took by remaining in Liberia and working with their Liberian counterparts.
    2. This is in contrast to what participants felt was the over-abundance of caution in the United States. One example is that all returning military personnel from Liberia (and other West African countries) were housed in a "tent city" on a US base for 21 days of "controlled monitoring." Interviewees felt this quarantine measure was disproportionate to the real threat but attributed the decision to a "better safe than sorry" philosophy.
      - ii. Some interviewees felt OUA was more style than substance. OUA increased logistical abilities and resources to build treatment facilities in Liberia, but it was perceived by some on the ground as a costly and somewhat superficial "show of force."
      - iii. Those who had relationships with the Liberian military described close relationships between their partners and themselves. A few participants were very impressed with individual Liberians who they felt provided cool-headed leadership at the height of the crisis. Many were impressed by the Liberian military response to the crisis and said that the outbreak served as an unintended, but effective opportunity for the Liberian military to conduct a real-world, complex, and high stakes operation within their borders. For those participants, the Ebola outbreak was a litmus test for Operation ONWARD LIBERTY, the six-year-old mission mentoring and advising mission that was established between the US Department of State and Liberian government after that country's civil war.

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<sup>6</sup> Public/on the record- transcripts may be released without removal of any material. Non-attribution/confidential- interviewee name and organizational affiliation will be removed. Anonymous/background information- interviewee name and organizational affiliation will be removed; contact information will be deleted. Release of partial or scrubbed transcripts will be subject to explicit permission of the interviewee.

<sup>7</sup> The two non-governmental participants were identified through the listservs and websites made available through the University of Florida recruitment process.

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## CONCLUSION

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The West Africa EVD outbreak was unprecedented for many reasons, including the way it has impacted how international organizations, national leaders, and local government leaders view humanitarian response efforts and their roles in these efforts. The Ebola 100 research initiative is a unique effort on behalf of social scientists to capture knowledge from individuals who performed a wide variety of roles in the response effort. In contrast to the other academics and social scientists participating in Ebola 100, TRG researchers housed within the Marine Corps' Education Command have unique access to military personnel. In regard to the research process, the snowball sampling method has netted higher-ranking personnel, many of whom know each other from their deployment to Liberia. In other words, this effort has not captured the range of military ranks and specialties that deployed with OUA. On the other hand, these eight military participants provide complementary viewpoints of a similar stage in the outbreak timeline, and the results may be slightly more deep than wide. Once the completed transcripts are transitioned to the Ebola 100 website, TRG personnel, as well as individuals who access the Ebola 100 database in the future, will have a rich resource of lessons learned upon which to draw.