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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**235th MP Company remains actively engaged in Afghanistan**

*By Maj. Orson Ward, public affairs officer*

BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan – Nine months down and three to go. Soldiers from the 235th Military Police Company, South Dakota Army National Guard, remain actively engaged conducting security missions during a year-long deployment in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

The 130 Soldiers from the Rapid City-based unit began their 12-month “boots-on-ground” deployment in January and served for the past several months in four separate locations; Bagram Air Base, Forward Operating Base Salerno located just north of Khwost, FOB Fenty at the Jalalabad Airfield in northeastern Afghanistan, and at Camp Eggers in Kabul.

According to 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Dana Nelson of Rapid City, S.D., the unit’s operations include law-and-order and convoy security missions, provincial reconstruction team site security, customs inspections, and detainee security. He said the unit also provides additional support to the bases where unit members are stationed. With a mobilized reactionary force, the 235th provides immediate military response in case of an incident or attack.

“We are staying pretty busy and the troops are doing great,” said Nelson.

Nelson said one of the reasons the morale of the unit remains high because of the satisfaction of knowing the service they are providing and the interaction with the local population is having a positive effect.

“Our troops are well received because they're getting things done to make things better here,” he said, “Like building schools, hospitals, bridges and that type of thing.”

“The locals know you’re here to help them out,” said Spc. Jeremy Timmer, Spearfish, S.D., who has had a great deal of interaction with the local population. His platoon was assigned to conduct village assessments the first few months of the deployment.

“We have interactions with everybody, from far away into the mountains to right next to the base,” said Timmer. “It’s really good to know that you are doing something for the locals around here, and it's nice to go out and visit with these people.”

Timmer said his unit has been able to help by providing food and fresh water from newly dug wells, and its presence reduces the threat of attack from the Taliban.

“The Taliban is real big out here, so we talk to them about making sure the Taliban is gone and if they show up we can help,” he said.

This is Timmer’s first deployment overseas but for Spc. Andrew Martinmaas of Miller, S.D., this is his second as he deployed for a year to Iraq in 2004-2005 with 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 147<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery. While serving with the South Dakota artillery unit, Martinmaas performed similar security escort missions that he and fellow Soldiers are now conducting in Afghanistan.

“We do some convoys that are similar but also different,” said Martinmaas comparing the two deployments. “In Iraq we would spend 14 to 16 hours a day on the road and we’d travel hundreds of miles. [Now] we spend 14 to 16 hour days on the road and we may only go about 30 miles.”

Martinmaas said this is due to the extreme difference in the two countries’ terrain and weather. He said the mountains and climate in Afghanistan have some similarities to the Black Hills of South Dakota where he calls home.

Despite the similarities, the one thing all 235<sup>th</sup> Soldiers have in the back of their mind is the distance and absence of their families.

“Leaving my family obviously was difficult,” said Staff Sgt. Seth Brennan of Deadwood, S.D.

Brennan and many of his fellow MPs are familiar with separation from family. He and about a third of the unit members serving in Afghanistan deployed to Fort Carson, Colo., in February of 2003, to conduct law enforcement missions for the active duty installation.

Brennan said he was personally disappointed when the unit got mobilized a few years ago because they weren’t going overseas. The deployment to Afghanistan is an adventure he and his fellow Soldiers were eager to experience.

“My wife and I kind of knew what to expect since we had already been in this situation,” said Brennan. “The only difference this time around is I’ve got a three-year-old daughter.”