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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**Rapid City Guard unit will be honored at deployment ceremony**

RAPID CITY, S.D. – Soldiers from Detachment 3, Company A, 641<sup>st</sup> Aviation, South Dakota Army National will be honored during a deployment ceremony at 10 a.m. (MDT) on Thursday, Oct. 11, at the Army Aviation Support Facility near the Rapid City Regional Airport.

The public is encouraged to attend.

The South Dakota Army National Guard unit will deploy for six to 12 months in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and report to Fort Benning, Ga., to complete the deployment process. The unit will spend time training at Fort Benning before it deploys overseas with a primary mission of providing aviation support to units in theatre.

The detachment specializes in transporting personnel and cargo with its two C-23 Sherpa cargo planes. The C-23 Sherpa is capable of airlifting up to three and a half tons of cargo or about 20 passengers.

This is the unit's second deployment to Iraq as the unit was mobilized as Detachment 3, Company A, 249<sup>th</sup> Aviation on Dec. 1, 2004, and deployed there in January of 2005. Soldiers returned from this last deployment in January of 2006. The recent name change from the 249<sup>th</sup> to the 641<sup>st</sup> is due to the Army's Transformation but the unit personnel, equipment and mission remain the same.

During the 2005 deployment, the unit was stationed at Logistical Support Area Anaconda, about 45 miles north of Baghdad.

During the unit's last tour in Iraq, the 249<sup>th</sup> flew 19,887 passengers, and delivered over 4.5 million pounds of cargo that included 541 equipment hauls and 90 ammunitions hauls. The aviators completed 1,260 missions by flying more than 4,800 hours throughout the combat zone.

Because of its performance in Iraq, Company A, 249<sup>th</sup> Aviation was selected as the 2005 Army Aviation Fixed Wing Unit of the Year by the Army Aviation Association of America. This honor goes to the most distinguished fixed wing unit within the Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve aviation units currently serving throughout the world.

Based at the Army Aviation Support Facility near the Rapid City Regional Airport, Det. 3, Company A, 641<sup>st</sup> Aviation consists of four pilots and four flight engineers. The unit typically deploys with three additional detachments from three other states, Washington, Oregon, and Oklahoma, to form Company A, 641<sup>st</sup> Aviation.