

South Dakota National Guard

Public Affairs Office

Phone: 605-737-6721 Email: pao@sd.ngb.army.mil

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

South Dakota MEDEVAC team ready for action

By Sgt. A.M. LaVey
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AL ASAD AIR BASE, Iraq — Every morning flight crews from Forward Support Medical Team, Company C, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment, South Dakota Army National Guard, head out to the flight line to bring their UH-60A Black Hawk helicopters through maintenance and pre-flight inspections, getting them ready for a mission which they hope they will never have to perform.

The teams are ready and waiting to be called upon, but “when we aren’t working, it’s good for the rest of the Army,” said 1st Lt. Joseph A. Stack, the team’s section leader and operations officer.

Charlie Company has three teams spread throughout the central region of Iraq, and is one of two aerial medical evacuation companies responsible for in-flight medical care for the entire country. The FSMT here is responsible for the northwest sector of the central region.

The company is comprised of pilots, mechanics, crew chiefs, flight medics and support personnel split between both the South Dakota and Montana Army National Guard.

“At home we drill separately— each in our own state, but while deployed we all get to come together,” said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Alissa Bare, pilot and team tactical operations officer. “It’s neat, like we’ve never been separated.”

Team as family plays a big part in why these soldiers join and stay in the National Guard.

“When I was active duty, my unit was my family, but generally after deployments, people leave the unit,” said Sgt. Adam D. Max, one of the team’s flight medics. “But in a National Guard unit, that family stays together pretty much their entire careers. So it’s like a real family - you know each other and their families a lot more than you do on the active side.”

Family also effects this team’s Guard recruitment. A few of the soldiers have family members also in the Guard, some of them aviators as well. Some just want to stay near their family.

“I joined the National Guard so that I could stay near home, while also serving my country and helping out the local community,” said Pfc. Nicholas Pickett, a UH-60 helicopter repairer with Company D, 1/180th Avn. Reg.

For many members of this team, this is their first deployment, as well as their first real-world mission.

“This mission is the best mission in the military,” said Stack. “We get to help people and it is the most challenging and most rewarding part of the job, flying a soldier to get the care he needs at the hospital in Baghdad.”

The MEDEVAC mission is very specific mission of timing and skill, these helicopters are sometimes put through environment conditions that other crews often don't face and as such require precision maintenance.

“We have to be ready to leave at any moment,” said Pickett. “Each day brings maintenance checks. You're looking at all the moving parts, a helicopter has a lot more moving parts than a fixed-wing so you have to inspect those parts and make sure everything is good.”

The maintainers are aware of the magnitude of their mission.

“Everybody relies on us,” said Pickett. “I am the beginning of the domino effect, if I'm not doing my job keeping the aircraft ready, then we can't go out and fly and save other people's lives. A lot of people rely on me.”

When not on mission or performing maintenance, the team is constantly training to ward of compliancy and to improve themselves personally and vocationally.

“Our operational tempo is slow most of the time, so we keep ourselves busy” said Stack. “The pilots host crew-led academics and the crew chiefs and medics cross train as much as possible.”

With the upcoming transition from American forces to Iraqi, the team might not be as busy as they thought they'd be, but they understand their importance in the region, supporting the remaining troops on the ground.

“We need to be here,” said Warrant Officer 1 Matthew T. Noble, one of the team's pilots. “We knew it was probably going to be slow, compared to Afghanistan – those guys are pretty busy - but we need to be here and we will be here until the last people leave Al Asad.

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PHOTOS: High-resolution photos for this release are available upon request or at: www.flickr.com/southdakotationalguard



111022-A-5083L-041: Sgt. Adam D. Max, of Rapid City, a flight medic with Forward Support Medical Team, Company C, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment, South Dakota Army National Guard, conducts a daily pre-flight inspection, getting ready for another day on the job at Al Asad Air Base, Iraq, Oct. 22, 2011. (Photo by Sgt. A.M. LaVey)



111022-A-5083L-001: Sgt. Anthony L. Michaelson, a crew chief with Forward Support Medical Team, Company D, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment, Montana Army National Guard, conducts a daily pre-flight inspection, getting ready for another day on the job at Al Asad Air Base, Iraq, Oct. 22, 2011. (Photo by Sgt. A.M. LaVey)



111022-A-5083L-009: Pfc. Nicholas Pickett, of Whitewood, a UH-60 Black Hawk repairer with Forward Support Medical Team, Company D, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment, South Dakota Army National Guard, conducts a daily maintenance inspection, getting ready for another day on the job at Al Asad Air Base, Iraq, Oct. 22, 2011. (Photo by Sgt. A.M. LaVey)

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Maj. Brendan Murphy at (605) 737-6721 or cell (605) 431-8753, or e-mail pao@sd.ngb.army.mil.