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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Soldiers get hooked up with ‘hawks

*By Sgt. Theanne Tangen and Spc. Jason Kaneshiro
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STURGIS, S.D. – In the distance, above the sound of the wind rustling through the grass, the low, mechanical drone of rotors cuts through the air. Soldiers look to the sky, and what initially was a small, black spot in the distance quickly becomes the outline of a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter.

The Blackhawks from C Company, 1st Battalion of the 135th Infantry Regiment, Nebraska Army National Guard, arrived Friday, June 6, at the Sturgis Municipal Airport to give Soldiers from across the country the opportunity for hands-on, sling-load training as part of the 2008 Golden Coyote training exercise, hosted by the South Dakota Army National Guard.

The sling-load training was conducted by a seven-person mobile training team, currently the only team of its kind to provide this type of training from Fort Lee, Va., which travels around the world to train members of the armed services.

“This training is excellent,” said Lovell Willis, a retired Soldier from Birmingham, Ala., who is an instructor with the mobile training team. “We show the Soldiers how to be proficient at rigging a load.”

Sling-loading – the process of taking supplies and rigging them to a helicopter as it hovers overhead – has proven to be a critical skill for troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. In many instances, supplies and equipment are often needed in areas inaccessible by ground vehicles and must be airlifted to remote areas of operation. In those situations, Soldiers who are trained in sling loading become instrumental in sustaining the mission and supporting fellow Soldiers.

As part of the training, Willis stressed the importance of safety and paying attention to detail. With loads of up to 10,000 pounds being attached to the underside of the helicopters, the dangers of improper procedures are explained and shown to the students.

“You don’t want anything to go wrong,” Willis said. “You miss one thing and it can cost somebody their life.”

The physical loads may be heavy, but the burden of responsibility weighed even heavier on the minds of the students.

When she first started the course, Spc. Monica Jacobs, an administrative specialist with the Army Reserve’s 484th Medical Detachment from Kalamazoo, Mich., felt intimidated by the task of remembering all the details involved in the sling-load process. As she progressed through the training, her skills at sling loading and her confidence as a Soldier grew.

“The coolest thing was seeing the Blackhawks flying around and seeing people hooking the loads up. I didn’t think I would be doing anything with helicopters,” said Jacobs.

-30-

High resolution photos will be available at the following Web site:

LINK: <https://sdguard.ngb.army.mil/sites/GC2008/default.aspx>

Photo Cut Lines:

080606-A-7033K-056.JPG: UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters, provided by C Company, 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation of the Nebraska Army National Guard, were on hand Friday, June 6, at the Sturgis Municipal Airport to provide hands-on training to Soldiers participating in the sling-load course being taught in conjunction with the 2008 Golden Coyote training exercise hosted by the South Dakota Army National Guard. (Army Reserve photo by Spc. Jason Kaneshiro) (RELEASED)

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080606-A-7033K-135.JPG: UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters provided by C Company, 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation of the Nebraska Army National Guard, were on hand Friday, June 6, at the Sturgis Municipal Airport to provide hands-on training to Soldiers participating in the sling-load course being taught in conjunction with the 2008 Golden Coyote training exercise hosted by the South Dakota Army National Guard. (Army Reserve photo by Spc. Jason Kaneshiro) (RELEASED)

080606-A-7033K-232.JPG: UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters provided by C Company, 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation of the Nebraska Army National Guard, were on hand Friday, June 6, at the Sturgis Municipal Airport to provide hands-on training to Soldiers participating in the sling-load course being taught in conjunction with the 2008 Golden Coyote training exercise hosted by the South Dakota Army National Guard. (Army Reserve photo by Spc. Jason Kaneshiro) (RELEASED)

080606-A-7033K-250.JPG: UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters provided by C Company, 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation of the Nebraska Army National Guard, were on hand Friday, June 6, at the Sturgis Municipal Airport to provide hands-on training to Soldiers participating in the sling-load course being taught in conjunction with the 2008 Golden Coyote training exercise hosted by the South Dakota Army National Guard. (Army Reserve photo by Spc. Jason Kaneshiro) (RELEASED)

080606-A-7033K-266.JPG: UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters provided by C Company, 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation of the Nebraska Army National Guard, were on hand Friday, June 6, at the Sturgis Municipal Airport to provide hands-on training to Soldiers participating in the sling-load course being taught in conjunction with the 2008 Golden Coyote training exercise hosted by the South Dakota Army National Guard. (Army Reserve photo by Spc. Jason Kaneshiro) (RELEASED)

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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION about the South Dakota National Guard, please visit our Web site at <https://sdguard.ngb.army.mil/default.aspx>

NOTE: The South Dakota National Guard will host the annual Golden Coyote exercise from June 7 – 21 in the southern Black Hills. More than 4,000 service members from 92 units representing 27 states and four foreign nations are participating in the exercise. The Golden Coyote exercise has been conducted for the past 24 years. The exercise provides relevant training opportunities in support of the war on terror and homeland defense.

Residents should be aware of an increase in military traffic throughout the Black Hills and an increase in the level of noise due to military operations. Aviation activity will be operating out of Camp Rapid and the Army Aviation Support Facility next to the Rapid City Regional Airport.

Aircraft will be primarily training on equipment and personnel transport missions as well

as medical evacuation. Aircraft will respond to real-world emergencies during the exercise and remain in an all-hours-ready status during the exercise. Spectators to military training are welcome, however caution is warranted and spectators are asked to remain at a safe distance from all moving military vehicles and aircraft to prevent injury to personnel or damage to property.