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**MEDIA ADVISORY - 'Hanoi Taxi' departs Robins Monday after final maintenance stop**

**ROBINS AIR FORCE BASE, GA --** On Monday Oct. 7, A C-141 that will forever be remembered for flying American prisoners of war out of North Vietnam will get a grandiose farewell from Robins on Monday.

A red-carpet departure ceremony will honor Aircraft 66-0177, dubbed the "Hanoi Taxi" by the POWs who flew to freedom aboard the plane. The event will be in front of base operations on the Robins AFB flight line Monday at 9 a.m.

Reserve Maj. Gen. Edward J. Mechenbier, one of the POWs repatriated aboard the "Taxi," will fly the historic aircraft out of Robins. Prior to the flight, Mechenbier, the mobilization assistant to the commander, Headquarters Air Force Materiel Command, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, will deliver a speech commemorating the aircraft and its everlasting bond with the 40 POWs it flew out of Gia Lam Airport in Hanoi, North Vietnam, on Feb. 12, 1973.

Local POW/MIA groups, C-141 maintenance workers who worked on the aircraft, crewmembers from the 445th Airlift Wing at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, Air Force Reserve command and Robins officials will participate in the ceremony.

For the ceremony, the aircraft has been returned to the original white and gray paint scheme it had during Operation Homecoming, the 1973 repatriation of Americans held as prisoners-of-war in North Vietnam.

"Hanoi Taxi" is one of four C-141s assigned to the 445th that were involved in Operation Homecoming. Its name comes from the writing on the flight engineer's panel by the POWs aboard the plane for the freedom flight. Signatures of the freed prisoners have been preserved on the panel over the years and are the centerpiece of what is essentially a "flying museum." Plaques, documents and photographs of the homecoming are part of the on-board exhibit researched and created by the 445th. Etchings of the names of those who are missing in action were taken from the Vietnam Wall in Washington, D.C., and are mounted on the plane.

Although the "Taxi" is still an active and reliable component in the airlift business, the ceremony marks its final visit to the Warner Robins Air Logistics Center for programmed depot maintenance. The C-141 fleet will be retired from the Air Force inventory by 2006.

Mechenbier, a command pilot with more than 3,500 flying hours, served tours in Europe and Southeast Asia flying the F-4C. In June 1967, he was shot down on his 80th mission over North Vietnam and was a prisoner of war for nearly six years.

Note: Media members interested in covering this event must be at the Gate 2 visitors' center no later than 7:30 a.m. on Monday. Due to morning traffic flow measures, all traffic entering Gate 2 must be traveling west from Watson Boulevard as the entrance is closed to northbound and southbound traffic from Ga. Highway 247 at that hour. The early arrival time will ensure media members access to historic displays inside the aircraft and interviews with Mechenbier and the "Hanoi Taxi" flight crew prior to the ceremony. C-141 maintenance personnel who worked on the aircraft will be available for interviews after the ceremony. Please contact Faye Williams (478) 926-2137 for more information.

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