SPRINGFIELD, IL (10/31/2012)(readMedia)-- Six Soldiers with the aviation units in the Illinois Army National Guard completed Lincoln Land Community College's (LLCC) Airframe and Power Plant Technician course Oct. 18 at the school's aviation facility in Springfield.

The four-week course prepares the mechanics for the certification to support and maintain the four new UH-72A Lakotas the Illinois Army National Guard will be receiving September 2013, said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Norman Brooks of Clinton with Detachment 1, Company B, 1st Battalion, 376th Aviation Regiment. This is the first course of its type with other classes to follow in 2013.

"The UH-72A is a civilian off-the-shelf aircraft," said Brooks. "As military helicopter mechanics, we are not qualified to perform maintenance on the UH-72A. The UH-72A must be maintained to civilian standards with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations."

At this time the Army does not have military training for Soldiers to obtain the FAA certification, said Brooks. In order to meet the requirements and receive training the Illinois National Guard reached out LLCC for a way to train mechanics.

Brooks said according to FAA regulations servicemembers with 30 months of documented full-time experience can test for the Airframe and Power plant certification. The six Soldiers will take the certification testing starting roughly the last week of October with the final Soldier completing the evaluations on Nov. 3.

Over the past year the Illinois National Guard's State Aviation Office has worked in conjunction with LLCC to create a civilian Airframe and Power plant certification course. After taking the course the Soldier will then take the test for their certification of Airframe and Power plant technician that is granted by the FAA.

The course is typically 18 months long but is condensed to a four-week course for the Soldiers, said LLCC aviation instructor Todd Cole of Jacksonville. The three-week course covers all 44 sections outlined by the FAA aviation maintenance training standards.

"It's not aircraft specific," said Cole. "With what they learn here, they can take this information and apply it to any aircraft in the future."

The Soldiers showed a high level of proficiency and experience in the classroom and while working hands-on. In the end these Soldiers will have a greater knowledge of how to repair and maintain a variety of aircrafts, said Cole.

"They should have a thorough working knowledge of how to perform not only the upkeep maintenance and routine maintenance, but also major repair and alterations," said Cole.

First Sgt. Michael Garver of Decatur, with Company D, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment has worked as a military helicopter mechanic for more than 25 years.

"It's an opportunity to learn more about another type of aircraft that's a commercial version rather than a military version."

Garver said the course has been an enjoyable challenge to learn maintenance on the various types of civilian and commercial aircrafts.

"In the military I learned how to work on two types of aircraft, the UH-58 (Kiowa) and the UH-60 (Black Hawk)," said Garver. "This course expands it and opens it up to everything. I've gained a lot more knowledge about types of engines, air frames, airplanes and different types of systems we in the military don't necessarily use."

The three-week course prepares the Soldiers for the certification testing which typically takes eight hours a day over a two-day period.

"They have to be prepared," said Jim Van Kleek aviation program director with LLCC. "In

nationwide norms for this in FAA, nearly 20 to 30 percent fail this test the first time."

The information in the course and the testing ensure that those certified are trained and can provide the needed maintenance to ensure the readiness of the aircrafts, said Van Kleek.

"It's always about safety when it comes to aviation," said Van Kleek. "We try to teach them how to maintain these (aircraft) as safely as possible and that's our main goal. If you don't have the training, you don't know if these (aircraft) are operating properly."