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USACE turns over apron for Kandahar flights

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KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – The Kandahar province of Afghanistan is home to more than just thousands of coalition forces. Hundreds of aircraft are also housed on the bustling Kandahar Airfield, located 10 miles southeast of Kandahar City.

And just as more troops surge into Kandahar, so does the need to access more flights to and from one of the busiest landing zones in the world.

A recently constructed heliport was handed over to U.S. forces Jan. 31 to better sustain the high demand for military flights here.

Brian E. Zickefoose, left, goes over paperwork for Lt. Col. Robert A. Huntley, center, to sign and then take possession of a newly constructed rotary wing apron on Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, as Capt. Gregory J. Ward looks on. (Photo by Mark Abueg)

"The heliport consists of two phases," said U.S. Air Force Capt. Gregory J. Ward, liaison officer, Kandahar Airfield Area Office, Afghanistan Engineer District – South (AES). "The first phase included the runway and parking apron. The second phase has two additional parking aprons, which extends the east and west sides of the original apron, and a FARP (forward area refueling point) on the north side. We turned over the runway and all parking aprons to the 643rd Regional Support Group (RSG). The FARP is still under construction."

Ward said that the 643rd RSG assumed responsibility for the runway and aprons on behalf of U.S. Army Central (ARCENT). "The end user is the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, which is being replaced by the 159th Combat Aviation Brigade," he said.

The apron will accommodate up to 27 rotary wing aircraft, including the CH-47 Chinook and other helicopters.

"This is considerably more parking space than users had before," Ward said. "What we were using before – on another ramp here on KAF – was an expeditionary design where space was pretty tight. With the new apron, we have aircraft clearance that meets international standards. This is a permanent design that accommodates enduring operations and provides users with much more protection."

Capt. Gregory J. Ward, right, meets with contractors from Yenigün Insaat during a rotary wing turnover ceremony on Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan. (Photo by Mark Abueg)

The two-phase heliport project began in February 2009. Phase one consisted of 45,000 square meters of ramp and 20,000 square meters of runway; Contrack International Inc. constructed it for $10.9 million. The second phase, constructed by Yenigün Insaat for $16.9 million, consists of 120,000 square meters of ramp space and the FARP.

Ward indicated that not many turnovers have occurred on KAF because only a couple of contracts have been completed and closed out in AES's recently ramped up military construction program.

"Lt. Col. (Robert A.) Huntley was out here today to take possession of these projects," Ward said. "He signed the DD Form 1354, which is the transfer of real property record from USACE to ARCENT."

Huntley, who is the chief of Department of Public Works for the 643rd RSG and the U.S. Garrison master planner, is responsible for receiving the products and signing for the projects completed by the Corps of Engineers.

"In Afghanistan, the road network is sub-standard so transportation by ground is an issue. Because of all the mountainous terrain, helicopters play a very, very significant role," Huntley said. "We have a large number of helicopters present here, and we need space to operate those helicopters from on KAF."

The FARP, which will be able to refuel six aircraft, is scheduled for completion in April.

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