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Contact:
Dave Melancon
david.a.melancon@usace.army.mil

USACE turns over milestone project

SHINDAND Air Base, Afghanistan -- The Afghanistan Engineer District-South officially turned over a milestone project that is already bolstering the safety and security of Shindand Air Base.

During a symbolic ribbon cutting ceremony March 21, Air Force Col. Benjamin Wham, district commander announced that a \$18 million perimeter defense project surrounding the base was ready to be turned over the U.S. Air Force and ultimately, to the Afghan Air Force.

The eight-square mile air base, located about 300 miles north west of Kandahar, consists of a 12.5 kilometers roadway, security fencing, a 12.5 kilometer anti-vehicle trench, 51 guard towers spaced 250 meters apart, 17 electric transformers and electrical system connecting the towers to the installations main power plant. Work on the project began in October 2010, said Mathew Walden, resident engineer and contracting officer for the project.

“When you look at a segment of fence or one guard tower, it does not look like much,” he said. “But there are 51 towers and more than 10 kilometers of fence. It was a big project. It took a lot effort, a lot of people and a lot of money.”

“Our mission is to turn projects over and it is always a great thing to cut a ribbon on a facility with the quality products that were produced here,” Wham told the audience gathered for the ceremony at one of the site’s guard towers.

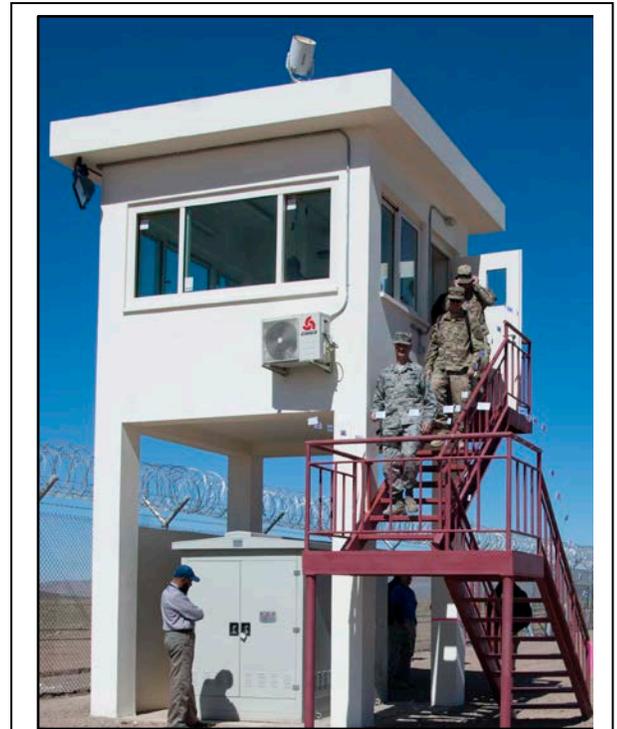
The project presented several challenges, Wham said. The most serious occurring when a contractor’s water truck stuck an improvised explosive device, killing its driver and wounding two other workmen.

Wham then asked for a moment of silence in remembrance of those killed and injured.

The contract was modified four times with the largest change calling for an additional 19 guard towers.

The project’s primary contractor, KAM Construction Management, “regrouped and brought in some senior people

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Air Force Col. John Hokaj, Shindand Air Base and 838th Air Expeditionary Advisory Group commander and Air Force Col. Benjamin Wham, Afghanistan Engineer District-South commander, emerge from one of 51 new guard towers surrounding the airbase shortly after a ribbon cutting ceremony officially marking the completion a perimeter defense system surrounding the airbase March 21.

to oversee the progress and got the project completed” Wham said.

“It’s huge and it’s here to protect a very important asset: the Afghan Air Force on Shindand Air Base,” he said. “This is a quality product and we at the Corps appreciate your hard work. We look forward to turning it over to our partners.”

“This day has been a much awaited event for us,” said KAM representative Melvin Arellano. “We encountered a lot of challenges along the way.”

Arellano cited professionalism, open communications and the good working relationships as key ingredients for the project’s ultimate success.

Disagreement with local villagers and the IED attack presented major obstacles to the project’s progress, but these were overcome by working harder, he said.

“These challenges were a motivation – not to bring us down but to step forward and push harder to complete the security fence and these guard towers,” Arellano said. “Our men and women responded to these challenges by working harder.”

The work was completed without compromising quality, he said.

“I am proud of what we have accomplished. Not only because we have completed this contract but also to contribute to the history of this country.”

“Less than a year ago, this was all pasture land. There were shepherds working out here as the contractors were working to build this fence,” said Air Force Col. John Hokaj, Shindad Air Base and 838th Air Expeditionary Advisory Group commander. “I do appreciate the work of the contractors from all of the nations that have come together in order to make this project a reality to bring safety and security to the people of Afghanistan.”

Hokaj said Shindand is the largest single installation in Afghanistan with more than eight square miles inside the fence line.

The completed perimeter security system “was a long time in coming and it has not been without its challenges,” he said. “But now we have the electricity turned on, the lights shining out and towers around this base. This brings a great capability for the safety and security of the people who work inside this base.”



KAM Construction Management, Inc., representative Melvin Arellano and vice-president Kassim Sayed join Air Force colonels Benjamin Wham, Afghanistan Engineer District-South commander and John Hokaj, Shindand Airbase and 838th Air Expeditionary Advisory Group commander for a symbolic ribbon cutting at one of the airbase’s 51 new guard towers during a completion ceremony March 21. (USACE Photo by Dave Melancon)

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