



Master Sgt. Rocky McKenzie and Maj. Gen. John Macdonald uncase the Afghanistan Engineer District – South unit colors for the first time during the activation ceremony.

A second Corps District activates in Afghanistan

By Bruce J. Huffman

Kandahar, Afghanistan--Colonel Kevin J. Wilson became the first commander of the newly established Afghanistan Engineer District – South, during an activation ceremony held Aug. 3 at Kandahar Airfield. During the ceremony, Maj. Gen. John Macdonald, Deputy Commanding General, U.S. Forces Afghanistan, unfurled the colors for the first time and passed them to Col. Wilson, symbolizing the official transfer of authority and activation of the second Corps District in Afghanistan.

The activation ceremony is a military tradition that is rich in symbolism and heritage, dating back to medieval times. Soldiers often carried staffs or standards into battle that identified them as a unit. Throughout military history, unit colors have marked the position of the commander in the battlefield, and served as a rallying point. While attacking or rallying on the battlefield, Soldiers would follow the standard or guidon of their leader, most often found at the forward edge of the battlefield.

In more recent times, the colors represent not only

the heritage and history of the unit, but also the unity and loyalty of its Soldiers. The colors are the commander's symbol of authority, representing his



Maj. Gen. John Macdonald passes the unit colors to Col. Kevin Wilson symbolizing his trust in Wilson's ability, the official transfer of responsibility, and the activation of the new Corps of Engineers District.

responsibilities to the organization. Wherever the commander is, there also are the colors. The passing

of the unit colors from the senior commander to the incoming commander signifies the passing of his trust and represents the assumption of authority and responsibility for the unit.

Col. Wilson then passed the unit colors to Master Sgt. Rocky McKenzie, the AED – South Acting Command Sergeant Major. The passing of the colors from the incoming commander to the CSM signifies his confidence in the noncommissioned officer corps and is the CSM’s first act of allegiance to his new commander – thus completing the activation and



Col. Kevin Wilson passes the unit colors to Master Sgt. Rocky McKenzie, AED-S Acting Command Sergeant Major signifying his confidence in the noncommissioned officer corps. This is the Command Sergeant Major’s first act of allegiance to the new unit commander.

assumption of command.

“There isn’t much better than doing a combat unfurling,” Said Maj. Gen. Macdonald. “To uncase a set of colors in the middle of a combat zone speaks volumes about how necessary this command is. So this is an exciting moment.”

Col. Wilson comes to AED – South from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Alaska District where he was the commander since July 2006. His experience in planning, engineering, construction, contracting, real estate, emergency operations, and regulatory services for military, federal, and local control entities throughout Alaska make him ideal to command the newly formed district.

The Corps of Engineers mission in Afghanistan is to conduct project management, construction and engineering in the Central Asian Republics, primarily Afghanistan, to help establish a secure and stable environment while promoting construction and infrastructure development. They have supported

Coalition Forces participating in Operation Enduring Freedom since 2002, and the first Corps District in Afghanistan, AED – North, was established in Kabul in March 2004. From 2002 through 2008, the Corps has done more than \$4.5 billion in construction in Afghanistan, mostly building facilities for the Afghan National Security Forces and Coalition Forces. In 2009 alone, AED will do more than \$2.6 billion in construction in Afghanistan with even more work planned in the next few years as they provide facilities for the build-up of incoming U.S. and Coalition Forces. This increased workload was the driving force behind the creation of the new Corps District. AED – South will handle construction activity in Regional Commands South and West, and AED – North will handle construction in Regional Commands North and East.

“The Afghanistan Engineer District – South is operational,” said Col. Wilson. “Our colors are unfurled, and we are going to be a lean and capable organization with the agility and technical competence to execute whatever program comes our way.” According to Wilson, supporting combat operations is a key part of the Corps mission, but you also have to do projects that support the Afghan economy. “You’ve got to generate the power, you’ve got to put in the



Col. Kevin Wilson gives an interview to a reporter after the ceremony standing in front of a Corps of Engineers flag. The flag in the photo has been signed by members of the Afghanistan Engineer District.

roads so they can get their agriculture products to market, process them, and forward them on the global economy,” said Col. Wilson. “That’s how you connect Afghanistan, and that’s what the next step is and how we’ll win this war.” 