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Pantano takes command of Afghanistan Engineer District North



KABUL, Afghanistan – Col. Alfred A. Pantano Jr. took command of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in northern Afghanistan in a ceremony steeped with military tradition at the unit's headquarters at the Qalaa House compound July 8.

Read more: <http://www.dvidshub.net/news/91248/pantano-takes-command-afghanistan-engineer-district-north#ixzz21SHzetSL>

South District bids farewell to Wham, Quarles assumes command



KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Afghanistan Engineer District-South bid farewell to its commander of the past year, Air Force Col. Ben Wham, and welcomed its new commander, Army Col. Vincent Quarles, at a change of command here July 12.

Read more: <http://www.dvidshub.net/news/91464/south-district-bids-farewell-wham-quarles-assumes-command#ixzz21Sfc1oWs>

USACE to improve access to water and power in southern Afghanistan



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Read more: <http://www.dvidshub.net/news/90520/usace-improve-access-water-and-power-southern-afghanistan#ixzz21SEfzrbd>

9th Commando building project nears completion, turnover to Afghan army



HERAT PROVINCE, Afghanistan – A large building project managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Afghanistan Engineer District-South will be crossing the finish line before the end of the summer, according to the two USACE employees overseeing the work.

Read more: <http://www.dvidshub.net/news/91303/9th-commando-building-project-nears-completion-turnover-afghan-army#ixzz21SEqSqHv>



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Army divers support South District work at critical Afghan dams



KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — Six members of a unique Army unit — engineer divers from the 569th Engineer Dive Detachment — recently spent 30 days in southern Afghanistan, conducting underwater surveys to help the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Afghanistan Engineer District-South prepare for major repair projects at Kajaki and Dahla dams.

Read more: <http://www.dvidshub.net/news/90579/army-divers-support-south-district-work-critical-afghan-dams#ixzz21SGJXS7W>



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Story by [Paul Giblin](#)

KABUL, Afghanistan – Col. Alfred A. Pantano Jr. took command of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in northern Afghanistan in a ceremony steeped with military tradition at the unit's headquarters at the Qalaa House compound July 8.

Pantano, of Jacksonville, Fla., became the 11th commander of Afghanistan Engineer District-North, which was established in 2004. He succeeded Col. Christopher W. Martin, of Argyle, Texas, who had served as commander since July 10, 2011, a period the positioned the district to finish the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan as U.S. and coalition combat forces prepare to withdraw from the country.

Pantano told about 350th Corps of Engineers employees and U.S. and Afghan guests that he felt blessed to step into an operation that already was running so well. "I look forward to each and every day and to serving with each and every one of you," he said.

He credited Martin for assembling an incredible team of civilian and military personnel and for introducing him to the district's program during the past several months. However, he said, Martin hasn't heard the last from him. "I have a good sense for what to do, but I don't know it all. I'll be calling you on the phone probably every other day to figure it out," Pantano joked.

The district is comprised of approximately 500 military personnel and civilians stationed in Kabul and across northern and eastern Afghanistan. The unit's primary operation is directing construction of hundreds of projects designed to bolster Afghanistan's infrastructure after three decades of war. The scope of work includes military bases, police stations, prisons, roads, government buildings, hydropower plants, electrical transmission lines and more. Many projects are constructed in hostile regions of the country.

Maj. Gen. Michael R. Eyre, the presiding officer of the event, awarded Martin the Bronze Star Medal for exceptional meritorious achievement while serving as commander of the district. Eyre is the commander of the Transatlantic Division, which is the umbrella organization over Afghanistan Engineer District-North and two other districts.

Eyre called Martin an exemplary commander who will be remembered for his spirit of service, patriotism and dedication to the United States.

"Col. Martin did a superb job leading a team of professionals in executing a \$4 billion construction program in support of the transition strategy for Afghanistan," Eyre said. "With Chris' guidance and keen insights, the district has been able to build an even greater, more robust quality Corps of Engineers contingency organization, one that is better able to meet the overall mission requirements."

Eyre said Martin logged an impressive list of accomplishments, such as the completion 116



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construction projects and development of 167 on-going projects across the northern portion of the country. In addition, Martin oversaw an initiative to teach construction and management skills to Afghan workers, which will be vital to Afghanistan's stability in the future.

"Col. Martin's dynamic leadership and 'Acts, not words' mantra brought the team even greater success in building a robust capacity development program that mentors Afghan engineers in how to build, maintain and sustain both the Army facilities and police stations long after the United States and coalition forces leave Afghanistan," Eyre said.

Eyre said Martin was equally ardent about guaranteeing that construction contracts were awarded to Afghan firms through the district's Afghan First program. "Last year alone, almost 65 percent of the contract hours were obligated to Afghan firms. That's over \$1.1 billion reinvested into Afghanistan," Eyre said.

Martin, in turn, credited the civilian and military members of the district for the accomplishments during his tenure. The employees' dedication, professionalism and camaraderie during challenging times were admirable.

"It has been an incredible ride during the course of the last year. I've truly been honored and humbled to be your commander. And I'll always think very fondly of the last year I've spent here with you," Martin said before pausing to collect his emotions.

"I thought this was going to be easy," he said.

He noted that the district's employees came together as they endured warzone hardships and turmoil, including an attack in September on the U.S. embassy compound just outside of the Qalaa House compound, a coordinated attack in April 2012 on several locations in the Green Zone, the extremes of Afghanistan's harsh weather and an extensive workload.

Martin paused again when he recalled the loss of Corps of Engineers employee James W. "Will" Coker, of Mount Pleasant, N.C., who was kidnapped and killed by insurgents at Camp Blackhorse near Kabul Sept. 5.

"We form some incredible relationships in a combat environment. We've accomplished so many things. During the next few months, the district will finish a significant number of projects. Everything we do is important. If the Afghans are going to make it as a country, they'll have us to thank," Martin said.

The colonel used his farewell address to thank personnel within the Corps of Engineers, other U.S. agencies, Afghan ministries and contracting companies who had served either alongside him or under him during his command. He thanked many by name, including personnel whose tours in Afghanistan had ended weeks or months earlier, and those whose tours in country extend weeks or months beyond his own.

Martin also thanked his wife Carolyn, who watched via a live video feed. "She has the hardest job in the military, that of an Army wife. I don't feel whole when we're apart. I miss



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her so much. She is my best friend," he said.

While much was done during his tenure, more work remains, he said. "You have a great commander coming in who will lead you through this challenging period, Col. Al Pantano," he said.

Under sunny skies outside the namesake Qalaa House building, Martin and Pantano followed longstanding Army tradition as they passed the unit's red-and-white flag to represent the transfer of authority from one commander to the other.

First, Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Bob Rucinski, the senior enlisted service member in the unit, passed the flag to Martin, symbolizing his last act of allegiance to the outgoing commander. Then Martin passed the flag that bears the Corps of Engineers' castle logo to Eyre, signifying that the unit is never without senior leadership.

Next, Eyre passed it to Pantano, symbolizing the transfer of responsibility for the unit and its members to the incoming commander. Finally, Pantano completed the rite by passing the flag back Rucinski, showing his confidence in the senior enlisted service member, and allowing Rucinski to demonstrate his first act of allegiance to him.

Capt. Terry Harrington served as the narrator for the ceremony and Qalaa House religious lay leader Robert E. Medlock II gave the invocation. The list of distinguished visitors included Brig. Gens. David Weeks and Bryan Watson, SESs Stacey Hirata and Howard Stickley, and Afghanistan Builders Association vice president Mowdood Popal, among others.

Pantano previously served as commander of the Jacksonville District. He also has served in Missouri, New York, Massachusetts and Kentucky, plus Germany and Iraq, among other posts. He is a graduate of the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, Va., Murray State University in Murray, Ky., and the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle Barracks, Pa.

Following the ceremony, district employees and guests greeted him in the dining facility and he pledged to visit all the area offices across northern Afghanistan in coming weeks.

Employees also lined up on the Qalaa House porch to say goodbye to Martin, who left immediately afterward. He will retire from the Army, concluding a 29-year career. Before arriving in Afghanistan, he served in Georgia, Texas, Kentucky, California and Virginia, plus Germany, Bosnia, Italy and Iraq, among other locations. He is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., and the University of Illinois in Champaign, Ill.

He said he plans to return to Texas to his wife and son Ryan, but his thoughts and prayers will remain in Afghanistan, particularly because his other son Nolan is serving as an infantry platoon leader in Kandahar province, which is one of the most dangerous areas of the country.

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South District bids farewell to Wham, Quarles assumes command

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Story by [Dave Melancon](#)

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – The U.S Army Corps of Engineers Afghanistan Engineer District-South bid farewell to its commander of the past year, Air Force Col. Ben Wham, and welcomed its new commander, Army Col. Vincent Quarles, at a change of command here July 12.

Army Maj. Gen. Michael Eyre, USACE Transatlantic Division Commander, presided over the ceremony.

Speaking before an audience of South District service members, employees and other guests, Eyre praised Wham for his service – not just as South District commander – but as an Air Force officer over a distinguished 26-year career.

“Col. Wham and Col. Quarles represent the very best the Air Force and the Army have to offer in engineer leaders,” he said. “They also represent the efforts and capabilities of so many others – the civilians and military personnel of the Transatlantic District-South.”

“Colonel Wham did a super job, leading a team of more than 400 professionals in executing a multi-billion dollar construction program to support the transition strategy for Afghanistan,” the general said. “With Ben’s guidance and keen insights, the district has been able to build an even greater, more robust, quality U.S. Army Corps of Engineers contingency organization – one that is better able to meet the overall mission requirements through demonstrated engineering and construction expertise.”

After assuming command of the district July 8, 2011, Wham and the South District completed 66 projects valued at \$444 million dollars. The district is supervising 218 ongoing projects valued at \$2.4 billion and will undertake 64 additional projects valued at \$992 million in the next two years, Eyre said.

The district can be proud of its road, public health, transportation, water and power projects, and its partnerships with battle space commanders, U.S. Agency for International Development, Department of State and Afghan agencies, Eyre said.

“It has been nothing short of stellar,” Eyre said. “When all construction is completed, the facilities to support more than 350,000 Afghan Army and National Police personnel will reinforce their capability to provide security and stability throughout Afghanistan.”

Before introducing Quarles, Eyre challenged the audience to remember the Transatlantic Division’s MATT imperatives: Mission, Affordability, Transition and Transformation.

“Your focus must remain on executing your mission, on staying affordable, and on transitioning to the post-2014 division structure,” he said. “As we go through this transformation and transition period, I encourage you all to stay strong. When the mission



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is complete and the last project has been turned over, you will be rewarded for your faithful service."

During his introduction of Quarles, Eyre told the district's employees and service members that they will be challenged and excited by the work ahead. "With Col. Quarles at the helm, I have no doubt that the district will continue to build on its widely recognized record of accomplishments."

"Ben, you will be remembered for your spirit of service, patriotism and commitment to our nation all of which make you a great American and an outstanding commander. I wish all the best to you and your family. Vince, welcome aboard. You are joining a great team," Eyre said.

"It has been a long eventful year and I have enjoyed almost every single moment of it," Wham told the audience.

Wham said that when he arrived he set five priorities for the command: protect people, get work done, work efficiently, follow the Corps of Engineers business and work processes and have fun. He said the district team had met or exceeded these expectations.

"We have protected the personnel of this district across a multitude of outside-the-wire missions and construction in some very inhospitable locations, as well as ensuring a safe environment in which to work, rest and play across this entire district," he said.

Under his command, the district placed more than \$710 million in construction, provided work and building skills to more than 7,500 Afghan workers, trained 263 Afghan National Army public works professionals and transferred 369 facilities to the ANA for their operations, Wham continued.

"They performed splendidly as a lean organization, placing more than \$1.9 million dollars per person, higher per capita than any other district in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, while setting the division standard for affordability and execution," he said. "They established new austerity standards for Afghan National Police facilities that will ensure the constructability of projects in some of the most remote locations."

Wham also thanked the regional commanders, the district's customers, U.S. agencies and the Transatlantic Division for their support, reserving his strongest praise for his district command team, employees, service members and family.

But the mission is not complete, Wham cautioned.

"There is still much to do before we can say that our mission is complete. I know that the members of the district will continue to bring the same energy, sense of mission, purpose and dedication under the leadership of Col. Quarles," he said. "The district has gained a great leader who has commanded both combat engineer units and a USACE district before today and I look forward to hearing and reading about all the great things that he and this district will accomplish over the coming year."



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Wham will join his wife and two daughters in Charleston, N.C., and he will complete his Air Force career on Joint Base Charleston.

Quarles reports to the South District after earning a master's degree in National Resource Strategy and participating in the Afghanistan and Pakistan Fellows Program at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, D.C. Before attending the Industrial College, Quarles commanded the USACE Chicago District from 2008 to 2011.

"I know that delivering quality engineering projects and services here in Afghanistan has not been easy," Quarles said. "The days ahead will be just as challenging as we work to award 50 or so new construction contracts by the end of this calendar year and place about \$800 million in construction by the end of 2013."

Quarles said he will build upon Wham's and the district's successes.

"We are well positioned to get this work done due to your outstanding efforts under the superb leadership of Ben Wham during the past year," he said. "I know we will deliver these and other requirements while taking care of each other and sustaining solid relationships within and outside of our district family."

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USACE to improve access to water and power in southern Afghanistan

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Story by [Karla Marshall](#)

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -The United States military and its coalition partners may be drawing down their combat missions in Afghanistan, but the next two years will continue to be busy for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Afghanistan Engineer District-South.

Among the South District's 51 construction projects still to be awarded this fiscal year, three water and infrastructure projects sit high on the district's priority list — Dahla and Kajaki Dams and the Southeastern Electrical Power System — vital infrastructure systems in Afghanistan's arid south that are in need of substantial upgrades and repairs.

"These three projects are critical to improving the lives of Afghan citizens in Helmand and Kandahar provinces," said Air Force Col. Benjamin Wham, the South District commander. "Together they represent about \$421 million worth of construction and will boost the supply of water and electric power to both provinces."

Dahla Dam

Located in Kandahar province on the Arghandab River, the Dahla Dam has suffered from years of neglect and war. Its intake and outlet works do not operate correctly and sediment reduced reservoir capacity. As a result, the water supply to Kandahar province does not reach 30 percent of the irrigation canals refurbished by the Canadian International Development Agency over the past several years.

Increased water for irrigation means the once productive "breadbasket of Afghanistan" can again produce the fruits and vegetables that Afghanistan needs to feed its people. "The Canadians already rehabilitated many of the irrigation canals south of Dahla Dam as part of their Arghandab Irrigation Rehabilitation Project," said Wham. "Our mission is threefold: to boost the holding capacity of the Dahla reservoir so more water is available for irrigation, raise the spillway height and shore up existing embankments and saddle dams."

The Corps of Engineers will oversee the construction at Dahla Dam in two phases.

The first phase will include improvements to the intake and outlet works. "We expect to award this phase of the Dahla Dam project in September," said Linda Murphy the South District's water and infrastructure branch chief. The existing intake tower will be retrofitted to accommodate an 8-meter dam raise, the existing tower gate and operating machinery will be refurbished, and the single tower gate design will be maintained by reinforcing of the tower gate slot and providing a new tower gate and operating machinery.

The outlet works will consist of a new valve house adjacent to the existing one and connected to the outlet tunnel extension. Four new valves will replace the two existing



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valves and the valve house will be sized to accommodate two future valves for industrial water supply.

The second phase will include the embankment works. "We plan to raise the main dam embankment by five meters," Murphy said. To stay within budget, we will use a mechanically stabilized earth wall."

The plan also calls for earth fill to raise the six saddle dams and roller-compacted concrete to widen the main spillway, Murphy said. The second spillway will be replaced with an earthen saddle dam.

As soon as funding is available in fiscal year 2013, the district will award the second phase.

Kajaki Dam

Located in Helmand province on the Helmand River, the Kajaki Dam serves two functions: a source for irrigation and water along the lower Helmand River and hydroelectric power generation. USACE has several concurrent project plans associated with the Kajaki Dam with a total program amount of approximately \$205 million.

Together, the projects will improve water flow for irrigation and electric power generation, said Murphy, who deployed from the USACE Louisville District.

The first phase will repair the dam's intake structure. The gates currently do not close, so no maintenance can be performed on the gates or the irrigation outlet tunnels, said Nader Noori, the district project manager for Kajaki Dam.

"This project includes the rehabilitation of existing intake structure components – intake bulkhead gate, steel sliding gate, crane, crane hoist assembly, lifting assembly, embedded parts, and hydrology gage," said Noori, a native of Afghanistan who immigrated to the United States more than 30 years ago.

The second phase will rehabilitate the three 84-inch roto valves inside the irrigation tunnel and three 84-inch jet valves at the outlet end of the irrigation tunnel.

According to Noori, a roto valve is designed to open and close relatively easily, despite high fluid pressure. Jet valves are installed as part of the outlet structure, and decrease the pressure of the water exiting the bottom of the dam, which prevents erosion and scouring.

Another part of the project is to evaluate the current condition of inoperable piezometers at the dam and seek bids to repair or replace them. Noori said piezometers measure the flow of water through a dam; they help operators monitor the stability and "health" of a dam.

"There are a few challenges ahead of us at Kajaki," said Murphy. "We have several moving pieces that are included in the contract. Tracking and funding them separately will involve more time but in the end will make the award and construction process cleaner, meaning that we will track expenditures and schedules more efficiently and effectively."



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South East Power System

This two-phased project promises to improve access to electric power for residents of Helmand and Kandahar provinces. The current system has been the victim of years of war and neglect, starting with the power house at the Kajaki Dam.

“The power house was built in the ‘70s,” said Jim Murray the SEPS project manager. “It can hold three turbines, but only two were ever installed. USACE is not adding the third turbine as part of the SEPS upgrade, but what we are doing is improving the delivery of power. USAID will install the third turbine in the Kajaki Dam powerhouse.”

The SEPS – Helmand phase includes rebuilding the Kajaki Substation; replacing the 20kV line from the Kajaki Substation to Tangi; a new switchyard at Tangi; a new substation at Musa Qal’eh; a new 110kV line from Kajaki Substation to Musa Qal’eh Substation; a new 20kV line from Kajaki Substation to Kajaki Village, and the rebuilding of a 110kV line from Kajaki Substation to Sangin.

The project also includes rebuilding the Sangin North Substation, a new substation at Sangin South, rebuilding a 110kV line from Sangin to Durai Junction, and rebuilding a 110kV line from Durai Junction to Lashkar Gah.

USACE awarded the project June 22 to Perini Management Services Inc. of Framingham, Mass., with a 550 day period of performance.

The SEPS-Kandahar project includes repairing an existing 110kV line from Durai Junction to Kandahar City, constructing new substations at Maiwand and Pushmool, and upgrading substations at Breshna Kot. This project is scheduled to be awarded by the end of the fiscal year.

These projects should improve distribution of electrical power to the people of the Lashkar Gah area in Helmand province, and the Kandahar City area.

“These three projects really are pretty complex,” said Wham. “But when complete they will be a tangible demonstration to Helmand and Kandahar province residents of the commitment of the U.S. to improve their livelihoods. I am proud to be a part of this work as it represents our desire to see Afghanistan grow in its ability to provide vital services to the people.”

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9th Commando building project nears completion, turnover to Afghan army

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Story by [Dave Melancon](#)

HERAT PROVINCE, Afghanistan – A large building project managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Afghanistan Engineer District-South will be crossing the finish line before the end of the summer, according to the two USACE employees overseeing the work.

Work on the \$13.7-million 9th Commando compound, located in the outskirts of Herat City, will become the home for a battalion-size element, or kandak, of the Afghan National Army Special Forces later this month said Jackson VanPelt, the project engineer.

“We should be ready to turn it over to the Afghan National Army very soon,” he said. “The contractors are wrapping up some finishing work and we’ll conduct our final inspection soon.”

VanPelt said remaining work at the site includes touch-up painting, finishing concrete roadways, sports fields, perimeter walls and anti-vehicle ditches, installing windows and interior hardware on several the site’s 55 buildings and installing stoves and other appliances in the dining facility.

This project, which kicked off in January 2011, is for the Afghan army and is being built by an Afghan contractor with Afghan workers, VanPelt said. Arao-Fellgroup Joint Ventures Inc. has about 250 men working on the day shift and 100 working overnight to get the final work done.

A formal final inspection will take place later this month and a “punch list” of last-minute and fix-up tasks will be given to the prime contractors. A formal ribbon-cutting ceremony, to officially mark the project’s turn over to the Afghan army, will take place later this summer when all the punch list items are checked off as completed.

Members of the South District’s Operations and Maintenance Division will team up with Afghan maintenance crews to decide the best plan for use and maintenance of the site’s buildings, generators and other equipment, VanPelt said.

“These guys will be set up pretty well,” he said. “They will be completely self-sufficient.”

The compound boasts two wells, its own power generators, bunkers, dining and storage facilities, recreation areas, parade field, entry control points, roadways, medical clinics and security systems, he said. Only the waste water will be piped to nearby Camp Zafar for treatment.

In addition to the main battalion area, USACE engineers supervised the construction of several buildings on an adjacent compound used by U.S. Special Operations Command “mentors,” VanPelt said.



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“This project will help our people because it helps improve our Army,” said Tariq Taheri, Afghan project engineer and one of two Afghan USACE employees assigned to the project. “The Army will protect the people.”

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Army divers support South District work at critical Afghan dams

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Story by [Mark Ray](#)

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — Six members of a unique Army unit — engineer divers from the 569th Engineer Dive Detachment — recently spent 30 days in southern Afghanistan, conducting underwater surveys to help the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Afghanistan Engineer District-South prepare for major repair projects at Kajaki and Dahla dams.

“We basically conducted two missions at each dam,” said 1st Lt. Michael Jappe, who led the team. “We conducted hydrographic surveys, mapping the underwater contours of the reservoirs, and we used a remotely operated vehicle — essentially, an underwater drone — to check the condition of various submerged structures, such as trash racks and inlets for irrigation tunnels.”

“The team deployed with an inflatable Zodiac boat,” added Staff Sgt. Andrew Miltenberger, the senior non-commissioned officer on the team. “On the Zodiac, we have a sonar system that is linked to a global-positioning system which can produce very accurate underwater topographical maps of the reservoirs.”

“The hydrographic surveys allow us to estimate the current volume of the reservoir,” explained Nader Noori, project manager for Kajaki Dam. “We have the original survey maps from when the dams were constructed. By comparing the original topography with the dive team’s products, we can determine how much sedimentation has occurred and how much reservoir capacity has been lost since the dam was built.”

“We try not to dive around dams, if possible,” Miltenberger said. “The turbulence and currents can make it pretty hazardous. The remotely operated vehicle allowed us to safely inspect various underwater features — the dam face, the trash racks and their guide rails, the inlets of the irrigation tunnels.”

“This mission was a great experience,” Miltenberger said. “The planning, preparation and coordination with the district were superb. We are only the second group of Army divers to work in Afghanistan and support Operation Enduring Freedom. We’ve had the chance to go where few Army divers go.”

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