



Photo by Amy Baker

## romania joint task force - east

Story by Justin Ward

A thin, muddy road gently follows the curve of the rolling green hills in this part of Romania, forming a fine border between one small-scale subsistence farmer's parcel and another.

This cracked thoroughfare, barely more than a well-worn cart path, has seen its share of horse-drawn wagons through the years. They serve as symbols of the simple, agrarian lifestyle that has existed here for hundreds of years and attest to the hardy spirit of the community.

Yet soon, the familiar clip-clop sounds of the carts will fade. In their place will be booms and beeps of construction. Progress. Near this stretch of green earth will be the first enduring U.S. military presence in a former Warsaw Pact country: Joint Task Force - East, Romania.

At 353 feet above sea level, in a largely unpopulated agricultural region about 16 miles northwest of the port city of Constanta, Romania, there is an arborous, limited-use military facility called the Mihail Kogălniceanu 34th – or simply, MK.

The 78 buildings on this abandoned base that once supported about 3,000 troops are old, the vast majority not considered salvageable. The site itself is austere and overgrown, with only a minimal caretaker staff remaining on base.

Before long, demolition and construction will start on MK, making way for invited U.S. troops who are estimated to arrive as early as mid-2008 as part of the U.S. military's transformation process.

Between now and then, however, an army of red, Corps of Engineers castle logos will pop up – from the sides of trailers to the backs of jackets of engineers walking around, conducting inspections.

The engineers and other employees from Europe District will be setting the stage for an influx of about 130 staffers, local nationals, and as many as 2,100 service members rotating through this co-use facility at any given time.

District employees there will be planning, designing, and managing the construction of basic facilities, including billeting, a clinic, and a communications center that will run the nearby armor and infantry training ranges. These facilities, to be used for training and mobilization,



Photo by Jessica Schoplick, AMEC GmbH



**Mihail Kogălniceanu, former publicist, historian, and Prime Minister of Romania, for whom the base is named.**

**Large and colorful trees distinguish the Mihail Kogălniceanu base from the surrounding wheat and soy fields of the agricultural Black Sea basin. The base, located only about 10 miles from the Black Sea, sees relatively mild weather the majority of the year.**

will breathe new life into this old installation.

More importantly, they will bring capital to a country just starting its partnership with NATO and still gearing up for its Jan. 1 entrance into the European Union.

In October, the first stirrings of a rebirth began to appear on MK, with representatives from the District's environmental and logistics offices heading to the base to take important first steps in helping this foreign base meet current U.S. military standards.

Amy Baker, an environmental protection specialist with the District, went to the joint-use MK installation situated next to the Constanta International Airport for a couple days in late October to better understand the current environmental conditions and assess possible site contamination.

"We did a visual inspection to look at the surface features and buildings and figure out what kind of activities they did there," Baker said. "That kind of helps you decide where you're going to do environmental sampling and drilling."

Baker said during the contractor's field work, emphasis is placed on both a visual inspection as