



Modernizing Army Family Housing

Story by Justin Ward

Ten years ago, the Department of Defense said enough is enough.

About two-thirds of all military housing was deemed substandard, and leadership estimated it would take 30 years for traditional military construction practices to yield a suitable outcome.

The eventual solution was the Secretary of Defense's mandate to have all services submit by July 2000 Family Housing Master Plans.

The Army's plan was to increase the housing allowance for Soldiers, use privatization methods, and, most prominently, eliminate all inadequate family housing. In Europe, that last challenge fell to the Corps of Engineers, Europe District.

Because of the difficulty in securing decisions on overseas basing, the Army has extended the deadline in Europe, giving the Army's Installation Management Agency - Europe (IMA-E), more time to fully develop its plans.

Through discussions with IMA-E, Europe District is bringing these plans to life - awarding, designing, renovating, and constructing projects that seek to

eliminate all inadequate family housing in Europe, said Dorothy Richards, District housing program manager.

According to the Army Housing Web site, this undertaking, in total, "is the largest transformation of its kind in the history of the United States Army."

Many of the buildings facing renovation are from the 1950s, postwar relics that suited the needs of the Soldiers at that time. Today, the typical Soldier is older, better educated, and more than likely a parent.

Because the face of the Army has changed, so must the accommodations.

One change is the construction of new townhouses.

"When IMA-E saw the Air Force was building townhouses in the Ramstein area, they wanted to have some built for the Army as well," said Richards. And after a study of the potential neighborhoods, IMA-E considered both the

Wiesbaden and Ansbach areas.

In Wiesbaden, four townhouse projects are on the drawing board, with two planned to be constructed at the Wiesbaden Army Air Field and two planned in the Aukamm neighborhood.

These projects, expected to be awarded by March 2009, will offer modern floor plans and amenities, and will provide a higher quality of life for Soldiers and their families, said Richards.

Another change is modernization through

renovation, including a project at the Wiesbaden Army Air Field, two projects in the nearby Aukamm neighborhood and a Whole Neighborhood Revitalization (WNR) project in Hainerberg.

Hainerberg's WNR project, also to be awarded in 2009, will take a more holistic look at updating the entire neighborhood, Richards said, requiring a



rethinking of layout, space requirements, and future needs. Specifically, many of the buildings currently on the site will be modernized to comply with current Army Family Housing standard design guidance. In addition, the sidewalks, storm drains, playgrounds, and parking areas will all be modernized as well.

All these projects in Wiesbaden amount to a significant chunk of the housing projects in Europe.

In fact, according to a March 2006 congressional statement on military quality of life, almost 40 percent of all non-line-item Army Family Housing projects in Germany are taking place in Wiesbaden.

Outside of Wiesbaden, one of Europe's largest Army Family Housing projects is being planned in Urlas, an Army community in Ansbach, Germany, located in Western Bavaria.

For about one hundred years, the forested green hills of Urlas have been a military training site – first to the German *Wehrmacht* and then to the U.S. Army.

Over time, the vacant land was built up with bunkers, training facilities, and electrical substations to support military missions, said Philip Cohen, strategic planner for the District's Installation Support Planning Branch.

Today, however, plans are in the works to transform the site.

According to the Army's 2005 stationing plan, which selected locations for the modular Brigade Combat Teams based on existing and potential capacities, available training space, and current locations of supporting units, Urlas is the final staging location for the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade.

The 12th CAB, as they're called, is U.S. Army Europe's first modular aviation unit, merging Soldiers from five units around Germany. Housing the 12th CAB would not only mean building completely new housing units on the vacant Urlas grounds, but would also mean running utilities there, constructing drainage infrastructure, building parking lots, and

setting up community support facilities – like a PX, commissary, school, child development center, and recreational facility – that make every Army community home.

In July, a master planning charrette was held to propose locations of the facilities and roads on these green acres.

Phase I of the Urlas project is scoped to provide 132 townhouses with six senior officer single-family detached units, said Michael Hogg, District project manager. Phases II and III, if commenced, are estimated to call for a much bigger end state.

Once phases II and III are built, there will be a total of 530 homes, said Hogg. "And when you add to that a shopping center, theater, chapel, and a host of other community facilities, we're really planning for an entire new town. There will be plenty of green space, walking and biking paths and other amenities that make it pleasant and livable."

All these housing projects have been carefully monitored and championed by the watchful eye of the Pentagon; but an even closer source of campaigning exists at Patch Barracks, in Stuttgart, Germany, home to Marine Gen. James Jones, commander, U.S. European Command and the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe.

In July 2005, Patch Barracks saw the completion of a \$17.5 million WNR project, which housed 110 military families.

"The well-being of our military families is linked to readiness, retention, reinforcement of our core values, and mission accomplishment," Jones said.

"These families are an absolutely integral part of our team."

Continuing to provide adequate housing for Soldiers and their families is critical to ensuring combat readiness and quality of life, said Jones. "The challenge before us now is to ... resource and execute this transformation."

