



Press Release

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New U.S. Army commander arrives to lead Joint Task Force-East

By Lt. Col. Daniel E. Herrigstad, JTF-E PAO

MIHAIL KOGALNICEANU AIRFIELD, Romania -- The new U.S. commander of the Romanian-U.S. Joint Task Force-East headquarters arrived this week at MK Airfield to lead the 2009 rotation of the U.S. and Romanian joint military exercise that will be held this summer and fall at the Babadag training area.

Colonel Gary R. Russ, a U.S. Army officer with 29 years of service, arrived unceremoniously with a small advance-party staff to take the reins as the co-director of the task force for this year's rotation. Romanian Colonel Mihail Nicolescu - of the 1st Infantry Division "Dacica", based in Bucharest - is his counterpart in the exercise this year.

"I'm glad to finally be here with my feet on the ground", said Russ. "My team and I are looking forward to a fantastic training rotation with our Romanian partners this year. Our working relationships are already great and it'll only get better as we move forward expanding our training opportunities."

Col. Russ, an Arizona native, came from U.S. Army Europe / 7th Army Headquarters in Heidelberg, Germany. As an engineer officer, Col G. Russ has served combat tours in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Russ is currently an activated Army Reserve officer but has also served in the National Guard and over 18 years on active duty. In his civilian capacity, Russ is an environmental engineer with the U.S. Army Europe/7th Army Headquarters in Heidelberg.

This year JTF-E marks its third annual rotation. It is part of a continuing effort by the U.S. and its partners in the region to improve interoperability and develop relationships with partner militaries in theater security operations. Over 2100 Romanian and U.S.

troops and other support personnel are expected to take part in training operations this year in Romania. In addition, JTF-E has similar training exercises in Bulgaria.

The JTF-E main body deployment of U.S. support staff is scheduled to start arriving at MK Airfield the last week of June with over 160 total personnel. The first rotation is due at the beginning of August with members of the Tennessee Army National Guard along with a platoon of Romanian infantry. The units will train together in the Babadag Training Area, Tulcea County, for approximately 21 days. Shortly afterwards, the 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment (2SCR) from Germany will arrive to conduct a similar exercise. Another Romanian Infantry platoon will train and rotate with three different U.S. Stryker companies until the end of October.

The National Guardsmen will primarily conduct small unit infantry tactics training with their Romanian counterparts and will be maneuvering High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWV). The 2SCR and their Romanian partners will use maneuvering the U.S. Stryker combat vehicles along with the Romanian armored personnel carriers in and around the Babadag Training Area. Their focus will consist of reconnaissance training, small arms training, and live fire of the weapons systems on the combat vehicles.

“In this partnering relationship with our Romanian host nation, we are taking one step at a time with regard to the training,” said Col. Russ. “Each year we are adding more and more building blocks and expanding the depth and breadth of the joint and combined training. This year, I am certain, will be great; next year even better.”

The U.S. forces participating in and supporting the training rotation are scheduled to return home by the 31st of October 2009. A small staff and the Seabee detachment augmented with the six Romanian engineers will remain and continue local Humanitarian Civic Actions projects. The approximately \$ 50 million U.S.-funded Permanent Forward Operating Site currently under construction adjacent to MK Airfield is scheduled to be complete this fall. The facility will be able to house and feed up to 1,700 soldiers that are intended to rotate thru conducting similar coalition training in the years to come.

JTF-E continues to be one of the U.S. Army Europe’s strategic priorities and plays a key role in U.S. European Command’s Theater Security Cooperation program. The intent of JTF-E is to build the interoperability, professional and personal relationships necessary for the success of U.S.- Romanian and other partnered-nation coalitions in overseas contingency operations around the globe. Currently, a company of U.S. infantry is under direct command and control of a Romanian Infantry Battalion. The units are fighting side-by-side and performing with distinction.

For more information regarding JTF-East, please contact the Public Affairs Office; U.S. PAO, Lt. Col. Daniel Herrigstad; daniel.herrigstad@eur.army.mil; Manuela Stroescu; manuela.stroescu@eur.army.mil.

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