

# Operation Sand Castle

## ENGINEERS GO VERTICAL

By Private First Class Christine Samples

**A**lpha Company and Charlie Company, 458th Engineer Battalion, United States Army Reserve units out of Brookeville and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, learned new jobs during Operation Sand Castle 2007. The Soldiers of the two companies were tasked with building a number of pre-engineered buildings and concrete masonry unit (CMU) structures in three weeks. The challenge was that they had little or no experience with vertical construction before coming to NTC, because they were reclassifying from combat engineer military occupational specialties (MOSSs) to jobs that support vertical construction. The urban city, Medina Jabal, being built at NTC was their learning site.

**A Soldier with Alpha Company, 458th Engineer Battalion, sets a cinder block down on fresh mortar on a CMU structure.**



Photo by Private First Class Christine Samples

Operation Sand Castle gave the Alpha Company Soldiers a lot of tough training. With just four days to construct four CMU structures, the days started at about 0400. On some days, the Soldiers didn't get back to their forward operating base (FOB) until after the showers closed at 2300. That provided motivation for them to get their jobs done faster so they had time for hot showers.

The Soldiers didn't spend all their time building. Trips to and from the work site were delayed by attacks from the Opposing Forces (OPFOR) that were in place at NTC to help create a more realistic training environment. Before they started work for the day, the Soldiers also practiced clearing buildings that were already finished at the site. Clearing involved searching out hidden enemy forces and other hazards the OPFOR might have set up overnight.

Charlie Company engineers teamed up with the 461st Engineer Company out of Fargo, North Dakota, to begin working on a taped-off L-shaped area in the sand that would become a CMU structure. Since they had built roads during a deployment to Iraq, these Soldiers had experience in horizontal construction, but they too had never built structures that go up into the air.

The NTC training aimed to teach Soldiers what to expect during a deployment. The experience of those who had already been deployed was helpful when the company performed a convoy or pulled security, but their experience usually did not extend to vertical construction.

The transition of Alpha and Charlie Company's Soldiers to vertical engineer skills fits in with the Army's move to a more modular force. Engineer jobs are changing as the Army becomes more versatile and mobile. These Soldiers are taking the change in stride as they adapt and learn their new role in the Army.



*Private First Class Samples is a member of the 350th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, an Army Reserve unit from Indianapolis, Indiana.*