

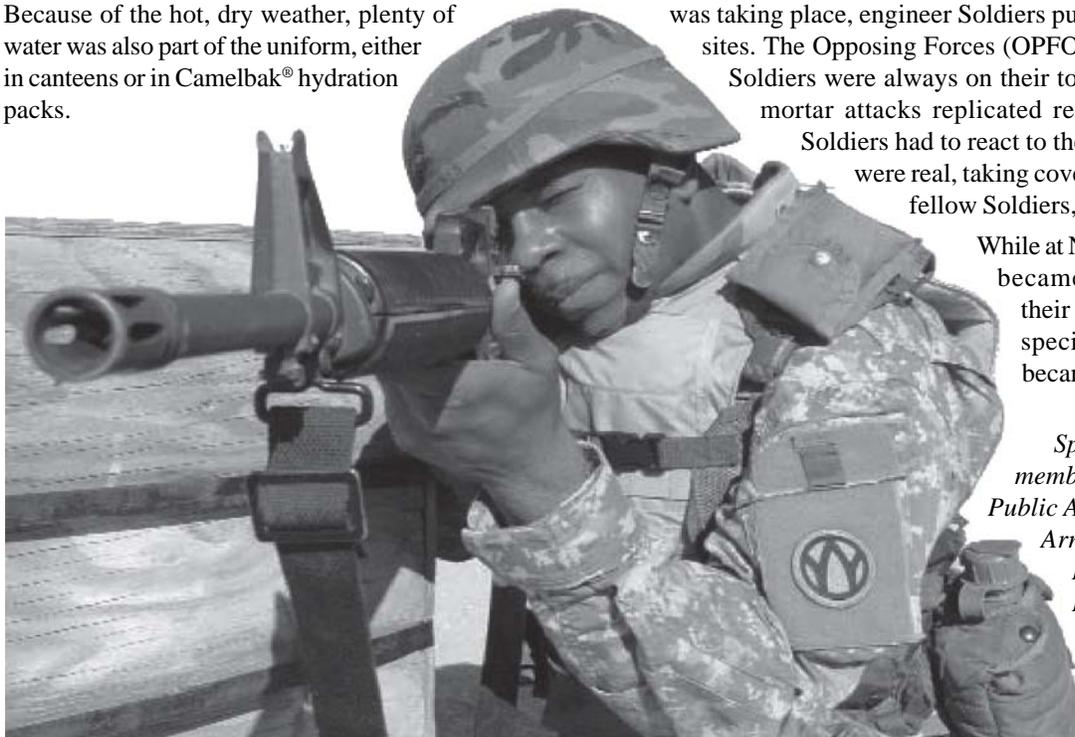
Engineers Train As They Fight

By Specialist Matt Wisnieski

A Soldier first—that was the spirit instilled in United States Army Reserve Soldiers at NTC during Operation Sand Castle 2007. Soldiers trained to proficiently construct buildings, roads, and bridges, and along with that, they performed and succeeded in tactical training. The Reserve Soldiers traveled to Fort Irwin to upgrade existing facilities at NTC, the military's premier desert environment training center.

The Soldiers worked out of Forward Operating Base (FOB) Santa Fe, which was operated as if it were in a hostile area. Guards searched vehicles and also ensured the safety of Soldiers inside the wire. Outside the FOB, Soldiers wore full tactical gear, to include Kevlar helmets, body armor, ballistic eye protection, and individual weapons.

Because of the hot, dry weather, plenty of water was also part of the uniform, either in canteens or in Camelbak® hydration packs.



Vehicles leaving the FOB were treated as if they were in a combat zone as well. As a safety precaution, convoys were used to ensure that no Soldier went into the combat zone alone. In response to security alerts, convoys had to have at least four vehicles with two Soldiers in each of them. During convoy missions, they learned to react to improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and when vehicles were stopped during missions, they pulled security along the roadside.

Security was important in other situations as well. A combat engineer from the 671st Engineer Company pulled guard duty along with his team during a reconnaissance mission. While his battle buddies took measurements for a future bridging mission, the 671st Soldier and his team were in the prone position providing overwatch for safety. While construction was taking place, engineer Soldiers pulled guard at the work sites. The Opposing Forces (OPFOR) made sure that the

Soldiers were always on their toes. Dummy IEDs and mortar attacks replicated real combat situations.

Soldiers had to react to the explosions as if they were real, taking cover, accounting for their fellow Soldiers, and securing the area.

While at NTC, engineer Soldiers became more proficient at their military occupational specialties, and they also became better Soldiers.



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