

## The Birth of a City

By Sergeant First Class Craig Pickett

**H**undreds of thousands of Soldiers have trained for desert warfare at NTC. All come away with an appreciation for the heat and the challenges the desert brings to even the simplest missions. However, NTC is changing. With the help of the United States Army Reserves and Operation Sand Castle, it will eventually have in its training arsenal a booming Middle Eastern town. The long-term goal of Operation Sand Castle is to construct approximately 480 buildings over 10 years, creating a small city called *Medina Jabal*. This city will provide a backdrop similar to current

operations, allowing Soldiers training at NTC to train in a robust urban environment that will help them save lives in the Middle East. The 10-year mission is now in its third year.

The 412th Engineer Command from Vicksburg, Mississippi, was the exercise agent for year three of Operation Sand Castle. The command planned training, arranged logistics, and coordinated all the participating units. The 412th brought together a balanced team of Army Reserve units to accomplish the mission and provided quality training opportunities for the Soldiers. The units were from different commands and locations, and many had never worked together before. That fell in line with what units experience when they deploy overseas, making the training opportunity very realistic.

The 412th was also instrumental in integrating the Active Army brigade combat team (BCT) training at NTC with the Reserve elements. This gave both an opportunity to interact and to rely on each other as they would overseas on a real-world deployment. As Operation Sand Castle drew to a close, the planning had already begun for the 2008 rotation. In the works is a 10-mile section of road into the eastern expanse of NTC, as well as more buildings for Medina Jabal. As always, training will be paramount for everyone involved.



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



Photo by Sergeant First Class Craig Pickett

**A Soldier mans a squad automatic weapon while on the jobsite at Medina Jabal. The heavy equipment operator with Company C, 854th Engineer Battalion, must keep an eye out for enemy forces and provide protection while his fellow Soldiers construct buildings.**

Photo by Sergeant First Class Craig Pickett



Members of the maintenance section, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 854th Engineer Battalion, fill sandbags to place around the edges of their tents to keep sand from blowing in.

Photo by Sergeant First Class Craig Pickett



A Soldier from Company A, 854th Engineer Battalion, places forms for a building at the Medina Jabal work site.

Photo by Private First Class Christine Samples



Soldiers with Company A, 458th Engineer Battalion, check for levelness while building the door frame for a building at Medina Jabal.

Photo by Sergeant First Class Craig Pickett



Soldiers of the 770th Engineer Company pave the parking lot of the post theater at Fort Irwin, California, as part of Operation Sand Castle.