

PAVING THE WAY



By Sergeant First Class Craig Pickett

Thanks to the 770th Engineer Company, a Reserve unit from Penn Yan, New York, NTC is getting a fresh topping of hot asphalt on some well-worn areas. Since there were no paving missions in the emerging city of Medina Jabal, planners turned their focus to the post. Three areas were identified based on the unit's mission-essential task list,

time restraints, and project size—a portion of Barstow Road, the theater parking lot, and Hamby Barrack's parking lot. In keeping with the scope of the mission, all paving operations were done tactically, including Soldiers setting up perimeter security to guard against possible enemy attacks. The Soldiers wore full “battle rattle”—flak jacket, Kevlar helmet, and M-16 rifle—while they shoveled, pushed, and laid down the hot, rocky blend.

The noncommissioned officer (NCO) in charge of the lay-down projects was concerned about the extra gear. Since the personal equipment could get caught on machinery, leaders had to pay close attention to Soldiers as they worked and rely on battle buddies to make sure everyone was safe. Also, since the pavers work with hot equipment and materials, leaders had to ensure that Soldiers did not suffer from heat exhaustion and dehydration. Working in these conditions is not new to the Soldiers of the 770th. They deployed to Kuwait and Iraq from 2003 to 2004 and performed their paving mission daily in much worse conditions.

A Soldier uses a lute to smooth asphalt on a section of Barstow Road at NTC as part of Operation Sand Castle.



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Members of the 770th Engineer Company repair a section of road at NTC in full combat gear.

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A Soldier shovels asphalt to fill in the gaps as the 770th Engineer Company repairs a section of Barstow Road at NTC.

They were tasked with repairing, patching, and fixing roads so that convoys could get through easily and quickly.

The projects at Fort Irwin may not determine life or death, but they are important for those living and working on post. They will be focal points for people parking on the lots and driving on the roads. Even the slightest bump will be noticed. The civilians in charge of setting up the projects were wary of the Reserve pavers and unsure of their abilities. Paving is expensive and if not done correctly can be costly to repair. But after two days of paving, they realized that the Reservists were good at their job.

A civilian truck driver delivering material to the crew on Barstow Road definitely had reservations about the Soldier pavers at first because an inexperienced paver operator could damage his truck if the paver does not maintain a straight course. He said the Army Reserve pavers were comparable to any commercial crew, and he was pleased that his truck came away unscathed. The paver operator, who kept the paver in line, said the hardest part of driving the paver is indeed keeping it straight, but also keeping an eye out for his fellow Soldiers. During paving operations, large dump trucks hauling tons of asphalt are constantly moving in and out of the work area. It is up to another Soldier to ensure that the trucks are backed into position and their loads are dumped into the paver's hopper at the correct rate. Some Soldiers on the crew smooth the 300-degree asphalt with long rakes, called *lutes*, while others constantly monitor the depth and make adjustments to the screed. The screed is the back portion of the paver where the asphalt is pushed under, smoothing it out and setting the thickness.



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