



GATOR COMPANY FRG NEWSLETTER



VOLUME 1, ISSUE 4

A COMPANY 2-12 INFANTRY, 4BCT 4ID

NOVEMBER 2009

FORWARD OPERATING BASE BLESSING KUNAR PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN



**THE VILLAGE OF NANGALAM AND THE PECH RIVER VALLEY
LOOKING EAST FROM GATOR COMPANY HEADQUARTERS**



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A NOTE FROM GATOR 6

The last two months have been incredibly busy for the Soldiers of Gator Company. Following the elections, our attention turned to getting back to the basics, getting back out into sector and strengthening already established relationships and going to new areas to try to make friends. Gator Company conducted an Air Assault into the volatile Shuryak Valley, 2nd Platoon flew out to support one of our sister battalions in Nuristan, and 1st Platoon spent two weeks in the Korengal Valley to provide additional boots on the ground for Baker Company. One thing is for sure, when help is needed, the powers that be call for Gator Company. I am always impressed with their ability to do more with less and they are very flexible.

We've also got some new faces around Gator Company. 1LT Scott Klaas was called to Brigade Headquarters to assist the Engineer cell. We wish the best of luck for Scott and his wife Jennifer; we have enjoyed the time they spent with us. The new company Executive Officer is 1LT Michael Luth of Yorktown, Virginia. 1LT Luth comes from Dagger Company 3rd Platoon, where he served as a Heavy Weapons Platoon Leader for 16 months. We welcome him and his wife Katie to the Gator Team. We also welcome 1LT Taylor Gillespie as 3rd Platoon Dagger Platoon Leader (I'll explain in a minute), and SFC Jason Findish (who replaced SSG McKinney following his combat injuries).

I know it is sometimes confusing all the people moving around but it is understandable and family members back home sometimes get confused why this platoon is working with that company and where are they and who is in charge and whatnot. We started out the deployment with 1st Platoon Dagger attached to us but since the Platoon that was on Route Clearance (3rd Platoon Dagger) was due to be switched out, well, you know the rest. 3rd Platoon Dagger has been attached to Gator Company for the past month and is doing an outstanding job here, we are lucky to have them and it is likely that they will be with us for the remainder of the tour.

In the coming months, we will continue to do much of the same as what we've been doing. The main focus is on development, there is plenty of international fund organizations that have donated money for infrastructure development of Afghanistan. Although our main priority here is security of the people, we also get involved in this process, pushing the village elders and government officials to use systems designed to pave the way for eventual autonomous management. Much of the frustration your men endure is directed at the very slow pace at which this system works. Make no mistake, Gator Company has over 27 different projects running at the moment and much of our time is taken up by either implementing, managing, or protecting these projects.

We are almost halfway through the tour and the job hasn't gotten any easier. The 1SG and XO have worked tirelessly to get Gator Company more internet access and with luck should have it within the next month. New billets for 2nd Platoon have been submitted and look to start construction on them in the next two months. Yes, things move pretty slow here, including time!

Thanks again for all that you do for our Soldiers. A very special thanks to Kelley Granzow, she has sent packages and letters and has even put many Soldiers in Gator Company on a list to receive Christmas presents. In addition I would like to personally thank A 2-12 Association members Bill Comeau and Brigadier General (RET) Jim Bisson. They along with many others who have contacted me from this association, served in A 2-12 in Vietnam and are very interested to know what the Company is doing day to day here in Afghanistan.

Stay strong and stay GATOR TOUGH!!!

Sincerely,
CPT Kevin W. Hutcheson
REFUSE TO LOSE!



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1SG Corner,

By the end of OCT we have been in Afghanistan for five months and still we learn something new every day. The OPTEMPO stays high as this month we detached 1st Platoon to the Korengal Valley in support of Bco. With them gone the other platoons had to fill in for them and maintained a constant presents in our area. Even with the workload outside the wire, we are continuing to train here, revising our battle drills, adapting to the enemy's Tactics and procedures. We can never be satisfied with what we know, we must always get better.

As the 1SG I brief all of the Soldiers before they go on their R&R leave. Generally when a Soldier has to go and see the 1SG they are pretty nervous and possibly scared. But when they know that they are getting their leave counseling they come in happy and full of smiles as they know that they will be home with their loved ones in the next couple of days. Those fifteen days of leave in the middle of one of these rotations is one of the best inventions that the Army has ever come up with. When a Soldier returns they never hesitate to share their adventures. Everyone always says it was good, but it was too short. I look forward to my leave, Tina and I have already started planning.

As I said earlier 1st Platoon was detached for most of this month. I felt like a dad saying goodbye to his sons as they got on the bus going to camp. Only this time they were getting on three Blackhawks and going to the Korengal. They worked long hard hours aiding in security and increasing the number of patrols that could be conducted. When they returned I talked with 1SG Noell (Baker7) and he had nothing but good things to say about the professionalism and dedication that you're Soldiers showed him in the Korengal over those 17 days. We have now had Gator Soldiers do missions in all of the company areas and also help in two other Battalion sectors, always with great compliments from the elements that they help. Dagger7 thanks me every time that I see him for sending him 3rd Platoon, and 2nd Platoon pins on new awards at every ceremony for their efforts out of sector missions.

I would like to tell all of the families back home how much we appreciate the support that they are sending us over here. We have received Halloween candy from the FRG and Boxes of Beanie Babies from PFC Utslers Family. Our company has also been adopted by the Granzow family and friends from Ohio. Thank you all.

1SG Mark Eckstrom
Gator 7



Headquarters Platoon



CPT Hutcheson reenlists SPC Henrichs at FOB Blessing



SSG Lamb on patrol with Marines from the Embedded Training Team (ETT) and Afghan National Army Soldiers



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Headquarters Platoon



SGT Lemieux and SSG Corley hard at work in the Company Tactical Operations Center



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Dear Family and Friends of 1st Platoon,

A lot has happened during the month of October for the men of 1st Platoon. Every day we spend here the men learn something new about the Afghan people while also sharing pieces of our own culture. 1st Platoon has been busy with everything from Shura meetings to Air Assaults in support of other 2-12 IN units; they have adapted incredibly well to the changing atmosphere of Afghanistan. One day they are being asked to fight the Taliban with extreme force while the next they are out swimming and fishing with the local children. If one thing can be said about the men of this platoon it's their ability to adapt to any situation and to do so with incredible success.

While I was back in the states enjoying a short vacation from the deployment the men of this platoon were here thriving; doing everything that was asked of them and more. While this comes as no surprise to myself and should not come as one to you either it really is true proof this Platoon possesses the finest NCO's and Junior Leaders in not only this Company but in the Battalion. Not that it needs to be said but you should all be very proud of the job these guys have done and continue to do. The majority of the month was consumed by our guys traveling down to the Korengal in support of Baker Company. 1st Platoon can now say they have seen all that Konar Province has to offer, they have been throughout the Province from its most Eastern to Western and Southern to its most Northern limits.

The Soldier of the month for 1st PLT is SGT Kaminski. As a new Squad Leader in the Platoon, SGT Kaminski deployed his squad on a QRF mission in under two hours to support B CO 2-12 IN. SGT Kaminski assisted in the Force Protection of B CO 2-12 as well as assisted in the closure of OP Vegas. He kept his squad motivated for those 17 days in the mountains, and assisted in many different job titles in aiding in their patrols. He truly showed what the heart and soul of a Squad Leader should be in today's Army.

Finally we had the pleasure of promoting two of our soldiers into the NCO Corp this month. Congratulations to the friends and family of SGT Strong and SGT King. Both have been a tremendous asset to the platoon thus far and I know they will only continue to mentor and develop their soldiers throughout the deployment.

Thanks to all the family and friends during this first quarter of the deployment, the letters and packages have helped tremendously to keep the guys spirits high. As always the soldiers here in 1st Platoon continue to do an amazing job, myself and SFC Findish are truly blessed to have these guys around us pushing day in and day out. With your continued support we will be home, back in the Rocky Mountains, in no time. God Bless.

Very Respectably Yours,
1LT Chris Capasso
SFC Jason Findish



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1st Platoon



PFC BAKKEN WITH FISH IN HAND



SGT HARRIS TAKING IT ALL IN



1st Platoon



PFC FINN WITH OUR MASCOT RAFIKI



SPC BAKKEN AND SSG BATES FISHING WITH THE LOCALS



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Dear Friends and Families of 2nd Platoon,

As the platoon passes the fifth month of our deployment, we have been greeted with some salvation from the blistering Afghan heat. October's weather has been pleasantly cool, which has made our day-to-day operations more comfortable and bearable. It is amazing how much more acclimated the platoon is to the terrain and climate in our sector from when we first arrived. We are now able to move quicker and further across our sector with less physical strain or exertion. Willingly or not, many of us have become quite experienced rock climbers.

The past month has been a rewarding month for the Platoon. We have continued to interact with the local population in the Waygul Valley, focusing our attention on legitimizing the Afghan government and the development of infrastructure. Progress in Afghanistan takes patience, and sometimes it is easy to lose sight of your accomplishments. Even the pessimist cannot ignore the valuable impact that 2nd Platoon has had in the Waygul. Every time the platoon walks through a village in the Valley, we are confronted with thanks and praise from the local population. While much of the Pech Valley continues to struggle with security, the Waygul serves as an example of success.

As many of you know, Rest and Recuperation (R&R) Leave has begun for roughly 20% of the platoon. The leave scheduled has been posted, and everyone has a rough idea of when they will be coming back to the United States. R&R is an event that I am sure you and your Soldier are desperately awaiting, and I encourage you to enjoy the time together as much as possible. Soldiers returning from R&R are a source of encouragement and energy to a tired Platoon, which greatly increases our effectiveness.

I am happy to announce that several Soldiers in 2nd Platoon have been promoted since the last news letter. SSGs Rodriguez and Schroeder were promoted from Sergeant to Staff Sergeant in the beginning of the month. SGT French was promoted from Corporal to Sergeant and will undoubtedly perform excellently as a Non-Commissioned Officer. In addition, SPCs Mustain and Tinsley will attend the E5 promotion board at the beginning of November, and I have no doubt they will be promoted.

With the Holidays rapidly approaching, I encourage you to begin preparing your holiday packages and send them here sooner rather than later. The large surge of mail that Bagram Airfield is sure to see in the next month will undoubtedly cause strain on the mail system resulting in extra travel time for packages.

I know the past months have been difficult on your families, but I thank each and every one of you for your service to this country. There is no way this Platoon would be as successful as it is if it were not for your support. Once again, thank you!

Respectfully,
1LT Bill Fio Rito



2nd Platoon



2nd Platoon, Gator Company



Members of 2nd Platoon celebrate an EID dinner (called an Iftar) with Haji Arif and his family during Ramadan



2nd Platoon



After Air Assaulting in Nuristan, 2nd Platoon secured a key hill-top in the Kunar Valley in order to allow a coalition supply convoy to pass unharmed. The platoon secured this hill-top for 36-hours, and prevented the enemy from massing on the coalition convoy. In this picture, SPC Bentham is over watching the notorious Saw village



While on patrol, 2nd Platoon came across a man who had rolled his car off a 8ft wall onto the field bellow. 2nd Platoon helped overturn the car and then proceeded to winch the car back onto the road, receiving praise from the growing crowd of villagers.



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3rd Platoon FRG Newsletter November 2009

For all the families checking in on their soldiers at COP Michigan, I again take the opportunity to thank you all for your support. 3rd Platoon got all the Halloween candy bags and really appreciate everything you do back in the rear. It makes a great difference and goes a long way to sustain morale.

There have been quite a few promotions since I last wrote and I wanted to take this opportunity to recognize all the soldiers who have risen in rank. Julio Gonzalez and Anthony Garcia went from Private to Private First Class. John Rushing and Luke Steel rose from Private First Class to Specialist. Christopher Collins, Anthony Elenburg, Nicholas Mordaunt, Thomas Hunt, Marcos Ramirez, Joseph Pratt-Majesky, and Shawn Dickson all joined the NCO Corps and were promoted to Sergeant. And last but not least, Carl Faulk was promoted to Staff Sergeant.

The Platoon recently went on a pretty interesting mission, playing an Afghan version of capture the flag. The other day in mountains above one of the villages which our Platoon is responsible for, a flag appeared. All of the villagers and workers on our COP told us that the Taliban had put the flag there and threatened anyone who dared to take it down, because it symbolized their power in the village. When the ANA found out about this, they asked for our help to remove the flag and show the peoples resistance to Taliban influence. Our platoon, along with the ANA, met with the local Afghan Police and village elders, and walked up the mountain to take down the flag. After walking all the way up to the top, we took down the flag, and on that same mountain we raised the flag of Afghanistan, to symbolize that the village stands for the government and does not tolerate Taliban fighters. There are pictures of this attached, and I hope it helps you all at home glean a better understanding of the kind of differences your soldiers are making here.

For Soldier of the Month this time around, I select SSG Faulk. As the Platoon's humanitarian aid representative, he has distributed aid to several hundred families in need of assistance to make ends meet. His work has been absolutely transformative in making our villages both safer and better places for the Afghans. Aside from just organizing and packaging the aid, he also coordinates the distribution with local Afghan authorities, which goes leaps and bounds towards putting the Afghan people further along in taking charge of their country.

We continue to appreciate everything you all do for us, and like I have said before, your support goes a very long way motivating us to get through the tough days walking the hills and making this place safe. Please accept my thanks for all of your efforts in helping make this Platoon successful.

1LT Mark Zambarda
Platoon Leader



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3rd Platoon



The ANA raising their flag after taking down the Taliban flag



CPL Moore helping secure the perimeter during a humanitarian aid drop



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SSG Faulk giving out aid to poor families



SSG Krepcho and SGT Ramirez speaking with locals about their needs



3rd Platoon



SSG Campbell giving radios to local children



SGT Elenburg, SGT Pratt-Majesky, SFC Goodin, 1LT Zambarda, PVT Stone, and PFC Garcia during a presence patrol



TIDBITS...

If any of the families know of Soldier support organizations, please feel free to give our address to them as soldiers can always use extra support items. Please have these organizations send items to 1SG Eckstrom, as he will see that they are evenly distributed. In addition, www.anysoldier.com has a listing of what can and cannot be sent overseas to Soldiers deployed in the Middle East. Items Soldiers typically fashion are the following:

1. Hygiene items
2. Wet wipes
3. Movies
4. Video games (X box 360, PS3)
5. Junk food (candy, beef jerky, etc.)
6. Any baked items should be placed in sealed containers
7. Magazines (no pornographic)
8. Books
9. Autographed pictures or posters

This list is not all inclusive, Soldiers are strange creatures!

UNIT MAILING ADDRESS

SOLDIER'S NAME (NO RANK)

A 2-12 IN, 4BCT 4ID

FOB BLESSING, APO AE 09354



A Message from the FRG

Dear Family and Friends,

October has brought us that much closer to the holiday season, some colder weather, and enjoying some mid-tour leave by a few of our soldiers. We also welcomed a few new little Gator arrivals to some proud parents. Congrats!

There are a lot of local holiday events coming up here at Fort Carson so please check the FRG website often or contact any of us in the FRG for details. We are also looking for any volunteers that would enjoy helping us raise money by wrapping gifts at the PX this year. Please call your FRG representative if you are interested in participating and will be in town between the dates of November 27th and December 24th.

Aco and Dco had a little Christmas prep get together on November 5th that was a ton of productive fun. We will continue meeting up with the Dagger FRG as they are truly our sister Company and enjoy sharing ideas and knowledge with them. Thank you so much to those that came out to make a difference for all of our Gator soldiers.

The next Battalion FRG Meeting will be held on December 3rd at 6:30 p.m., located at the Family Readiness Center. FREE on-site childcare will be provided. Please provide names and ages of children to your FRG or Kimberly Mendenhall by 12:00p.m., November 24th. Please note that this Battalion wide meeting will replace any individual Company FRG meetings, so please attend if you have any concerns, questions, suggestions or just want to be in the know.

We hope that everyone enjoys their Thanksgiving and see you next month.

Jessica Hutcheson



A Co Contact Information

FRG:

FRG Leader: Jessica Hutcheson

Treasurer: Jessica Hutcheson

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1st PLT POC: Celia Salas

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2nd PLT POC (active): Jessica Hutcheson (see above)

3rd PLT POC: Amber Pool

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Rear Detachment:

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1SG: 1SG Michael Pak: 719.503.4210

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