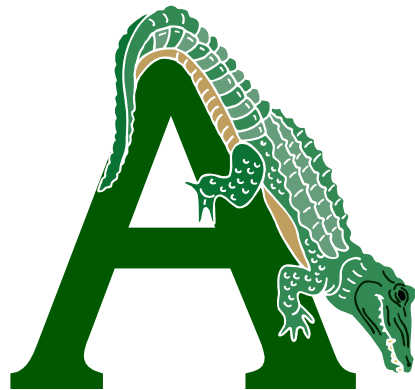


A-Co Deployment Newsletter

June – July 09'



A Message from CPT Hutcheson (Gator 6)

Greetings!

Well, the 1st month is already done and we are settled into our daily routines here at Camp Blessing in the Kunar Province. The trip over here wasn't without difficulty as the travel arrangements here are not as predictable as they are in Iraq. First off, the men arrived at Manas Air Base in Kyrgystan to a country that has trees everywhere (unlike Kuwait), and off in the distant south, monolithic mountains could be seen; a sure sign of things to come. After spending a few days in Manas, the troops boarded flights to Bagram Air Base, where the soldiers were treated to living conditions much different from home. Massive living tents were what the men called home for some, as much as a week or two. After a few days of training at Bagram, flights to Jalalabad Airfield marked the next leg of the trip. It was at Jalalabad where the intense heat started. Temperatures above 100 degrees were the norm, and the air conditioning in the tents was not all that great. The men endured and most would only be there for days, some only for hours until they loaded helicopters that brought them to Camp Blessing or Camp Michigan (3rd Platoon).

Upon arrival the Gators immediately began training on new equipment that was already in place for us. Our counterparts, C Company 1st Battalion 26th Infantry from the 1st Infantry Division, were incredibly helpful in getting our soldiers ready for upcoming operations in the Pech River Valley. As those Soldiers from the 1-26 slowly filtered out, the Gators took over the role of "land owners" and have been conducting operations on their own since the 24th of June.

One thing is for sure, the customs and rituals of the Afghan people are like nothing I've seen before. They are rich in tradition and pride themselves on their ability to endure hardships. They are an honorable people for the most part, and I have enjoyed their hospitality on multiple occasions, even this early in the deployment.

Our men are doing fine, they are settled in, and are conducting operations on a daily basis. They have laundry facilities, a Moral, Welfare, and Recreation facility (which has internet and phones), and a very good chow hall (which has ice cream from time to time and even lobster and steak every Friday night). The living conditions are cramped, but it was expected so the men were actually quite surprised at how much more room they actually did have.

In conclusion, the key word for the first month here has been "flexibility", and the men are meeting every challenge that is placed before them. As part of all our newsletters, I have given the task to all platoon leaders to write a short synopsis of what the month entailed, also pointing out a Soldier that has done a great job and is deserving of all of our praise. We will try to get a few pictures in there as well, as I want all platoons to be represented in the newsletter so as families can see their Warriors.

I want to personally thank all of the families that have endured thus far and will endure for the remainder of the deployment.

CPT Hutcheson (Gator 6)

1SG Corner

Thirty June marked the end of a very busy month and a time to get settled in to a new routine. As you all know we started this month with a new journey by saying goodbye to our loved ones, and moving half way around the world. While we settle into a high paced tempo, I am pleased with the work that the Gator Company Soldiers are doing each and every day.

As we left Fort Carson I can say for myself that I am proud to be a part of such a great organization. Each and every Soldier in the formation that day left loved ones behind proud of what they have become and looking to the task set before us. We traveled through twelve time zones and somehow ended up ten and a half hours ahead. After multiple flights on both fixed and rotary winged aircraft we arrived in the Kunar Province. We got our first look at the Mountains and realized why we had been traversing the hills of Colorado to get ready for this challenge.

Here on the Forward Operating Bases (FOB's) we have been busy trying to figure out our work routines and organize our living circumstances all at the same time. We have trained hard for the last year and have prepared our selves physically and mentally. The outgoing unit has given us a good idea of our area and did a great job prepping the battle space for our success. Multiple patrols a day help to build rapport with the local people while learning to understand their patterns of life. Both will help us to better accomplish our mission.

One of the Army Values comes to mind "Duty", translated in to Army terms means, "fulfill your obligation." That is what your Soldiers are doing each and every day. Whether they are hot or tired they always complete the mission with great results.

1SG Eckstrom (Gator 7)



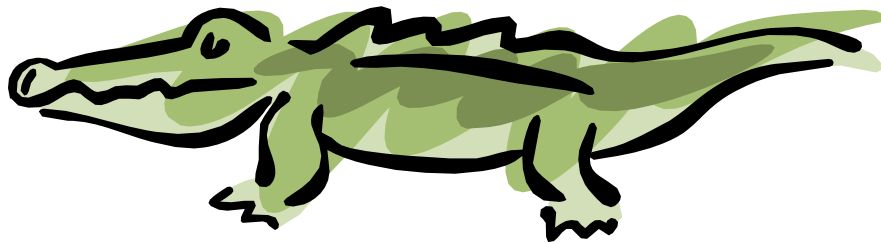
1st Platoon News

Hello from Afghanistan. We can tell you that while the mountains may be a familiar sight, the people and villages are very different from Colorado Springs. First Platoon, Gator Company has been working very hard to get all our boys familiar with the area and its people. If it were not for the war, this would really be a very beautiful country. The local children floating down the Pech River, or playing a game of cricket during these hot summer months constantly entertain us. Minus the mud-constructed homes the landscape is very similar to Colorado.

First Platoon has been working hard to build the positive relationship needed here to gain trust with the locals. Our main focus is to oversee projects for the villages. These include handing out cement, school supplies, and sports equipment for the children. Our latest mission had us giving out soccer balls to the villagers of Quandarro. Many of the children here play one of two sports, soccer or cricket. However due to the poverty rate being so high money for sporting goods often takes a back seat to the needs of each family. Giving the children of these local areas an education and recreational goods is the key to building a trusting relationship and creating the foundation for a more educated and happier Afghanistan.

Your Husbands and Sons have been working very hard and will continue to do so. All of your support and admiration has been the driving force for all of First Platoon's soldiers. From all of us here in First thanks again, and we will continue to update you on all events.

1LT Capasso, 1st Platoon Leader



2nd Platoon News

Dear Friends and Family,

Greetings from Forward Operating Base (FOB) Blessing; 2nd Platoon is still settling into our new living quarters as well as getting familiar with our Area of Operations (AO). The living conditions at FOB Blessing are quite comfortable, and I am confident we have the best showers in all of Afghanistan. Moral is high, and your soldiers have been doing excellent work, despite the rugged terrain and blistering heat.

The learning curve over here is steep, but the intensity of our pre-deployment training has prepared us well for the environment we operate in. The Platoon has been conducting Counter- Insurgency (COIN) operations over the past month, which provides us with the opportunity to meet and support the needs of the local population as well as separate the bad guys. To the Platoon's chagrin this also provides us with the "opportunity" to operate along river banks as well as Afghanistan's rugged ridges. 1st Battalion 26th Infantry Regiment, our predecessors, had a great working relationship with the people of the Waygul Valley which we hope we can continue and expound upon throughout our deployment.

On the Platoon's personal front, we have good news to report. PV2 Robert Rondash has been awarded Soldier of the Month for 2nd Platoon. Robert is quick and enthusiastic to perform his duties without direction for superiors, and rarely requires correction. Throughout the past month, Robert has been excelling as a M2 .50 caliber gunner for truck A23. The truck crew often remarks about the comfort they feel when Robert is in the turret. Never complaining, always hard working, Robert has set a high standard for future Soldier of the Month recipients.

I would like to extend a personal thank you to all the friends and family of 2nd Platoon. A soldier is only as strong as the foundation that he is built upon, and the care and generosity that you all continue to show allow them exemplify the standards of an American Soldier. Please continue to show your support by sending e-mails, letters, and packages; all of these items bring comfort to your soldiers and improve moral. I will continue to update you all on the Platoon's condition as the deployment progresses. Once again thank you for all your love and support.

1LT Fio Rito, 2nd Platoon Leader

3rd Platoon News

I'd like to take the opportunity to introduce myself for all who are reading this that I have never met at any of the FRG functions. I am 1LT Mark Zambarda and I am the Platoon Leader for 3rd Platoon, Gator Company, and I have the privilege of working with and planning missions for your boys in Afghanistan. The intent for this newsletter is that it will come out as regularly as time permits, and the plan is for it to come out monthly. Like I am sure most of you have heard, my Platoon is detached from Gator Company so many of the things we are doing are quite different and in support of different operations. Hopefully this newsletter will allow you all to glean a better idea of what we are doing. We have taken a large volume of pictures within the platoon as well, which I will try to consolidate and push out so you can see what kinds of things your Soldiers are doing.

Since we left for Afghanistan things have been very busy and the learning curve has been quite steep. The Platoon has adapted incredibly well and I am very impressed with how quickly the men learn and adjust to the environment. We were actually able to complete the process of taking over operations earlier than scheduled from the unit we replaced. They thought it would take longer for us to adjust to the altitude and the mountains but we are actually lower here than at Ft. Carson by a few thousand feet, making the air easier to breathe.

The focus for our first few weeks here has been learning our area of responsibility and all the villages inside it. As I imagine most of you have heard from your Soldiers, the kids are a handful and they swarm our vehicles every time we stop. Many of your Soldiers spend a great deal of time handing out humanitarian aid that we keep in the vehicles when we visit the villages, and quite a few already have the children calling out their name as soon as they are recognized. Our most recent project was delivering furniture to a local school. This created a huge group of spectators that watched as the Afghan National Army and U.S. soldiers worked hand in hand to help out the educational system in Afghanistan, something that will keep the children pro-government and away from the anti-government propaganda.

I will mention one Soldier every month that I see doing exceptional over here, and this month I would like to highlight the efforts of Specialist Joseph Pratt-Majesky. He is the Platoon Forward Observer, which means he handles coordinating artillery, helicopters and the jets that fly over us for support. His last tour in Iraq he was not able to really be fully utilized and do his job like he was trained, simply because operations there are much different than here. In Afghanistan though, his job is critical to the platoon, and he has helped us many times when we needed him the most. Not only does he do his job well, which can be very difficult while managing all the different assets, but he has displayed an incredible amount of confidence which has impressed everyone around him. He really sounds like an expert when he goes to work, and it is a wonderful thing to see him do his job.

On a final note, if you have any issues, please feel free to let the rear detachment chain of command know what it is you need and they will do the best they can to help you resolve your issues. The best way to support the men out here is to keep things strong on the home front so they can keep their minds clear. You all have done very well so far, and greatly appreciate the things you do to help enable us for success. I hope everyone enjoys this newsletter, and that they are able to keep up to date with their Soldiers out here. Until the next edition, I wish everyone well and look forward to sharing more of the great things these men are doing over the following month.

1LT Zambarda, 3rd Platoon Leader

FRG News

With all of the preparation that is done prior to deployment, no family is truly looking forward to that faithful day when they hug their husband, son, or father for the last time for many months. We were just happy to report that the trip to their final destination, though long, was a safe one.

We have all hopefully had an opportunity to receive a call or email from our Gator Lethal Warriors and other than working hard without much rest, all is going relatively smoothly. Both FOB Blessing and COP Michigan are equipped with computers and telephones that keep us thankfully connected. As you may have heard from your soldiers, the area that they are located in is very similar to the Colorado terrain, all that field training sounds like it's paying off!

Since our brave Gator Company departed, the FRG has been all about business and working on making sure that we keeping an organized and effortless communication flow. As expected, there are always post-deployment hiccups and though everyone is in a slightly heightened state of emotion I am proud to say that our FRG and its members have all kept cool heads and handled this extremely tough time with bravery and integrity. Families celebrated Independence Day by getting together with "Battle Buddies" and family members and many were able to get out of town to be close to those that can support them through the hard first month.

Our FRG June meeting was productive and we were lucky enough to have in attendance, 1SG Pak from the BN Rear D, Kimberly Mendenhall the BN FRSA, and Frances Sasser, our BN FRG advisor. They all provided a wealth of information especially for anyone experiencing their first deployment. What we forget sometimes is that every deployment is different, so if this is your first or 3rd, there is always new things to learn and be aware of and these individual's knowledge is invaluable. We were also lucky enough to have our new BN CFN present, SSG Kang to cover any and all financial concerns that need to be directed to the Rear D.

We also covered a few of the local summer events and Army family offerings and advised of future consistently scheduled FRG meetings. The fun part of the meeting was talking about box mailing preferences and suggestions. We will become the most skilled shopping and post office agents in the BN!

Our next FRG Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, July 23rd at the FRC and we are looking forward to having CPT Main from the Rear D in attendance for this round as well as pre-ordering our Gator Shirts. Hope to see you there!

Jessica Hutcheson – Aco FRG Leader