



GATOR COMPANY FRG NEWSLETTER



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AUGUST 2009

FORWARD OPERATING BASE BLESSING KUNAR PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN



**GATOR COMPANY HEADQUARTERS
FOB BLESSING**



A Message from the FRG

Dear Family and Friends,

August comes to us as another deployment month down and chalk full of summer activities, including back to school preparations. We are hoping that you have been able to take advantage of the many local, Fort Carson summer fun opportunities, as well as have had the benefit of viewing the many pictures and reading the various articles that have been published about our brave soldiers. If you haven't yet viewed the pictures on the www.armyfrg.org site or need information for the best websites to see and hear about our men in action, please contact your POC or FRG Leaders and they can direct you to the best places.

Our Gator FRG has had a few changes in Point of Contacts as well as our Rear D NCOIC. Please see our newly revised Contact Roster and let us know if you have any questions or concerns in regards.

The next FRG meeting will be a pot-luck and held at the FRC on August 19th, beginning at 6:00p.m. We will be planning our September "end of summer" bash as well as covering various up and coming FRG activities. For those of you who would like to attend the D co FRG meeting, it is being held at Iron Horse Park, August 13th, beginning at 5:30.

We'd also like to welcome our newest member of Gator Company, Devon Kaminski, born to Kate and Dustin on July 26th. Congratulations!

The FRG is here for you and please let us know if you have any questions, needs, or just want to share!

Jessica Hutcheson

Aco Contact Information

FRG:

FRG Leader: Jessica Hutcheson -
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FRG Co-Leader: Jessica Combs –
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HQ POC: Tina Eckstrom -
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1st PLT POC(active): Jessica Combs
(see above)

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

3rd PLT POC: Amber Pool –
apool05@yahoo.com, 541.324.0233

Rear Detachment:

BN CDR: CPT Ryan Main:
719.503.4200

BN CSM: 1SG Michael Pak:
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Aco NCOIC: SSG Talkington:
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Commander's Corner

Okay, so we are two months down and the men are, as expected, doing just great considering the environment in which they operate in from day to day. This past month saw Gator Company shift focus from area familiarization to elections preparation. The Afghan national elections, which are set to take place on the 20th of August, are incredibly important to the good people of this country. Your Soldiers have been out every single day, most of the time partnering with their Afghan Security Forces counterparts ensuring the public is knowledgeable about the benefits of taking part in the elections. It may sound like an easy task, but the people here are largely uneducated, with a illiteracy rate of 75%, many can't even read a ballot much less the Koran. Because of this, many people require a visit from us, giving us another opportunity every day to meet new people and share in their Pashtun customs. I can personally say that in the last 5 days, I have eaten more Afghan food than I have American food, and although not always good on the stomach, it gives me a chance to learn new things about the Afghan people, and more importantly, they get to learn new things about me and the rest of Gator Company.

During the month of July, we had platoons supporting everyone! 1st Platoon flew out early in the month to support an operation in Nuristan in support of the 10th Mountain Division. The men of 1st Platoon were gone for nearly two weeks and while we missed them here, the locals in which they've befriended probably missed them more. 2nd Platoon took part in three different support operations for Chosen Company, in one of them they actually were alerted and less than two hours later they were flying out on a Blackhawk helicopter, and later on that day, even linked up with 3rd Platoon on the ground who was also supporting the operation. 3rd Platoon, well what can I say about 3rd Platoon... Those guys are just plain busy! They are working their tails off out at Combat Outpost Michigan, and are indeed an incredible asset to Dagger Company. They do similar things there that we do here, connecting with the populace and making a difference in people's lives.

As for the home front, I did want to say some things about OPSEC (operational security). I know that many of the best ways to communicate are on social websites. I just ask that when we are all talking on them or leaving messages, that we do our very best to safeguard information regarding what we are doing here. If your loved one is sending you (what you think), may be potentially sensitive information (that means to me, any information that if the bad guys got a hold of, they could use to possibly hurt one of our men or family members), that I ask you remind your Soldier about OPSEC. I would also request that information that is sent around back home be verified by me, 1SG Eckstrom, SFC Pak, or CPT Main before it be published as truth. I know how it can be back there during deployment time; many stories come out that are not always true. I just ask that we all use discretion in what we talk about, and I will do the same with our Soldiers here.

In closing, I would like to thank all the volunteers of the Gator Company FRG. It is a selfless thing they do, and their contributions do not go unnoticed to myself or the 1SG. So from all of us here in Afghanistan, THANK YOU!!!

Captain Hutcheson
REFUSE TO LOSE!



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1SG's Corner

Families and friends of Gator Company, I would like to take this opportunity to tell you what an outstanding job our Soldiers have done over the past two months. Working with them has truly been a pleasure. We have accomplished a great deal over that time period. We have settled into a new routine and have conducted operations throughout our sector and have also been called to lend a helping hand to other units. We have maintained a continuous presence in the villages and on the hills with temperatures nearing 110 degrees. No matter what the obstacle is the men of Gator continue to accomplish their missions.

On the 12th of July we held a patch ceremony awarding the 4th Infantry Divisions combat patch to Soldiers here at FOB Blessing. It was an honor to see these young men proudly wearing this permanent award. The 4th has a long tradition of great fighting men leading back to 1917. More than 540,000 Soldiers have worn the distinctive patch of the Ivy Division on their uniforms. I know that I am proud to be apart of such a great organization that has fought in every one of our nations wars since WWI. On the same day we were able to award the Combat Infantryman's Badge to 1LT Capasso, 1LT Armstrong, SSG Pequeno and the Combat Action Badge to SGT Arnold. Congratulations!

Like always, I want to thank all of you for the love and support that you provide from home. It definitely makes all our jobs a whole lot easier.

1SG Mark Eckstrom
Gator 7



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1 Platoon FRG Newsletter

Another month down and things couldn't be going better. The guys have been doing an excellent job with the up tempo pace we have been keeping. Over the past month, 1 platoon has been all over the country side completing missions and assisting other units. These men have done everything we have asked of them. I don't have to tell you all because I'm sure you know but you should all be extremely proud of them.

While it's difficult to get into a rhythm due to the ever changing mission, all the soldiers of 1st Platoon are becoming much more accustomed to the terrain and people. We have made many friends here and are finally being recognized and praised by the villagers while out on missions. The guys are having a blast learning cricket and interacting with the locals. Since the last newsletter our area of operations has expanded to include a new village. This has to be one of the men's favorite places to patrol due to the large Bazaar and overwhelmingly cordial population. As always we will continue to push and work hard thanks to your support from back home.

From everyone here in 1st Platoon we would like to send our thanks for all the packages and warm letters the guys have been receiving. Mail day has been a mini, once a week Christmas for us all here. Thanks again for all the support.

1LT Chris Capasso
1st PLT Leader



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1st PLATOON!



SGT Walters requested a “fly by” so we could meet the pilot



SGT Bates and PFC Finniginam during tea-time



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1st PLATOON!



SGT Clark arguing with a local about who's better
RED SOX or Yankees



SGT Laguna, SGT Clark, PFC Acedo... With the help of
these three the war will be over soon!



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2nd Platoon FRG Newsletter

Dear Friends and Family,

Greetings from Afghanistan! As 2nd Platoon has conducted operations throughout the Battalion's Area of Operations over the past month, a song by Johnny Cash comes to mind. In the song the chorus line reads, "I've been everywhere man..." and nothing speaks more of the truth. Since the last letter, 2nd Platoon has spent more time in other valleys than in its own. The first two weeks we were operating in the notorious Watapur Valley. We executed an Air Assault mission onto a ridgeline to support our brothers from Chosen Company. No more than six days following this mission, the Platoon once again found itself in the Watapur Valley supporting Chosen Company. To make things more challenging, we drove this time instead of being inserted by helicopters. I cannot convey to you how terrible the road, if you can even call it that, we drove to get to Chosen Company's position. Needless to say the Platoon has displayed unparalleled strength and courage when executing these missions. As a result of these two missions 75% of the platoon has been awarded the Combat Infantry Badge for their bravery and professionalism while under direct enemy fire. After these two firefights I have had the time to reflect on the actions of your soldiers, and I am honestly humbled by their bravery and commitment towards one another.

Following our missions in the Watapur, the Platoon resumed normal operations in the Waygul Valley. We conducted an 18-hour long joint operation with the Afghan National Army (ANA) to the village of Walo Tangi. For the past two months the village has had little interaction with the government, and our mission was to reestablish that connection. Upon arriving in the village we handed out 50 transistor radios so the people could listen to the Afghanistan Government's broadcasts. We conducted a series of three Shuras (similar to town-hall meetings in the US). The operation was extremely successful; the people were very receptive to the ANA and US presence, and I anticipate that our relationship will continue to grow over the next few months.

On the Platoon personal front we have good news to report for promotions. SGTs Rodriguez and Tiller have passed the BN's Promotion Board and have been recommended to be promoted to E6. SPC Mazzarella has also passed the BN's Promotion Board and has been recommended to be promoted to E5. These three soldiers will be promoted on September 1st and continue to serve as outstanding combat leaders.

Once again I would like to thank all of you for the support you have shown the Platoon over the past two months. Tuesday is mail day, and every Tuesday your packages and letters continue to improve the morale of your soldiers. I encourage you all to continue writing letters and sending packages to your soldiers; it provides them with a small feeling of home, which in turn allows them to function at their best. I will continue to update you on the Platoon's success as our deployment progresses. Thanks again. Two down, Ten to go!

Respectfully yours,

1LT Bill Fio Rito
Platoon Leader
2/A/2-12IN



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2nd PLATOON!



SPC Genaw, known as John Cena by the children, poses for a quick picture with some children from Kandaru while on patrol in the Waygul Valley.



CPL French high above the Waygul Valley while on a dismounted patrol to secure Khawri Ghar mountain



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2nd PLATOON!



PVTs Henslee and Ramirez while on an early morning dismounted patrol to establish an over-watch position



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3rd Platoon FRG Newsletter

Welcome back loyal readers to the 3rd Platoon FRG Newsletter. 1LT Mark Zambarda here, writing to you from COP Michigan, in the beautiful mountains of the remote Kunar Province of Afghanistan. This month has been exceptionally busy, with a big push for patrols centered around enhancing the security around the polling sites in preparation for the election on August 20th. Our modus operandi has revolved around talking to the villagers, finding out what their concerns are with regards to voting, and addressing their needs as best as possible. We are also working with the Afghan National Police, who are the first line of defense for the citizenry from the bad guys, to prepare them for securing the polling sites and conducting traffic control points. The police have really improved since we have been here, and we have learned as much from them as they have from us. They are local, so they really know the people and are helpful when it comes down to learning the ins and outs of the villages we visit.

The Soldiers of 3rd Platoon are also doing very well here. We have all really learned our area and started to develop strong relationships with the people we see on a daily basis. Soldiers have also begun to start rotating out on leave, which will give them some much deserved rest after hitting the ground running over here. We sent three Soldiers to the NCO promotion board this month, SGT Faulk, SPC Collins, and SPC Hunt. All of them did very well, and passed the board. Once they have the enough promotion points, they will all be promoted to the next higher rank, something they all deserve.

The Brigade Commander Colonel George came out and visited our COP to award some of our soldiers the Combat Infantryman's Badge. This award recognizes the sacrifices that Infantryman make in combat, and all of the soldiers of this Platoon have earned it. We had one soldier, SSG Talkington, go back to the Fort Carson after dislocating his shoulder during a mission. While here as our 3rd Squad Leader, he did an incredible job relaying his experiences from four deployments, two of which were in Afghanistan. He is very much missed and we look forward to seeing him again, either once we redeploy or if he meets us again out here. Because of his hard work as a Squad Leader I am naming him as the Soldier of the Month for July.

1LT Mark Zambarda
1st PLT Leader



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3rd PLATOON!



SPC Lollis treats an injured Afghan civilian



Joint ANA Patrol through the Pech River Valley



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3rd PLATOON!



From left to right: SPC Hunt, SGT Faulk, SFC Goodin, CPL Elenburg, SPC Pratt-Majesky, PFC Rushing



TIDBITS...

AUGUST BIRTHDAYS

6 August

PFC Luke Steele
SSG Johnny Bates

7 August

SPC(P) Nicholas Mazzarella

10 August

PFC Harold Dufour

11 August

PVT Andrew Rebhun

15 August

SPC(P) Nicolas Mordaunt
SGT(P) Marcel Tiller

18 August

CPL Scott French

19 August

SSG Shane Corley

21 August

SPC Martin Rodriguez

24 August

1LT Jon Farwell

AUGUST PROMOTIONS

TO SERGEANT

SGT LAMB
SGT PATE

TO SPECIALIST (E4)

SPC BAKKEN
SPC BENTHAM
SPC GENAW
SPC VALDEZ

TO PRIVATE FIRST CLASS (E3)

PFC ACEDO
PFC BERRYHILL
PFC CAMBELL
PFC CONNOLLY
PFC CONSTANZO
PFC COX
PFC DORNHECKER

PFC GARCIA
PFC GONZALEZ
PFC RONDASH
PFC SOLOMAN

TO PRIVATE (E2)

PV2 EGGARS
PV2 REBHUN
PV2 SUKHBIR
PV2 WELCH



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

FOB BLESSING, APO AE 09354