



GATOR COMPANY FRG NEWSLETTER



VOLUME 1, ISSUE 3

A COMPANY 2-12 INFANTRY, 4BCT 4ID

SEPTEMBER 2009

FORWARD OPERATING BASE BLESSING KUNAR PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN



**PECH RIVER VALLEY
LOOKING WEST FROM OBSERVATION POST (OP) AVALANCHE**



GATOR COMPANY FRG NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2009

A NOTE FROM GATOR 6



The month of August was an incredibly busy one. I know we say that every month, but it really was the busiest month since we've been here. Our operations for the first three weeks of August were all centered on you guessed it, Afghani Elections. The men of Gator Company have worked extremely hard to ensure that the people of Afghanistan are informed about the elections. In support of this, Gator Soldiers have handed out over 750 solar power radios in the Pech river and Waygal Valleys, attended over 50 village elder shuras to promote and educate villagers on the benefits of having their voices heard,. On 4 out of 5 occasions they have partnered with their Afghan Security Forces counterparts in accomplishing all these tasks. The men have truly put their hearts into this; they understand that the way ahead is getting this system on its feet.

On the 20th of August, the Afghan people, despite numerous threats by the Taliban, exercised their right to vote. Though many locations throughout our area of operations were not able to vote, the majority of our areas had extraordinary voter turnouts. On Election Day, the majority of Gator Company went west to Chapa Dara, a district center 17 kilometers away that was the location for all voting in the Chapa Dara District. Our presence was required there to discourage the enemy from attacking civilians as they tried to vote. Through persistent patrolling and much stubbornness toward the enemy on our part, over 4,500 people turned out to vote. Unfortunately, we cannot be everywhere at once, and many people closer to Camp Blessing did not get the very same opportunity as the enemy was very busy that day as well.

Now that the elections are over, our focus will not shift all that much. Your men are still out there every day getting after it. They are at the point in the deployment where they are very much used to their surroundings, to the point where they can see the subtle changes that have taken place in their sectors. On the contrary, we don't see drastic changes, they are all very slow and very small, so we don't really notice them at first; it has taken us to look back from the time we arrived to now in order to actually point them out. Your men are responsible for all these changes through their honest interest in improving the lives of the everyday Afghan citizen. Out of every 100 Afghans, 95 of them are good people with a very rich culture and beliefs system; the other 5 are the bad guys that we are doing our best to root out. We will continue to support the Afghan people and their fledgling government.

Your men are hanging in there. We are getting ready to surpass month number 3, a quarter of the way done. We have begun to send guys home on leave so they can get some much deserved rest and relaxation. We understand that many of the spouses have adjusted to them being gone, showing their strength and flexibility very early on in the deployment. The 1SG personally counsels all Soldiers before they go back on leave and reminds them of these facts so they are not in shock when they come home to see their wives mowing the lawn or taking care of things they normally wouldn't be. I would personally like to express my solemn pride in the spouses of our Soldiers, they truly are the best! If you would like to volunteer for the FRG, please contact my wife Jessica, as she and the rest of the Gator volunteers could always use your help in keeping our families informed and up to date. Keep supporting your Soldiers and keep the mail coming...there is nothing worse than mail call and your name not being among those called. 9 more months left!

Sincerely,
CPT Kevin W. Hutcheson
REFUSE TO LOSE!



GATOR COMPANY FRG NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2009



1SG's Corner

Here we are, it is the end of August and we have been here for three months. It is weird how time has flown by yet it seems so long since we have seen our families and friends. The Soldiers of Gator are staying busy with prepping to go on missions, conducting the missions and recovering equipment after the missions. Then it all starts again the very next day. Even with the heavy work load the Soldiers are continuing to train revising battle drills and adapting to the enemy's Tactics and procedures.

Every day seems to be the same. Nobody tracks what day it is only what they have to accomplish within the next 24 hours. The only sign that marks a day is when you walk to the dining facility and you smell them cooking steak. That marks the end of the week, Friday. Every Friday since we arrived we have had steak and seafood, if that isn't enough we also have Ice Cream, many different flavors from chocolate to strawberry. I guess that is one more way to count the time away, only 36 more Surf and Turf meals to go.

The Soldiers of Gator played a huge part in history when we made a trip out to Chapa Dara for the first ever Afghanistan controlled election. The numbers that voted in that area are far greater than what was expected. Many of the people were reported of saying that they would not have voted if there was not a coalition presence in the area. That is probably not the type of story that you would see in a liberal news paper. However it is proof that what each and every Soldier is doing here is making a difference.

As I am sure all of you are, I also am proud of the Soldiers of Gator Company. I see my Soldiers working hard every day; they never quit and never say a job is too hard. All of you reading this letter have the right to brag that you Soldier is one of a great organization we are "Gators".

Mark A. Eckstrom
1SG, US Army
Gator 7



Headquarters Platoon



SGT Laguna, SSG Cardenaz, and CPL “Doc” Alonso prepare for the trip to Chapa Dara on 18 August



SGT Pate takes a break after some serious climbing



Headquarters Platoon



SPC Henrichs, Gator 6's gunner



1SG Eckstrom sits in on a meeting with the Chapa Dara Sub-Governor on 19 August



What has 1st Platoon been doing?

1st Platoon has been very busy over here the past month. Between day to day missions, the elections, and the start of Ramadan 1st Platoon has been running all over the Pech Valley. Due to the incredible groundwork of your husbands, fathers, and sons the elections here in the Kunar Province were a complete success. 1st Platoon was out and on the ground during the elections in order to ensure security for the people. We worked hand in hand with the ANA (Afghan National Army) and successfully fought off many who would try to make the elections an event to mourn rather than celebrate.



“Let me tell you ‘bout my best friend”
Hughes and ANA soldier the day before election day.



Walters, the man who makes
it rain steel.



SSG McKinney and our terp,
Sammy, after a shaving cream fight
on the FOB.



GATOR COMPANY FRG NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2009



The beginning of a very long day for 1st Platoon



Early Morning Patrol



GATOR COMPANY FRG NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2009



Finn speaking Micronesian to the Afghan kids in Nangalam



“GIVE ME PEN!”



ELECTION DAY IN CHAPA DARA, AFGHANISTAN





GATOR COMPANY FRG NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2009



This is why we are here.... While many Americans take basic rights like voting for¹¹ granted, these people risk their lives to do it. A truly rewarding experience for us.



GATOR COMPANY FRG NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2009



SEPTEMBER FRG LETTER 2nd PLATOON

Dear Friends and Family,

The past month in Afghanistan has been truly historic. On 20 August, the people of the Waygul Valley took to the polls to cast their votes for the next President of Afghanistan. Taliban fighters attempted to disrupt the election through intimidation and a barrage of mortars and rockets, but were unsuccessful. Ignoring the threats against their lives, nearly 75% of the people in the Waygul Valley went out and voted. This is an encouraging statistic as it indicates the people of the Waygul are beginning to develop faith in their government, which then degrades the Taliban's ability to hide in plain sight.

The soldiers of 2nd PLT continue to act with bravery in the face of the enemy. On 17 August, 2nd PLT was conducting a convoy to Asadabad when we came across an Afghan National Army (ANA) convoy caught in a Taliban ambush. 2nd PLT moved into the ambush to help our counterparts who had several disabled vehicles. The Taliban fighters were surprised at the arrival of 2nd PLT and attempted to withdraw from their fighting positions; they did not make it very far... While all of the 2nd PLT Soldiers acted with bravery, SPC Ryan White was truly the hero of the battle. I am also happy to report that CPL Scott French was presented with the Army Commendation Medal with Valor for his heroic actions on 17 July 2009 in the Waterpur Valley.

The two previously mentioned soldiers are examples of the strength and courage your soldiers are displaying on a daily basis in Afghanistan. I have been a part of many different types of teams throughout my life— both military and athletic— but I have never been a part of a team like 2nd Platoon is. Every soldier in this Platoon cares deeply about the safety of the man to his right and left. I am extremely proud of the accomplishments of this Platoon, and I am continually in awe by what these men can accomplish. Once again, thank you for all the love and support that you have shown this Platoon over the last three months, it has not gone unnoticed.

Respectfully yours,

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



2nd PLT with ANA counterparts conduct a village Shura in Dari Harr in the Waygul Valley



SPC Cabrera carries a Soccer Ball on a dismounted patrol to Omar Ghandi in the Waygul Valley. The children of Afghanistan are avid soccer players.



GATOR COMPANY FRG NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2009



DOC Mustain and CPL French share a private moment following the conclusion of a dismounted Patrol.



2nd PLT conducts a joint Patrol Brief with the ANA prior to a 24hr mission to the village of Walo Tangi



GATOR COMPANY FRG NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2009



Members of 2nd PLT on a dismounted patrol high above the Waygul Valley



PVT Robert Rondash behind the M2 .50Cal Machine Gun on MRAP A26



3rd Platoon FRG Newsletter

September 2009

Another month has gone by and we are now about a quarter of the way done with the deployment. The platoon continues to do well and I have been incredibly impressed to see how we have grown and adapted to meet the demands of this deployment. I have had the privilege of leading this platoon for thirteen months, and have taken them from the very beginning of the pre-deployment training up until now. I can really see how all the long hours and time in the field have made a difference over here, and this platoon has made an incredible difference in our AO, both against the enemy and for the people of our villages.

Elections were on August 20th and like I mentioned in the last newsletter, much of our focus had been towards ensuring the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) were prepared to provide security at the polling sites so that the Afghan citizens could elect their next president. While the Afghan National Army has an embedded training team of U.S. Marines to continually instruct and mentor them on Soldiership, the Afghan National Police have a very short period of instruction before becoming policemen and we do everything we can to help improve their capabilities. Election day was quite hectic, and was a long day for both the ANSF and us, but the people showed up at the polls and voted, and we ensured that all the ballot boxes were safely delivered to the appropriate locations. The days following the elections, we saw the Afghan people showing off their fingers which were still colored by the ink used to mark their ballots. The ink's primary purpose is to ensure people do not vote twice, which is why it cannot easily be washed off, but it also provides a sense of pride to the Afghan citizens that they can show off their participation in their country's Democracy.

Between missions, the platoon worked incredibly hard improving our living conditions here on COP Michigan. Several projects have been underway, including building a new gym, dining facility, and MWR. Interestingly enough, once the MWR went down and no one could use the internet or phones, it was very easy to find volunteers to help get it back up and running.

For this month's Soldier of the Month, I have chosen SPC Christopher Collins. SPC Collins is a team leader in 3rd squad, and he has been an incredible soldier and asset to the Platoon for as long as I've been around. What's unfortunate is that because SPC Collins always performs exceptionally well, he rarely gets credit for how well he does. That being said, I wanted to take this opportunity and recognize him for his performance during these demanding times in Afghanistan.

Thanks again for reading, and I look forward to updating you all next month.

1LT Mark Zambarda

3rd Platoon Leader



GATOR COMPANY FRG NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2009



PVT Bentley, SGT Cook, and SPC Pratt-Majesky enjoy a Mango smoothie in the local Bazaar



SGT Faulk, PFC Rushing and SSG McDowell chat it up with locals on a patrol



GATOR COMPANY FRG NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2009



1LT Zambarda, SSG Krepcho and our Platoon interpreter checking out some homes out in sector



SGT Faulk and SPC Collins take a break in a villagers home during a patrol



GATOR COMPANY FRG NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2009



PVT Bentley interacts with a local boy while on patrol



AWARDS



COMBAT INFANTRYMAN'S BADGE AWARDEES

SPC Carpenella
SPC Bakken
SPC Valdez
PFC Finninginam
PFC Hughes
PFC Mathis
PFC Solomon
PFC Cox
PFC Cambell
PFC Welch
PVT Haas
SPC Borja
SPC Cabrera
PFC Pierce
PV2 Rebun
PFC Rondash
SPC Rodriguez

ARMY COMEDATION MEDAL WITH VALOR DEVICE

1LT FIO RITO
CPL FRENCH
PFC FINNIGINAM

ARMY COMEDATION MEDAL

SSG SALAS



TIDBITS...

SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS

SGT ARNOLD 09/02

PV2 HAAS 09/07

SPC PRATTMAJESKY 09/12

1LT ZAMBARDA 09/17

SPC RIOS 09/18

SPC ELENBURG 09/18

PFC LYNCH 09/23

SPC COLLINS 09/25

1LT FIO, RITO 09/26

PV1 EGGERS 09/27

SPC CONOVER 09/30

PFC FINNIGINAM 09/30

SEPTEMBER PROMOTIONS

TO SERGEANT

SGT Harris

SGT Collins

SGT Elenburg

TO SPECIALIST (E4)

SPC Saengduangchan "Seng"

SPC Rushing

TO PRIVATE FIRST CLASS (E3)

PFC Welch

PFC Eggers



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,

September marks our deployment time as a quarter of the way through and we are still holding our heads high. Many families are super busy with getting the kids back to school and gearing up with holiday season preparations. We nervously supported each other while our soldiers were off ensuring that the elections were safe and were all grateful to their return back to the FOB/COP. We are so proud of our men!

A few of our Gator Families recently walked or ran in the **Run for the Fallen** event and proudly represented fallen soldiers and the 2-12IN. They are truly great examples of patriotism and family support.



The next FRG meeting will be an organized pot-luck with the FRG handling the main grilling and held at Iron Horse Park on Saturday September 19th, beginning at 1:00p.m. You will be hearing from your POCs soon on the surprises that we have planned for this fun end of summer get together.

We would like to welcome the new families recently added to Gator and hope to meet them at our summer bash.

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



A Message from the FRG

A Co Contact Information

FRG:

FRG Leader: Jessica Hutcheson
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1st PLT POC: Jessica Combs
combsj18@yahoo.com, 719.210.8459

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

3rd PLT POC: Amber Pool
a.pool05@yahoo.com, 541.324.0233

Rear Detachment:

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1SG: 1SG Michael Pak: 719.503.4210

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