



GATOR COMPANY FRG NEWSLETTER



VOLUME 1, ISSUE 6

A COMPANY 2-12 INFANTRY, 4BCT 4ID

FEBRUARY 2010

FORWARD OPERATING BASE BLESSING KUNAR PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN





IN REMEMBRANCE OF OUR FALLEN BROTHER

SSG Michael Cardenaz



31 March 1980 – 20 February 2010

Company A, 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division

SSG Michael David Cardenaz was born on 31 March 1980 in Constantinople, CA. After arriving to Fort Carson in September of 2005, Michael was assigned to C Co. 2-12 IN where he deployed with the Battalion in support of OIF 5, Al-Doura, Baghdad, Iraq. Upon redeployment, Michael was reassigned to A Co. 2-12 IN.

SSG Cardenaz succumbed due to injuries he sustained from shrapnel by an enemy 107mm rocket while setting up a forward mortar position at the Chapa Dara District Center, in the Chapa Dara Valley of Afghanistan on February 20th 2010. During his time in the Army, he has served honorably as a Rifleman, M240-B Gunner, M2 Bradley Gunner, Team Leader, Squad Leader, and Platoon Sergeant.

SSG Cardenaz has been awarded the Soldiers Medal, Purple Heart, the Bronze Star Medal with one Oak Leaf Cluster, Army Commendation Medal with V-device, Army Commendation Medal with two Oak Leaf Cluster, Army Achievement Medal with six Oak Leaf Cluster, Good Conduct Medal with 2 knots, Kosovo Campaign Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal with Campaign Star, the Iraq Campaign Medal with Campaign Star, the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, the Army Service Ribbon, the Overseas Service Ribbon with numeral 3, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Medal, Combat Infantryman Badge, Expert Infantryman Badge, and the Driver's Badge.

Michael is survived by his daughters, Mariella, Mariliz, Marianna of Colorado Springs; Jasmin of Freiburg, Germany; his son Jason of Yonkers, New York; and his wife Macarena Cardenaz of Colorado Springs.



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A NOTE FROM GATOR 6

It has been a tough month here in February. Due to constant enemy attacks out at the Chapa Dara District Center, we've been forced to go out there more and more, many times unscheduled just due to what is going on there. Our men have done their duty and have not complained. In a realistic sense, it isn't unnatural for guys to not like change, but the men here in Gator Company do very well when they have to be flexible, they take care of any mission assigned to them, I couldn't be more proud of the job they do here every day. It is a testament to their abilities to see problems and go after them head on. Unfortunately, on the evening of 20 February, we lost one of our best to enemy fire. SSG Cardenaz was wounded by enemy fire while in Chapa Dara and succumbed to his injuries because of it. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Cardenaz family. SSG Cardenaz will be remembered by all of us as a charismatic, capable leader...and one hell of a Soldier.

During the same incident that evening, we had many wounded Soldiers as well. All will be fine eventually, some less injured than others, and a few cases where rehabilitation will be long and arduous. We miss our brothers in arms and sincerely wish the best for them during their recovery process.

At the end of this month, I will be finishing up my time as a Company Commander, a move that has been in the works for the last 4 months. As this will be my last FRG letter, I would like to thank each and every one of you who have helped and supported our troops both in garrison and while deployed. We really could not do what we do without your support and you have my deepest appreciation for making my time here as the Gator Company Commander an outstanding learning experience, many memories which I will carry with me for the rest of my life. The new commander will be Captain Chris Migliaro, and he will introduce himself in next month's FRG Newsletter.

I know redeployment is at the forefront of everyone's mind. We'd be lying if we said we don't think about it all the time. But the main thing to keep in perspective is that we are not home until we get on an aircraft, so until then our men will remain focused on the mission and task at hand. Please remember OPSEC. Movement times, dates, and anything concerning redeployment should not be discussed unless in person. Please contact the Rear Detachment for this information and stay in touch with the FRG, they will probably have information prior to us getting it here; and they will more than likely know flight times and who will be on those flights when those times come. Again, this is easily about 75-90 days away, so please remember OPSEC. To assume the bad guys aren't listening could prove costly. Also understand that any breaches of OPSEC by our Soldiers here could result in UCMJ Punishment, it is that serious.

In closing, let me assure you that all of your men are doing great things here. They go out every day and do the most amazing things. I am proud to be in their company. Thank you all for your support!

Sincerely,
CPT Kevin W. Huteson
REFUSE TO LOSE!



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1SG Corner,

Dear families and friends of Gator Company. This letter is a hard one to write. By now I am sure that you have heard about the events that happened on the 20th of February. We lost a great NCO and a powerful leader. SSG Cardenaz was one of my Platoon Sergeants and I looked to him as a friend. He had a strong dominating presence that will definitely be missed here in Gator Company.

Your Soldiers have worked extremely hard this month and have achieved new tactical goals every day. They have improved the Kunar Province by separating the enemy from the people and have brought work to the villages. We are daily training a new Afghan National Army Battalion and are continuing to improve the Local Police Force. We have seen definite improvements on OPs, Avalanche and Hammer Head. Our Soldiers are up there for a week at a time and they deserve at the least a solid roof over their heads. That will for sure be done in the next month.

I again want to thank all of the friends of the company for the support that you have given us thru out the last few months. You are all awesome.

1SG Mark Eckstrom
Gator 7





1st Platoon

Dear Family and Friends,

It's that time of the month again, the Newsletter is here; an update on your loved ones and all the good they are doing here for the people of Afghanistan. I would like to start this letter with our deepest sympathies for the family and friends of SSG Michael Cardenez who gave his life for his country this month. He will be remembered for who and what he was, an amazing father, husband, soldier, and friend and will be truly missed by all here in Gator Company.

While February may be the shortest month of the year it hardly felt that way. The news is riddled with constant fighting and explosions; I want you to know, that is just a piece of the story here. Everyone in first platoon has been working harder than ever in order to leave this country and these people better than how we found them. It is amazing to see the transformation first hand. I have mentioned it in letters before but these people have taken us in as their own. We cannot go on patrol without children coming up asking for soldiers by name, without old men asking how families are back home, and without fellow Afghan Army Soldiers and Afghan Security Forces wondering when we will be doing the next patrol with them.

Now Don't get me wrong the men of 1st Platoon are the best at what they do, but I want to tell you the stories they probably don't, the one that define them as humans rather than the hard core soldiers you and the media know them as. Being a soldier means "alpha male", fighting without emotions, and doing the job no matter the cost; what you don't know is that in order to be successful here your soldiers have to have emotion, they have to go from shooting to handing out candy, and they have to go from being at the ready to helping change a local national's flat tire.

This month your men have helped with the train up of a completely new Afghan Army Company, they have been hard at work teaching this new Afghan force how to plan and execute missions. We have done multiple weapons training exercises, medical aid training, and proper planning techniques. Our biggest project in the Pech Valley is trying to get our main road paved. Getting this road finished will open trade and allow people who normally stick to their villages the ability to travel from Nuristan all the way to Jalalabad. First Platoon has also been working closely with Battalion's Non-Lethal side to plan and execute a Veterinary Clinic for the people of the Pech Valley. During the operation over 200 animals were treated and local nationals were taught better ways to take care of their livestock. Finally we have started doing Medical Operations along the valley, specifically in Chapadara to build relations between the Afghan government and the local population. On average these operations bring in around 100 locals with problems ranging from diabetes to babies with the flu. The work being done by first platoon is truly instrumental in building relationships and pushing the Afghan people toward a healthier and more democratic way of life.

In closing I would like to recognize SPC Carpenella as the soldier of the month. During a recent joint operation with the Afghan National Army SPC Carpenella was searching a cave where he found a 107mm Rocket. His bravery and actions that day resulted in the capture of an enemy weapon that has been repeatedly used against US forces.

As always thanks again to everyone for the letters, packages, thoughts, and prayers. Not long to go now.

Very Respectfully,

1LT Christopher Capasso
SFC Jason Findish



1st Platoon



BELOW: PFC Mathis
contemplating the
meaning of life

Above: SSG Combs out on patrol

Snipers in Overwatch



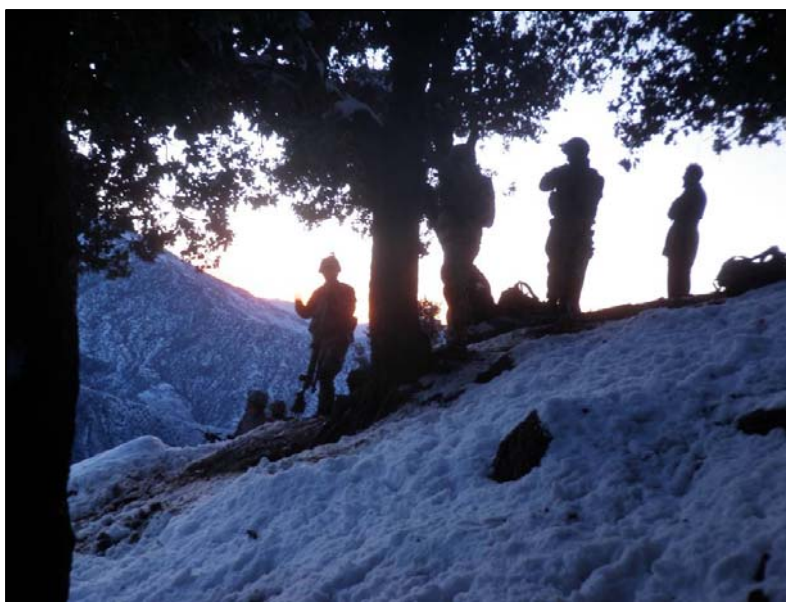


2nd Platoon

Greetings family & friends of 2nd Platoon, Gator Company 2-12 IN from Kunar Province, Afghanistan!

The months here in the Waygul Valley have been going by very smoothly as your sons, husbands, and friends display a great deal of fortitude every single day. As you may have heard, it has snowed several times here before and after Christmas, bringing a touch of home to many of the soldiers. During many patrols, local national children engaged in snowball fights with our platoon and we returned fire in kind. Although several feet of snow fell, this was a relatively mild winter compared to previous years. The 1st day of March proved to be a beautiful day that, hopefully, will set the tone for the rest of the Spring.

2nd PLT soldiers provide security in the early morning during a mission in the Waygul Valley.



2nd PLT has gone through experiences that will be remembered for a lifetime by all of those involved. The deeds of this Platoon have been noticed throughout a Brigade of several Battalions. This is my second Company I have been in, therefore I've seen what right looks like...and this Platoon is right. You should be proud of 2nd PLT's accomplishments that have involved reaching the peak of a 7,900 ft mountain (and the descent of said mountain). Whether it's Key Leader Engagements with local elders or climbing mountains, 2nd PLT gets the job done.



2nd Platoon



(L to R) SPC Ramirez, SGT Klein, and PV2 Miller provide security while in the Bazaar of Nangalam. This Bazaar is the focal point of economic support through the Manogai District.

Many of the Soldiers in 2nd PLT have demonstrated the ability to perform at the next rank, thus they have been promoted. These promotions include: SGT Tinsley, CPL Rios, CPL Mustain, PFC Mcauley, and PFC Henslee.

PFC Henslee walks through the village of Walo Tangy in late February





2nd Platoon



SGT Weaver engages the local populace in the village of Walo Tangy, Waygul Valley

Your sons, husbands, and relatives are doing amazing things for the United States and the country of Afghanistan. Everyday our PLT leadership works tirelessly to ensure the safety of your Soldiers before each mission. While we are in the final quarter of the deployment, 2nd PLT leaders have increased their checks on Soldiers before mission in order to mitigate any complacency. I look forward to meeting those of you who shaped these men into such Soldiers and leaders when we return back to the states.

-1LT Hugh Miller





3rd Platoon

Family and friends of 3rd Platoon, Gator Company,

February has come and gone, and we are now in the early stages of preparing ourselves for redeployment and the transfer of our AO to our incoming counterparts. Much time is spent planning for all the incredible logistics involved of moving all of the Soldiers from this Brigade back to Fort Carson, as well as ensuring that all of our hard work and effort is passed on. Collectively the Platoon is putting together a continuity book which provides detailed, essential information that will hopefully save those replacing us a great deal of effort in trying to figure out all the intricacies of this area.

Since the last newsletter we also saw our first snowfall since being here in the Pech. Snowcaps have draped the landscape up in the mountains, much like you all see back in the U.S. near Fort Carson and around Pikes Peak, but for the first time snow fell down on the Valley floor. It provided a welcome change of scenery, and gave us the opportunity to deliver much needed winter supplies to villagers who had nothing to keep them warm.

While all the Soldiers in the Platoon amaze me on a daily basis, after much deliberation I have chosen PV2 Stone as the Soldier of the Month. PV2 Stone came to the Platoon in late September, and serves as an Automatic Rifleman in 2nd Squad. Whether on mission or on the COP, PV2 Stone provides a great deal of motivation for all those around him. He has an uncanny ability to not only get the job done, but to look good doing it. His contributions go a long way to get us through tough times, and for these actions I grant him this honor.

I thank you all again for your endless support. Leading your men is a distinct pleasure and privilege. Please keep us in your thoughts and prayers,

Mark Zambarda,
1LT, PLATOON LEADER



3rd Platoon





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3rd Platoon





Gator Company





A Co Contact Information

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UNIT MAILING ADDRESS

Headquarters, 1st and 2nd Platoons

SOLDIER'S NAME (NO RANK)

A 2-12 IN, 4BCT 4ID

FOB BLESSING, APO AE 09354

3rd Platoon

SOLDIER'S NAME (NO RANK)

A 2-12 IN, 4BCT 4ID

COP MICHIGAN, APO AE 09354