

53RD INFANTRY BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM



THE DUSTY GATOR

VOLUME 1

ISSUE 1



Commanders' Comments



Col. Richard Gallant

Gator Brigade Families,

We have finally arrived in Kuwait and all of our units and Soldiers are decisively engaged in getting established and ready to assume the

mission.

The transition is going remarkably well as the 115th Fires Brigade, Wyoming National Guard, is bending over backward to ensure that we are successful when we take the reins from them.

Our Soldiers are doing great, and it's obvious that the hard training and preparation last year in Florida and Fort Hood is paying huge dividends.

As expected, the living conditions are great in each of our camps and the quality of life for our Soldiers is better than it was at Camp Blanding or Fort Hood.

We exchanged the snow, sleet and freezing rain of Fort Hood, TX for the warm breezy climes of Kuwait, it was close to 100 degrees this week! Certainly a taste of things to come...

We are focused, trained and ready to take over as the ARCENT SECFOR Brigade, the convoy escort battalions are tested and proven, our force protection battalions are established and rehearsed and our camp command

cells are prepared and ready with a customer focus that will ensure all Soldiers on our camps enjoy a positive experience.

As we have been extremely busy during this transition, units will begin sending newsletters home to Florida to keep you updated on the tremendous work we are doing.

Also, you can follow our progress on the official 53rd IBCT facebook page. Thanks for all that you do to support the very best Soldiers in the National Guard!



Command Sgt. Maj. Comments

We have completed our Transfer of Authority and the weight of the mission has shifted from the 115th Fires Brigade, Wyoming Army National Guard, to our mighty 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team. Our Wyoming brothers, "The Cowboys," did a stupendous job and we have big shoes to fill. We are excited for them as they go home to their families and wish them safe travels.

Well it seems like yesterday when we started planning and leaning forward in preparation for this mission, but that was over eighteen months ago. We are here now, and it has finally started. A lot of hard work, long hours, resources and training events got us here and as a member of this Task Force I am amazed at the vast talent we have. You should be proud of what these great Americans do and accomplish every day. Just like Fort Hood and at home, we are blazing trails and letting it be known we are the high standards for those around us to meet.

Joining our Task Force is a Chemical Company, an Army Dive Com-

pany, an Explosive Ordnance Disposal Company and task forces from the Coast Guard and the Navy. The Gator Brigade has grown and we welcome these Soldiers, Sailors and their Families to our ranks.

As always at this point in the deployment our Soldiers, Sailors and Family members need to establish a "battle rhythm" or simply put, a regimine for communicating back home. Whether that is a call on a set day or a letter home or to the front, get in the rhythm and stay connected. As a reminder in this world of e-mail, video, etc. be mindful of Operation Security. Families they cannot tell you everything, but they can let you know how much they miss you and that is most important.

Additionally, e-mails can be misinterpreted and/or misunderstood. Ask to clarify what point you are trying to communicate BEFORE you get upset. The intentions may have been innocent, but they may have been received wrong

by a family member, friend or fellow Soldier.

Thanks!



Command Sgt. Maj. Stephen Corrow

53rd IBCT

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On the Cover:



The mission is passed from the 115th FiB to the 53rd IBCT during the TOA ceremony at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait March 27. (Photo by Master Sgt. Dave Largent) See *The Journey Begins*, page 7

The Dusty Gator is an authorized publication for and in the interest of the personnel of the 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team and their Families. The editorial content of this publication is the responsibility of *The Dusty Gator* staff and not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, and the Department of the Army or the Army National Guard.

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Taking time to remember: 53rd IBCT Soldiers mourn the loss of a brother-in-arms

Story and Photos by Spc. Spencer Rhodes

Soldiers of the 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team mourned the loss of Sgt. Jon Erstad, a rear-detachment Soldier attached to the 53rd Brigade Support Battalion, Saturday, March 27 at Camp Buehring, Kuwait.

Soldiers at Camp Buehring, gather at the quiet post chapel, where Chaplain 1st Lt. Jaime Villacorta gives the Invocation prior to Lt. Col. George Rosser, commander for 1st Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, 53rd IBCT along with Soldiers from Company E, 53rd BSB speak about him.

Both Erstad's company commander, Capt. Roberto J. Demarquez and Spc. David Martinez, a Soldier from the same platoon as him, spoke about their experiences with Erstad and how his character should never be forgotten.



A Soldier of the 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team gives his final salute at the memorial service for Sgt. Jon Erstad, a rear-detachment Soldier who passed away in Florida.



Company and battalion leadership for 1st Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, give their final salute to Sgt. Jon Erstad during the memorial service, March 27th, at Camp Buehring. Erstad was a rear-detachment Soldier who recently passed away in Florida.

Demarquez, who served with Erstad in Company E, went into Erstad's military history. Erstad had originally enlisted in April of 1992, and with an honorable discharge, left the military in 1998. However, the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001 motivated Erstad to re-enlist into the Florida Army National Guard in 2004. From 2006-2007 he deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 111th Aviation Regiment. In 2007 he was re-assigned to Company E, 53rd BSB, 53rd IBCT.

Spc. Martinez, who first met Erstad after joining the unit after Basic Combat Training and Advanced Individual Training, said that Erstad was always in a cheerful mood, always had something good to say, and was the type of man that you would remember for the rest of your life, even if you had only spoken to him once or twice. Based on his example, Martinez said that he knew what kind

of leader he wanted to be.

"Sgt. Erstad was one of the nicest people, one of the most professional Soldiers I have ever served with, and one of the fairest NCO's I've served under," Said Martinez.

Immediately following Martinez, Lt. Col. Rosser gave his Commander's Tribute. According to Rosser, Erstad was a man of exemplary character and his ethics were something to be emulated.

"In today's world of selfish behavior, Sgt. Erstad stood out for his selfless service. He will be sorely missed," said Rosser.

After the final remarks of Soldiers he served with, Chaplain Villacorta gave the benediction, touching on the legacy Erstad left behind. Soldiers attending the service gave their final salute to the sounds of bagpipes and drums. 🇺🇸



CAMP VIRGINIA, Kuwait— Spc. Stephon Oliveros driver and medic for 2nd Battalion 124th Infantry Regiment part of the 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team based out of Florida shows the lost portion of his finger, Oliveros was injured during post mobilization training at Fort Hood, Texas nearly two months ago.

Injury can't hold him back

Story and Photos by Pfc. Lindsey Jones

A Soldier from the 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team refuses to let an injury he received during mobilization training at Fort Hood, Texas stop him from deploying to Kuwait and Iraq. Spc. Stephon R. Oliveros, a driver and medic for B Company, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment lost the tip of his right index finger in a training accident while participating in urban operations training.

Oliveros said he and his team were involved in training when his finger was slammed in the door of his up-armored tactical vehicle. He does not plan to let the injury stand in the way of his deploying, he said at Fort Hood.

The doctors at Fort Hood were initially unsure as to whether or not Oliveros should deploy, he said.

"I told the doctor no matter what I still wanted to deploy, I'll do whatever I have to do, take whatever

precautions I have to take as long as I can deploy," said Oliveros. "He gave the okay and told my NCOs the next two to three months are going to be really painful."

With the help of a physical therapist, Oliveros said he is relearning how to use his finger as well as desensitizing it. "The therapist said I have to get the nerves used to the way things feel to my finger," Oliveros said at Camp Virginia March 26.

He said he had to make a few adjustments at Fort Hood, but is still able to do his jobs, both as driver and medic.

"The main problem was starting an IV line. Everybody started to give me a hard time, joking around saying that I wouldn't be able to do it, so I proved to everyone in the barracks that I could start a line," said Oliveros.

According to Oliveros, he is the type of person who when told he won't be able to do something he sets his mind on proving them

wrong.

In his short time in Kuwait and Iraq, Oliveros said he has been able to treat a few local nationals and the lack of a finger tip on his dominant hand has not affected his ability to treat his patients.

He said that he no longer has the ghost pains and is getting the nerves in his hand used to the fact that when he touches something with his finger that it isn't necessarily painful but the sensation of touching an object.

Oliveros said that he refuses to let his injury affect his missions or his ability to treat people. As a way to keep a positive outlook on it and even keep up his spirits, he has a name tape that says nine fingers. Oliveros said he has gotten over the initial shock of losing part of his finger and that things have returned to normal for him.

"I'm not trying to make it all heroic," he said. "We join up for our country, to do something for our country." 🇺🇸



CAMP ARIFJAN, Kuwait -- Staff Sgt. Rana Spiegler, Master Driver Trainer, from B Company, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, inspects the Caiman vehicles before receiving them here March 15. The Caimans will be used to support the responsible drawdown of US forces in Iraq. The 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team traded out their MaxxPro Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protected vehicles for Caiman MRAP vehicles. The Caimans are better suited for Iraq and the MaxxPros are better equipped for the terrain in Afghanistan.

53rd trades vehicles to support the mission

Story and Photos by Spc. Karen Kozub

CAMP ARIFJAN, Kuwait -- The 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team received Caiman Mine -Resistant Ambush- Protected vehicles in exchange for their MaxxPro MRAP vehicles here, March 15.

The Caimans will be used as convoy protection platforms, while



The 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team receive Caiman Mine -Resistant Ambush- Protected vehicles in exchange for their MaxxPro MRAP vehicles here, March 15.

the 53rd IBCT conducts convoy security and escort missions. The Caiman is an armored vehicle with a V-hull design based on the Family of Medium Tactical Vehicles. Because several of the parts between the FMTV and the Caiman are interchangeable, maintaining both vehicles should be easier.

“With the Caiman being similar to the FMTV, there are common parts on hand in the Army inventory,” said Maj. Aaron Bryant, Logistics Officer for the Headquarters of the 53rd IBCT. “The MaxxPro parts are not as common. The parts have to be specially ordered from the manufacturer or contractor. The Caiman is a known platform for the mechanics so they won’t have to re-learn the vehicle.”

The 53rd IBCT was issued several MaxxPro MRAP vehicles to fill their mission requirements, and will exchange their Caiman MRAP vehicles. The Caimans are coming out of Iraq as part of the responsible-draw-down of US Forces, while the MaxxPro vehicles will be sent to Afghanistan. They are a priority due to

the more difficult terrain and to support the surge in Afghanistan.



1st Lt. Gilbert Alvelo, Brigade Maintenance Officer, from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, takes a second look at the Caiman MRAP vehicles to ensure all equipment is accounted for before receiving them here March 15.

The Journey Begins

Story Spc. Karen Kozub

CAMP ARIFJAN, Kuwait – Wyoming's 115th Fires Brigade, handed over command to Florida's 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team in a Transfer of Authority ceremony here March 27.

This event symbolizes the completion of one command and the beginning of another.

Col. Richard Knowleton, Brigade Commander of the 115th FiB and Command Sgt. Maj. Kenton Franklin case their brigade colors as they complete their service here.

Col. Richard Gallant, Brigade Commander of the 53rd IBCT, and Command Sgt. Maj. Stephen Corrow remove the casing of the brigade colors simultaneously and unmask the brigade flag together as they assume command.

The Florida flag will be flown for the duration of the deployment. Florida's 53rd IBCT will continue to support the responsible draw-down of US forces in Iraq.

"After 18 months of Training and hard work its nice to finally be here and to start the mission, knowing that we will do well," said Lt. Col. David Yaegers Jr., Operations Officer of the 53rd IBCT.



This deployment is historical for the 53rd IBCT in that it is the largest single-unit mobilization for the Florida National Guard since World War II.

"The weight has been lifted off the shoulders of the 115th FiB, and put on the shoulders of the 53rd IBCT, and we are prepared for the challenge," said Command Sgt. Maj. Stephen Corrow. 🇺🇸



High speed training on the high seas

Story and Photos by Spc. Spencer Rhodes

The sound of diesel engines and the smell of saltwater fills the air as Coast Guard observer controllers stand on the deck of the U.S. Army Vessel Churubusco off the coast of Kuwait. Members of the Command Task Group 56.5, a Port Security Unit, participate in the Basic Underway Machine Gun Fire course, an annual training requirement that has Coast Guardsmen practicing their skills with an M2 .50-caliber machine gun, firing at a floating target while under way.



Inside the control room of the U.S. Army Vessel Churubusco, Sgt. Herb Carter makes adjustments to the instrument panel on their way out to a training range for the U.S. Coast Guard, March 11th, at Camp Patriot. Carter is a boatswain aboard the Churubusco and is often in charge of personnel working on deck on a daily basis.



Coast Guardsmen from the Command Task Group 56.5, a Port Security Unit, load rounds into a .50-caliber machine gun during the Basic Machine Gun course at Camp Patriot, Kuwait, March 11th. The Basic Machine Gun course is an annual requirement that tests the Guardsmen's ability to fire a live weapon at a floating target, while on a moving patrol boat.

Soldiers and observers aboard the Churubusco try their hand at firing the M2 .50-caliber machine gun, and the MK-19 grenade launcher. Firing large caliber weapons are not in the daily job requirements for many military personnel, so having the chance to fire a grenade launcher was a rare opportunity, even for the Soldiers assigned to the Churubusco.

Chief Petty Officer, Jose Galvan, an operations NCO for the March 11 Training, says the Churubusco was a perfect platform for the Coast Guard and Navy personnel to observe and grade the day's performance, and for range control to keep an eye out for potential hazards in order to maintain a safe training environment.

The factors that come into play on the water for Range Safety Officers are vastly different than a controlled land firing range. Unlike shooting on land, when running a range on the water, RSO's have to look out for incoming and outgoing maritime traffic. A vessel that is over a mile away, sometimes barely visible, is still in the

confines of the firing lane, since a .50-caliber round can cover over a mile and a half.

The training prepares Coast Guardsmen and Sailors to efficiently react to a hostile conflict or crisis, while on their patrol boat. The training is required annually for both the Coast Guard and the Navy Port Security Personnel.

According to Cmdr Joan A. Dodd, deputy commander of CTG 56.5, the training better prepares them for their daily responsibilities and the possible threat of hostile contact.

"The more you practice, the more proficient you become. You always have to be ready for any threat that comes into a harbor, and that's what we're training for right now," said Dodd.

Dodd explained that calmer water makes for a good building block in training. Choppy waters require more balance and concentration on other factors that aren't present when the water is smooth. Despite the water's calmer start, the firing course still

Continued on next page



Members the U.S. Coast Guard Command Task Group 56.5, a Port Security Unit, prepare to move ahead of the U.S. Army Vessel Churbusco, the observation boat for the Basic Machine Gun course, for Coast Guardsman at Camp Patriot, March 11th. The training is part of an annual requirement that has Coast Guardsman firing at a target while on a moving patrol boat.

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gave Coast Guardsmen and Sailors a challenge.

Both the Coast Guardsmen and the Navy Sailors, utilizing the machine guns mounted on their patrol boats, went through multiple runs firing at the same target from different angles with different gunners. The sound of machine gun fire echoes across the deck of the Churbusco as pockets of water

explode into the air, as the gunners walk their rounds onto the target.

Once the boat crews accomplish their training, they depart leaving more prepared for the next day than they were before.

Petty Officer 1st Class Quincy Lawton, the driver and NCO in charge of his boat, says that the more efficiently they train, the more proficient they become at

their duties and combating potential threats.

“Our job is to escort high value assets and keep a lookout for the enemy, checking for targets of interest posing an imminent threat. This training makes me trust even more that we’ll be able to take on the enemy when it comes,” said Lawton. 🇺🇸

Message from the Brigade Surgeon

In order to prevent the spread of many communicable diseases please implement good hygiene practices. Some simple ways to prevent sickness:

- 1) Practice appropriate hand hygiene frequently (Approximately 10 seconds of scrubbing your hands with soap. Wash with soap and water or use alcohol based hand-sanitizer)
- 2) Keep all wounds clean and covered with a clean, dry dress-

ing.

- 3) Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, clothing, razors, bar soaps, etc.
- 4) Maintain good general hygiene by regular bathing.
- 5) If you start any medication, be sure to finish all of the medication even if symptoms are resolved unless told otherwise by a medical professional.
- 6) Do your laundry regularly, don’t forget your bed linen.

Sick Call Hours

0730-1000 Mon - Sat

Sun - CLOSED

If you have a medical emergency please go directly to the emergency room or call 911 from DSN or 2389-9911 from Cell.

Chaplain's Corner

Transfer of Authority (TOA)

By the time this newsletter is published and in your hands, every unit in the 53rd IBC T will have conducted a TOA ceremony. The ceremony involves the casing of the departing unit colors and the uncasing of the arriving unit colors symbolizing the transferring of authority to conduct the area mission. Our brigade is the relief in place (RIP) for the 115th FiB and we now have the authority to conduct our mission.

I've been thinking a lot about authority since we have been using this word so much lately. The dictionary tells us

that authority is "a power or right delegated or given, such as the 'right to command.'" In the best scenario, authority is a power to be used for influence rather than coercion or manipulation. And yet, how many times have we seen people in authority use the power of their position to exact their will. We've seen it in commands, platoons, the workplace, missions and marriages. Why is it that we miss the most important aspect of authority? It's a gift.

Jean Jacques Rousseau said, "No man has any natural authority over his fellow man." Authority is a trust that is earned and implemented, and people either despise it or honor it for the way

it is exercised. No matter what your position, be it in your unit, your career, your relationships or your marriage, if given authority, receive it and use it with honor.

Every Soldier in the 53rd IBC T now has a trust...the authority to complete our mission. Let's do so with honor, so that those who gave us the authority will be glad they did!

"...there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God." — Romans 13:1

Chaplain Finch
Brigade Chaplain

EOA Corner

This Month in Women's History Month

The public celebration of women's history in this country began in 1978 as "Women's History Week" in Sonoma County, California. In 1981, Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) and Rep. Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.) co-sponsored a joint Congressional resolution proclaiming a national Women's History Week. In 1987, Congress expanded the celebration to a month, and March was declared.

Famous Firsts

1849 Elizabeth Blackwell receives her M.D. becoming the first woman in the U.S. with a medical degree.

1864 Antoinette Blackwell becomes the first American woman to be ordained a minister.

1866 Lucy Hobbs becomes the first woman to graduate from dental school, the Ohio College of Dental Surgery.

1887 Susanna Medora Salter

becomes the first woman elected mayor of an American town, in Argonia, Kansas.

1977 Juanita Kreps becomes the first woman director of the New York Stock Exchange. She later becomes the first woman appointed Secretary of Commerce.

1981 Sandra Day O'Connor appointed by President Reagan to the Supreme Court, making her its first woman justice

1983 Dr. Sally K. Ride becomes the first American woman to be sent into space.

1984 Geraldine Ferraro is the first woman to run for vice-president on a major party ticket.

1993 Shiela Widnall becomes the first secretary of a branch of the U.S. military.

1998 During Operation Desert Fox in Iraq, Lt. Kendra Williams, USN, becomes the first U.S. female combat pilot to bomb an enemy target.

1999 Lt. Col. Eileen Collins is the first woman astronaut to command a space shuttle mission.

1999 Nancy Ruth Mace is the first female cadet to graduate from the Citadel.

2005 Condoleezza Rice becomes the first African-American female Secretary of State.

2008 Hillary Clinton wins the New Hampshire Democratic presidential primary, becoming the first woman in U.S. history to win a presidential primary contest.

Equal Opportunity Advisor

CPT Cassandra Peck

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Deployable Sexual Assault Coordinator

SFC Agustin Perez

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