

Operations Security (OPSEC) Guidance for Family Members

As a family member of the military community, you are a vital player in our success and we could not do our job without your support. You may not know it, but you also play a crucial role in ensuring your loved ones' safety just by what you know of the military's day-to-day operations. You can protect your loved ones by protecting the information that you know. This is known in the military as, "Operations Security", or OPSEC.

What is OPSEC? OPSEC is keeping potential adversaries from discovering Unclassified Information that is Critical to your safety and also your spouse's Mission Accomplishment. Mission Accomplishment depends on secrecy and surprise, so the military can accomplish the mission more quickly and with less risk. Enemies of freedom want this information, and they are not just after the military member to get it. In December 2009, Al Qaeda gave instructions to all their operatives to target military personnel and their families. They were told to search for personal information, find out where their families live, and find the easiest way to target their workplaces.

The posting of pictures and information to unofficial website that is pertinent to your loved ones military unit and/or to personal and family websites has the potential to jeopardize the safety of the entire unit. Coordinate with your unit's Family Readiness Officer and have pictures screened and posted to the "Official" Family Readiness Officer website. This will ensure that you contribute to OPSEC and keep the force safe.

What Can You Do?

There are many countries and organizations that would like to harm Americans and degrade US influence in the world. It is possible and not unprecedented for spouses and family members of US military personnel to be targeted for intelligence collection. This is true in the United States, and especially true overseas! What can you do?

1. Be Alert Foreign Governments and organizations can collect significant amounts of useful information by using spies. A foreign agent may use a variety of approaches to befriend someone and get sensitive information. This sensitive information can be critical to the success of a terrorist or spy, and consequently deadly to Americans.
2. Be Careful There may be times when your spouse cannot talk about the specifics of his or her job. It is very important to conceal and protect certain information such as flight schedules, ship movements, temporary duty locations and installation activities, just to name a few. Something as simple as a phone discussion concerning where your spouse is going on temporary duty or deploying to can be very useful to US adversaries.
3. Protecting Critical Information Even though this information may not be secret, it is what the Department of Defense calls "critical information." Critical information deals with specific facts about military intentions, capabilities, operations or activities. If an adversary knew this detailed information, US mission accomplishment and personnel safety could be jeopardized. It must be protected to ensure an adversary doesn't gain a significant advantage. By being a member of the military family, you will often know some bits of critical information. Do not discuss them outside of your immediate family and especially not over the telephone.

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What Information Is Sensitive?

Examples of Critical Information: The following examples may help you in defining parameters for your communications. It is important to remember that there are many more examples than those listed below:

1. Detailed information about missions of assigned units.
2. Details concerning locations and times of unit deployments.
3. Personnel transactions that occur in large numbers (e.g., pay information, power of attorney, wills or deployment information).
4. References to trends in unit morale or personnel problems.
5. Details concerning security procedures.

Puzzle Pieces: These bits of information may seem insignificant. However, to a trained adversary, they are small pieces of a puzzle that highlight what US forces are doing and planning. Remember, the elements of security and surprise is vital to the accomplishment of US goals and collective DOD personnel protection.

Where and how you discuss this information is just as important as with whom you discuss it. An adversary's agents tasked with collecting information frequently visit some of the same stores, clubs, recreational areas, places of worship and social networking sites as you do.

Determined individuals can easily collect data from cordless and cellular phones and even baby monitors using inexpensive receivers available from local electronics stores.

Make sure if you use Social Networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace, to only add friends you really know. If you have never met them face to face, they probably do not need access to see photos or news about you and your family.

If anyone, especially a foreign national, persistently seeks information, notify your military sponsor immediately.

From <http://www.marines.mil/unit/marforpac/fro/Pages/opsec.aspx>

"OPSEC for Families" presentation materials are from
<http://www.opsecprofessionals.org/training.html>

and

<http://www.slideshare.net/DepartmentofDefense/opsec-for-families>