



U.S. Navy / Photographer's Mate 2nd Class Prince A. Hughes III

COMING

By Richard Millikan

GIVEN the steady rotation of troops overseas and various deployments around the world, many families endure the long separations accompanied with military life. All military personnel have heard the term Operations Security, or OPSEC. Hopefully, personnel receive OPSEC awareness briefings before leaving the USA and when arriving at their overseas assignment. In most commands the families also receive information on OPSEC before their loved ones depart.

OPSEC is quickly becoming a common household term in military communities. Not since World War II has the term "loose lips sinks ships" been used to illustrate the importance of OPSEC. The term "loose lips sinks ships" is one of the most well known World War II phrases. Quite simply, the term reminded civilians and military personnel to keep quiet about ship movements for fear there were many enemy spies living among the American population. The more people talked about shipping schedules or various supplies loaded onto ships, the more likely the ship convoy would come under enemy submarine attack. Therefore, talking "loosely" in a bar or on the telephone could invariably sink the ship or ships in a particular convoy.

Obviously, a tank company or infantry platoon does not tell local Iraqis about their next mission. That could cost the lives of American soldiers and result in destroyed equipment and vehicles. Hopefully, they use secure radios to communicate with one another. Units in combat learn to practice good OPSEC because it saves lives. OPSEC keeps our intentions, capabilities, weaknesses, etc., from the adversary. OPSEC is also a way to prevent patterns or indicators from being predictable to the adversary.

What can you and your family do to make sure everyone is safe during deployment?

This article narrates simple and clear examples of OPSEC to military personnel, their families, and their civilian friends. These examples illustrate how our adversaries work, or maybe, just how little they work to obtain the information they need. Keep in mind that although some examples used in this article are

non-military, poor OPSEC can cause the deaths of our servicemen and women, uniformed allies, and/or innocent civilians.

Having heard about OPSEC and practicing OPSEC are two different things. Once service members and their families start practicing good OPSEC becomes second nature. Undoubtedly, all of us have used some forms of OPSEC at home from one time or another without even realizing it. Most of us used OPSEC before we joined the military.

How many times have you gone on vacation and stopped your mail, placed timers on lights, and/or asked someone to mow the lawn or shovel snow from the driveway and walkways? Why do we do those things? So our house has the appearance of being occupied and thieves may not consider breaking into it. If our lawn is not maintained or our driveway and sidewalks are snow-covered with no signs of footprints or tire marks, thieves will notice. Thieves also look for a house with no lights on during the evening "prime time" hours (7-10 p.m.). A pile of newspapers is also an indicator that no one is home and, better yet, that nobody is checking the house. Almost all local police departments have a "vacation watch" or "keep a check" program for homeowners who travel frequently or go on vacation. Some departments even leave business cards on the front door to let the owner, and would be burglars, that they have done their job by watching the property.

The same applies for Christmas shopping. Have you ever gone to the mall and bought so many gifts that you didn't want to lug them around with you? Before continuing your shopping, you take the goodies to your car. Instead of throwing the bags in the passenger compartment of your car (in plain view), you throw them into the trunk. You may even get into your car and drive to the other side of the mall in the event someone was watching and waiting for you to go back inside, only to pop the lock on your trunk and abscond with the presents. This is a form of OPSEC.

Military personnel preparing to deploy also run the risk of giving indicators to individuals who might want to take advantage of their absence. For instance, an Army National Guard unit gets an alert notification. Almost immediately, the local news media pick up on the story. As time gets closer to leave, the news coverage becomes more frequent. The Public Affairs Officer (PAO) does his job and hands out hometown news releases for the troops to complete and return. While complet-



U. S. Air Force / Amn Daniel J. St. Pierre

For Loved Ones Back at Home

ing a hometown news release is not mandatory, those who do complete the form may be increasing the risk of putting their loved ones in jeopardy. Public Affairs (PA) personnel have an important job to do. Their mission is to get a positive message about our armed forces to the civilian world. If or when you have a chance to work with someone from PA, make sure you give only the information with which you feel comfortable. The same goes for civilian news reporters, whether they are from radio, television, or print medias. You must be especially careful what you say to a civilian reporter, as they do not realize some of the information you give could be harmful in the future. The PAO, on the other hand, has a set of OPSEC guidelines and can edit your information, if needed, for security reasons.

Consider the fictitious information available to complete strangers in the following newspaper article. It is an interview given by a member of an Army National Guard unit getting ready to deploy in the following weeks.

SGT Sam Wattzhizname of Anytown, USA is leaving for a one-year tour of duty to the Middle East. He is a member of the Alpha Company, 1-323rd Infantry of the Anystate Army National Guard. His unit's armory is in Thattown, USA. "I have a duty to do and I'm proud to serve, but I worry about leaving my job. I help my dad run Shine-Brite Auto Painting. He has owned the business since 1976. Since we added brand new state-of-the-art painting equipment, business has been very good with no sign of letting up. But, with me gone for a year, it looks like my younger twin sisters may quit college for two semesters to help dad until I get back. My youngest brother is a junior in high school and after football season, he'll probably work nights," SGT Wattzhizname said with concern in his voice. "Dad suffered bad leg wounds in Vietnam and now that he's approaching 60, it's harder for him to get around the shop," the father of five-year old Hanna, continued. "My sisters Becky and Brenda are both very athletic and can help him in the shop while I'm gone."

When asked about his wife, SGT Wattzhizname said, "Lu Ann is taking this with pride. Her mom and dad met while both in the Navy and she has a brother in the Marine Corps Reserves who just came back from Iraq last month. Our families will help with Hanna when Lu Ann starts her last phase of night school this fall."

Of course this is a fictitious example, but hopefully will make valuable learning points. The good sergeant has a very unfamiliar name. It would be easy to find his address in the phone book, if listed. Even common names such as Smith, Williams, or Anderson can eventually be narrowed down. It's just as easy, or easier to do the same search online for any individual. Even some

online services can reveal an unlisted phone number and address for less than \$15.

Now we have the phone number and address of the individual and his wife, Lu Ann. We know they have a five-year old child named Hanna and they will be there alone for at least a year, after his unit leaves on a certain date. Finally, she will start attending night school this fall. If a thief wanted to make an "easy hit," all he has to do is observe the house this fall to find out when she goes to school. More than likely, she'll drop Hanna off at a family member's house on her way to school. Soon a pattern has been established as to which nights she has school, the time she leaves the house for school, and average time she returns. The thief can make his move whenever he feels comfortable that Lu Ann's routine will be the same every night she has school.

For this example, there are a few ways to thwart a break-in. First of all, the article quoted SGT Wattzhizname that the entire family will help Lu Ann while he is away. The presence of several adults at various times around the house will likely frustrate a potential thief. Lu Ann doesn't always have to take Hanna to a babysitter. A family member could stay at the house with Hanna while Lu Ann goes to school on various nights (but not the same night every week). Lu Ann could drive Sam's car every once in awhile giving the appearance that two adults live there. Obviously, neighbors may know otherwise, but nefarious strangers would not know the difference.

The same scenario could apply to the Shine-Brite Auto Painting store. We know that Mr. Wattzhizname could possibly be the only male working and he is no longer as physical as he once was. It is likely that Sam's sisters may be working there, as well. After November, you'll likely find Sam's younger brother working nights. Until then, at times, the two women may be the only ones working since, "Business has been very good with no sign of letting up..." according to SGT Wattzhizname. Given this information, we have a potentially lucrative auto painting shop with modern equipment inside. Granted, most businesses are burglarized at night when no one is around. However, what if the target was not the paint shop, but Sam's twin sisters? The information in the above article tells a stalker when and where to begin his surveillance.

Imagine if over a period three weeks, the local paper printed short stories or interviews with most of the members of SGT Wattzhizname's unit? While burglaries can and do happen every day and night, we all know that OPSEC cannot prevent 100 percent of them. In the cases above, a burglar could very well break into the paint shop at three o'clock in the morning. Or, Lu Ann's house could



get burglarized during the day when she is at work. In both cases, it could be that the perpetrators had no prior knowledge that Sam Wattzhizname is overseas. However, changing routines, preventing patterns, and having family members visit often could very well give the appearance that a thief would want to go to another location where the risk of getting caught is much lower.

Putting burglary aside for a second, let's look at a more local and evil threat to children. Have you, or someone you know told children to never say on the phone, "My mom (or dad) isn't here right now..." or "Just me and my little sister are the only ones here right now..." Instead, "My mom is in the shower and can't come to the phone..." or "My dad is outside with the neighbor, can I take a message?" You do this to protect your children from predators. Some families have their child leave the greeting on their answering machine. This tells a potential predator there are kids in the house and, by the child's voice, their approximate age. While rare, it does happen and the results are sickening.

Consider the following scenario you are about to read. In this case, it doesn't matter if you are a Guardsmen, reservist, or on active duty. Let's say that the caller is a child predator has accidentally misdialed the phone number of a friend. On an answering machine a child's voice says, "Hello! You've reached Bob, Sandy, Brittany, and Chrissie Hastings. Please leave a message." Now, all the caller has to do is look up Robert or Bob Hastings in the phonebook. Again, even if the last name is as common as Miller or Carson or Wilson, he will eventually narrow it down since it is close to the number he had originally intended to dial. He knows that three females live at the residence. If the family is in the phonebook, he now knows the address. Within five minutes after making the accidental call, he knows where to start observing the daily routine of the family. (If not in the phonebook, he can look online, which may slow his search down by about twenty minutes). Within days the predator knows that the father, Bob, leaves for work around 7:15 a.m. M-F and returns home sometime around 6:00 p.m. He can locate the nearest bus stop to the house and watch to see if the mother, probably Sandy, walks the kids to the bus or watches from the driveway. Assuming only one child, possibly Brittany, gets on the bus, the youngest child, presumably Chrissie, is too young to go to school.

Let's assume this is a meticulous predator who does not want to get caught, so he watches the house for a several weeks. He can watch and learn the children's play habits when outside. Do they stray from the house? Is there a fence around the yard? Do they have a big dog? Are there other adults close by at the same time when the girls are outside playing? How often does a police cruiser

troll the area? He can watch them ride their bikes. If they ride out of view of the house, he can follow them and learn where they tend to go. He can seek hiding places along their route if in a secluded area.

After a few days, he'll know whether the mother works during the day or if she stays at home with the youngest daughter during the day. It's only a matter of time before he strikes.

Unfortunately, the above scenario illustrates how all the pieces of the puzzle can be put together in a short amount of time. As tragic and sickening as the above example is, it demonstrates just how easy it is to gather enough information for the bad guy to get what he wants from us.

Our adversaries use similar activities to piece together bits of information about military operations. The adversaries can monitor our tactical radios, if not encrypted. They have the technology to monitor non-secure emails (AKO, AOL, Yahoo!, hotmail). That means if you have a dot mil e-mail address, but your family has AOL or cox.net, the bad guys can still read your mail. They can listen and monitor non-secure telephones. You never know who is eavesdropping on conversations while standing in line at the theater or the grocery store.

When you are deployed, there is no doubt that emails and phone calls are much easier and faster than "snail mail". During deployments, everyone becomes an integral part of the OPSEC puzzle. Going back to the National Guard example earlier in the article, suppose Sam e-mails Lu Ann and tells her he will be coming home sometime in June. Although he roughly knows the possible dates, he does not want to tell her. However, she replies the next day stating that at the Family Support Group meeting the commander's wife said "sometime between the 10th and the 14th." The families must learn that OPSEC is very important to the mission, as well. If the adversaries intercepted that email, they would know that SGT Wattzhizname's unit would be leaving the country sometime around the end of May.

The stories you have just read do not only apply to Guard and Reserve personnel, but active duty folks, too. It can also apply to professional businessmen and women who travel for weeks at a time, leaving a family at home. Don't let poor OPSEC at home lower your morale. Educate your family about using the phones and e-mail and make sure they have a plan to protect themselves while you are serving far away.



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