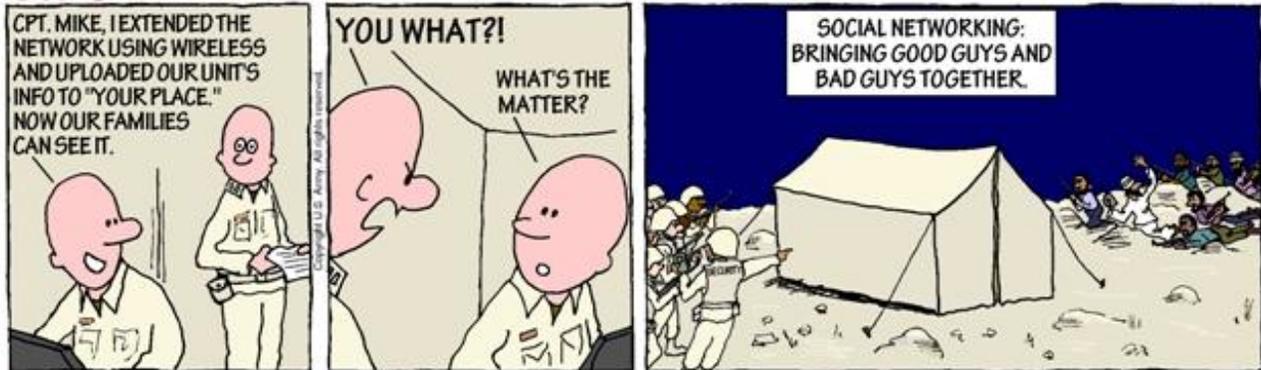


Restrictions Reduce Potential Problems But Social Networking Threat Remains

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ON CYBER PATROL



Soldiers in a war zone understandably need to connect with their friends and loved ones back home. It helps relieve the pressures of the situation and provides some level of comfort to everyone. Today's global computing and communication capabilities make staying in touch much easier than in past conflicts. Nevertheless, it has also added a whole new dimension to an age old problem – denying enemies valuable intelligence.

To their credit, many soldiers are great improvisers and problem solvers. They have the knowledge and creativity to improve computing and communication capabilities in order to make reaching home easier. Unfortunately, that capability also can benefit the enemy. The real life example depicted in June's On Cyber Patrol is based on a real situation in a front line zone. Soldiers had extended their net work signal to make it easier for fellow soldiers to access social networking sites like My Space. This increased signal spilled outside the camp's perimeter opening up the possibility of easy eavesdropping by unfriendly forces. Potentially innocent messages and postings could have revealed valuable information to enemies possibly resulting in loss of life.

This was not an intended result by the soldiers. They were just trying to stay in touch with folks stateside. However, the consequences could have been serious. This activity has probably happened on other military installations around the world, including war zones. It attracts attention from both sides. Bad guys listen in on one side and Army computer security personnel move in from the other. The consequences for the soldiers in the middle are not good in either situation.

Recently, the military has banned access to many "social networking" sites using Army computer and communication equipment. No one is happy to reduce contact with friends and family, but overloading the network can put missions and lives at risk. This order might have stemmed the tide, but remember the resourcefulness of the American soldier. There are personal and commercial computer equipment and networks still active in zones of conflict. Used incorrectly or carelessly they will continue to draw attention from both sides. We all need to remember that information and intel are the keys to military success. The loss of some avenues for contacting home is tough, but the results of compromised networks, missions, and deployments have a much more negative impact on soldiers lives and the fate of family and friends.