

# US military tweets news from Afghanistan

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This screen shot taken from Twitter.com shows the Twitter page of the U.S. military in Afghanistan. The U.S. military in Afghanistan is launching a Facebook page, a YouTube site and feeds on Twitter as part of a new communications effort to reach readers who get their information on the Internet rather than in newspapers, officials said Monday, June 1, 2009. (AP Photo/Musadeq Sadeq)

(AP) -- U.S. and Afghan forces killed four militants in Wardak province, the U.S. military tweeted on Monday.

That's right. The [military](#) "tweeted" the news, sending it worldwide on [Twitter](#), the social networking site, hours before making the formal announcement to the media.

The U.S. military is putting Twitter, along with Facebook and YouTube,

into its arsenal of weapons for getting out its side of the Afghan story, reaching the online generation and countering the Taliban's own fast-growing Web-site and text-messaging skills.

"Afghan & coalition forces killed four militants & detained two suspects in a Wardak Province operation targeting an IED-network commander," said a military's tweet Monday, coming in just under the 140-character limit for such messages. IED is shorthand for a roadside bomb.

Got a comment? sign up with <http://twitter.com> and then go to <http://www.twitter.com/usfora> .

On the military's Facebook page, <http://tinyurl.com/nz3xam> , launched on a test basis in April, you can talk to U.S. spokespeople, while its Youtube postings on <http://www.youtube.com/usfora> will feature original material such as video news stories.

"There's an entire audience segment that seeks its news from alternative means outside traditional news sources, and we want to make sure we're engaging them as well," said Col. Greg Julian, the top U.S. military spokesman in Afghanistan.

But the limitations of military tweeting were quickly laid bare when it was announced Monday that four U.S. troops were killed in two separate roadside bombings. Those troops were under NATO command, which would have to approve an announcement on the U.S. military's Twitter page.

Besides tweeting, the brass are also encouraging troops to post stories and photos on Web sites to portray daily life in Afghanistan and highlight development projects that may not have made the news. Julian described it as "an unfiltered opportunity" for public interaction with troops.

Many military commands and individual troops already use [social networking sites](#). But the effort in Afghanistan is the first to harness the power of such sites for spreading information from an active [war zone](#).

Not all the Facebook posts have been pro-military, and officials say no criticisms will be suppressed provided they are free of hate speech, sexual or otherwise offensive material.

A team based in Kabul will update and maintain the sites and watch for false postings that evade the password protections. U.S. troops already scour Web sites, respond to questions from individuals and rebut what the military considers to be false information.

The military has recruited professional journalists for their effort, including Matthew Millham, 31, of New Paltz, N.Y., a former reporter for the military newspaper Stars and Stripes. Now an Army staff sergeant, he reads blogs several hours a day and responds to posts.

Navy reservist Lt.j.g. Tommy Groves, 33, of Jacksonville, Fla., is a former CNN producer who helps update Twitter.

"When you're able to connect with the people directly, out of the mainstream, it can be powerful," Groves said. Asked if this was a way of bypassing mainstream media, he said: "I don't think we're bypassing anything. This is just another avenue to reach another audience."

U.S. officials here have long fretted that the military is losing the information war to the Taliban, who they say routinely inflate their own successes, and American failures, on Web sites with chat rooms frequented by Taliban sympathizers.

Much of the new plan was hatched by Navy Lt. Adam Clampitt, a 34-year-old reservist from Washington, D.C., who notes that 74 percent

of Americans ages 18 to 35 use Facebook.

The Pentagon now spends more than \$550 million a year - at least double the amount since 2003 - on public affairs, not including personnel costs.

Though the Facebook site is still in the testing phase, it already has attracted several thousand members by word of mouth, including parents of troops.

"As a mom it brings me comfort to know what is going on," Jill Busch wrote in an e-mail message to The Associated Press. "Certainly all we hear in the news is negative stuff. My son has wanted to serve our country since he was 10 years old. I am very proud of him."

Robert Lee, a 36-year-old American from Huntington Beach, Calif., who now lives in Tokyo, said the military's Facebook feed was "factual as opposed to interpretive" from traditional media.

"I am a natural news junkie by nature, but the FB Afghan news feeds fill a very specific niche that I find valuable: consistent and timely updates on what's happening on the ground in Afghanistan with minimum interpretive filtering," Lee told AP by e-mail.

The new Facebook page provides a forum for troops to share scenes of daily life. Ken Lagerquist, in a message on Facebook on Sunday, appeared to allude to the increase in U.S. troops in Afghanistan: "Long lines at the main chow halls, so that tells ya how busy it is getting. Thank god im at a Special forces camp!"

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On the Net:

U.S. military on [Facebook](#), <http://tinyurl.com/nz3xam>

U.S. military on Twitter, <http://www.twitter.com/usfora>

U.S. spokesman on Twitter, <http://www.twitter.com/gregjulian>

U.S. military on YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/usfora>

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