US Army gives soldiers a few tips on social media

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The Twitter homepage appears on a screen in Washington 2010. The US Army issued soldiers a new handbook on social media this week, warning troops to think twice before divulging some information on Facebook or Twitter that could be exploited by adversaries.

The US Army issued soldiers a new handbook on social media this week, warning troops to think twice before divulging some information on Facebook or Twitter that could be exploited by adversaries.

The guide comes a year after the Pentagon announced a new policy that officially opened the door to web 2.0 sites popular with a younger generation of soldiers.

The guide encourages the use of social media but asks troops to exercise common sense and some restraint when it comes to posting on Facebook

or Twitter.

"Our adversaries are trolling social networks, blogs and forums, trying to find sensitive information they can use about our military goals and objectives," Sergeant Major of the Army Kenneth Preston wrote in the handbook.

"Therefore, it is imperative that all soldiers and family members understand the importance of practicing good operations security measures."

Troops and their relatives should avoid mentioning ranks, a unit's location, deployment dates and the type of equipment used, the guide said.

Writing that "my family is back in Edwardsville, IL" could be "dangerous" and it was better to be more vague, saying instead "I'm from the Midwest," according to the guide.

The handbook also warns soldiers against geo-tagging applications on smartphones or social media sites, including Facebook and Gowalla, that show a user's precise location.

In November, the US Air Force warned service members that using location applications could have "devastating" consequences for military operations.

The manual, which in some ways resembles precautions issued by many companies to employees, asks soldiers to pause before posting personal photos or videos, which it said could potentially offer a trove of sensitive information to US adversaries.

The guide expects senior officers to take part in the online sites favored

by their troops, following the example of a number of high-profile commanders. The military's top officer, Admiral Mike Mullen, frequently posts on Twitter and Facebook, calling attention to his speeches or testimony before Congress.

But the guide also advises officers to keep in mind that their work relationships online should not differ from how they treat lower-ranking troops offline.

"How they connect and interact with their subordinates online is up to their discretion, but it is advised that the online relationship function in the same manner as the professional relationship," it said.

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