

Domestic Spying and Intimidation of Military Families

Letter From a Military Mom

By [Jack Dalton](#)

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It wasn't that long ago that the military command in Iraq started pulling computer access to various units. Seems some of the troops were writing emails home to family, to friends, to various anti-war groups and the like, and the military was getting a bit disconcerted by that. After all, can't have your own troops pretty much turning the "official news" on its head now can you? So what do you do? You shut them up and any way that you can. Let them know they are monitored works pretty good.

But, what about the "moms" back home that are writing on the internet? Moms like Robin Vaughan, whose letter detailing her recent experiences with the Department of Defense and the Army is below.

Moms writing back and forth to "sons and daughters" in Iraq, who might "slip" and tell "mom" what life is really like in Iraq; Can't have that now, can we? What if the "moms" start telling others what their sons and daughters are telling them (at least the ones that are still able to access a computer). Can't have that people might turn against the war ON Iraq. I guess we better threaten and intimidate the moms so they'll keep their mouths shut, stay off the internet and just go home and be a mom. Doesn't matter to the military these moms only wanted to do what moms do, especially military moms, worry and take advantage of the internet to chat with sons and daughters.

This is pretty much what has happened to Robin Vaughan, the mother of a young man who was in Iraq. We have a DoD and Pentagon (military) that has become the foreign policy 'setter', and enforcement arm for the Bush/Cheney cabal-(you know, the guy who said, with a smirk, that he broke the law then pretty much asked, what are you going to do about it?)-that is now attempting to eliminate the rights, the very speech of a group of mothers with sons and daughters in Iraq.

Read Robin's letter. Write her. Give her your support—what has been done to her and the other mothers in her group cannot go unanswered! This will only get worse the longer we delay in taking this nation back from the crooks, thugs in whose hands it now is in. Too many Iraqi's; too many of our own; just too many, period have been killed and maimed already! Now moms are being threatened...what next? (Definitely a rhetorical question)

Robin's letter came to me thru VAIW (Veterans Against the Iraq War). I have since exchanged a couple of emails with Robin and phone calls, and plan on helping her get this story out—read her letter and join me. -- Jack Dalton

Letter From A Military “Mom”: Domestic Spying & Incident of Intimidation of Military Families

Written by: Robin Vaughan

I am sending this letter to you in hope of finding a source to hear my concerns. It is something that has bothered me since the occurrence, and I know it is not something that should have happened, and I worry for my family’s safety as I step out to speak about this.

During my son’s deployment to Iraq, February 2004-February 2005: I created a small group website on MSN, for families and friends of our soldiers’ deployed unit. It was a membership only site, and we were a tight group of mostly “Moms”, from all over the United States, just trying to make it through each day. The support and help we gave one another is a singular experience of grace, I will never forget.

During the first few months of our site, the Army decided to call every single family on the site, informing them, that the site was not to be used by any of the families. The Department of Defense called families in the middle of the night to notify them to not use the web site. Most of the families were near tears, thinking they were getting “THE” call telling them their child or loved one had been killed or injured.

The information received via the phone call was to inform the families that the base did not condone the site, nor [did] the Army, and that it was not to be used; the gist was, families were not allowed to use the site, or they could get into “trouble”. Some members reported their soldier calling from Iraq, telling them to be careful about using the site as the Army was monitoring it.

As Web Mistress of the site, I needed to respond and qualify this information, as well as to educate this commanding officer as to the rights and liberties of a private web site; which I did. I was told I would have to let a commanding officer on the site to monitor the messages; I did allow this, but I also informed the officer that this was a courtesy, as there is no such law, or right of the military to monitor, shut down or exclude our web site.

I believe we received this order, and treatment for a couple of reasons.

Occasionally we would voice our concerns publicly over what our government was failing to do to help our soldiers, or we would share or argue political opinion as well. The second reason may be: the armed services all have a group of their own family type support (FRG); as we were not local to the base our soldiers deployed from, the site was a means to provide that support, as best as we could.

The support group at our base, tried to force the site to be given over to them, which I refused. At this time I was told, I might want to be careful, as the government was monitoring the site as well. Soldiers in our unit, while in Iraq, were telling their parents to stay off of the site, or to be very careful of what they wrote. This came from a rear detachment officer in charge, and members on the site.

I reminded the Army I am a private citizen, not on base, with a private site making no claims to have any affiliation with any branch of service, but clearly stating we were families and friends of our unit in support of one another. We were treated to power by intimidation. It isn’t hard to make that work, when you have someone’s child in a war zone.

We were a group of 77 families from all over the country, at the time of the call. Every single family was phoned and told not to use the site; and I believe some 150 other families were phoned as well, as it was an official order from a commanding officer.

I have waited to speak of this situation until my son was home safe and sound, and also after his transfer to another base. Yes, I was afraid of repercussions that could have harmed him, one way or another. I called my local senator's office, 4 months ago, following up every 10 days to 2 weeks, and still have no answers or support.

I admit I am not comfortable writing this, as required to, as I am still concerned for my son and the other soldiers and families involved on the site. We didn't endanger them by means of displaying their photos with their names, giving up information about their location and actions. We were very careful to not breach Intel protocol, learning Ops protocol, as well as respecting and complying with it. We simply were at times, vocal about our displeasure with our president and government for how our military was being treated, or how the presidential election was being handled.

There are literally hundreds of military family, private support groups on the Internet. I truly believe we were singled out because of my refusal to hand the site over to the local F.R.G., as well as [my] outspoken political beliefs.

It's simply amazing that my son and others risk their lives for "Freedom" in Iraq, when his own mother's civil liberties are threatened, and families are intimidated into silence, by the very same Army he is serving. I am hoping after reading this you may direct me as to where I can at least have this concern heard. Basically, are the following common practice, and legal?

**The Armed services can order families from communicating in a private forum?

**The Armed services can threaten private citizens' first amendment rights?

I want to make sure this is not happening to other service member's families. We live in a hell everyday during the deployment of our loved ones; we don't need the added bullying or stripping away our means of helping one another.

Any idea or direction you can point me in would be greatly appreciated. Also, this problem can be corroborated by other families if need be.

Why did it take so long for me to step forward?

Originally I contacted my Senators office, with no reply for six months, and have also spoken with the A.C.L.U; (with little hope of action due to the length of time that has passed) but until now was not willing to come forward in a public way. It took until September for my son to be safely stationed at another base, and other family's service members to either be out of the service all together, or be transferred as well.

We were afraid for their safety, our own, our relationships with them and their future in the service, all of these things could have been affected, and we couldn't chance one more problem or pressure being added to the already heavy load the families and soldiers live with. The intimidation worked. Is this just something silly I should let go?

It doesn't seem trivial to me, but I am learning unless it happens to someone personally, no one seems to care.

Thank you, for your time

Robin Vaughan

MomRobin7@msn.com

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Articles by: **[Jack Dalton](#)**

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