

## **New Paltz Soldier Demoted for Writings**

A local veteran of the Iraq War has been fined and demoted by the U.S. Army for posting writings about his military experience on his personal Web log.

Jason C. Hartley, 32, of New Paltz, says he was on the verge of being promoted to staff sergeant with the Army National Guard last year when he was punished for his blog postings, and demoted to specialist.

Hartley said he started the blog in late September 2003, before he was deployed to Iraq, and had it running almost the entire time he was training at Fort Drum. His commander found out the blog just before he was deployed and ordered it taken down, Hartley said.

Many other soldiers keep similar blogs, but with fears of potentially classified and dangerous information falling into enemy hands, some commanders have begun keeping tighter control over soldiers' military blogs - "milblogs," for short, requiring registration of Web sites with military content and prohibiting the posting of certain kinds of information.

Hartley said he took his blog off the Internet, but continued to write and send his writings to an e-mail list. "I wrote the entire time, start to finish," he said.

About a month or two before leaving Iraq, in late 2004, Hartley said, he put everything he had written, along with his photographs, back online. Someone alerted the chain of command, and that is when he got in trouble, Hartley said.

"Then I was basically put on house arrest at my base while an investigation went on," Hartley said. He said investigators examined all of his writings and charged him with a number of offenses, including conduct unbecoming a non-commissioned officer, violating operational security and violating the Geneva Convention. Hartley said the latter charge, which concerned photographs he had taken of detainees, was dropped before his case went to a hearing.

Hartley said he wound up being punished for disobeying a direct order and violation of operational security, meaning his command felt he was putting information on the Internet that could be used by the enemy. The end result was his demotion and a \$1,000 fine.

"They got really super nitpicky about what they thought were violations of operational security," Hartley said. He said he was criticized for writing about how he put three tracer rounds at the end of his gun's magazine to let him know when he is running out of ammunition, which concluded would allow the enemy to know when a soldier is reloading, and give the enemy an opportunity to attack.

Hartley also described his unit's flight route into Iraq, which authorities said could have given the enemy information to shoot down U.S. aircraft.

Hartley said he does not feel he violated operational security or disobeyed orders.

"I didn't want my stories to be news," Hartley said. He said he was more interested in the

emotional experience of being a soldier and would wait to send information because he was not interested in being a "military geek with up-to-the-minute happenings." Hartley added that a lot of his writings were transcendental, and some were about his childhood.

Hartley was born and raised in the Salt Lake City area of Utah. He joined the Army when he was 17 and has re-enlisted several times since. Hartley moved to New York state in February 2000, and lived in Manhattan for three years before moving to New Paltz.

In his writings, Hartley said he made light of everything because there is a lot of absurdity in the military, but he that silliness and absurdity is kind of what makes the military endearing to him. Some people, however, take the military very seriously and do not want it mocked, he said.

"That's ultimately what they took umbrage with," Hartley said. He said the military could not charge him with mocking it, and so charged him with violating operational security.

In some of his postings, Hartley wrote about Iraqi street children, and captioned some pictures "Photos of the week of cute Iraqi kids who I want to shoot." Hartley said he did not actually want to shoot them, but said kids raised on the street are a pain, no matter where they are from.

Hartley said the children would swarm the soldiers and make it impossible for them to do their jobs. He said the children actually put soldiers at risk, because they would keep soldiers from focusing on the job at hand.

Another entry was titled "I Y dead civilians." Hartley said he said he does not actually love dead civilians, but maybe the military does because it produces so many of them. He said more than 2,000 U.S. troops have been killed, but many more civilians.

He said made fun of the situation in a distasteful way to make people stop and think about it. "Everything I ever wrote was because I wanted people to think," he said.

Under a Multinational Force-Iraq policy provided by a spokeswoman for U.S. Central Command's Department of Public Affairs in Tampa, Fla., Web sites with content from soldiers must be registered in the interest of monitoring. If that monitoring uncovers information that could put coalition soldiers in danger or provide propaganda for the insurgency, the author is notified and the Web site taken offline until the offending content is corrected or removed, the policy states.

The policy also states that soldiers who post content that endangers fellow soldiers, contains prohibited information, or could be deliberately misleading and mean to impugn members of the coalition forces, may also be punished.

Mathew Tully, an Albany attorney and major in the Army National Guard who recently returned from a tour of duty in Iraq, said restrictions were placed on the posting of information that is classified, information on casualties, information protected for reasons of privacy, information on incidents undergoing investigation and information for official use only, to keep harm from soldiers or civilians.

"This is specifically for people in Iraq," Tully said. "Generally, when you leave Iraq, the restrictions are greatly decreased."

Tully said he was adamant about monitoring milblogs because he saw firsthand how such information could cause harm. One soldier, he said, posted a photograph of a Hummer damaged by a roadside improvised explosive device, and the picture was lifted by al Qaeda for use in a training manual. He said the photograph showed just where to hit the vehicle to do the most damage.

Command did not know about that soldier's milblog until they found the photograph in the

training manual, Tully said.

"Iraq is hard-wired to the Internet," Tully said. He said the enemy is monitoring sites for information and sometimes people underestimate its capabilities.

The creator of the online site Mudville Gazette, who identifies himself only as Greyhawk, said he kept a blog while deployed to Iraq last year. He said he started his Web site in 2003 to counter "the many pundits who proclaim they speak for the troops. This troop can speak for himself."

Greyhawk said he and his wife now post stories that catch their eye. He said his wife does a daily roundup of several news sources and seeks out milblogs. He said he looks for the underreported stories like those of a GI taking on congressmen at town hall meetings and the father of a fallen soldier giving his opinion.

Greyhawk said he and his wife also founded the MilBlogs Ring, a group formed in 2003 that claims several hundred members. He said he has been an advocate of military blogs "for quite some time."

In regard to milblogs being potentially harmful, Greyhawk said, "My quote on this is that a military blogger has to write as though his mother, his entire chain of command and the enemy are all in the audience. Few can do that successfully."

Greyhawk, who says he is still on active duty, said the Internet is just another platform for communication. He said the rules regarding that medium are no different from any other, though communication on the Internet lasts a bit longer than words spoken aloud or written in a letter home.

"While the result of a security breach via any of those means could be equally devastating ... that longevity and accessibility make the potential greater for a breach via the Internet," Greyhawk said.

Hartley's milblog became the basis for his book, "Just Another Soldier: A Year on the Ground in Iraq," which was published in October by Harper Collins. Included in that book are writings under headlines such as "Blood and Soap" and "By Far the Most Breathtakingly Stupid and Embarrassing Thing I've Ever Done In My Entire Military Career."

In one piece, titled "An Ignoramus's Tikrit Palace Tour of Art," Hartley starts with the line, "Duality is implicit to mortality."

In his writing, Hartley said, he was trying to think about how to be an effective infantryman, to kill the enemy and at the same time maintain humanity. He said his whole book is about the duality of the situation.