



United States Army Criminal Investigation Command

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

U.S. Army CID Warns Unsuspecting Victims of Internet Romance Scams Female victims swindled out of thousands

FORT BELVOIR, Va. March 23, 2010 – Special Agents from the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command are warning the American public to be vigilant of internet scams and Impersonation Fraud –especially those promising true love, but only end up breaking hearts and bank accounts.

According to Army agents, CID is receiving frequent reports of various scams involving persons pretending to be U.S. Soldiers, who get romantically involved on the internet with female victims and prey on their emotions and patriotism.

“We are seeing a number of scams being perpetrated on the internet, especially on social, dating-type websites where females are the main target,” explained Chris Grey, Army CID’s spokesman.

The criminals are pretending to be U.S. servicemen, routinely serving in Iraq or Afghanistan. The perpetrators will often take the true rank and name of a U.S. Soldier who is honorably serving his country somewhere in the world, marry that up with some photographs of a Soldier off of the internet, and then build a false identity to begin prowling the internet for victims.

The scams often involve requests for money from the victim to purchase “special laptop computers,” international telephones and transportation fees to be used by the “deployed Soldier” so their fictitious relationship can continue. The scams include asking the victim to send money, often thousands of dollars at a time, to a third party address so the phone or laptop can be purchased for the Soldier.

Once hooked, the criminals continue their ruse.

“We’ve even seen instances where the perpetrators are asking the victims for money to “purchase leave papers” from the Army or help pay for their flight home so they can leave the war zone,” said Grey.

These scams are outright theft and fraud and are a grave misrepresentation of the U.S. Army and the tremendous amount of support programs and mechanisms that exist for Soldiers today, especially those serving overseas, said Grey.

Army CID is warning people to be very suspicious if they begin a relationship on the internet with someone claiming to be an American Soldier and within a matter of weeks, the alleged Soldier is asking for money, as well as their hand in marriage.

Many of these cases have a distinct pattern to them, explained Grey. "These are not Soldiers, they are thieves."

The perpetrators often tell the victims that their units do not have telephones or they are not allowed to make calls or they need money to "help keep the Army internet running."

"We've even seen where the crooks said that the Army won't allow the Soldier to access their personal bank accounts or credit cards," said Grey.

All lies, according to CID officials.

"These perpetrators, often from other countries, most notably from Ghana, Angola and Nigeria, are good at what they do and quite familiar with American culture, but the claims about the Army and its regulations are ridiculous," said Grey.

To date there have been no reports to Army CID indicating any U.S. service members have suffered any financial loss as a result of these attacks. Photographs and actual names of U.S. service members have been the only thing utilized. On the contrary, the victims have lost thousands.

The U.S. has established numerous task force organizations to deal with this and other growing issues; unfortunately, the personnel committing these scams are utilizing untraceable email addresses on "gmail, yahoo, aol," etc., routing accounts through numerous locations around the world, and utilizing pay-per-hour Internet cyber cafes, which often times maintain no accountability of use. The ability of law enforcement to identify these perpetrators is limited, so individuals must stay on the alert to protect themselves.

What to look for:

- If you do start an internet-based relationship with someone, check them out, research what they are telling you with someone who would know, such as a current or former service member.
- Be very suspicious if you never get to actually speak with the person on the phone or are told you cannot write or receive letters in the mail. Servicemen and women serving overseas will often have an APO or FPO mailing address. Internet or not, service members always appreciate a letter in the mail.
- Be extremely suspicious if you are asked for money for transportation costs, communication fees or marriage processing and medical fees.
- Many of the negative claims made about the military and the supposed lack of support and services provided to troops overseas are far from reality – check the facts.
- Be very suspicious if you are asked to send money or ship property to a third party or company. Often times the company exists, but has no idea or is not a part of the scam.
- Be aware of common spelling, grammatical or language errors in the emails.

Where to go for help:

Report the theft to the Federal Trade Commission. Your report helps law enforcement officials across the United States in their investigations.

Online: <http://www.ftc.gov/idtheft>

By phone: 1-877-ID-THEFT (438-4338) or TTY, 1-866-653-4261

By mail: Identity Theft Clearinghouse, Federal Trade Commission, Washington, DC 20580

Report the theft to the Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) (FBI-NW3C Partnership).

Online: <http://www.ic3.gov/default.aspx>

Report the theft to one of your local law enforcement agencies.

FBI: <http://www.fbi.gov/homepage.htm>

United States Secret Service: <http://www.secretservice.gov>

United States Postal Inspection Service: <https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov>

United States Army Criminal Investigation Command: <http://www.cid.army.mil>

United States Navy Criminal Investigative Service: <http://www.ncis.navy.mil>

United States Air Force Office of Special of Special Investigations:
<http://www.osi.andrews.af.mil>

United States Coast Guard Investigative Service: <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg2/cgis>

In cases where your identity has been utilized during the commission of these scams (i.e. photograph) with **no further Personally Identifiable Information disclosed**, the following actions should be completed as soon as possible to assist law enforcement:

Report the fraud to the Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) (FBI-NW3C Partnership).

Online: <http://www.ic3.gov/default.aspx>

Report the fraud to the Federal Trade Commission on Nigerian Scams.

Email: spam@uce.gov