

# Troops see the bright side of working nightside

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CAMP BONDSTEEL – Working nights presented special challenges for soldiers in KFOR rotation 3B, including increased responsibility, reduced contact with others and erratic sleep patterns.

But nightside duty also had its perks – according to a handful of soldiers found at work during one of their last remaining night shifts in Kosovo.

“It’s great because you get away from the chain of command a little bit,” said Pfc. Erin H. Hellwig, 20, a member of C Company, 10<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion, based at Fort Drum, N.Y. “You get away from the extra duties that come with daylight.”

Hellwig, from Dunkirk, N.Y., is a 31R – multichannel transmission communications operator and maintainer. During KFOR rotation 3B, from a hut in the Camp Bondsteel signal compound, she patched calls through from soldiers in Kosovo to their families.

Hellwig said the pace of work picked up at night – but to her, that was a good thing.

“I like it because you get to put through a lot more morale calls,” Hellwig said. “Between around nine (p.m.) and one o’clock in the morning, the phone is off the hook – well, it’s always ringing,” she said.

But sleeping during the day meant interrupted sleep, she said. Recently, Hellwig was awake during her ‘down time’ to move out of SEAhuts into tents and turn in equipment.

She said she didn’t like doing physical training in a small group instead of with the whole unit. “It’s not as organized because there’s more people on day shift and there’s only two people on night shift,” she said.

Working at night was also more dangerous for Hellwig, whose duties included periodically checking the operation of systems outside the hut.

“It’s really dark outside, and you can trip over just about everything,” she said.

The night crew tended to take on additional duties as well. “They usually task us to do a lot of cleaning,” Hellwig said.

She and her co-workers overcame the time pressures of their shift through teamwork, she said. For example, soldiers from the unit often came to the compound after pulling guard duty to help others finish their work. “Even though it wasn’t their shift, they still stopped by after guard duty,” Hellwig said.

Sgt. Juan V. Gonzales and Spc. Paul A. Garibay, both 31R’s in C Co., 10<sup>th</sup> Signal Bn., worked nights troubleshooting computer problems in the Multi-National Brigade (East) automation office. Their lists of night-shift disadvantages were short.

“Everything you have to do in the day, it’s on your own time,” said Gonzales, 29, of Edinburg, Texas. At first, the lost



Pfc. Erin H. Hellwig of C Company, 10<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion, said she liked working nights because she got to patch more morale calls through for soldiers at remote sites in Kosovo.



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Spc. William H. Washburn Jr. of the 110<sup>th</sup> Military Intelligence Battalion said missing out on sleep is part of being on the night shift. “Really, you just get used to it,” he said.

sleep during the day translated to trouble staying awake at night, he said.

“Another thing bad about nights is all the resources are (available) during the day, so we have a hard time getting stuff at night,” he said.

Garibay, 21, from Houston, had one minor complaint: “Usually you get tasked with ... little tidbits that the day shift didn’t get to.”

Both said that overall they found the pace of the night shift to be more relaxed.

Battle desk radio telephone operator Sgt. Peter L. Ducos, 21, said he liked the night shift in the MNB(E) tactical operations center because “there’s less people. ... I don’t have to deal with a lot of people yelling at me.”

Ducos, from Centerville, Mo., is an infantryman in Headquarters, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, based at Fort Drum.

“What I don’t like about it is the fact that you feel like a zombie,” he said “The best word to describe it would probably be ‘daywalker’ ... you feel like a vampire walking in sunlight.”

Ducos said increased responsibility compounded the problem. “A call could



Sgt. Peter L. Ducos, a radio telephone operator in the MNB(E) Tactical Operations Center, said working nights sometimes made him feel like a “vampire walking in sunlight.”

come in at any time with all kinds of information, and they’re expecting you to pretty much deal with it as best you can, with as little sleep as you have and as tired as you are.”

Another drawback to working nights: “You don’t get to really socialize with anybody. It’s just you and whoever you work with. You know them pretty well.”

Ducos said “lots of coffee and interesting Web sites” helped him stay alert during lulls in activity.

“The laid-back atmosphere” is what Spc. William H. Washburn Jr., 24, from Tyler, Texas, said he liked best about the night shift.

“There weren’t a lot of fire missions coming up,” said Washburn, an intelligence analyst in the 110<sup>th</sup> Military Intelligence Bn., based at Fort Drum. He worked in the MNB(E) analysis and control element, tracking the status of intelligence collection assets.

“We just had one straight mission that was clear-cut when we got here, and we did that pretty much every night.

“There was a lot of fun, a lot of camaraderie,” he added.

Washburn echoed others’ frustration at having to choose between sleeping and doing errands. He said most facilities opened for business “like, two hours after we got off shift.”

Like Gonzales, Washburn had trouble staying awake on his shift, he said.

The solution? “Really, you just get used to it. ... Being woken up in the middle of the day every day just becomes second nature to you,” he said. “It gets to the point where it doesn’t even bother you anymore.”