



(U) Longest Shifts: Working Overtime in Pursuit of SIGINT (part 2: conclusion)

FROM: the SIDtoday Editor

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(U) To mark Labor Day, SIDtoday asked its readers to tell us about the longest shift they ever worked. On Friday we presented [part one](#) of the submissions we received; here's part two:

(U//FOUO) Submitted by [REDACTED]

(S//REL) When I was still in the Air Force, I was a member of an NSOC Special Support Activity (SSA) team that was assigned to Joint Task Force - South at Fort Clayton, Panama, during Operation Just Cause [the US intervention in Panama] in December 1989 [see [background](#)]. Our team included three analysts and two comms maintainers. One of our team members, [REDACTED] had to go over to a U.S. Army SIGINT facility on the other side of Panama the morning before the U.S. operation began and didn't make it back to Fort Clayton in time for H-Hour. The other team member was [REDACTED] and the two of us worked at least 48 hours straight beginning about 12 hours before the operation kicked off and through the first two days and nights. We were, needless to say, very busy.

(S//REL) After a while, it all became a blur and we eventually had to be ordered to get some sleep. I slept on the floor of an empty office in my sleeping bag for just four hours and woke up feeling very refreshed. I then worked 36 more hours before sleeping again. At that point, reinforcements from the SSA arrived and [REDACTED] returned from his own exciting side-trip, so we finally settled into a much more normal 12-on, 12-off schedule. I was much younger then and I can't even imagine doing something like that now.

(U//FOUO) Submitted by [REDACTED]

(S//REL) Back in late 2001, I was deployed to Tuzla, Bosnia, as part of [Operation Joint Forge](#). I was the NSA Rep to the intelligence section of the Multinational Division North command, part of SFOR [Stabilization Force]-10. The unit in charge was the 29th Infantry Division (Light), a Maryland/Virginia National Guard unit, and then-Major General H Steven Blum (now chief of the National Guard Bureau) was the commanding General.

(S//REL) Earlier that year, 6 members of the Algerian-based Armed Islamic Group (GIA) had been taken into custody by the Bosnian government for surveilling the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo, and for planning an attack against it. However, because much of the evidence against them came from U.S. intel, the Bosnian government didn't have access to it, and after a couple of months in custody, the six prisoners were scheduled to be released without trial. The U.S. did not want to let them go back into the general population (all had come to Bosnia as foreign fighters against the Serbs, and had married Bosnian women and remained after the war ended), however, and so MG Blum and his staff planned to take the prisoners into U.S. custody as soon as they were released by the Bosnians. The prisoners would be taken from Sarajevo up to Tuzla, normally a 2-to-4-hour trip (depending on road conditions and the amount of traffic). MG Blum wanted SIGINT coverage of the trip to ensure that no attempts were made to ambush the convoy carrying the prisoners.

(S//SI//REL) My normal day had started, as usual, at 0530 in order to prepare for the 0630 morning intel brief. The prisoners were scheduled for release late in the afternoon, but the actual release was delayed for several hours due to a large demonstration outside the building

they were being held in. The convoy did not leave Sarajevo until after midnight. They then decided, for security reasons, to take an alternate route to Tuzla. This trip ended up taking about 8 or so hours, before they safely arrived at Eagle Base. I remained on duty, in contact with Bad Aibling and NSA-Texas (then called Medina RSOC), who were covering the convoy movement, until about 1000 [the next day], when I finally stumbled off to bed.

(U) The "gentlemen" in question are still guests of the U.S. Government, at Guantanamo Bay.

[Redacted]

(U//FOUO) Submitted by [Redacted]

(TS//SI//REL) While on TDY to Lahore, Pakistan, on an [F6](#) assignment, I served for quite some time as the lone Intelligence Analyst at site, located at the U.S. Consulate. Given the high-priority of the SIGINT mission in Pakistan, it was not uncommon to work about 10-12 hours a day during the week, and slightly less on weekends. The days always seemed to go by rather quickly, with lots of scanning and reporting to do. And given the security situation in Pakistan and the relevant restrictions, there wasn't much else to do other than work.

(TS//SI//REL) However, the various threats to Pakistan's internal and external security would often necessitate a few extra hours spent on the job, with customers asking for the quickest and latest updates on certain events. One day in particular turned out to be much longer than anticipated. On 2 June 2008, terrorists attacked the Danish Embassy in Islamabad with a car bomb, killing at least five people and wounding about 25 others. As soon as the news of this bombing hit the airwaves (thanks, CNN!) we immediately began looking for reflections in traffic.

(TS//SI//REL) Just before our scheduled return to the hotel in the evening, our exceptional voice linguist stumbled upon some police communications relaying the casualty report garnered from hospitals around Islamabad. Since the details of the bombings and fatalities were still hazy at this point, any SIGINT was considered valuable, especially since it just so happened that a Danish SIGINT delegation happened to be visiting Ft. Meade for briefings with S2A42, the Pakistan Shop. After receiving the voice transcript, I quickly drafted a First Instance Report (FIR) and then contacted the S2A42 analysts. The report was sanitized for release to Danish 3rd Party partners and was well-received, in addition to other SIGINT reports written across the SIGINT enterprise. By the time my nerves had returned to normal levels, it was about 2100. It had been about 14 hours. Definitely my longest day at the office, but probably my most rewarding as well.

(U//FOUO) Submitted by [Redacted]

(S//REL) Without doubt, the longest day I worked at NSA in my 22 years was dayshift in NSOC on 9/11/01 (not in time, but in stress). I was assigned to the Transnational Issues Desk (TRAN) Team 5, on the NSOC watchfloor. I and all my team members watched with disbelief on the NSOC TV as the second hijacked airliner hit the tower. TRAN desk was responsible at the time for interaction with FAA [the Federal Aviation Administration] and Cheyenne Mountain [where [NORAD](#) is located], who both reported to me that an airliner was headed for NSA, with the hijack transponder on (turned out to be a mistake). So, between the threat of an airliner hitting NSA (getting 10-minute position updates from FAA and knowing that we in NSOC were unable to leave!) and the incredible number of rumors, circular reporting and coincidences that occurred that day (to include a helicopter crash in Baltimore City!), it turned out to be the very longest day by far of my NSA career!! Even the invasion of Iraq in 2003 pales in comparison!!

(U//FOUO) Blizzards and tropical storms have also caused MANY shiftworkers (including me!) much overtime, but even those don't compare to 9/11/01!

[Redacted]

(U) Editor's note: Here's the same event from a different perspective -- that of someone working in the Pentagon on 9/11:

(U//FOUO) Submitted by [REDACTED]

(U//FOUO) It wasn't my longest shift in terms of time, but in every other way, my day watch at the Pentagon on 9/11 was certainly the most interesting. The day watch began at 4:30 AM and by 8:15, everyone had the twin tower on their TV, watching the fire. It wasn't until the second plane hit the Pentagon that the floor began to buzz. I was speaking to the NSA Rep to the FBI in New York the very moment the second plane hit the second tower. "This was no accident," the words being spoken by both of us at about the same time, and we hung up.

(U//FOUO) Soon afterwards, I got a phone call from the wife of one of my soldiers asking if we were ok, and I said, "Yes, why?" She proceeded to tell me the Pentagon was just hit by a plane. In our office, no one knew it or felt it. There are many "mini-stories" on that day at the NMJIC [the National Military Joint Intelligence Center at the Pentagon]. The folks on the floor remained very professional, making all the right calls, and staying calm and collected. While there was panic elsewhere in the Pentagon with people evacuating, the folks at the NMJIC stayed the course throughout the entire day.

(U//FOUO) Finally, around 10 PM, relief came and my crew and I left the Pentagon. One of my soldiers and I sat outside on the wall, listening to the dead silence and looking at the smoke coming from the other side of the Pentagon. Reagan Airport is normally busy with flights at all hours, yet, this night, there was nothing but silence. We sat there and reflected on that day, and I don't think it really hit either of us until the next day. Although it wasn't my longest shift in terms of time, it was assuredly a long day...

(U//FOUO) Submitted by [REDACTED]

(U) In February 2003, I was the senior person on a desk in NSOC and was scheduled to work the 8 hour day shift on the day a major snow storm was predicted to hit the area. That morning, the snow was already falling as I drove to work, and I fully anticipated having to stay extended hours. Before my shift was over, I called the person who was scheduled to relieve me for the swing shift, who lived in the general area, and told him not to bother trying to get to work, because of the current conditions. Eight hours later, I made a similar call to the person who was scheduled to work the mid shift, who lived on the Eastern Shore, because there had been no abatement in the storm. Eight hours later, I worked the second 8 hour day shift for which I was scheduled.

(U) After working four consecutive 8 hour shifts, for a total of 32 hours, I was as tired as the four or so other people in NSOC who had been there as long as I had been. However, I got a call from the person who was scheduled to work the swing shift, saying that the access from his cul de sac to the street had not been plowed and he would not be able to make it to work. So, as all the other people who had been at work in NSOC for 32 hours were relieved and went home, I got to stay for yet another eight hours, for a total shift of 40 hours. Then when the Eastern Shore resident arrived for his mid shift to relieve me, I was finally able to go out to my car and commence the process of digging my buried car out of the snow so I could make the drive home.

(U) The drive took quite a while because of the road conditions, but then, when I finally got home, there was no place to park the car, and I had to dig out a place into which I could put the car off of the road, before I could go inside and rest. I was awarded a Star Award the following month for my escapade.

(U//FOUO) Submitted by [REDACTED]

(S//REL) Two score and some years ago I was team chief of an Air Force mobile maintenance

team that serviced Minuteman missiles in their silos around Malmstrom AFB, Great Falls, Montana. The silos were spread across an area twice the size of the state of Maryland, so we spent a lot of time on the road. Quite a few times we worked beyond 16 hours, and were not allowed to drive, so a driver had to be sent out to drive us to the nearest launch control facility, where we could get some food and sleep, and then the next day we drove out to service another site. The codes that we used to authenticate ourselves when we entered a missile silo, which was unmanned, were generated right here at the Agency.

(U//FOUO) Submitted by [REDACTED]

(U//FOUO) It's not something that happened at an exotic locale, but it illustrates long hours are put in by all sorts of career fields. Hope you find it entertaining!

The hours were long, the work rife with stress, but dedication to duty kept us at our desks; That fateful night when our staff was depleted, we stayed and worked til the action was completed:

The day started early, as most day shifts do, as the sun closed the day, we were closing our desks, too.

We had already worked more than nine hours straight, but as actions go, this one could not wait.

The chief was on leave, our deputy in charge, having just returned from assignment at large. (She spent the past year at another location - elsewhere in the IC, promoting collaboration.) We were logging off screens, turning off the lights, when the deputy stepped over to block our flight. " An action arrived with a short suspense," she explained as she threw it over the fence.

Sure enough, as our screens flicked back into life, an e-mail popped in with a deadline: COB tonight.

The lights went back on, and we went straight to it, to gather the info required to do it. We gathered the numbers, crunched them real good, made sure justifications were well understood;

Compiled all the data and with budget defended, our late night adventure now had ended.

I remember distinctly the day of that tasking; I worked the day shift, and my husband worked swing.

We finished the task at half past nine (up until then, no one noticed the time).

With action completed, we called it a day, and that's when I called my husband to say: You just got off work? Well, so did I. Let's grab some dinner, relax and unwind.

My eight-to-five day finally ended at ten, and when mission requires, I've done that again. For that's the support our customers expect; from business managers, that's just what they get! While it's no tale of glory, or PCS locale, it lets everyone know long hours are not rare. For every career field holds chance to excel; and everyone has a story to tell.

(U//FOUO) Submitted by [REDACTED]

(S//SI//REL) On the morning of 8 January 1996, a Sunday, I started off for work early because of the heavy snow that had begun overnight. It was to be first day watch of six in SILKWORTH,* a 24-hour shift operation, where I was a Senior Voice Intercept Analyst. The drive in took me three hours from Littlestown, Pennsylvania, with SUVs and other four-wheeled drive vehicles strewn about the medians and berms of roads such as I-795, I-695 and MD 295 on the way in. While it was slow going in my Toyota Tercel, with several harrowing near misses and struggles with accumulating snow on the roadway, I was able to relieve the waiting mids crew by 0700 -- two hours later than normal. Two women from the previous shift remained to augment manning, as most folks were having trouble getting out of their driveways, let alone making it into work. Even folks who lived less than a few miles away could not make it into work.

(U//FOUO) As it turned out, a rather select group were able to either get back and forth to work from home or simply stay through several shifts -- sleeping at first on the floor, and then on cots provided by the Staff Duty Officer in OPS 2A. The cafeteria was unstaffed because its own employees could not reach the building or get supplies, and the agency was closed for regular personnel for some time. It was actually illegal to cross the border between Maryland and Pennsylvania for a couple of days, except for emergency personnel, because of the dangerous road conditions and the number of accidents that had occurred. While several others shared my plight, I believe I was the only one who spent as much continuous time at the job as a result of the situation. I did not leave SILKWORTH until the close of the dayshift on Wednesday, 11 January, returned the next morning, and was stuck again until Saturday, 14 January. My boss, [REDACTED], brought in food for the workers stranded by the snow and took my clothes home to wash them (I had brought only one extra set with me on Sunday) so that I could last out the siege.

*(U//FOUO) See an [article](#) from the "Prognoz" publication from 2001 regarding the closing of SILKWORTH.

(U//FOUO) Submitted by [REDACTED]

(U) I don't believe that I have a claim to the longest shift, but I did have a (now) humorous experience during DESERT STORM:

(U//FOUO) When the conflict began, I was a Branch Chief in a cryptanalysis branch in Z23. A call had come out for 2nd and 3rd shift processors in support of DESERT STORM. Although my branch was not targeted against that region, I wanted to set an example for our area by volunteering. My choice was to work the 3rd shift (starting at midnight). My plan was to work that shift and then my normal shift in my home branch.

(U//FOUO) The main glitch was that I lived 75 miles south of Ft. Meade -- with a travel time (one way) of about 1 1/2 hours (don't tell the State Police). After one round of doing the round trip, I realized that I needed the travel time for sleep, so I packed a sleeping bag and a pillow and slept in the parking lot (don't tell the NSA Police) in my pickup truck which was, fortunately, equipped with a cap over the back.

(U//FOUO) For the benefit of my coworkers, I showered and shaved in the runners' locker room (they complained!) in the north corridor of the basement after each of my midnight shifts and arrived bright and shiny in my office each morning, on time like clockwork each day for the first time since very early in my career. The combination of the two shifts was about 17 hours, nowhere near a record, but it was sustained for over 2 months until I was no longer needed. When it was over, I didn't go to Disney World -- I went to bed!

(U) *Editor's note: Many thanks to all who sent in their stories -- the response was great! Although I couldn't post them all, I have created an entry on the SIDtoday Blog for further postings on the subject. Click [HERE](#).*

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