

# **What Every Person Should Know About A Soldier's Lifestyle**

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The thing that I feel is most important for every person to know about war is the specifics about a soldier's lifestyle, this is important because these soldiers go to war to preserve our lifestyle. We are all able to find out the number of United States soldiers killed in combat and where certain divisions are at any given time quite easily, but most people have no idea about the basic living conditions that those soldiers are in. It is those kinds of details that I feel everyone should know so that they are fully aware of the impact, both physically and mentally, that sending soldiers to war has on them. Here are some details about a soldier's life and why they are important to know and understand.

Let me start by describing one of the basic human necessities in the war zone for soldiers: needing to use the bathroom. At home in the United States we are all used to using flush toilets that are within relatively easy reach of wherever we happen to be at anytime, a soldier doesn't have that luxury. Instead soldiers need to use latrines, of which one might serve multiple camps (around 120 soldiers for 3 camps), so be a bit less pleasant than the bathrooms we use at home (Hedges, 29). Further, military rations were designed to make soldiers constipated, so that they wouldn't need to defecate more than once every 3 days (Hedges, 30). In emergencies soldiers may even use an empty ration box (Hedges, 30).

Another basic human need is that of food, we all need it to function normally day-to-day. At the highest level, soldiers are given rations, set amounts of food that they can't surpass. This is contrary to the civilian reality that we can eat essentially as much food as we'd like on any given day. Further, these rations are not set in stone, but rather they are dependent on what tasks you are expected to do that day. For example, if you need peak cognitive ability then your ration will be protein rich. But if you need to sleep away most of the day your ration will be carbohydrate rich and low in protein (Hedges, 28). The contents of your ration will depend on the climate in

which you are operating (Hedges, 29). In short, soldiers are fed based solely on need where as we can eat the same foods every day if we so choose.

Sleep is very much the same way, the amount you get depends on the tasks at hand, but you should be able to expect at least 4 hours of sleep in each 24-hour period (Hedges, 37). Further, you will be sleeping initially in barracks (cots may be just inches apart). You will see combat action throughout the night, but over time will grow used to sleeping through the noise (Hedges, 38). All in all the sleeping conditions for our soldiers are less than ideal compared to the conditions we civilians sleep in.

As with any foreign territories there will be diseases to worry about. Battle injuries are all we hear about in the mass media, but disease-related injuries and deaths are just as common an occurrence. Lately disease has been less of an issue, but it is still an issue (Hedges, 35). Soldiers do get vaccinated against local diseases before, during, and after deployment. However, it is good to note that vaccinations used for combat soldiers do not need to pass the same trials that civilian vaccinations do (Hedges, 36). Personally that makes it seem like they are less safe to me, but you can have your own opinions there.

Lastly, the traumas of combat will also cause soldiers to become more religious and superstitious (Hedges, 32-33). This has a lot to do with the prevalence of violence and the seeming randomness of who lives and who dies (Hedges, 32). It may be comforting to have something you are in control of with you at all times (Hedges, 33).

This essay barely taps the contrasts of a soldiers lifestyle to that of our civilian lives. We civilians never experience anything like what our soldiers are going through. We need to keep that in mind when communicating with them during and after their deployments. Knowing how soldiers live should help us to appreciate their commitments all that much more.

### **References**

1. Hedges, Chris. (2003). *What Every Person Should Know About WAR*. New York: Free Press.