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Personnel Security Adjudicators: Results of a Semi-Structured Interview

by
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August 1987

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During the start-up period for PERSEREC, technical studies were performed by contract personnel that provided an initial examination of DoD personnel security practices. We have found these reports to have continuing relevance and deserve dissemination to a wider audience.

There is no doubt that adjudication is a crucial element in the personnel security system; yet many people involved with other aspects of personnel security are unclear about the actual practice of adjudication. The following report presents the results of interviews conducted with adjudicators in March, 1987. Job incumbents with varying levels of experience offered their personal perspective about specific characteristics of adjudication: work load, task variety, decision-making processes, and career concerns.

These comments have helped direct the PERSEREC research agenda towards analyses of job tasks, job knowledge, and job satisfaction. Additionally, the report has been useful in assessing users perceptions of the investigative product provided by the Defense Investigative Service.

Because of the important role of adjudicators we think other security professionals will find their comments informative and useful.

Carson K. Eoyang
Director
PERSEREC



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Foreword

This report addresses one of the important areas of concern to the personnel security community--adjudication. How do adjudicators go about determining whether a clearance should be granted? What information do they consider and how do they assimilate the information brought before them? How do they view their jobs and tasks? To answer these and related questions, HumRRO International, Inc. (HII), under contract to the Defense Personnel Security Research and Education Center (PERSEREC), conducted semi-structured interviews with adjudicators from the Service Central Adjudication Facilities.

The authors would like to express their appreciation to the many persons who contributed to this project. Dr. Ralph Carney from PERSEREC served as the technical monitor and provided valuable guidance and suggestions during the course of this effort. The Defense Mapping Agency was kind enough to open its doors to us during the interview pretest phase of this project. Through the feedback of Ms. Linda Skelly, Mr. Doug Kiel, and Ms. Nancy Sheldon the authors learned a great deal and were able to improve the ensuing interview protocol. The representatives of the Service Central Adjudication Facilities who helped to coordinate the interviews and/or who served as interviewees truly deserve mention. To avoid attributing specific comments contained in this report to specific individuals, the adjudicators' names are not listed, but we are grateful to them nonetheless. We will, however, mention the able assistance of the chief adjudicators of the Service Central Facilities: Ms. Bette Lyons from the Army, Ms. Mary Weaver from the Navy, and Mr. Leonard Hair from the Air Force.

Within HII, the authors owe a debt of gratitude to Ms. Patricia L. Colot and Dr. Douglas R. Rosenthal for assisting in the interview process and to Ms. Monica A. Rositol for editing the final version of this report. Ms. Barbara Roberson's clerical and administrative assistance is also worthy of praise. Finally, we thank Dr. Preston S. Abbott, who provided valuable comments on the draft report.

Overview

The results of semi-structured interviews with a small sample of personnel security adjudicators from the Army, Air Force and Navy are presented in this report along with some recommendations for further behavioral science research on the adjudication process. This overview offers a summary of the major findings in four categories--work load, task variety, decision making and quality of information, and career concerns--and looks at each Service and how each is similar to, and different from, the others.

Work Load - There are large differences in the average number of cases adjudicated each day across the grade levels for all of the Services. The senior adjudicators work on a small number of difficult cases while the junior adjudicators process a large number of clean cases. Although there appears to be a substantial difference in the case loads of the Air Force junior adjudicators, this is a function of the different organizational structure. The Air Force junior adjudicators review all cases but do not adjudicate any derogatory cases, whereas the junior adjudicators in the Army and Navy have a more restricted case load. The general feeling for all Services is that their case loads were heavy, but not overwhelming.

Task Variety - There were no apparent differences between Services regarding opinions on task variety. Every adjudicator agreed that the job included variety because each case is unique. The variety of types of cases requires adjudicators to be familiar with the guidelines for each type of case. The variety of types of cases was similar for each Service; the junior adjudicators process easier cases while their senior colleagues adjudicate more difficult, derogatory cases.

Decision Making and Quality of Information - Adjudicators from all Services stressed that the information received from Defense Investigative Service (DIS) investigations was generally complete and if more information were needed they could easily request further investigation. Several Air Force adjudicators reported problems with National Agency Check with Written Inquiries (NACI) investigations generated by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). These cases usually did not provide sufficient information, and OPM does not follow up on written inquiries

The decision-making process for collateral clearances is guided by DoD Regulation 5200.2-R and for Sensitive Compartmented Information (SCI) clearances by Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) Directive No. 1/14. Although the guidelines for Top Secret (TS) are different from those for SCI, most adjudicators stated that they applied the guidelines in a similar fashion for TS and SCI. Those adjudicators who could

verbalize the process they use indicated that they review all information on the case and then look for patterns of behavior, taking into consideration the "whole person." The general procedure seemed to be the same for all Services. The Services have the option to issue internal regulations that interpret and supplement DoD guidelines. The potential exists for inconsistent interpretations of DoD guidelines, which could precipitate a problem. This matter should be monitored to ensure consistency across Services.

Career Concerns - The questions in this category covered feedback and performance evaluations, KSAs (Knowledges, Skills, and Abilities), and training. These questions uncovered more differences between the Service than the other categories of questions.

Overall, junior adjudicators indicated they did not receive enough feedback and were not aware of how their performance was evaluated. The amount of feedback did not appear to be in proportion to the amount of case review by supervisors in the adjudication process. Army supervisors tended to receive "better marks" from their subordinates than Navy and Air Force supervisors, which may suggest a need for supervisory training.

The top KSAs reported by the adjudicators were decision-making skills, good judgment, written communication skills, analytical ability, and common sense. The adjudicators from the Navy and the Army expressed interest in training on a number of adjudication-related topics from seminars on the new guidelines to lectures on related subjects such as psychology and criminal law to specialized talks by guest speakers. The Air Force adjudicators were much less inclined to discuss the need for training.

The general findings and differences of the Service adjudication facilities have been presented in this overview. Additional pertinent information can be found in the introduction, procedures, and observations and recommendations sections. Detailed answers to all of the interview questions are in the findings sections. The small, hand-picked sample of adjudicators interviewed for this report may not be a representative sample. Therefore, the findings and recommendations contained in this report should be carefully reviewed before further studies are considered.

Table of Contents

Foreword	i
Overview	ii
List of Tables	v
Introduction	1
Procedures	3
Findings	5
Work Load	5
Task Variety	9
Decision Making and Quality of Information	12
Career Concerns	29
Observations and Recommendations	39
References	47
Appendix: Decision-Aid Checklist Used by Defense Mapping Agency Adjudicators	49

List of Tables

1. Adjudicator Interviews	4
2. Adjudicator Case Loads	6
3. Types of Cases Adjudicated by Service and Adjudicator Grade Level	10
4. Investigated Background Areas For Which Adjudicators Most Often Request Additional Information	15
5. Issues Adjudicators Frequently Discuss with Peers and Supervisors	17
6. Relative Frequency of Potential Disqualifiers	27
7. Skills Important for Adjudicators	33
8. Knowledges Important for Adjudicators	34
9. Important Training Topics for Adjudicators	35

Introduction

The principle focus of the Stilwell Commission inquiry was: "How can the DoD security system be improved to ensure that only trustworthy persons are permitted within it; that they abide by the rules; that those who chose to violate the rules are detected, and those who are detected are dealt with justly but firmly?" The Stilwell Commission found that:

The adjudication process in which security clearance determinations are rendered must be improved. There is reason for concern about the efficacy of the adjudication process. The denial rate is low throughout the DoD but nonetheless varies widely among the military departments and defense industry. Although adjudication is the final step in determining eligibility for access to classified information, such decisions are made on the basis of vague criteria, and many adjudicators are inadequately trained. As a result, it is possible to reach different adjudicative determinations in applying the same guidelines to a given set of investigative findings (DoD, 1985, p. 10).

The present study was a first step in addressing the above concern raised by the Stilwell Commission. The objective of the study was to develop an overview of the factors involved in arriving at personnel security determinations.

The approach was to investigate adjudication from the incumbent's perspective, since these individuals provide a unique perspective on the day-to-day issues of adjudication. They have first-hand knowledge of work load, task variety, decision-making processes, and career opportunities. This report summarizes the answers of DoD adjudicators in the following areas: amount of work performed; type of work performed; types of information available for use in the adjudication decision; quality of available information; decision-making processes; adjudicative guidelines; disqualification criteria; training needs; performance feedback and evaluation; and job requirements (e.g., the knowledges, skills, and abilities required to perform the job). The product is a series of observations and recommendations that is intended to assist future research efforts in the area of adjudication.

Procedures

The first step taken in investigating the adjudication process was to review relevant documents and regulations. DoD Regulation 5200.2-R, DoD Personnel Security Program Regulation, proved to be invaluable in providing a background and framework for investigating the adjudication process. Recently, Rudy (1987) described the processes and procedures involved in the conduct and adjudication of personnel security investigations. Both of these documents provide background information necessary to understand the adjudication process. The interested reader is directed to those sources for further information.

After reviewing relevant documentation, several informal interviews were conducted with adjudicators and managers at adjudication facilities, as well as personnel from the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy. The purpose of these interviews was to become more familiar with the adjudication process and to develop and pilot-test a semi-structured interview. This preparation phase included visits to the Defense Mapping Agency (DMA) for a briefing on internal adjudication practices and policies. In addition, a visit was made to the Army's Central Clearance Facility at Ft. Meade for an overview of the administrative aspects of processing adjudicative files.

Based on the information gathered to this point, an interview protocol was developed which was pilot-tested at DMA with two senior adjudicators. These adjudicators also provided useful feedback on the interview protocol. Based on the results of the DMA pilot session, the interview guide was revised; the final version appears in this report. The DMA pilot-phase responses were integrated into the final report.

In late March, 1987, interviews were conducted with 18 adjudicators at three central clearance facilities: (1) Army Central Clearance Facility (CCF), Fort Meade, Md; (2) Department of Navy Central Adjudication Facility (DONCAF), Silver Spring, MD; and (3) Air Force Security Clearance Office (AFSCO), The Pentagon. At each facility the point of contact was briefed regarding the purpose of the interviews, and adjudicators were assigned to one of four interviewers. Six adjudicators were interviewed at each facility according to the following experience level: two junior, two journeyman, and two senior level. Table 1 shows the interview schedule for the research team.

The information collected in these interviews was cumulated and analyzed for this report by the authors. The findings of these analyses are included in the next chapter. Observations and recommendations are included in the final chapter.

Table 1

Adjudicator Interviews

Adjudicator Characteristics					
Interviewer	Date	Service	Grade	Level	Years of Experience
Rosenthal	3/24/87	Army	5	Junior	1/2
Rosenthal	3/24/87	Army	7	Junior	1
Ziemak	3/24/87	Army	9	Journeyman	1 1/2
Ziemak	3/24/87	Army	9	Journeyman	3
Colot	3/24/87	Army	11	Senior	2
Laurence	3/24/87	Army	12	Senior	22
Colot	3/31/87	Air Force	5	Junior	1/2
Colot	3/31/87	Air Force	7	Junior	1
Laurence	3/31/87	Air Force	7	Journeyman	1
Laurence	3/31/87	Air Force	7	Journeyman	1 1/2
Rosenthal	3/31/87	Air Force	9	Senior	2
Ziemak	3/31/87	Air Force	11	Senior	2 1/2
Colot	3/25/87	Navy	5	Junior	1/2
Colot	3/25/87	Navy	7	Junior	1/2
Rosenthal	3/25/87	Navy	9	Journeyman	2
Rosenthal	3/25/87	Navy	9	Journeyman	3
Ziemak	3/25/87	Navy	11	Senior	7
Laurence	3/25/87	Navy	12	Senior	4 1/2

The reader should keep in mind there are limitations to this study. Only a limited sample of adjudicators was interviewed (6 at each of the Services and 2 at DMA) and these individuals were selected by facility managers. This represents about 15% of the available population, but selection was not random, so traditional caution is advised. Nonetheless, our experience suggests that the adjudicators responded with candor and the results are credible.

Findings

The format for this section is as follows: the question asked in the interview is presented in bold print, followed by a summary of the findings. Each question is presented in the order it was asked. One focus of the data analysis was to identify trends across Services and/or across grade level. Discussion is limited to those questions where differences were evident. They are clearly stated.

The questions and answers are categorized under four general topics: work load, task variety, decision making and quality of information, and career concerns. The interview was structured to progress from questions on work load and variety to the decision-making process, and then finish with some career concerns. These categories are not rigid; they are for organization. Since the purpose of the interviews was to obtain a more thorough understanding of the adjudication process, the interview questions were open-ended. The adjudicators' responses were much broader than the questions and sometimes overlapped categories. When this occurred, answers are presented under all relevant categories.

Work Load

1. **How many cases do you adjudicate on a "typical" day? [If it depends on the type of cases they adjudicate, have them answer for each type].**

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the number of cases adjudicated per adjudicator by Service and grade level. These figures are based on estimates provided by the adjudicators interviewed, not actual statistics kept by the Services.

Evaluation of these data shows that novice adjudicators (GS-5) evaluate a large number of cases. As adjudicators advance to the next grade (GS-7) the number of cases they review becomes even larger. Adjudicators at these two levels primarily review "clean" cases and/or cases with simpler investigative elements. Therefore, this heavy case load appears to be reasonable. At higher grades the number of cases adjudicated begins to drop substantially because higher graded adjudicators evaluate cases which are less clear cut, have more derogatory information, and require more involved actions (e.g., Letters of Intent [LOIs])¹. Supervisory adjudicators (GS-12) rarely adjudicate cases. Their role is primarily to review the decisions and recommendations of junior adjudicators.

¹LOI is the generic term for letters prepared for cases where, on the basis of the information to date, clearances cannot be granted. The Air Force designates them as Notice of Intent (NOI).

Table 2
Adjudicator Case Loads

<u>Service</u>	<u>Grade Level</u>				
	<u>GS-5</u>	<u>GS-7</u>	<u>GS-9</u>	<u>GS-11</u>	<u>GS-12</u>
ARMY	20-25/day	30-35/day	300-400/month	10-12/day 15-20/day	1-3/day
NAVY ^a	25 NACIs or 30 NACs or 10-15 others /day	25 NACIs or 30 NACs or 10-15 others /day	No one at this level interviewed	20-30 SBI/ day ^b	0
AIR FORCE	50 SBIs/day ^c 60-65 BIs/day	100 SBIs/day ^c 90 BIs/day 90 NACs/ENTNACs /day 70 NACIs/day <u>110 Tracers/day</u> more senior 7's do 40-50/day	5-10/day	5/day	No one at this level interviewed

^aNavy is currently undergoing reorganization so these figures are estimates.

^bThis adjudicator had recently transferred to DONCAF from the Naval Intelligence Command (NIC), the Naval SCI clearance facility. She had only been at DONCAF for a short time, so she was uncertain what the actual workload would be. These figures represent her workload at NIC.

^cThis Air Force facility investigates collateral clearances; however, the adjudicators indicated they review SBI investigations.

The reader may notice differences across the Services in the number of cases adjudicated at each level. These differences appear to be artifactual. It is difficult to compare the Navy figures to the other Services because they are only gross estimates due to the present reorganization to a centralized adjudication facility.

The differences between the Air Force and the Army appear much larger than they actually are because of different organizational structures at each facility. The Army adjudicators evaluate a broader range of cases at lower grades than their Air Force counterparts. The Air Force is broken into two teams with different purposes. The first team consists of junior adjudicators whose job is to review all cases that are received at AFSCO. If the case is clean, adjudicators approve it for clearance. If there is derogatory information, the case is sent to the second team for adjudication. Therefore, Air Force GS-5's and 7's review more cases per day than Army 5's and 7's, but Army GS-9's and 11's review more cases than Air Force 9's and 11's because they adjudicate derogatory cases and the simpler non-derogatory cases.

2.a. Do you have daily goals or quotas?

All of the Services assign goals to adjudicators. The Army is automated, so specific types of cases (e.g., derogatory vs. non-derogatory) are forwarded to each adjudicator. Prior to forwarding cases to each adjudicator, cases are sorted by type and derogatory/non-derogatory by another branch at the Army CCF. Each case is monitored by the system to see that action has been taken by the relevant suspense date. If a case has not been adjudicated by the suspense date, this information is reported to the adjudicator for follow-up action. The goals set by grade level are as follows: a) GS-5 20-25/day; b) GS-7 30-35/day; c) GS-9 20 SBIs, 5 collateral major derogatory, and 1 major derogatory SBI/day; d) GS-11 10-12/day.

Because of the recency of the reorganization at the Naval facility, the goals are still tentative. These goals are as follows: a) GS-5/7 50 NACs/day, 25 NACs/day or 20-25 BI's day; b) GS-9/11 10 expanded NACs/day or 2 letters of intent per day.

Air Force goals by grade are as follows: a) GS-5 25 per day; b) GS-7 35 per day; c) GS-9/11 50 per day. Note that these goals are much less than they actually adjudicate per day.

2.b. If so, how are goals determined?

2.c. By whom?

At the Army, the goals were determined by the chief adjudicator, team chiefs and the CCF Commanding Officer based on previous experiences, and statistics, on the amount of work that can be performed. Work assignment is automated and detailed information is available on goal/quota-setting. Several adjudicators indicated that they would have liked to have some input into the goal quota-setting process. They felt that workers should be consulted about the actions they perform on a day-to-day basis.

At the Navy it is difficult to establish quotas at present because of the lack of a track record. The supervisor indicated that he is currently monitoring performance to determine if the goals are appropriate. These goals were established by the chief adjudicator and the Commanding Officer of the facility.

None of the Air Force adjudicators interviewed knew the origin of their goals. Several suggested that the goals are just part of their job descriptions and perhaps the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) determined them. Higher level adjudicators work without specific goals or quotas and perform the work they are assigned by their supervisor. Overall, the Air Force goals, where they exist, appear low and the adjudicators complete many more cases per day than required.

2.d. Is your workload at an appropriate (realistic) level? That is, do you have too much work, too little work, or just the right amount?

At the Army the general feeling was that the work load was a little bit heavy, although it varies greatly. The heavy workload is particularly stressful for adjudicators when they are dealing with a case with derogatory information because these cases are less predictable. Additionally, adjudicators have to hold cases while queries are made to the field for more information. In such cases, they do not know when responses will come in from the field. Overall, there do not appear to be major problems due to the workload because management seems to be flexible in allowing adjustments to the quotas/goals to reflect individual case loads.

The reorganization at the Navy made it difficult for the adjudicators to answer this question. The general response was that while very busy they were not overwhelmed by the amount of work.

Lower graded adjudicators at the Air Force felt that their work load was fine, but the higher graded adjudicators reported that they need more help in getting the work accomplished. This is somewhat surprising since the lower graded adjudicators appear to review many more cases than any other adjudicators, and higher graded adjudicators reported that they did not have quotas. Further, the senior adjudicators reported that they did not have a backlog of cases.

- 3.a. Do you currently have a backlog of cases?
- 3.b. If yes, how big is it in terms of hours, days, months?
- 3.c. If no, have you ever had one?
- 3.d. What was the cause of the backlog?

At the Army there are currently backlogs. The amount and cause of the backlogs vary greatly. Backlogs can get as big as 60 cases (a week's work) per adjudicator. Management monitors backlogs and any case that has been waiting over 15 days for processing is identified and made a priority case. If any adjudicator's backlog gets too big, management stops giving that adjudicator cases or reduces the number of cases given so the adjudicator can catch up.

In the recent past, backlogs have been caused because of personnel shortages due to turnover. In particular, with the establishment of the Navy's Central Adjudication Facility, several Army adjudicators "transferred" to the Navy. Other backlogs at the Army are caused when there are increased demands for the CCF's services. Individual adjudicator backlogs occur when special or complex cases are assigned or when more information is required to make adjudicative decisions.

Currently there is no backlog at the Navy, but that is probably because of the recent reorganization. In the past they have had backlogs and anticipate more in the future. The workload will dramatically increase when they start adjudicating cases for military personnel as well as civilians.

Senior Air Force adjudicators had little to no backlog. Junior Air Force adjudicators had several-day backlogs, but they emphasized that these are small backlogs compared to the other Services.

Task Variety

- 4.a. Do you adjudicate cases for more than one type of clearance?
- 4.b. Which one(s) (collateral, SCI, continuing evaluation, etc.)?

Derogatory cases are more difficult to adjudicate so they are given to higher graded adjudicators presumably more experienced and more skilled. Junior adjudicators are primarily given clean cases until they are familiar with the adjudication process. They are gradually given more difficult cases to work on until they are fully trained. Table 3 presents the types of cases adjudicated by Service and grade level.

Table 3

Types of Cases Adjudicated by Service and Adjudicator Grade Level

Service	Grade Level				
	5	7	9	11	12
ARMY	Collateral (non-derogatory)	Collateral and SCI, mostly non-derogatory	Collateral (derogatory); SCI (non-derogatory); Specialty cases; LOIs (Referrals)	Collateral (derogatory); SCI (derogatory); Specialty cases; LOIs;	Collateral; SCI; Speciality cases; LOIs; Supervision
NAVY*	Secret**	Collateral; mostly non-derogatory	Collateral	Collateral; LOIs	Collateral; LOIs; Supervision
AIR FORCE*	Collateral	Collateral	Collateral; NOIs	Collateral (derogatory); NOIs (derogatory)	Collateral (derogatory); NOIs (derogatory); Supervision

* The Navy and Air Force Central Adjudication Facilities do not adjudicate for SCI access.

Collateral - confidential, secret, and top secret clearances.

SCI - Sensitive Compartmented Information access.

LOIs - Letters of Intent

NOIs - Notice of Intent is used by Air Force.

Specialty cases refer to areas requiring special training or greater experiences such as Loyalty cases or White House Security.

**Navy GS-5 adjudicators will soon be adjudicating all collateral cases.

- 4.c. **If you only do one type, would you like to do others? and if so why? [If they do more than one type, go on to question 4d].**

All adjudicators reported that they liked variety and felt it made their job more interesting. Even those adjudicators who dealt with a limited variety of cases saw their job as interesting because each case is unique.

- 4.d. **If you do more than one type, explain the major differences in the adjudication process. [If they only do one type, go on to question 5].**

Overall, adjudicators commented that the primary difference between types is the scope of the investigation. The adjudication process is the same, only the amount of information varies. Some reported that they were more careful with higher clearance levels, while others said it made absolutely no difference in how they adjudicate. An Army adjudicator commented that a person deemed ineligible for SCl access may be eligible for a TS clearance, illustrating the need for different criteria for each case type. According to some senior adjudicators, an important reason for adjudicators to work on different types of cases is to make them generalists. The more broadly trained adjudicators are the more valuable they are to the organization.

- 4.e. **Is one type more important than the others? More desirable to work on? Easier to work on?**

In general, adjudicators agreed that all types of clearances are important. Few were willing to say that some types were more important than others because much damage can be done by people with a lower level clearance. Those who said that some clearances are more critical tended to place more importance on the higher levels.

- 5.a. **Do you specialize or get a wide variety of cases to adjudicate?**

- 5.b. **Why is this the case (are you a novice adjudicator, an expert in some particular field, etc.)?**

- 5.c. **Do you have a preference for any particular type of case? If so, what type?**

All of the adjudicators we talked with work with a variety of cases. The amount of variation depends on the adjudicator's grade and level of expertise. In general, higher graded individuals adjudicate more difficult (i.e., more derogatory) cases, while less experienced, lower graded adjudicators deal with easier cases.

Most adjudicators said that the broader the scope of the investigation the more interesting the case is. That does not necessarily mean those cases are more desirable or easier. There were clearly individual differences in preferences. Some preferred simpler, clear-cut cases and others preferred more difficult (and interesting) cases. Most adjudicators preferred a variety of cases to working on any one particular type of case. Some adjudicators reported that SCI cases were relatively easy because the guidelines are stricter and the subject's appeal rights are fewer. Collateral cases more often tended to be in the gray areas; therefore, they were more challenging and difficult.

The Army is divided into three branches that, in addition to their normal adjudicative duties, specialize in the following areas: Loyalty Program, Military Intelligence Branch Acceptance and Special Access Program cases, and General Officer and Presidential Support cases. Adjudicators on each branch deal with all cases in these areas. They also receive special training on those topics. All other cases are arbitrarily assigned.

The Navy currently does not specialize other than assigning more difficult cases to more experienced adjudicators.

The Air Force is divided into two branches. The first branch reviews all cases. If the case is clean they grant the clearance. If there is derogatory information, it is forwarded to the other branch. The second branch adjudicates the cases and prepares the LOIs.

Decision Making and Quality of Information

6.a. Describe (or show me if possible) the type of information you get in order to make adjudication decisions. [Get copies of forms, worksheets, etc.]

There is a large variation in the amount of information the adjudicators review in each case. If the subject is a new recruit with no derogatory information uncovered in the investigation, the case file will contain relatively little information; such a case can be reviewed and adjudicated quickly. Other cases are very involved and may take hours just to review the file. The more involved cases tend to be handled by more advanced adjudicators because these cases require greater knowledge and analytical abilities.

A recent report prepared for PERSEREC summarizes the processes and procedures involved in the conduct and adjudication of personnel security investigations (PSIs) (Rudy, 1987). Rather than digress from the purpose of this report, the reader is encouraged to review that report for detailed information on the content of the case

files. That report includes examples of investigative reports and other information that adjudicators use in the decision-making process.

6.b. Could this information be organized in a way to make your job easier? How?

Overall, the adjudicators felt that DIS does a good job in preparing the case files. Generally, investigations are complete and clearly presented. When there are problems, they are generally attributed to an investigator error rather than a problem with the system.

Most comments about the information concerned providing more information. Higher level clearances involved more detailed investigations; therefore, more data. Part of the difficulty in adjudicating collateral cases is the fact that less information is available to make decisions.

A complaint made by several adjudicators involved OPM and NACIs. In general, NACIs do not provide all of the requisite information because OPM does not follow up on written inquiries. This raises more questions than it answers for those adjudicators.

6.c. Do you use certain information about the subject differently, depending on the type of clearance? [Does not apply if the adjudicator only works on one type.]

In general, adjudicators answered that they handle cases similarly for different levels of clearance; that is, they apply the adjudicative guidelines in the same fashion. However, the guidelines do vary for certain criteria because the different types of clearance are covered by different regulations; collateral is governed by 5200.2-R and SCI by CIA Directive No. 1/14. For example, the amount of outstanding debt a person can have is lower for SCI than for collateral clearances. There are issues that may require less detailed information for a collateral clearance than for a SCI clearance. In general the SCI standards are stricter and more clear cut than the collateral standards. Several adjudicators reported that the new 5200.2-R is much improved and more in line with the SCI guidelines.

6.d. How much time elapses between the collection of the data and your receipt of it?

Responses to this question were fairly consistent across Service and grade level. Many adjudicators had not thought about this issue before and could not answer the question. Based on the responses of the adjudicators who could answer this question, it is estimated that NACs and NACIs take 30-60 days and BIs and SBIs take 3-6 months from the start of the investigation until the clearance facility receives the case for review.

These time frames vary depending on the amount of derogatory information and difficulty collecting the information.

Several adjudicators expressed concern that the investigations take longer than desirable, with adverse effects on the adjudication process. For example, the guidelines may say only that a certain number of traffic violations are allowed in a 1-year period. Because of investigation delays, which may be based on delays in a local legal system, the adjudicator may not receive the proper information until after the case has been adjudicated. If the adjudicator had received information one month earlier, the clearance would have been denied. However, since the information was not forthcoming, the adjudicator has to grant the clearance. Adjudicators have some discretion to deal with borderline situations in such "untimely" cases, but some adjudicators felt that such cases could be a problem, especially if the guidelines were followed too rigidly.

After DIS investigations are complete, the central adjudication facilities receive the information very quickly. There do not appear to be significant problems or delays in that part of the process.

7.a. Is the information you receive from the field usually sufficient?

According to adjudicators, DIS generally does a very good job with only an occasional "slip up". Adjudicators generally would like all possible information so that while case files are usually sufficient, adjudicators would like more information if possible.

NACIs (conducted by OPM) are more of a problem according to some adjudicators because most of the written inquiries are not followed up. Therefore, much information is generally missing from NACIs and the adjudicator often wonders why there was no response. Perhaps no response indicates an issue which should be followed up. There is simply no way to evaluate the applicant without information.

When a Commanding Officer from an activity requests an investigation as part of Continuing Evaluation (CE) efforts there is sometimes a problem. Commanding Officers often do not include relevant information required for adjudication. This occurs either through ignorance, carelessness, or trying to beat the system. A recent report (Robbott, 1987) discusses the dilemma facing Commanding Officers. They are often in the position where they will lose a slot or position if the incumbent does not retain the clearance. In the meantime, work still needs to be done and deadlines have to be met. There are disincentives to Commanding Officers in dealing with security issues.

7.b. Do you ever ask for additional information on a case?

Yes, the investigators are not perfect. Army CCF management is currently conducting a short-term study on this issue.

7.c. What sorts of information do you usually have to ask for?

There was no consistent pattern of missing information reported across Services or grade level. Most examples cited were probably a result of a careless investigation rather than indicative of systematic problems. Table 4 lists the areas for which the adjudicators most often request additional information.

Table 4
Investigated Background Areas For Which Adjudicators
Most Often Request Additional Information

Areas Requiring Further Information	Number of Adjudicators Mentioning Area
Credit and financial information in BIs and SBIs	5
Psychiatric treatment, mental illness	4
Drugs - type of offense, treatment	3
NACIs - written inquiries not followed up	3
Arrest disposition	2
CIA checks	1
Background of immediate family of subject	1
NACs not expanded when there are obvious issues to follow up	1
Foreign national checks	1
Falsification of information	1

Note: These data are based on a sample of 18 adjudicators from the Army, Navy, and Air Force Central Adjudication Facilities.

7.d. Do you ever have to make assumptions rather than get more information? If so, explain.

The most common response to this question was absolutely not; adjudicators can never make assumptions when peoples' lives and national security are at stake. However, when pressed, many adjudicators did admit that assumptions are often made because they never have all of the information needed to be absolutely certain. Also, adjudicators could not possibly send every case back for further investigation. One adjudicator suggested that she would be more willing to make an assumption if a lower level clearance is involved, but not make an assumption when higher level clearances are involved. Fortunately, the quality of investigations is generally high so that is unnecessary. Obviously, insignificant information is not pursued if it is missing.

Several adjudicators said that there is no room for personal feelings in adjudication and that they have to be able to defend every decision and recommendation with data. Still other adjudicators said that it is impossible to not make assumptions, because they have to assess information (often incomplete) and draw inferences.

To help make these inferences, two adjudicators said they apply the worst case scenario. If the worst possible alternative had occurred and a clearance would be granted, then they would not request more information. If the worst case scenario would deny clearance, then the adjudicators would request more information.

Adjudicators are often presented with contradictory information and must assess the reliability and credibility of the sources. In some cases, the adjudicator may have all available information and still have to make inferences or assumptions about patterns of behavior and anticipated future behavior. Clearly, adjudicators must possess good judgment to perform their job well.

8.a. Do you discuss difficult or ambiguous cases with your peers or supervisor?

At the Army and Navy the answer was unanimously yes. Many adjudicators said that they could not possibly do their job without teamwork. Others said that decisions usually are not cut and dried; adjudicators cannot make some decisions without consulting others. Even if the adjudicator does not want the interaction with peers and supervisors, the chain of command and review process assures that the work will be reviewed before final decisions are made. When supervisors disagree with recommendations, they generally discuss the cases with the adjudicators.

Most, but not all, of the Air Force adjudicators said they typically do not discuss cases with their peers or supervisors. Their assumption seemed to be that once you have been trained you can do it yourself and it would reflect poorly to ask for help.

8.b. If yes, what problems do you usually discuss?

It varies greatly on a case-by-case basis, depending on each person's expertise and experience. Table 5 presents issues frequently discussed with peers and supervisors.

Table 5

Issues Adjudicators Frequently Discuss with Peers and Supervisors

<u>Issues Discussed with Peers and Supervisors</u>	<u>Number of Adjudicators Mentioning Issue</u>
Alcohol and drug related issues	3
Adultery and sexual preference	2
Any issue that may be precedent setting, is borderline, or is different than the guidelines	2
Loyalty issues	2
Financial issues	2
Psychological problems	1
Sexual abuse	1
Cases where some information is unavailable	1

Note: These data are based on a sample of 16 adjudicators from the Army, Navy, and Air Force Central Adjudication Facilities.

9.a. What are the KEY pieces of information you look for when reviewing case files?

This was a difficult question for most of the adjudicators because the answer really depends on the type of case involved. Several adjudicators suggested that the most important thing to look for is the comprehensiveness in the scope of the investigation. There are several important questions that adjudicators often ask about a case: Did the investigation overlook anything? Are there any patterns of behavior

that should have been followed up? If an issue was raised, was there any resolution? For example, did the drug possession charge end up with a conviction or dismissal, or is it still pending?

The pieces of information most frequently named as essential were the Personnel Security Questionnaire (National Agency Check) DD398-2 and the Personnel Security Questionnaire (BI/SBI) DD Form 398. These forms are checked to see if the person identified as the subject of the investigation matches the person investigated. Comparisons are made between the results of the investigation and the self-report of this information by the subject.

Other key pieces of information mentioned were:

- o Proof of citizenship, place of birth
- o Police checks
- o Arrest records
- o Organizational memberships

Most adjudicators reported that all information has potential value. Therefore, it is important to review all available information.

9.b. Do you follow (a) set checklist(s)/pattern(s)/procedure(s)? If so, describe it (them).

9.c. If so, who determines these procedures?

Most adjudicators stated that they know what to look for when reviewing case files. Cases are usually examined for comprehensiveness in scope. During training, checklists and worksheets are followed to ensure all areas are covered. However, other than using 5200.2-R or CIA Directive No. 1/14 as a guide, fully trained adjudicators do not use decision aids. Many adjudicators felt that a worksheet or decision aid would not help because DIS already checks the scope of the investigation. These adjudicators felt that using a decision aid, like a checklist, would overlap with DIS responsibilities and waste time. They reported that the investigations are generally complete; there is no need to formally check the investigation for completion.

The adjudicators interviewed at the Defense Mapping Agency (DMA) disagreed with the opinions about decision aids expressed by the Service adjudicators. DMA adjudicators use an adjudication checklist that includes a 15-year calendar in which the adjudicator can lay out the subject's history (DMA Form 5200-12). This checklist

provides a short audit trail and assures that all important aspects of the investigation are considered by the adjudicator. The DMA checklist is included in the appendix to this report.

It is difficult to explain why the Service adjudicators reacted so negatively to the use of some form of decision aid. Perhaps they did not understand how the decision aid would or could be used. Perhaps they felt threatened or believed using a decision aid implies they are not doing their job well.

9.d. How do you (and/or the procedures) handle multiple issues?

This was difficult for many adjudicators to answer. Many adjudicators said that they follow the "whole person" concept. That is, they try to look at everything in the subject's background and look for interrelationships or patterns of behavior. Often several small issues add up to something big. For example, drug and alcohol problems are often a cause of financial problems. If derogatory information is found, the adjudicator looks for interrelationships.

A number of adjudicators said they follow the guidelines (5200.2-R). These adjudicators did not seem to display an appreciation of the interrelationships between issues and the level of sophistication expected from someone making such important decisions.

Other adjudicators stated that they ask for help from supervisors or peers whenever a case is too complex and they are unsure of how to handle it.

10.a. How do you go about taking all the information, integrating it, and coming up with a yes/no decision?

Many adjudicators had a difficult time responding to this question. For many, their response was simply, "I follow the guidelines." For those who could describe the process, a pattern emerged. The first step is to read through all the information and summarize or highlight the relevant pieces of information. This summarization helps the adjudicator to look at the "whole person." The information is then compared to the guidelines. If a subject's record is squeaky clean or very bad, then the decision is easy, but that is not always the case. If the answer is not clear cut, they discuss the case with their supervisor or peers. It is clearly not easy to make a decision because many cases fall into gray areas.

One senior adjudicator was concerned that the process not be mechanized in any way. Further, the adjudicator indicated that it is doubtful whether such a procedure

process and the process of considering all factors (the whole person) is what makes the process work. The adjudicator felt that computerization or mechanization of the process would probably lead to many more errors.

One adjudicator said that it is easy to remain objective in the current process because the adjudicators are removed from the situation; all they see are reports. They can make fair and accurate decisions without being subjected to irrelevant factors.

One adjudicator pointed out that a lot of common sense judgment is involved, and errors are made. However, this adjudicator did not think the system could be improved much.

One adjudicator stated that peoples' values could affect their judgments. For example, an adjudicator who is too "moralistic" would deny clearances to almost everyone. Individual differences in adjudicators may be an important factor in the decision-making process. Adjudicators may possess various biases that systematically affect their decisions. These biases may concern the following topics: homosexuality, drug usage, alcoholism, mental illness, male or female chauvinism, religious preferences, race and national origin.

Most adjudicators claimed to be unbiased. However, several adjudicators made comments suggesting that certain issues are more controversial to them than others. For example, one adjudicator commented that her father was an alcoholic, so she was particularly interested in alcoholism cases.

10.b. Do you encounter cases that have gray areas, that is, are difficult to call?

Almost all adjudicators said they have cases that fall in gray areas. Interestingly, several said they do not have borderline cases; their job is to obtain more objective information so a fair decision can be made. If the case is still unclear, they do not decide without further investigation for pertinent information.

Across the board it appears that most cases are clean, but different adjudicators are exposed to differing amounts of issue cases. For example, at the Air Force clearance facility junior adjudicators process all cases and pass only issue cases to more experienced adjudicators. These junior adjudicators will see many cases that are gray, but they will rarely have to make decisions on them.

10.c. Describe a situation(s) or cases(s) that you consider to be a gray area.

The most common examples of gray cases concerned financial issues. One example concerned a divorced woman who had gone bankrupt while married. When her husband made child support payments she was able to pay off the old debt, but when he stopped payments she no longer could make her payments. Many other examples of financial problems were given. The key piece of information seemed to be whether serious efforts were being made to clear up the financial problem. Based on the frequency with which financial examples were raised, this may represent an important training need.

Another example included a person who had previous extramarital affairs. These affairs were in the open and marriage counseling was sought. Sexual preference blackmail was brought up as another example of a difficult issue.

Gray areas may also arise in conjunction with the recency of the issue. For example, the adjudication policies and mitigating factors might say that if the issue happened within the past 5 years a clearance should be denied. However, in a particular case the issue may have occurred 4 1/2 years ago and efforts have been made to correct the problem. Adjudicators are urged to use sound judgment, but issues at the borderlines of the guidance can pose problems even though the adjudicator's judgment says to grant the clearance.

Another concern involved personnel officers trying to resolve personnel suitability issues by getting security clearances revoked. Not only are these cases in gray areas, they probably should not even be considered by the adjudication facilities. The civil service system protects employees to such a degree that it is almost impossible to take any adverse actions. The security issue is often artificially raised to remove an unsuitable employee.

10.d. When you encounter such a gray area case, do you generally tend to favor the individual or the government.

The unanimous response to this question was favoring the government and national security. While adjudicators often may be sympathetic to the subject, they try not to let that get in the way. This is not a big issue with adjudicators because the appeal process is so thorough that it is unlikely that an individual will be treated unfairly.

Several adjudicators said that while the party line favors national security, the appeal/due process system is so arduous that they have to defend every aspect of a clearance denial. It is easier for the adjudicator to approve rather than deny a clearance

for borderline cases. Because of this, some adjudicators are concerned about the quality of some decisions.

11.a. Do you feel comfortable granting clearances for a 5-year period? Particularly in some cases (e.g., non-disqualifying issue cases)?

11.b. Would you prefer to grant some clearances for shorter time periods? Say 1, 2, or 3 years followed by a reinvestigation of questionable cases?

More than half of the adjudicators answered with an unqualified yes; 5 years is an appropriate time frame. Those who disagreed understood that the financial costs of any other time frame would probably be too high. Many adjudicators stressed that they would feel more comfortable if greater security emphasis occurred at the activity/-installation level. Security officers, Commanding Officers, management and all employees need to keep their eyes open for security violations. Despite all of the recent attention on personnel security, some adjudicators do not feel that there is a great degree of security consciousness. Of those adjudicators who recommended shorter time frames, most indicated that they would like the discretion of calling for shorter time frames on a case-by-case basis (e.g., to determine whether financial matters have been resolved). Clearly, CE efforts would have to be strengthened in such instances.

Several adjudicators stressed that their workloads were already too big and the clearance facilities would have a difficult time if clearance time frames were shortened. They also questioned the financial utility of more frequent investigations. The money might be better spent at the activity level, emphasizing security consciousness and continuing evaluation.

12.a. Do you receive information on race, sex, national origin, religion, etc.?

12.b. If so, how is this information factored into your decision process?

Adjudicators have access to information about race, sex, national origin and religion or can determine from names and other information in reports. All adjudicators stated that these factors do not and should not have an affect on decisions, with one exception; If an individual's national origin is from a restricted nation (e.g., Soviet Union) and there is concern about their allegiance, then that information should go into the adjudicative decision. Only two adjudicators suggested that they may be more lenient if the subject was from a disadvantaged background. For example, a poor, black, unwed mother would be more likely to have financial problems than other subjects. This appears to be more a function of the situation than of race or sex of the subject.

13.a. Do investigators ever try to sway or persuade the adjudicator? How?

Generally, adjudicators did not perceive the investigative reports as an attempt to persuade them. The reports contain facts. Several adjudicators noted that some subjectivity creeps into reports. For example, the report may state that the subject "seemed nervous" or "was uncooperative." These are perceptions, not facts. Several adjudicators who had previously been investigators suggested that these perceptions may end up in reports more often than is desirable and adjudicators must be able to distinguish fact from perception.

13.b. Are the investigator reports thorough?

For the most part the adjudicators were very satisfied with the thoroughness of the investigator reports. Two adjudicators who were former investigators were, however, quite critical. They suggested that there is a big variation in the quality of investigations and investigative reports. Too often investigators do not pursue obvious leads and do not cover enough sources. This may be due to the way investigators are assigned work. If an investigator closes a case, he/she gets credit for completing a case even if it has to be reopened the next day for further information. In these cases the investigator gets credit for two cases completed. Quantity is stressed over quality.

Another problem is that DIS investigators are not always assigned to complete a whole case. They may investigate one aspect while another person investigates other parts. There tends to be a lack of continuity in such reports and information can easily be overlooked. These adjudicators recognized that by necessity some cases must be split up among investigators in different geographic locations; however, at times an investigation is split up for no practical reason.

Air Force adjudicators also complained about NACIs conducted by OPM. Very few of the written inquiries are returned and OPM does not follow up on them.

13.c. Do you ever need to make assumptions about what happens in the investigation? If so, please describe.

Most adjudicators said this is a non-issue. They have to assume the investigations were conducted thoroughly and according to the investigative guidelines. There is not enough time to question all investigations. If any information is missing or unusual, the adjudicator can gather more information or send it back for reinvestigation. The adjudicators who were former investigators said that they do question the accuracy of investigations (perhaps more than most do) and are not hesitant to get more information when necessary.

14. Do you receive any information that is never of any value in making adjudication decisions? If so, what is it?

Adjudicators reported that almost all sources of information have potential benefit, some just have higher payoffs. Two Air Force adjudicators said that they tend to discount the results of Air Force Office of Special Investigation reports because they are generally not complete. Senior AFSCO personnel disagreed with this comment.

Adjudication is a program of exceptions. In general, one will not find that any source consistently identifies security risks, because the base rate is low. But if a source identifies problems even occasionally, it has some value.

15.a. Do you know the job that the person is being cleared for or only that a specific clearance (Top Secret, SCI) is required?

15.b. Does it make a difference to you if the job requires only tangential exposure to classified material (e.g., clerical support) versus a job that requires detailed analysis of classified material? Explain.

Sometimes the adjudicator knows the job the person is being cleared for, but not in every case. All but two adjudicators said it makes no difference because it is the person being cleared, not the job. One adjudicator said that if the case involved a highly sensitive position, they would be tougher in their adjudication; and another said if the case involved a less sensitive job (e.g., janitor, clerk), he would be tougher. It appears that most adjudicators do not consciously consider the type of job in their decision.

16.a. Have you reviewed the new adjudication guidelines in DoD Regulation 5200.2-R?

16.b. If you have, do you currently use them?

16.c. Do you have any comments about the new guidelines or the regulation?

The three central clearance facilities had only just received the new guidelines (now policy), so many adjudicators had not received them and could not really comment. Most adjudicators who had seen the new guidelines liked them. These adjudicators reported that the new guidelines were better written than the old guidelines, were not too restrictive, and were very helpful.

One Service adjudicator who reviewed the guidelines in more detail was critical of several aspects:

- 1) The new hostage policies were so specific that they never could be applied.
- 2) The new drug guidelines were far too liberal.
- 3) The sexual standards could not be applied consistently because the standards rely on whether charges were filed against the individual. For example, jurisdictions have differing sodomy laws; therefore, the same behavior will be treated differently depending on where the subject lives. In one state an individual can be arrested for a particular behavior, while in the next state no crime will have been committed. This adjudicator suggested that DoD study this question and come up with a consistent policy.

17.a. How do you use the guidelines for disqualification provided in Appendix I of DoD Reg 5200.2-R? That is, are you constantly referring to them or do you end up memorizing them?

These guidelines are referred to constantly and most adjudicators get to the point where they memorize them. Most said they do not rely on their memory, especially when taking any adverse actions (e.g., LOIs).

17.b. Are the new guidelines specific enough? Or are they too specific? That is, do they limit your professional judgment?

Many adjudicators could not answer this because they had not really reviewed the new guidelines/policies yet. Those who had reviewed or used them reacted positively. One adjudicator indicated the new guidelines could have been a little more detailed in how to deal with drug issues. The new guidelines appear to be at an appropriate level of specificity.

Only one adjudicator was critical, expressing concern that the guidelines had become too specific. They were no longer guidelines, but now were policy, and the latitude adjudicators previously had was gone. This adjudicator was also concerned that the new guidelines on refusal to answer left the adjudicator on thin ice.

An Air Force adjudicator stated that the guidelines did not adequately address differences between military and civilian homosexuality issues. For the military, homosexuality is a violation of the code of conduct and can lead to loss of clearance

and dismissal. This is not the case for civilians. This adjudicator felt this inconsistency should be resolved.

17.c. What changes or clarifications, if any, would you like to see made to these guidelines?

Because the guidelines/policies are so new there were few recommendations. One of the most interesting recommendations that did emerge, however, concerned the method in which guidelines are interpreted by each Service. Each Service has its own regulations that interpreted and expanded the previous guidelines. These regulations are currently being revised for the new set of guidelines by each Service. Perhaps DoD should develop case examples that describe how to interpret each guideline. These examples could be synopses of precedent-setting cases. This would be particularly helpful for training and could be updated periodically as new precedent-setting cases occur.

One concern that is raised by each Service interpreting the guidelines concerns the comparability of those interpretations. Since clearances are transferable from one Service to another and presumably the security issues are the same across Services, the guidelines should be similarly interpreted. While there is no evidence that different standards are being applied across Services, the potential for this problem exists.

18. For each of the following potential disqualifiers, please estimate the percentage of issue cases that involve that issue. Indicate whether you have ever disqualified someone on the basis of these issues. Which are most important in making decisions about granting clearances?

This was difficult to answer for some adjudicators. All of these disqualifiers had been used to deny clearance at one time by at least one of the adjudicators. With only a few exceptions, no major patterns were detected across Service or level of adjudication. Sexual misconduct was mentioned as an issue more frequently by Navy adjudicators than the other Services. This may be because they are responsible for clearing individuals for day care worker positions. In the Army, adjudicators are assigned to specialty teams so there was a greater frequency of that disqualifier being used (e.g., member of the Loyalty team reported more incidents of loyalty cases than most other adjudicators did).

It is difficult to determine if adjudicators feel one issue is more important than others. The most common response was that all issues are important, but vary in their frequency of occurrence. Each factor is important if it is an issue in a particular case.

The disqualifiers are rank ordered in Table 6, based on the estimated percentages of cases in each disqualification category given by the adjudicators.

Table 6
Relative Frequency of Potential Disqualifiers

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Disqualifiers</u>	<u>Relative Frequency</u>
1	Drug abuse	Very common
2	Criminal conduct	Very common
3	Alcohol abuse	Very common
4	Financial matters	Very common
5	Sexual misconduct	Occasional
6	Mental or Emotional Disorders	Occasional
7	Falsification	Occasional
8	Foreign connections/ vulnerability to blackmail or coercion	Rare
9	Security responsibility safeguards	Rare
10	Refusal to answer	Rare
11	Foreign preference	Extremely rare
12	Loyalty	Extremely rare

19. Are these disqualifying categories comprehensive or are there some other categories that need to be added?

All adjudicators interviewed felt that the disqualifying categories are comprehensive.

20.a. What is more important - keeping out security risks or making sure you do not unnecessarily disqualify someone?

The vast majority of adjudicators said that keeping out security risks/protecting national security is the highest priority. Those who commented further on this topic said that unnecessary disqualification should be avoided, but many checks are built into the system to protect an individual's rights. A clearance is never denied on the basis of one person's judgment; multiple adjudicators review such cases. Also LOIs are sent to the subject so that he/she has an opportunity to correct any errors that may have occurred during the clearance process.

One adjudicator said that national security and individual rights are equally important. That is why the clearance denial/revocation process is so complex. It is very important that adjudicators assure that individuals are given the due process guaranteed by the Constitution.

Only one adjudicator said that not unnecessarily disqualifying someone is more important than keeping out security risks. This adjudicator said that the system is not perfect; many of the recent "spies" had squeaky clean records. This adjudicator was concerned that the Services would go overboard and make the guidelines too stringent.

20.b. Does keeping out security risks or making sure you do not unnecessarily qualify someone vary depending on the type of clearance being sought or the type of job being considered?

Most adjudicators responded that it makes no difference what type of clearance or job is involved. Several adjudicators did say that higher level clearances are more important, so they place even more emphasis on protecting national security for those cases.

20.c. How do you balance the concerns of the individual versus those of national security?

Many of the adjudicators did not see this as a big issue. To them national security is preeminent and totally outweighs other concerns. Also, the extensive appeal process assures that individuals will not be harmed.

Other adjudicators said that they work hard at being fair and objective. By treating each case as important, using sound judgment, and carefully considering the facts before making decisions, they can balance these concerns.

Some adjudicators said that they remove themselves emotionally from the case. This is easy since they do not have direct contact with the subjects. Since the adjudicators are now centrally located, they do not get the direct pressure from local commanders or managers.

Several adjudicators mentioned that particular types of cases really hit home because of issues they have faced in their own personal lives. It is important for adjudicators to be aware of their own personal biases. Some adjudicators are aware of their own personnel biases and get assistance on such cases. Two adjudicators suggested that they could use some training to help them be more objective. Other adjudicators did not seem to realize that this is a potential problem and reported that they are always objective.

Career Concerns

21.a. Do you receive feedback on your performance from your supervisors?

Most of the adjudicators said they receive some sort of feedback from their supervisors. At a minimum they should get feedback at their annual performance review. However, several adjudicators indicated that they did not even get feedback then. Surprisingly, given the amount of work/case review in the adjudication process, there does not appear to be a great amount of feedback. Based on adjudicator comments, Army supervisors appear to be better than the other Services at providing feedback. This may suggest a need for supervisory training or it may merely reflect the large workload taking time away from this activity.

21.b. Is feedback something you want to receive or do you feel that you know how well you are doing on your own?

About half of the adjudicators interviewed said they want feedback and would like to receive more feedback than they currently receive. Many of them stressed that they need to receive positive as well as negative feedback; too often the only contact they have with their supervisor is negative.

The other half of the adjudicators felt they really did not need feedback because they know how well they are doing. Several said that they know they do a good job because few of their decisions are overturned. Also, if there are no complaints from the activities about their decisions, they know they made good decisions.

21.c. [If they want to receive feedback] From whom and what types of feedback would you like to receive?

Adjudicators get little feedback on their decisions unless their supervisor evaluates their work. They have little contact with the activities and no contact with the subjects. They almost never find out the consequences of their decisions. It appears that supervisors and team leaders are the only people in a position to provide this feedback.

One adjudicator suggested that there be more contact between adjudicators and the security officers in the activities so they can find out the consequences of their decisions. However, this may conflict with the rationale for centralizing the clearance process: removing the direct pressure of the commanders at the activities.

21.d. Do you ever find out about the consequences of your decisions? For example, did that individual commit security violations or did that person lose a job because you denied the security clearance?

Because they are removed from the activity, adjudicators almost never find out the results of their decisions. Occasionally they may find out short-term consequences like the subject's reassignment to a nonsensitive position, or that the subject is appealing the decision. Other than that, they would only hear about consequences if the case made it into the press.

One adjudicator stated that she really did not care what happens to the subject because she is just doing her job. If a subject's record is so bad that he or she cannot get a clearance, he or she should not be surprised by the denial. If the employee is a really good employee, the activity will find the person a nonsensitive position. If the activity cannot or will not find such a position, then it is good that the person was denied clearance.

22.a. How is your performance judged or evaluated by your supervisor? [If possible, get a copy of the evaluation form.]

A high number of adjudicators were not aware of how their performance was evaluated. Several adjudicators complained that performance expectations were not communicated well by their supervisors and management. A number of adjudicators indicated they were evaluated on statistics, without reference to the quality of their work.

Some adjudicators and supervisors indicated that adjudication performance is evaluated on multiple factors that appear relevant to the job. The work of novice adjudicators is carefully reviewed for accuracy during the training process. Gradually, as the

adjudicator acquires proficiency, the amount of review is reduced. Fully functioning adjudicators have the authority to approve clean cases. Supervisors reported that they spot check the clean cases that have been approved. Cases with an adverse decision are frequently reviewed by senior adjudicators (team and branch chiefs). This provides ample opportunity for feedback and to evaluate the quality of work.

All LOIs are approved by a higher level adjudicator, so there is the opportunity to evaluate decision-making and writing skills. One adjudicator reported that his supervisor required adjudication of "test cases" to evaluate decision-making/adjudication abilities.

Overall, it appears that there is ample opportunity for supervisors to evaluate their subordinates' performance. Whether supervisors adequately evaluate subordinate performance is another question that cannot be answered through interviews. It appears that there may be some communication problems in some instances over the performance appraisal process because of the number of adjudicators who did not know how they are evaluated.

22.b. How do you know if you have done a good job, that is, you made the right decision?

Several adjudicators said they never know if they are doing well; they just assume that if no one appeals or complains they did a good job. Several adjudicators reported that their supervisors provide them with feedback on their performance. Others said that if the chief approves a recommendation, their judgment must have been correct. One adjudicator said that if he denies a clearance, if there are no complaints from the activity, and if the subject does not appeal, he did well. Still others reported that because they are very experienced they can tell when they are getting in over their head and need assistance.

22.c. How do you think adjudicators' job performance should be evaluated? Specifically, what factors should be considered?

Many of the adjudicators were not sure how their performance should be evaluated. The most frequently recommended factor was quality of work--the accuracy of decisions made and the display of good judgment. Several adjudicators said that quantity should be deemphasized, but others recognized that quantity of work has to be an important factor. Several adjudicators mentioned the quality of correspondence prepared (e.g., LOIs) and the writing skills of the adjudicator. Interpersonal skills were mentioned by several adjudicators as important for dealing with peers and supervisors, and others emphasized the interaction, albeit limited, with the Commanding Officers,

managers, and security officers at the activities. Other factors mentioned were independence, ability to deal with and keep up with change, and dedication to the work.

23.a. How important is your job?

All adjudicators reported that they perceive their job as very important. It is important because they potentially affect national security and can have a profound effect on people's lives.

A fair number of the adjudicators had previously held clerical jobs. To these adjudicators, in particular, the job was extremely interesting and important. Some of the adjudicators who had had some form of security background prior to becoming adjudicators were less enthusiastic (or more realistic) than others about their role in the big picture.

23.b. How interesting/boring is your job?

Most adjudicators feel that their job is very interesting. It is interesting because of the variety of cases with which they deal and the potential impact they have on individuals and national security. Lower level adjudicators tended to report their job as being somewhat less interesting than higher graded adjudicators because of the more limited variety and challenge of the tasks they perform.

23.c. How do you keep motivated to do a good job?

There did not appear to be any problems of motivation. Most of the adjudicators interviewed appeared to be self-motivated and take pride in their work. (One should recall the adjudicators interviewed were selected by the agency, not at random; therefore, these adjudicators may not be representative of the population of adjudicators.) Many of the adjudicators said they enjoy the challenge and the sense of accomplishment they get from their job. It appears that the higher graded adjudicators may be more motivated because of the sense of wholeness or completion they get from being involved in the whole process (adjudication, LOIs, dealing with appeals, etc.). Some of the lower level adjudicators may be frustrated by the restricted role they have.

24. **What skills, special abilities, or other characteristics are important for being a good adjudicator?**

Table 7 presents skills, abilities, and other characteristics identified by the adjudicators as important to being a successful adjudicator.

Table 7

Skills Important for Adjudicators

Skills, Abilities and Other Characteristics	Number of Adjudicators Recommending
Decision making skills/good judgment/ common sense	9
Written communication skills	7
Analytical ability	5
Reading ability	5
Oral communication skills	3
Flexibility/ability to deal with or work on several things at once	2
Interest in security issues	2
Ability to work under pressure	2
Maturity	1
Good memory	1
Public speaking ability	1
Ability to defend decisions	1
Patriotism	1
High energetic level	1
Dedication	1
Ability to deal with large amounts of information	1
Self-motivation	1

Note: These data are based on a sample of 18 adjudicators from the Army, Navy, and Air Force Central Adjudication Facilities.

25. What areas of knowledge would be useful in performing your job? For example, psychology, law, finance, etc.

Table 8 presents knowledges identified as important for adjudication.

Table 8
Knowledges Important for Adjudicators

Knowledge	Number of Adjudicators Recommending
Psychology/mental illness/treatment	10
Legal issues/criminal justice	8
Financial issues	8
English/grammar	5
DIS/Investigation process	3
Drugs	2
Military structure	1
Sociology	1
Geography	1
Military justice	1
Adjudication guidelines	1
Subversive organizations/cults	1
Appeal process	1
Business	1
Medical technology	1

Note: These data are based on a sample of 18 adjudicators from the Army, Navy, and Air Force Central Adjudication Facilities.

26. In what areas would you like to see new/more training?

Table 9 presents training topics recommended by adjudicators in each of the Services.

Table 9

Important Training Topics for Adjudicators

Army

Minor collaterals
Personnel Security Screening Program (PSSP)
Adjudication seminar given by Director of CIA
Legal issues
Precedent setting cases
Loyalty issues
New forms being used in security arena
Special Access Programs
New 5200.2-R
English
Criminal Law
Psychology - mental illness
Administrative procedures - LOIs

Navy

Writing
Seminars/brown bags on interesting cases
Hands on/how to training
5200.2-R
Finance/credit
Psychology
Drugs
DIS
Subversive groups/cults

Air Force

Review of unique cases
Investigation process
Philosophy of adjudication
Consistency across adjudicators
The Air Force
Adjudication policy and regulations

Because the Navy is in the process of reorganizing, there seemed to be more of a desire to receive systematic training in many basic areas. Army adjudicators also seemed eager to learn more about advanced topics.

27. **I have been asking you a lot of questions. What questions do you have for me? What other issues do you think are important for us to know about in order to really understand what your job is all about?**

Army

Several adjudicators stressed their belief that they do a very good job at adjudicating cases, but that everyone (PERSEREC, DoD) needs to realize that they are only one small part of the security process. These adjudicators were most concerned about the attitude toward security at the activities. For most commanders, managers and employees, security is only an "other duty as assigned". There are disincentives for people to get involved in security issues. It takes time away from their other primary duties and is generally an undesirable activity. This needs to be changed. All employees must be aware of security issues or we will continue to pay the consequences. Security officers need to be given more attention, authority, training, and so on.

Some adjudicators indicated that they would like more feedback on how well they are doing. They often feel as if they are working in a vacuum. These adjudicators do not see how their work fits into the big picture. Why do they do things certain ways? If they knew why, they could possibly improve procedures or at least be more motivated to do their job well. These adjudicators would also like to be more involved in the planning/decision-making process at CCF.

One adjudicator wanted more career guidance. Where can junior adjudicators expect to be several years from now? Are they in dead-end positions? If not, what do they have to do to advance?

One adjudicator was suspicious of military recruiters. He suspects that recruiters tell applicants how to fill out the questionnaires so they will be cleared, regardless of their actual background. This adjudicator seemed to question the accuracy of much of the data adjudicators review in making their decisions.

Several adjudicators complained about the amount of administrative paperwork involved in their jobs. They felt that, because of those duties, there was not enough time to actually adjudicate cases.

The Army adjudicators reacted very positively to the lectures given by experts on various topics. They requested that the lectures continue.

One adjudicator thought that one central DoD adjudication facility for all Services and DoD agencies would be a good idea. Such a central facility would be a vehicle for improving the adjudication process and gaining consistency across Services and agencies.

Navy

Because the Navy has just centralized, training is the biggest issue. Training of all sorts (e.g., on-the-job, expert lectures, supervisory training, etc.) may have some value. Related to this topic, one adjudicator suggested that the Navy provide a library with information on drugs, mental illness, legal issues, Navy regulations, and other information related to adjudication.

Another concern was raised about the amount of administrative paperwork that is involved in the adjudication process. Also, the Navy files are scattered over too many locations. There is a need to computerize the process, so adjudicators can concentrate on adjudication instead of clerical work.

Other comments included a need to emphasize quality instead of quantity. Commanding Officers have too much influence in the security clearance process; they often withhold relevant information. One adjudicator said they have a difficult time not getting personally or emotionally involved in the cases; perhaps training should focus on the issue of how to remain objective.

Air Force

Air Force adjudicators had few closing comments. One suggested that DoD form one central clearance facility for all Services and agencies. Another adjudicator suggested that AFSCO be combined with the other Air Force adjudication facility (INSB). This would streamline the clearance process and adjudicators could be involved with SCI as well as collateral clearances. Another adjudicator recommended that an adjudication certification process be established to ensure adjudicators are qualified and competent. Finally, several adjudicators reiterated their complaints about the OPM investigators and recommended that the investigators follow up on the written inquiries in NACIs.

Observations and Recommendations

Adjudicators must synthesize a great deal of information in deciding whether to grant or deny security clearances. To fully understand all the steps taken by adjudicators in performing their jobs and performing them well is a very large undertaking. This report identifies a few steps toward this end.

Information developed through job analyses may be useful in developing adequate performance criteria and subsequently, selection, assignment, and assessment techniques for adjudicators. More controlled studies and investigations are also needed to address the specific questions as to how adjudicators "analyze" the information from clearance cases and make a "yes" or "no" decision.

Interviews of adjudicators represent an important first step; however, policy-capturing studies and/or more controlled "experiments" are needed to produce more definitive answers. For example, controlled research studies in which samples of adjudicators adjudicate test cases may further elucidate how adjudicators deal with multiple issues and DoD policy guidelines and possibly identify biases. Below are several observations, and some recommendations, from the interviews with adjudicators which may be amenable to this type of research.

1. **Observation** - The average level of adjudicative experience is quite low for the adjudicators interviewed in all three Services. The median level of adjudicative experience was only 1 1/2 years. Only two adjudicators had more than 5 years of experience. To the extent that these adjudicators are representative of the population of adjudicators, one would conclude that there is a relatively inexperienced cadre of adjudicators making very important decisions.

Adjudicators at the Army and Air Force complained that many of their experienced people were "stolen" by the Navy. However, there were still many inexperienced adjudicators at the Navy.

The low experience levels of adjudicators has at least two potential implications. First, this places great demands on the training functions because there are many people in need of training. Second, greater demands are placed on managers to review subordinates' work. This means that managers have less time available to perform their management functions and/or adjudicative responsibilities.

Recommendation - Since we interviewed a nonrandom sample of adjudicators, it is possible that our conclusion about the average experience level is wrong; therefore, we recommend that the Services examine this issue.

If most adjudicators are inexperienced, the Services should determine if in fact this is causing problems (e.g., increased demands for training and management review). If it is causing problems, the Services should investigate the cause and search for potential solutions. Reasons for the inexperienced workforce may range from an increased workload to excessive turnover.

2. Observation - Related to observation 1, it appears that some senior adjudicators may spend too much time in administrative work. This may not be the best use of their expertise. Though it is difficult to say from the data collected, it is possible that the senior adjudicators meant that they do not open many new cases, but review many opened cases. If this is the case, then it is not a significant concern. If, however, senior adjudicators are doing only administrative work, they may not be using their skills well.

3. Observation - There appears to be a problem in communicating work goals to the adjudicators. All of the senior adjudicators and managers knew what was expected of them, but many lower graded adjudicators had no idea of what level of work was expected of them.

Recommendation - Supervisors should be reminded of the importance of clearly articulating work goals to subordinates. If an employee knows what is expected, he or she will be motivated to meet those goals. If the employee does not know what constitutes an acceptable work load, he or she is unlikely to perform at full potential.

4. Observation - Despite a few isolated complaints, it appears that most adjudicators' workloads are appropriate. Most do not feel overworked or unfairly treated. However, it is not really possible to determine through an individual interview if the workloads are too light.

5. Observation - The Army's system for tracking case suspense dates seems to be a good system for assuring that cases do not take too long to be processed. With the enormous amount of paperwork involved in the adjudication process, it would be easy to misplace files or lose track of their status. Such a system is not currently feasible at the Navy because their system is not yet automated. It is not clear if or how the Air Force tracks suspense dates.

6. **Observation** - There appear to be interservice rivalries. Competition or rivalry can be helpful if it increases motivation. However, this rivalry may not be helpful. For example, one Air Force adjudicator stated that they have a backlog, but bragged that it was small compared to the Army. If the Air Force backlog was small, in absolute terms, there is no concern. However, if such a rivalry causes one to ignore real problems, just because there are fewer in comparison to those of another Service, the rivalry can be dysfunctional.

7. **Observation** - There are at least two approaches toward designing work. One approach focuses the work to a narrowly defined limited aspect of the total job. Another approach involves the employee in a broad range of activities. The first approach can lead to efficient operations but is often unsatisfying to the employee. The second approach may be more difficult to arrange, however, employees may have a better sense of the whole job, have broader training, and be more satisfied with their work. The second approach may also produce a more flexible workforce.

None of the three adjudication facilities fits neatly into either of these categories; however, the Air Force has a more narrow definition of some adjudication tasks. The Air Force is set up into two branches, the Training and Operations Branch and the Adjudication Branch. Adjudicators in the Training and Operations Branch process all of the incoming cases. They do a cursory review and grant clearances if the case is clean and pass on cases that have derogatory information. The job has the characteristics of an assembly line and the adjudicators do not know what happens to cases they pass on. Employees in the Adjudication Branch have a broader job scope. They receive all cases with derogatory information and perform more complicated adjudications.

Recommendation - The Air Force may want to examine this issue to see if there are adverse effects due to this job design. Based on the interviews there were no obvious problems. However, it is possible that enriching the adjudicator job in the Training and Operations Branch could have some positive impact.

8. **Observation** - The classification specifications for adjudicators are outdated and do not reflect the current demands, activities, and KSAs of the jobs.

Recommendation - OPM should update the classification specifications. This could be accomplished through a multipurpose job analysis. Such a job analysis could also provide the foundation of adjudicator training.

programs, selection procedures, and performance appraisal systems. The KSAs listed in Tables 7 and 8 can provide a starting point for such a job analysis.

9. Observation - On the whole, adjudicators feel they do good work and the adjudication process works well. Furthermore, they believe that investigators do a good job overall. Adjudicators feel that they are only one small, but important, part of the process and more attention should be focused on continuing evaluation efforts and security awareness at the activities.

10. Observation - Several adjudicators strongly felt that there is a problem with NACIs conducted by OPM. Many or most of those inquiries are never returned and OPM does not follow up on them.

Recommendation - This may or may not be a significant issue. It would seem prudent for PERSEREC to investigate this issue further. In the meantime it appears that adjudicators could use some policy guidance for interpreting unanswered inquiries in NACIs.

11. Observation - It appears that investigations are conducted in a timely manner and are processed quickly by PIC.

12. Observation - Investigators are rewarded for quantity of investigations, not quality. Several examples were given about cases that were closed despite some obvious holes in the investigation.

Recommendation - PERSEREC should examine the investigation process, especially the reward structure and performance appraisal process.

13. Observation - For the most part there appears to be a cooperative atmosphere within the three adjudication facilities. More experienced as well as less experienced adjudicators seem to feel comfortable asking for help and discussing difficult cases with peers and supervisors. There were several Air Force adjudicators who were exceptions to this observation. These adjudicators had the attitude that they were properly trained so they never needed assistance.

Recommendation - DoD may want to consider workshops in which adjudicators can discuss ambiguous or difficult cases. Through such workshops a more cooperative spirit may be fostered.

14. **Observation** - The adjudication process is rather unsystematic. With the exception of DMA, there does not appear to be any systematic method for reviewing cases and coming to a decision. Several adjudicators talked about the "whole person" concept, but beyond that most could not articulate the process well. This lack of a formal or recommended adjudication procedure may hurt the reliability with which adjudication decisions are made.

Recommendation - PERSEREC may want to investigate the possibility of developing decision aids to increase the reliability with which adjudication decisions are made. The appendix to this report includes a decision aid used by DMA that might be useful. It consists of a calendar and checklist that is used to lay out all parts of the investigation. It is a check to ensure all parts of the investigation are completed. Furthermore, it provides a vehicle for laying out and organizing potentially large amounts of data.

15. **Observation** - There would probably be some resistance to implementing decision aids because most adjudicators feel they do their job well without them. There would be particularly strong negative reactions to more sophisticated aids like expert systems.

Recommendation - PERSEREC should more formally examine the reliability with which adjudicators make decisions (e.g., through a policy capturing study) to determine whether this is so, and to what extent it is a problem. If adjudicators do not reliably make decisions, then work should begin on developing decision aids.

16. **Observation** - Personal biases have the potential for systematically distorting adjudicator decisions. Adjudicators make decisions regarding highly sensitive issues like sexual preference, alcoholism, drug use, and so on. To the extent adjudicators have strong feelings regarding such issues, they may not be able to evaluate objectively cases involving those issues. There are strong implications for the training and selection of adjudicators if these personal biases cause a problem.

Recommendation - PERSEREC should conduct research on the possible effects of biases on the adjudication decision.

17. Observation - Most adjudicators reacted positively to the notion of tightening personnel security. However, many adjudicators thought this could be accomplished more practically through increasing security consciousness and continuing evaluation than by granting conditional clearances or clearances of shorter duration in cases that are borderline.

Recommendation - PERSEREC should study the costs/benefits to the Services of granting conditional clearances or clearances for shorter time periods.

18. Observation - Most adjudicators felt that the scope of the investigations is appropriate. The more information available the better.

19. Observation - The revised adjudication guidelines in DoD Regulation 5200.2-R appear to be a step in the right direction. However, they are too new at this point to evaluate properly.

Recommendation - At some point in the future, PERSEREC should evaluate the adequacy of the adjudicative guidelines to see if they address all required areas. Revise such sections as necessary.

20. Observation - The Services have the option to write guidelines that complement and supplement 5200.2-R. It is not clear that revisions are contemplated at the Services. Army does not plan to supplement the regulation unless necessary. If Service regulations are published that interpret DoD guidelines, there should be an examination to ascertain DoD guidelines are interpreted consistently.

Recommendation - PERSEREC should review and analyze the Service adjudication guidelines to ensure consistency across Services.

21. Observation - There are many opportunities for supervisors to provide performance feedback to subordinates; however, many or most of the adjudicators reported

that they seldom received feedback. When they did, it was generally in the form of criticism, never positive.

Recommendation - Supervisors should be given training in providing performance feedback at times other than annual performance reviews.

22. **Observation** - Supervisors and managers had a good grasp of what the performance standards are. However, many adjudicators did not know what was expected of them. Furthermore, it appears that too much attention may be paid to quantity at the expense of quality, based on the adjudicators current understanding of their performance standards.

Recommendation - Performance standards and expectations should be clearly explained to adjudicators.

23. **Observation** - The adjudicators interviewed appeared to be highly motivated and dedicated and to take their jobs very seriously. It should be pointed out, however, that only 18 adjudicators were interviewed. Furthermore, these adjudicators were hand selected, not randomly selected, so that they may be unrepresentative of the population of adjudicators.

24. **Observation** - There is a strong desire on the part of adjudicators (especially in the Navy and Army) to receive training of all sorts. Related to the training issue is a concern over career advancement and enhancement.

Recommendation - PERSEREC should examine the career paths of adjudicators. Are adjudicators professionals, para-professionals or clerical employees? The adjudication job has aspects of all three and it appears that different adjudicators perceive their jobs differently.

Behavioral science research can help to define and improve the security clearance adjudication process. It is important, however, to keep in mind that adjudication is just one element in personnel security. The information considered by adjudicators, and hence the decisions they make, is greatly influenced by the security investigative process. Thus, research in these domains must be orchestrated well.

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APPENDIX

Decision-Aid Checklist Used by Defense

Mapping Agency Adjudicators

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

NAME:								SSN:				
YEAR	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
1989												
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ADJUDICATION CHECKLIST

DMA SUBJECT INTERVIEW	MILITARY RECORDS
TIME FRAME/SCOPE	FOREIGN CONNECTIONS
DPOB	FOREIGN TRAVEL
CITIZENSHIP	FOREIGN BORN
EDUCATION	NAC (CLASS PRINTS)
EDU REF (2)	SPOUSE NAC
EMPLOYMENT	OTHER NAC'S
EMPL REF	MEDICAL RECORDS
UNEMPLOYMENT	DIS SUBJECT INTERVIEW
LISTED REF	ORGANIZATIONS
DEV REF (3)	DIVORCE
NEIGHBORHOOD	UPDATED DD FORM 398
LAC(s)	SUPERVISORY 398 REVIEW
CREDIT	OTHER (SPECIFY)