(U//FOUO) Interview with... Deborah Maklowski, NSA/CSS Senior Intelligence Authority and IA Skill Community Advocate

FROM: SIGINT Communications
Unknown
Run Date: 06/01/2004

*(U//FOUO) Note from SIGINT Communications: Here's another chapter in our new "Interview With..." series. Today's interview is with **Deborah Maklowski, the NSA/CSS Senior Intelligence Authority and IA Skill Community Advocate** :*

- (U) What was your first job at the Agency?

(S//SI) My first cryptologic job was in the US Army. I signed up in 1978 to be a 98G/Polish Linguist, in the hope that it would get me to Europe. I first had to make brief stops in Alabama and Texas, but as a bonus, of course, I got the 47 weeks in Monterey (heaven!), and I did eventually wind up in what was then West Berlin, working at the US Field Station. There may have been better places than West Berlin to serve an INSCOM* tour in the late 70's, but there can't have been very many.

(S//SI) The work was extremely interesting, and the city behind the Wall was fascinating: all the benefits of living in a large, urban cultural center but curiously rural-feeling, with a river, several lakes, and even its own forest. Add to that the city's very real atmosphere of international intrigue, the moving and sometimes weird relics of post-war Germany, and the proximity of President Reagan's Evil Empire, and it was The Perfect Tour. When my enlistment was up in 1982, I was hired by NSA as a Polish Language Intern. I did two tours in what was then called A313 (and today isn't called anything, since we stopped working Poland as a target quite a while ago), one on the domestic political target and one on the military side.

(S//SI) My third tour was as the apprentice to the analyst working Polish Military Trade and Aid issues, where for the first time I got to do it ALL: manage my own targeting and collection, do the language work AND target analysis, report, disseminate, and do customer support. It was magic, and I liked it so much that when the analyst who was mentoring me took another position, I asked to be released from the intern program to take the job permanently. Since I'd met all my training objectives, had passed both parts of the PQE*, and had 4 years in the Army to meet the experience criteria, the program agreed to release me.

- (U) What is the biggest change you've seen at the Agency in your career?

(U//FOUO) For me, there are really two answers to that question. In my 21 years here, targets have come and gone; we've debated the regional-vs-topical issue through at least 4 major reorgs (and several more aborted ones); we've announced that RF is dead, only to discover that many of our enduring targets weren't informed; we've jettisoned Traffic Analysis and then had to reinvent it; and we've weathered the collapse of the Soviet Union, the birth of the European Union, and the removal of the beer machines in the cafeteria. But there are two changes that are so radical, so fundamental to the way we do business, that I believe they constitute seismic shifts in our organizational culture.

(U//FOUO) **The first of these is the advent of the desktop computer.** Yes, the digital telecommunications revolution is huge, too, but in fact I saw profound changes taking place in our work centers long before email, long before Al Gore invented that Internet thing, and they started the day the first IBM XTs were delivered to our office. With their 12" monitors, green letters glowing on a black screen (so that, if you looked up after working too long, everything in the room had a pinkish cast), and a graphics capability limited to what you could draw using punctuation marks, the space bar, and too much unstructured work time, those Stone-Age PCs nevertheless altered forever the way NSA analysts do work.

(S//SI) When I arrived here, there were a few desk-top terminals called Delta Datas, roughly

one for every 10 or so analysts, upon which they could type their reports. But all traffic was delivered and analyzed in hard copy or on magnetic tape; we still had to fill out cover sheets and sourcing data ("back sheets") by hand; and -- most astoundingly -- the report that you typed into the Delta Data went to a pool of typists who took your egram and transmitted it to the customers by RETYPING IT into the dissemination system. All ancillary SIGINT processes -- taskers and responses, target and policy research, operational notices and success stories, etc. -- were done in hardcopy and walked from place to place (or sent through a pneumatic tube system, like Macy's in the 1940s). And that was fewer than 20 years ago.

(S) **The second seismic shift is Transformation 2.0.** The "SIGINT as a Team Sport" concept -- that we can and should engage our customers and partners at very early stages in the analytic process; that, properly handled by a trusted workforce, a robust information sharing relationship can produce better intelligence; and that our ability to add value, not the need to produce a lot of egrams, should determine the point at which we share information -- is nothing short of revolutionary. When I arrived here in the early 80's, the immutable policy was that NO SIGINT information was to be shared with non-SIGINTers ever, under any circumstances, unless and until it was officially published in a recognized SIGINT reporting vehicle. In fact, as recently as 1999, when I was at the US Mission to the UN as the NSA Rep, there were several occasions in which the NSA analysts and I had to find "creative" ways to give the customer essential, just-in-time information that didn't too blatantly defy SIGINT dissemination policy. But the idea that an analyst might actually be able to call up one of the USUN political officers, for example, to get that expert's opinion on the true context or significance of a piece of unpublished SIGINT was still anathema.

(S//SI) Over the past few years we've made great progress in redefining our relationships with our customers, leaving behind the parental model ("Trust us: we KNOW what's good for you") in favor of one that looks more like the business world's provider-client relationship. In general, that's good, but in the SIGINT context, the provider holds a monopoly and the client has no choices, and we all know how well THAT works. Transformation 2.0., however, looks more like a business partnership, where each partner is valued for the unique contributions it brings to the table, where information is a tool, not a prize, and where the success of the enterprise is a shared responsibility. As this concept matures, it, too, will alter forever the way NSA analysts do their work.

- (U) What was the most memorable experience you've had during your career?

(U//FOUO) For this answer, see the recently posted "InSIDer's View of History" article entitled ["SIGINT Appearing in the Press"](#)

- (U) What is the biggest challenge facing your organization right now?

(S) Without a doubt, our biggest challenge right now is hiring, training, placing, and mentoring the Intelligence Analysis (IA) workforce that will see this nation through for the next 20 years. It's patently clear to every NSA manager in those places where IAs are employed that we simply do not have enough IAs to do the work that needs to be done. That's as true for the **REALLY REALLY** high priority missions like counterterrorism and WMD proliferation as it is for those that are just **REALLY** really high priority, like everything else. And it's as true in the field as it is at HQs. We've seen an increase in hiring over the past 3 years that has certainly helped us begin to close the gap, and as a result, we've brought in some truly remarkable talent, IAs who are making huge strides in advancing the state of our knowledge about our targets and how we prosecute them.

(S) But we're running a race against time, trying to hire the next generation of experts before the previous generation, which must train them, walks out the door, and there are unfortunately several natural limits to our ability to do this. Space is a big one: although the IA Skill Community has the luxury of being able to select from an extremely large pool of qualified, talented, and eager applicants, we could not possibly absorb at once all the people we need, even if we were given unlimited hiring points. Another natural limiter is the training process : the success of our IA intern program relies to a very large extent on the availability of experienced target and topic mentors to make each intern's tour in a given office an effective training experience. But the extremely high operational tempo in many offices, coupled with the overall shortage of senior IAs, limits the number of new employees you can introduce into any given workspace at any one time.

(S) As the Chief of the TransAsia Division (whose targets included Afghanistan) on 9/11, I saw first-hand what happens when an already too-thinly stretched analytic workforce is suddenly overwhelmed by the addition of many bright and highly motivated people who nevertheless need a lot of target training all at once: these new analysts are greatly disadvantaged by the overly slow OJT* pace, and their initial enthusiasm turns pretty quickly to frustration that they are not able to make the kinds of mission contributions they came to make. Other limiters include the National Cryptologic School's (NCS) resources, which limits its ability to offer required coursework; the number of people dedicated to handle IA recruitment and hiring (4, which includes 3 from my staff and 1 from MB2/Hiring and Recruitment); and the number of people on the IA Skill Community Director's staff to oversee the various IA training programs (interns, cross-trainees, MINSAPers, and so forth).

- (U) What is the most exciting project for the future that your org is undertaking right now?

(U//FOUO) We're working hard to answer the charge from the DCI* and the Director to develop a method for measuring the capability levels of our Intelligence Analysts. We've assembled a great team that includes Anne Wright, Pardee Lowe, and Beth Mackey from the NCS (all of whom are very experienced at this), my IA readiness expert ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ (who brings a thorough knowledge of NSA's current assessment processes and of the larger systems into which any future initiatives will need to fit), and recent IA intern program graduate ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ (who brings the essential perspective of someone who HASN'T worked here since the Flood and keeps us all honest), and we're making what I consider to be great strides.

(U//FOUO) This really is exciting work. I'm learning a great deal, working with some truly remarkable people, and heading for some important results. It doesn't get much better than that.

(U) Notes:
INSCOM = The U.S. Army's Intelligence and Security Command
PQE = Professional Qualification Exam
OJT = On-the-Job Training
DCI = Director of Central Intelligence

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