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1. DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION

a. TYPE	b. TITLE SEYMOUR, Sharon 7-29-2008
Oral History	

c. PAGE COUNT	d. SUBJECT AREA
26	National Security Personnel System History Project

2. AUTHOR/SPEAKER

a. NAME *(Last, First, Middle Initial)*	b. RANK	c. TITLE
Seymour, Sharon		Associate Director, Personnel Plans and Programs

d. OFFICE	e. AGENCY
NSPS Office	DoD

3. PRESENTATION/PUBLICATION DATA *(Date, Place, Event)*

July 29, 2008, Oral History Interview

4. POINT OF CONTACT

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5. PRIOR COORDINATION

a. NAME *(Last, First, Middle Initial)*	b. OFFICE/AGENCY	c. TELEPHONE NO. *(Include Area Code)*

6. REMARKS

CLEARED
For Open Publication

APR 2 1 2017   13

Department of Defense
OFFICE OF PREPUBLICATION AND SECURITY REVIEW

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Q: The topic of this interview is National Security Personnel System, NSPS. Today's date is 29 July 2008, the time is 2:09 p.m., location: Springfield, Virginia. I'm the interviewer, Senior Master Sergeant Al Garver from the Air Staff History Office, and the person to be interviewed is Ms. Seymour. Ms. Seymour, please give your full name, and please state the proper spelling.

A: OK. My first name's Sharon B., as in "boy," Seymour, S-E-Y-M-O-U-R.

Q: And what was your title as it related to NSPS?

A: NSPS? Let's see, I'm trying to think, because I had a couple jobs in the course of all this, and initially was the Associate Director of Personnel Policy on the Air Staff. And then we created an office that merged the civilian personnel policy division and the NSPS implementation division. And I was put in charge of that, and I was called then the Associate Director Personnel Policy for NSPS. At some point we moved to the Plans & Programs Directorate in A1, and that changed the title to Associate Director, Personnel Plans and Programs for NSPS.

Q: OK. (break in audio) Please give a brief overview of your

career and how you came to work on this program at the end

of it.

A: OK. I started working for the Air Force right out of

college as a social worker, but I got into Civilian

Personnel in 1978. Came up through the ranks and a variety

of disciplines in all areas of civilian personnl. PCS'd

all over the place with the Air Force, and I guess came

back to the air staff -- well, back to the Air Force Senior

Leader Management Office, as a matter of fact, in 2002. I

spent two years there, and then at the end of that moved

over into the Personnel Policy DC -- Or what was it called?

Directorate I guess, yeah.

Q: Was that in the Pentagon?

A: In the Pentagon. And that was, oh, a month or so after the

NSPS legislation had been signed. It was part of the

National Defense Authorization Act, for 2005 I think it

was. Yeah. So it was signed in November of 2004. So I

came over a month or so later with the idea that I would

run the shop. (Note: I had this a year off. NSPS

legislation was in the NDAA 2004, signed Nov 2003. SBS)

Q: Please describe how you helped design, implement, and then

eventually evaluate NSPS.

A: OK. The first six or eight months after the legislation was signed, I wasn't as involved with it. I was doing mainly the policy -- the legacy policy bit. I don't know who else has been talked to. Judy Mayrose, who's still on the staff there, would be a good person to talk to about the design. Because I was not directly involved in it at that point. I do, you know, know because of what I was working, what I was doing.

The OSD initially wanted to get the thing implemented, I mean, with the speed of light. They wanted to push it through very quickly. And the idea was that it had already been designed with the variety of best practices kinds of work that had been done for several years before that. People are always looking at how to improve personnel systems.

So they had a lot of research already done, a lot of ideas. And the political leadership had their ideas and their directions too. And then of course a couple things happened that put a bit of a kibosh on that. The NSPS legislation was not union-friendly. No surprise there. And the unions didn't like it; no surprise there. But then

the other part that I don't think OSD anticipated was that
the components, and the senior management and the
components, didn't much like being force-fed a personnel
system by OSD either. So Gordon England, who was the
Secretary of the Navy at the time, and was the designated
senior executive for NSPS, heard all the complaints and
called a so-called "strategic pause," to let the components
get on the train, get in on some of the design, look at
some of the things that had been proposed for
implementation. Get some participation from the field,
both management officials and non-management officials.
And, you know, do this the right way, if you will. And
that took until about the time that I started getting
directly involved with NSPS in the summer of 2004, I guess
it would have been. Yeah, summer of 2004.

And at that point we were getting together working groups
to flesh out the specific pieces of NSPS, the specific
areas. And DoD and we were very diligent I think on
getting participation from as broad a spectrum of -- for
us, of course, the Air Force -- as we could. You know,
some of that was, there are lots of good ideas out there in
the field, certainly we wanted to tap into them. We had

people that had been under so-called personnel

demonstration projects that were similar to NSPS in many

respects, and we could learn from their experiences.

Q: Were those designs specifically geared towards this, or

were those just stand-alone pilot projects just to see what

happens?

A: The other demonstration projects?

Q: Mm hm.

A: They were for the most part stand-alone projects. But of

course all of them had at some basis the idea that if it

worked for a certain group, that maybe it worked for other

people. You know. But -- well, for example, Acquisition

Demo was probably the biggest demonstration project that we

participated in the Air Force. That was a Department of

Defense-wide program, and it was only for acquisition

personnel, contracting folks. The labs -- the science

labs, research labs -- had one they called "Lab Demo," that

was purely for the scientists and engineers and the lab

environment. And there were others like that.

You know, so you could learn from them. Now, all of them

had been tweaked to fit their little population. But that

was part of the problem in Defense, too. I've forgotten

the numbers now, but they would quote how many different

personnel systems there were that covered civilians in the

Department of Defense, and it was an extraordinary number.

Fifty, sixty, something like that.

Q: Wow.

A: Yeah.   Which -- Because I think if you'd asked the average

employee or manager how many personnel system are there in

DoD, they'd say, "Two, military and civilian."   Well,

that's not even true.   Because the Army manages its

military members differently than the Air Force does it.

But it's certainly not true in the civilian side.

And, you know, in the age of regionalization and

centralization and downsizing support staffs and all that,

it was just getting to be an unmanageable burden on

everybody.   The personnel community couldn't deal with it

anymore.   It's one thing if you were at Podunk Air Force

base, and maybe you didn't have all these other things.   Or

you were at Wright Patterson Air Force Base, and you had

Lab Demo and Acquisition Demo and regular civil service,

but you had a big personnel office.   Or whatever.   You

know, in the Air Force in particular, we're looking to have

everyone serviced out of one location in Texas.   It gets to

be unmanageable for them to have to deal with all these
different variations on the theme.

And the other problem in that is, you have -- each of our
installations would have a bargaining unit, concerned with,
you know, the union-covered people. And there might be
little variations there, because some things were
negotiable. Some important things, some not-so-important
things. And you had to abide by all those rules. So all
of this was getting to be a real problem for the Department
of Defense. And then of course global War on Terror just
upped the anti for the system having to be responsive to
new and different needs for civilians.

So anyway, so we got a lot of these people from the field
that could bring these experiences in. And also, honestly,
that was to get some buy-in from the field. Because you
know how it is in the field -- the attitude the people have
toward the Air staff. That nobody there knows anything
about the real world. Well, that may or may not be true,
but at least if you have people from the field helping you
to design a system there's less of that. And it worked
very well.

Now, you know, as much challenge as we had in Air Force in
trying to get all our ducks in a row, then you have to look
at the whole Defense Department. And that was one of the
more educating things for me. As long a career as I'd had,
and as much as I'd worked with other departments and
defense agencies, I don't think I really grasped how
different we are in our approaches to everything. And that
had to be worked out. Because the powers-that-be that were
at the time -- you know, Mr. Rumsfeld and his immediate
people -- were taking a fairly centralized view on a lot of
things. A lot of the design, in their minds, was going to
be one design for the whole Department of Defense, but then
the managers out in the field would have all kinds of
discretion. And they kind of cut everything else out in
between -- the major commands, the component headquarters,
and whatnot. And that wasn't a particularly realistic view
of the world, probably. But it certainly wasn't getting
people on board, so we had to deal with that.

So, you know, a lot of time was spent -- grand schemes of
strategic, "What do we want this to do for us? How are we
going to manage our civilians using this?" Down to the

little nitpicky stuff, on, "How many people are we going to

refer on a staffing certificate?" You know, and it was

different groups of people looking at each of those things.

And we had participation on all of the committees varied

depending on the subject, and who we had, certainly.

Because they had to have manageable group sizes on these

design groups. You couldn't have 50 people and get

anything done.

Q: Right. What --

A: So it'd be a dozen or so, maybe, on each area.

Q: What was your specific area of expertise that you zeroed in

on and provided important --

A: Well, you know, from a technical standpoint, none honestly.

I mean, I was a generic civilian personnel type.

Q: OK.

A: So I didn't myself participate in any of the working

groups. That was action officer level stuff. My specific

participation was in groups -- like we had senior advisor's

group -- or a "SAG," as we called it -- that for the most

part was non-personnel people. Like for the Air Force we

had -- Now the names are going to escape me. I swear I

should have boned up on names. The three star female

general who's the AFMC Vice at the moment, she was the

Tinker commander, and she was on it.(Note: Lt Gen Terri Gabreski) We had a Air Force one star who was the DFAS -- number two I think it was -- that was on it. (BG Denny Eakle) We had a couple senior civilian managers on this group. And the other components had similar people. And I was the personnel rep, if you will.

Q: OK.

A: Because it was a SES GO-level group. And I was like the number three, behind Mr. Dominguez, who was the staff MR at the time, and Mr. Blanchard, Roger Blanchard, who was the A1 Deputy at the time. To go to the what they called the OIPT meetings, the Overarching Integrated Product Team meetings, that were the -- for the most part -- the decision-makers on options. Policy options, implementation strategies and things like that. And that was the DoD-wide group. So I knew about the specifics of some of the programs. And the people who were developing these things for the Air Force worked for me, but I was not personally involved in most of those design groups.

Q: OK.

A: As I say, they were typically people -- 14, GS 13, 14 level.

Q: One of the questions I'm supposed to specifically ask is,
      please discuss your relationship with OSD officials
      designing and implementing NSPS before, and then after that
      strategic pause, strategic engagement. Was there a --

A: (laughs)

Q: Could you tell the difference --

A: No.

Q: -- and if so what were the differences?

A: The personalities of different players entered a lot into
      relationships between the DoD staff and the components, and
      specifically the Air Force. And there was an individual
      who was -- I think she was in a political-appointee
      position -- who was the senior OSD civilian personnelist,
      who was doing her leader's bidding, and trying to jam
      through implementations of NSPS. It had been her approach
      in the past to not be a particularly democratic person when
      it came to these things. They were in charge and we
      weren't. (laughs) You know.

Q: You're retired, you don't have to be diplomatic anymore.
      (laughs)

A: I don't have to be diplomatic, yeah. She was a hard case,
      she was hard to get along with.

Q: I do have to ask you who that is.

A: It was -- Ginger Graber was her name.

Q: OK.

A: (laughs) I -- And, you know, I mean in fairness to her, as
    I say, she fell to that roll fairly naturally. But Mr.
    Rumsfeld's approach could be seen.

Q: Understood.

A: And everything else. The politicals were very -- the
    political-appointees -- were very interested in getting
    this thing implemented, one because they thought it was
    important to the Department, but two, before there was a
    chance for it to be torpedoed. And they were certainly
    right in that regard. I mean, I think some of the problems
    that we had with the labor unions, we would have had
    anyway. But some of them we had because, instead of maybe
    trying to get them onboard, we just tried to jam it through
    before they noticed. And that just made it worse.

Q: OK.

A: It didn't work. So, the relationships with OSD were what
    they had been with OSD historically, which is ...
    love/hate. (laughs)

Q: How long was there after the pause began before things
      started moving again? And what was it that finally got it
      moving again?

A: Well, they continued moving, they just didn't move toward
      implementation directly. It was -- the strategic pause was
      a busy time period. Because that's when a lot of -- all of
      these groups were meeting, when the design teams were
      meeting, to try to develop something that didn't just come
      off the shelf at OSD.

Q: OK.

A: So the implementation was put on pause until that was all
      done. And this is where I've got to think of time periods.
      That's where you need to talk to the people that are still
      working who have the archives, and haven't dumped this all
      out of their memory banks. But it seems to me that we
      started -- we put together an implementation schedule with
      the idea that we were going to start implementing -- in DoD
      generally, but in Air Force -- early in the calendar year
      of ... let's see, what would that be ... 2005. Yeah. I've
      got to make sure I've got my dates right. OK, yeah, the
      NDAA I guess was the 2004 NDAA. OK, I think I said it was
      -- I think I had that a year off, when I talked about it
      before. So that would have -- basically be that we were

going to get some implementation started just a little over
a year after the thing was signed. Which was a while. But
that's a big project to get going, too.

Now, that slipped also, because the performance management
system that was key to everything -- it was key to the pay-
for-performance, it was key to everything in NSPS -- didn't
pass muster with Mr. England when he was briefed on it.
And he at this point, I believe, was the -- you know
Undersecretary of Defense. But he still kept his NSPS
role. And basically said, "Go back to the drawing board
and bring me something that's not going to glaze over
everybody's eyes when we try to explain it to them."
Because it was so important to the whole thing. So that
slipped the implementation another few months. But from
legislation to implementation with the first gang was not
much more than 15 months or so. And that's fairly quick
for something that big.

Q: OK.

A: Yeah. Now, for us, we asked for volunteers, but we twisted
some arms to get some organizations to be in the first
wave, and Tinker Air Force stood up to being the biggest
single organization that went under NSPS for us. The Air

Force Audit Agency also agreed to do that, and then Mr.
Dominguez's immediate staff. He kind of had to practice
what he preached, so yeah. And they were our first group
to go. And then after that -- Air Force in particular --
we had a very aggressive implementation schedule.

Now, some of that was my and my staff's doing, a lot of it
was our leadership's doing, in that we all recognized that
a slow bleed was not the way to go on this. To try to get
people trained and going and keep the momentum up and get
it implemented. Because being half-in and half-out was
going to be a problem for everybody.

Now, it didn't work ideally, in that we still couldn't
bring the union people onboard because of the lawsuits and
whatnot. And we decided to go ahead -- the whole
department decided to go ahead -- with non-bargaining unit
people. But we just didn't want to have to negotiate
things -- the particulars -- with the unions. So that
meant that, you know, you had organizations where some
people were in and some people weren't. And that was a
little problematic. But we'd done that before. I mean,
with Acquisition Demo we'd done that, and other things. So

we thought it was a doable thing. And we got senior leadership support, and whatnot.

Q: Did you have people -- where you had those dual areas -- where you had non-bargaining unit/bargaining unit people -- did you ever have any circumstances of the bargaining unit people *siding* with the new system? Or did they always side with the union leadership.

A: Well, you know, that's an interesting question. Because I think once people got under NSPS and had the first payout -- which was, you know, for Tinker was -- well, the year after they went into it -- that sometimes people would say, "Hey, wait a minute." You know, "Maybe I could do better under this new system." So there was some of that. You always have people who figure out how to game the system. No matter what system there is, you've got people who can do that. And some people saw that, if you kept going in and out of NSPS -- which you could, depending on your jobs -- you could probably pick up some payouts and some pay increases that you wouldn't otherwise get, and whatnot. But that was -- There was a minimal amount of that. You know, money controlled a lot of craziness when it came to that.

And, you know, I think a lot of it -- I've noticed, even
after I've retired -- when I talk to friends that are still
there that were initially a little leery of it -- and were
supervisors, so their discomfort was as much as anything
with what they were going to have to do. And it's
considerable. That's hard work. But, you know, some of
them have done quite well from a money standpoint. You can
buy favor fairly easily.

But, so when you talk about evaluation, when I retired --
let's see, October of 2007 -- we had gotten everybody that
we were going to implement implemented. But we had not had
our first payout for a lot of those groups. And you really
-- You know, that's when a cycle is over with, and you go
through all the performance panel and whatnot reviews, and
then actually pay people. And that had only happened for
our initial group of organizations that had gone under
NSPS.

So I didn't have direct knowledge at that point of, "So
how's this working for everybody?" But, I mean, we had
some indications. They'd have to have the mock pay pools,
which you do at about the mid-year to make sure that you

don't have some real terrible problems, while you still
have time to fix them. And those were going fairly well,
considering it was the first time and it was new for
everybody. We had some initial evaluations to see whether
managers thought they were getting better lists of
candidates, or worst lists of candidates, and looking at
timeliness and all. Not enough though to come to any
conclusions. Because a new system's always hard for
everybody. Yeah. It takes a while to settle in.

Q: Well, I would think it would be interesting how it would
impact longevity and retainability too. You would think
that, if it was a better system, people were less likely to
go somewhere else.

A: Of course, you know, depending on where they are, there's
no somewhere-else to go.

Q: Right. And you're indicating…?

A: Here in Washington, absolutely. You know. And we've
always lost people to the civilian agencies in this area.
Because you can get more money.

Q: Shop.

A: Well, you can shop, and you can get more money for doing
less work in civilian agencies. You know, Defense is a
high bar, and we're a little tight with the money because

we've got other things to spend it on. So I -- you know,
will NSPS help us in that regard? I don't know if it will.
I mean, you can't -- you can only throw so much money at
people.

Q: Right.

A: And that doesn't work after a while either. What you can
do is have a little bit more flexibility in how you use
people and assign them, and that helps usually. So.

Q: How much did the military services have on the best
practices study described on the first page of the NSPS
regulations?

A: Quite a lot. Because that's been an effort that's been
ongoing for a number of years. And, you know, I've only --
I mean, some of this was going on long before I came back
to the Air Staff. And I've come and gone a couple times.
So, you know, it's been going on for at least 10 or 15
years.

Q: OK.

A: In one guise or another. And the Department's had a lot of
influence and play in that.

Q: How long were those pilot projects going on before --

A: Some of them were quite old, as I'm trying to think. The
    legislation that allowed agencies to have these
    demonstration projects was part of the Civil Service Reform
    Act in 1978.

Q: Wow.

A: Now, I'm trying to think. Some had come and gone. Some
    didn't work, and they were terminated. And I honestly
    don't remember how old -- Lab Demo and Act Demo are not
    that old. But they were 10 years, give or take, I think.
    You know, so they've been -- the Department of Defense in
    particular had had a lot of experience with so-called
    "alternate personnel systems." And making them work, and
    the reactions and the results had been largely positive.
    But, you know, it's painful to get used to it. It's
    painful to get people in, and it's painful to get good at
    it. And then it's fine. What was different about NSPS --
    and it was a huge difference -- was, the most people you
    could have under a demonstration project by law was 5,000.
    But, you know, we were trying to put at one point -- what,
    three hundred and some thousand white collar people under
    NSPS? And the entire department, you know, was twice that
    many people.

Q: Wow.

A: So that's just huge. And we'd had no experience with

     something like that. We'd had no experience with blue-

     collar employees under any kind of a demonstration project.

     And we had put the blue-collar folks off even before the

     union issues got to be a problem. Because if you can't

     bring in bargaining unit blue-collar people, you're down to

     just a few supervisors. And it wasn't going to be worth

     the effort anyway. At that point we didn't think -- But

     they were looking at it. Because some of the management

     wanted to have the flexibilities that they saw in NSPS for

     their trades and craft workforce too. Now, subsequent

     legislation has eliminated that possibility anyway, so ...

     So there were plenty of unknowns, but it wasn't totally

     virgin territory for the department, no.

Q: OK. Can you describe any other issues you think should be

     noted as historically-relevant to a study on the

     development of NSPS?

A: Others who had more experience with this might not agree,

     but I thought the level of involvement and cooperation

     among the components in DoD was significant. I mean, after

     our initial steps, and when some personalities changed --

     in other words, Ginger Graber left -- we got some different

     people in there, they set up the NSPS Program Executive

Office. You know, they took an acquisition model for

fielding this, and that worked pretty well. They got a

really good person running that shop. That was Mary Lacey,

who's just moved on. But she was an engineer with

acquisition experience. No personnel experience, but had

personal management experience with another demonstration

project, so she knew about it. Mr. England, you know, lent

his considerable expertise and weight to it. And I think

it got to be a really, really good way to hash out some

important issues. Not foolproof, obviously, but it seemed

to be good. And I think that could be part of what --

whatever the study is, is looking at is probably that.

Because it was a successful -- largely successful endeavor

I think.

Q: One question I always like to close with is, can you think

of any amusing or interesting anecdotes that would

illustrate a difficult or an unusual circumstance that you

ran into?

A: That's a hard one. You know, we did plenty of laughing

along the way, the specifics of which are probably gone,

and some of which you don't want to have them in writing

anywhere. (laughter) You know. And in our informal

discussion before this started I alluded to it. You know,

the lesson for management I think was, be careful what you

asked for. Because as long as I've been in personnel,

management has been critical to personnel system. I mean,

that's the nature of the beast. General Brady, when he was

the A1, said, you know, being the Director of Personnel

means never having to say, "You're welcome."

Q: Wow.

A: But that's an appropriate way. And I think that, in an

effort to give management more flexibility in the use of

their workforce, we overestimated their willingness to take

on the responsibility that had to come with that. That's

not a funny anecdote, but I mean that's just something that

was a little disappointing when it worked out. But, you

know, I mean geez, in the same token we say we need this

system because there's a war on, but then there's a war on

so you don't have time to do things. So it was kind of

catch-22 in that regard. But yeah, I'm afraid I don't have

any big yucks from the NSPS train. The union had some

interesting things on their website. You know, being a

little freer to say what they want to in a public space.

And there's a commercial for something that they adopted

and amended for NSPS. And the commercial shows an airplane

in flight, and all these mechanics are working on the

airplane as it's flying. And they were saying, you know,
this is what we're trying to do with NSPS. And we thought,
yeah, that's true. I mean, we can't stop, retool, and
start again.

Q: You can't do it on the fly.

A: You gotta do it on the fly.

Q: Was there anyone that was capturing or archiving any of
those items relating to the unions and the challenges that
we should contact?

A: Huh. Because you had to be a little careful with that,
because you didn't want it to be an exhibit in the court
case against you. So ... The best person would be a DoD
person. I don't know if you'd want to contact him. His
name's Tim Curry, and he was the senior labor guy in the
PEO, and now in the OSD staff. And he was with it from the
very start. Carmen Livoti -- L-I-V-O-T-I -- is the Air
Force Labor Relations Officer, she might have some of this
(inaudible).

Q: OK, great.

A: We -- as I say, we had to be very careful on archival kinds
of practices, both to have what we *should* have -- to have
what we would be expected to have in a discovery kind of a
situation -- and not to have things that could be used

against us. The good news there was DoD was the target for

the lawsuit and we were just supporting players. But that

could change if you're stupid.

Q: Right. Well, you actually just answered my other last

question, is name some other names of relevant people you

think should be interviewed. Is there anybody else?

A: OK. Yeah, Judy Mayrose, who is the Chief of Civilian

Personnel Policy. She worked for me when I was working,

and she's a division chief in A1/APP now.

Q: OK.

A: Carmen works for her. Judy was involved with this from the

Air Force from the start. Plus she was involved with all

the best practices things earlier. She's been on the Air

staff for years.

Q: OK.

A: For years and years. So she'd be a very good source.

Q: OK. How do you spell her last name?

A: Mayrose. M-A-Y-R-O-S-E.

Q: OK.

A: And she's the only Mayrose in the Global.

Q: Anything else before we finish up that you can think of

that you'd want to get down on tape?

A: I -- You know, it was a great way, just on a personal

    basis...working NSPS was a great way to end a career. It

    was a little discouraging, in that subsequent legislation

    has, you know, weakened it. And if we have -- well, we'll

    have an administration change. If we have a party change,

    they're liable to try to kill it off. And that would be

    too bad. That would be throwing the baby out with the

    bathwater. Because there's a lot of goodness there. And

    you hate to see all the effort that's been put into trying

    to make this work wasted. But nothing's perfect, it's all

    a journey.

Q: Nope. Well thank you very much for your time today.

A: Well thank you.

Q: And I appreciate your taking the time to come out.

A: Thank you, that's --

End - NSPS-003 Ms Sharon Seymour