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The topic of this interview is National Security 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.

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

And what was your title as it related to NSPS?

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 Al, 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 personnel. 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.
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?


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