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R.C.M.P. SECURITY SERVICE  
"A" OPERATIONS (SECURITY SCREENING)

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R.C.M.P. SECURITY SERVICE,  
"A" OPERATIONS (SECURITY SCREENING)

"A" Operations is the branch of the R.C.M.P. Security Service which is responsible for investigating, for security clearance purposes, all applicants and employees of the Public Service of Canada and persons employed in the private sector, who are required to have access to classified information or material in the performance of their duties, with the exception of members and employees of the Department of National Defence (DND) who are subject to separate DND investigations.

There are a number of statutes and executive orders which relate to the security screening responsibility of the R.C.M.P. The duties of the R.C.M.P. are detailed in sections 17(3), 18 and 21 of the R.C.M.P. Police Act (S.C. 1959, C. 54), and Section 44(e) of R.C.M.P. Regulations (1960), which were proclaimed by the Governor-in-Council under the R.C.M.P. Act, sets out additional duties to be carried out - "to maintain and operate such security and intelligence services as may be required by the Minister". In relation to the investigation, for security screening purposes, of separatists and supporters of the Parti Quebecois, such authority was given by the Cabinet Committee on Security and Intelligence on 27 May 1976 (see attached letter from the Director General dated

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10 June 1976). There is no written policy which authorizes the Security Service to screen applicants for either Canadian citizenship or Canadian Certificates of Identity.

The relevance of security to the granting of Citizenship was considered by the Interdepartmental Committee on Security and Intelligence (ICSI) at a meeting held 3 December 1973 and by the Cabinet. On recommendation of the ICSI the Cabinet decided that security should remain a factor pending further study by ICSI (the details surrounding this are outlined in the minutes of the Security Advisory Committee of 2 April 1974, item V - see attached). There is no record of this matter having received further study by ICSI; however, the security screening of applicants for Canadian Citizenship is implicit in Section 18(1) of the Citizenship Act, passed 16 July 1976, which states ".....a person shall not be granted citizenship.....if the Governor in Council declares that to do so would be prejudicial to the security of Canada or contrary to public order in Canada".

In relation to Certificates of Identity, it is not known when it was first decided that applicants for these Certificates should be screened; however in 1956 the Interdepartmental Committee on Certificates of Identity was established and at its first meeting held 16 August 1956 the policies, procedures and rejection criteria relative to the screening of such applicants were revised. At that meeting it was established that "the R.C.M.P. would address their reports, in cases where they had adverse information of some

kind on applicants, to the Chairman of the Committee....."  
(see attached minutes of that meeting). We have continued to screen applicants for Certificates of Identity in accordance with that directive.

The primary document relating to security screening, however, is Cabinet Directive number 35, a 1963 unclassified document entitled Security in the Public Service of Canada. Paragraph eleven of that document explicitly defines the functions of the investigative agency as being "to conduct promptly and efficiently such investigations as are requested by departments or agencies to assist them in determining the loyalty and reliability of the subject of investigation; and to inform departments and agencies of the results of their investigations in the form of factual reports in which the sources have been carefully evaluated as to the reliability of the information they have provided".

This document goes on in paragraph fourteen to state "Where an applicant for employment in the public service, as opposed to a person already employed, is being considered for appointment to a position requiring access to classified information and doubt has arisen as to his suitability for such access, the following courses of action

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may be taken with a view to resolving that doubt:

(a) further specific investigation may be requested of an authorized investigative agency; or (b) the department or agency may at any time seek the advise of the interdepartmental Security Panel".

"A" Operations then has a "service" function in that we service customer's needs by conducting such investigations as may be needed to enable our customers to arrive at a considered judgement of a candidate's loyalty and reliability. We investigate, advise and recommend, but the final decision as to the granting or withholding of a security clearance rests with the employing department.

There are three classifications for which a security clearance is required - Confidential, Secret and Top Secret. Persons requiring clearance to those levels are required to complete a personal history form (copy attached) for a check of subversive records and submit fingerprints for a check against criminal records. All persons being cleared to Top Secret standards must be the subject of a field investigation. A check of subversive and criminal indices is sufficient for a clearance to Secret and Confidential although an investigation may be made in the case of Secret clearances at the request of the employing department or if we feel that enquiries are needed to up-date, clarify or verify available information. Field enquiries usually bring the

investigator into contact with character references, friends, neighbours, former employers, educational institutions, credit bureaus and, of course, established sources. The majority of cases are routine in nature and consist of a simple check of records for clearance to the Confidential and Secret levels. Approximately 70,000 cases are processed annually, 5% of which require field investigations.

There are cases, however, which require special attention because we have "adverse traces" which may require analysis and possible clarification. The question as to what kinds of information might be considered adverse in relation to security suitability is an exceedingly difficult one to assess. In a rapidly changing society, activities and ideologies which were once considered undesirable are now acceptable, while new kinds of activities, terrorism and violent confrontations for example, were, relatively speaking, unheard of a few years ago. Attitudes and values are changing, and "A" Operations must respond to such changes in spite of the absence in some instances of clear and definitive terms of reference.

A new Cabinet Directive to replace Cabinet Directive number 35 has been drafted and is now awaiting Cabinet approval. This Directive contains new and more definitive rejection criteria which will greatly facilitate the analysis and decision-making processes in arriving at a determination of a candidate's apparent loyalty and reliability. It states - "A personnel security clearance must

not be granted to a person whose loyalty is in doubt because there are reasonable grounds to believe the person:

- (a) is or has engaged in, or is planning to engage in, or
- (b) is, or has been, a member of an organization or, by his/her words or actions, supports or supported an organization engaged in, or planning to engage in:
  - (i) acts of espionage or sabotage;
  - (ii) activities directed toward gathering intelligence relating to and contrary to the best interests of Canada;
  - (iii) activities directed toward accomplishing governmental change within Canada and elsewhere by force or violence or any criminal means;
  - (iv) activities directed toward actual or potential attack or other hostile acts against Canada;
  - (v) activities directed toward the commission of terrorist acts in or against Canada;



- (vi) activities evidencing a commitment to an ideology, a cause, a movement or a foreign interest detrimental to, or directed toward the subversion of democratic government, institutions or processes as they are understood in Canada, and
- (vii) activities directed toward the creation of civil disorder in relation to any of the activities referred to above.\*

Most of these activities are fairly straight forward and not too difficult to assess. Obviously if an individual is known or suspected of having engaged in acts of espionage or sabotage, or being a member of a subversive or terrorist organization, he should not be granted a security clearance. What is difficult to assess in relation to political activities is the degree of commitment to, or the rationale supporting such activities. We sometimes find that certain actions which, on the surface, appear sinister and of security concern, are nothing more than a reflection of misplaced idealism

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\*These criteria have not yet been approved by Cabinet and are subject to change.



or an ill-considered attack against the so-called "establishment". Some people find themselves drawn into associations or activities which seem harmless at the outset but which can escalate beyond their control. It can be difficult at times to differentiate between normal, healthy dissent on the one hand, and subversion or clandestine influence on the other.

Adding to the complexity of these situations is the lack of guidelines for analyzing these cases. In many instances a final analysis or assessment must be based solely on instinct and reasoning which has been derived from years of experience in the field of analysis and/or passed down the line from supervisor to trainee. The possible ramifications involved if an incorrect assessment is made are obvious and need not be dwelt on at any length here. But those ramifications emphasize the importance of ensuring that the correct steps are taken to ensure that we assess a case correctly. Our primary concern is an obvious one - being absolutely certain that the information we have unequivocally pertains to the subject and/or relative and/or associate. This involves a great deal of research into each case with many cases being referred to our field units with instructions that an investigator contact certain established sources (usually those who have given the information) in order to have them provide some form of identifying data (usually biographical in nature)

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concerning the person on whom they have provided the information. We must ensure that that identifying data actually applies to the person with whom we are concerned. Some cases involve a prolonged exchange of correspondence between the field and "A" Operations until we are certain that we have the necessary identification. The fact that some investigators in the field do not fully appreciate security screening requirements and the consequence of error only adds to the complexity of the analysis and decision-making processes.

A primary concern in cases where a close relative and/or friend is involved is ensuring that all information has been gathered with regard to the influence, relationship and association factors. This is also done at the field level if, after analyzing the information on file, a determination cannot be made. Essentially each of these factors may be described in the following fashion - influence - what possible influence would the person on whom we have adverse information have on the subject. This factor is greatly determined by the relationship factor. Here we must consider what the relationship is - is it one of consanguinity or solely friendship. The influence a son would have on his mother or father may be minimal but the influence he might exert on his spouse or his brother/sister could be significant. Furthermore, a very close friend may influence the subject into following

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some political ideology. This type of case is common when dealing with university students who have become politically active during their university days. Under the association factor we must ask what association has the subject had with his family or friends in the past several years. The son who has resided away from home for an appreciable length of time is not now likely to be influenced by his father's communist leanings. We have just recently discontinued conducting overseas records checks on close relatives in cases where the influence, relationship and association factors are considered insignificant. The Deputy Director General (Operations), Security Service, stated in his memorandum to "Security Officers of All Departments and Agencies" dated 25 October 1978 that "As you know, paragraph 6(b) of Cabinet Directive No. 35 refers to the degree of influence that might be exerted on the subject through family or other close continuing relationships with persons likely to induce the subject to knowingly or unknowingly act in a manner prejudicial to the safety and interest of Canada. We are of the opinion that unless it can be shown there is a 'close continuing relationship' between the subject and his relatives abroad, and the degree of influence they might exert upon the subject could be a significant factor in relation to his security suitability, there should be no need to routinely seek a check of the relatives".

There are two other factors which must be considered before a final determination can be made.

The motivation factor is concerned with such questions as what caused an individual to join a certain organization or adopt a certain philosophy? Possible peer pressure could be the answer as opposed to a genuine interest in the movement. The final factor, the commitment factor, is concerned with the extent to which a person will go to uphold his philosophies - is he willing to become violent to further his organization's goals? Does he have just a passing interest which will eventually fade or is he likely to make this a lifetime commitment?

In relation to reliability, the new Cabinet Directive states: "A personnel security clearance must not be granted to a person whose reliability is in doubt because the person may be indiscreet or vulnerable to blackmail or coercion as a result of:

- (a) features of character such as those relating to greed, indebtedness, sexual behaviour, alcohol or drug abuse, mental instability or criminal activity; or
- (b) family or other close relationship with
  - (i) persons who are persons as described above, or

- (ii) persons who are living in countries whose governments may use such relationship for purposes prejudicial to the safety or security of Canada;

unless, after careful consideration of the circumstances, including the value of the person's services, the risk involved seems justified in the opinion of the deputy head.\*

It is in relation to assessing reliability from a character weakness point of view that we are often confronted with difficult decisions. This kind of information can only be uncovered through field investigations by interviewing persons who are knowledgeable of the subject, are willing to assist us, and are objective in their appraisals. We sometimes find that information is offered out of malice, vindictiveness or jealousy, and occasionally information is based on gossip, rumour or hearsay, or is exaggerated out of proportion. Thus it is necessary to carry out a very searching and penetrating inquiry to ensure that the information we are given is accurate and factual and that the sources are knowledgeable and well intentioned. Furthermore, it is often difficult to assess the significance of our information in relation to the

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\*These criteria have not yet been approved by Cabinet and are subject to change.

degree of risk or the extent to which that information could be used to compromise an employee occupying a sensitive position. For example, indebtedness is not too significant provided it is manageable and the employee is able to meet his obligations. However, when that employee finds himself in difficulty, with creditors closing in on all sides, he does present a potential security problem. We have a number of cases in which persons have been persuaded to co-operate with foreign intelligence services in order to improve their financial situation. Similarly, the permissive society in which we live renders security assessments much more difficult. Homosexuality and common-law relationships for example are considered more acceptable today than say five years ago. When such activities or associations are known or declared, the risk factor is negated or at least minimized; however, if there is any possibility of coercion or blackmail, the risk factor increases accordingly. The same can be said about illicit sexual relationships - the businessman or government official who succumbs to temptation during a visit to a communist country and finds himself confronted by the local security authorities who just happen to have the whole scene recorded on film. These kinds of situations, although they can be quite crude and heavy handed, can be most effective when blackmail is threatened. If the victim declares his indiscretion,



the possibility of compromise is greatly reduced. If not, he is certain to find himself in difficulty.

Alcohol or drug abuse can cause a person to be indiscreet or vulnerable, but again it is a question of degree. Certainly the alcoholic or the drug addict can present a very real security problem, but so can the weekend party-goer who becomes talkative after one or two drinks and likes to impress others with the importance or sensitivity of his position.

As a consequence, our inquiries must be as thorough as possible. If we are told, for example, that someone is an alcoholic, a gambler or is promiscuous, we cannot accept that information at face value and must seek clarification, elaboration and verification to be able to properly assess the source and evaluate the information.

An additional problem which now confronts us in relation to these kinds of inquiries results from the fact that society seems to be becoming increasingly impersonal, and we find that neighbors no longer know one another as intimately as before. The mobility of large segments of our population, the transient nature of the work force, the independence of high rise apartment dwellers all combine to make our inquiries increasingly difficult. It is not unusual to find neighbors of long standing who know little or nothing about the people next door.



As one of the major authorities on security screening, "A" Operations is consistently reviewing screening standards and requirements, and seeking new ways to improve the quality of its services. The recent changes instituted in relation to overseas records checks have already been cited in the above paragraphs. At the present time we are attempting to achieve a more effective personnel security program by altering the methodology whereby field investigations are being carried out.

In the past, field investigations have routinely included confirmation of the candidate's educational standing, previous employments, character and credit which are of more relevance to the staffing process than to security clearance. Consequently, it has been proposed that Departmental Staffing Officers assume those responsibilities, and that Departmental Security Officers become more personally involved in security clearance procedures. On 26 September 1978 the Director General, Security Service forwarded to the Chairman, Security Advisory Committee, the following proposal:

- (1) The Employing Department will
  - (a) Interview each candidate for  
Top Secret security clearance to  
obtain personal information about  
his character, background, atti-  
tudes and interests upon which

may be made an assessment of his probable loyalty and reliability. During the interview, the candidate will provide the names and particulars of three close associates (other than listed references).

- (b) Confirm bona fides of candidates by writing for confirmation, recommendation or comment from listed references, place of education and/or former employment. A credit check should be made if such is deemed necessary.
- (c) Submit Personal History Form, with particulars of associates attached, and fingerprints for check of appropriate R.C.M. Police records.
- (d) If adverse or doubtful information is revealed on interview, forward to the Security Service the results of the interview together with any useful comment. This should include a brief description of the subject's position as it relates to Top Secret material.

(2) Upon referral, the Security Service will

- (a) Interview at least two of the listed associates.
- (b) Conduct a field enquiry to determine the probable loyalty and reliability of the candidate and to confirm, qualify or elaborate on any adverse or doubtful information.
- (c) Interview the candidate when necessary to successfully complete the enquiry.

In concluding his proposal, the Director General pointed out that implementation of this proposal will:

- (a) Eliminate routine enquiries of questionable value;
- (b) Facilitate earlier conclusion of investigations;
- (c) Provide the department with more meaningful and relevant information upon which to evaluate each candidate's probable loyalty and reliability;

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- (d) Permit Security Service to  
employ its limited resources  
to greater advantage on  
national security operations,  
thereby expanding our records  
data base.

As will be noted in the attached structural chart, "A" Operations has an establishment of forty, including twenty regular members, fourteen civilian members and six public servants. Routine screening enquiries are attended to by the civilian members while the more complex investigations are controlled by regular members. The analysis and brief writing functions are performed by the senior experienced members.

There are five sections - sections A1 and A2 which handle the screening requests from government departments with each section having its own briefing unit. Section A3 is responsible for R.C.M.P. personnel screening and handling screening requests from foreign agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the British Security Service. This section also handles the screening of Citizenship and Certificate of Identity applicants.

Section A4 is basically the briefing section which handles information which is either separatist or terrorist in nature. This section is staffed by fluently

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bilingual members as many of the files they handle have emanated from the Quebec Area Command of the Security Service and are written in the French language. Section A5, another briefing section, handles information which would indicate either character weakness or deviant behaviour (homosexuality).

Job classification had a serious impact on "A" Operations. Following the original classification on 28 July 1975, the branch was re-organized in order to improve effectiveness and efficiency. This was to be accomplished by implementing structural changes, refining procedures and reporting relationships, increasing the number of responsibility centres and involving more members in the decision-making process. As a result of those changes, it was possible to reduce the establishment by five regular member positions.

Upon re-classification in May 1976, however, the branch lost three Staff Sergeant positions, six Sergeant positions and one Corporal position. This had the consequence of almost depleting the Branch of its senior, experienced members. At the present time, most of those members in briefing positions are inexperienced and lack the knowledge required to provide the various departments with the quality of briefs that are necessary. As a result a heavy burden is shared by the very few qualified personnel left in the Branch.

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Contributing to this problem is the fact that "A" Operations has long been used as a "training ground" for new recruits into the Security Service. The recruit is brought in to familiarize him with the functions of the Security Service and perhaps one year later he is posted to another area. Consequently, "A" Operations is unable to build up a bank of experienced personnel.

Another problem has been the employment of junior, inexperienced members on security screening investigations in the field. Security screening investigations have long been considered a menial task by members of the Force because they are routine and lacking in challenge. Consequently senior personnel have tended to avoid this work and it has become the job of junior investigators. This results in a lower quality of investigation because the expertise of the senior investigator is lacking.

Although the importance of security screening is readily acknowledged by all concerned, security screening investigations are seldom viewed with any degree of enthusiasm by the general membership, a fact which is often reflected in the quality of the investigations. This matter is currently under study, and every effort will be made to bring about the attitudinal and behavioural changes necessary to improve the image of security screening duties. The previously mentioned proposal relative to field investigations which is presently before the Security Advisory Committee will do much to enhance the

role of the investigator and should result in a more efficient and effective security clearance program.

Security screening is one of the most visible, positive functions the Security Service performs and the consequence of error, not only in relation to national security but to the rights and welfare of the person being reported upon, can be severe. It is therefore essential that only the most qualified, experienced and mature personnel should be employed in the collection, analysis and dissemination functions to ensure that "A" Operations can provide the best security screening service possible.