

or key documents related to particular policy issues or operational problems.

The Desk Officer Group

31. The three most important aspects of desk jobs appear by consensus to be; coordination of Canadian activities in the designated area of responsibility; liaison with posts (with some post management, e.g. Country Programming in the Geographic Bureaux); and policy formulation.

32. The normal pace of events causes the first two to dominate while the time for the reflection and analysis necessary to policy formulation tends to be squeezed to a minimum. The thrust of the desk job is usually operational which leads some to suppress the desire for more reflective/analytic work. Unfortunately, analytic work that is carried out is hindered by the difficulties experienced through filing problems such as slow retrieval response time, "basket" filing which results in large volumes of unwanted, irrelevant material obscuring the few desired items, and poor classification decisions resulting in individual items or whole subjects being incorrectly filed. This situation discourages the desk officer from making any more than minimum use of the Registry, thus widening the gap between him and the analyst looking after his area of responsibility. Furthermore, the Classification Guide becomes less well used and is surprisingly unknown to large sections of the Department. Few officers considered that training in filing techniques and registry facilities was adequate, and many admit that their knowledge of the Registry and its services is practically non-existent. This is another factor in the very low utilization of Departmental files.

33. On the other hand, in spite of lack of training in filing, classification, etc., nearly all desk officers in defence against the adverse environment have developed highly operational sets of working files. These vary from well organized, comprehensive files to very informal 'project' files consisting of selected key documents, with no pretense at comprehensiveness. While no doubt providing a valuable working tool, these files are nonetheless highly personalized and generally not usable by successors unless reorganized. Although the percentage of time spent organizing and maintaining these files is not too great it is time lost to other more productive work. The working files tend to reach back one to one-and-a-half years, which is what one would expect when average assignments in Ottawa are from two to three years. Unfortunately, when related to the fact that relatively little use is made of the Registry files, it becomes evident that an alarming trend is developing, such that problem solutions tend to be based on a reducing time depth, and in some cases only off the 'top of the head' and the latest telegram. While this is understandable, given the support deficiencies and rotational service, and in some cases is valid for the particular situation, the danger does exist that this approach could become the norm for all problems, particularly for younger officers who will have known no other method. This tendency towards a lack of operational historical perspective was further shown in the survey by the most important information sources identified by desk officers. Along with working files were cited telegrams, newspapers and colleagues, all very current sources, the Registry usually being ranked as lying between a very poor third to sixth source. This was highlighted even more by reported differences in average use for working files, four to six times per day as opposed to four to six times per month for the Registry. Operational imperatives will