SECRET//COMINT//REL TO USA, AUS, CAN, GBR and NZL//X1

(U) Cryptologic Almanac 50th Anniversary Series

(U) The Formation of NSOC

(C//REL) On 15 April 1969, the North Koreans shot down an American EC-121 reconnaissance aircraft over the Sea of Japan, an event reported in a CRITIC issued by _____ Back at NSA, where it was the middle of the night, General John Morrison, assistant director for production, was called in to coordinate the NSA response. _____ which oversaw _____ had a crisis response center (CSOC) with analysts on the scene already coordinating a response based on the Soviet _____ _____ responsible for the _____ had no such organization and had to call in day analysts. By 0330 CSOC had written a report based on the _____ but the _____ _____ reports were not yet complete. General Morrison raced back and forth between the different _____ offices to try to assemble the complete story. It took another hour and a half to get the story straight and to issue a follow-up to the CRITIC. After this frantic night, Morrison vowed to consolidate NSA's crisis and warning facilities into one organization in order to avoid future chaos such as that which he had just endured.

(S//SI//REL) But NSA had a long history of resistance to such an idea. When the Agency was formed in 1952, it inherited from its predecessor organization a watch office, the closest organization to NSOC in existence at the time. Under the responsibility of the Production (PROD) organization, the watch office had originally been created to provide round-the-clock crisis coverage during the Korean War. Renamed the PROD Watch Office (PWO), it was staffed by two officers and a group of enlisted personnel arranged into four shifts. The PWO staff manned their positions 24 hours a day, but did little real analysis, relying on called-in day workers when crises arose. While various proposals were made to place the Watch Office on the director's staff and endow it with the authority to make after-hours decisions, none were adopted. By 1958 the PWO had grown to seventeen people, both military and civilian. Its responsibilities had expanded to include daily intelligence briefings and monitoring NSA CRITIC handling, including placing proper addressees on CRITIC messages.

(S//SI//REL) In spite of the PWO, during a crisis different Agency elements would set up their own local watch areas. Such a unit was organized to support the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. At the same time, DIRNSA, General Gordon Blake, realized he did not have any sort of command post to monitor the unfolding events of this crisis in which NSA was playing a significant role and ordered one to be created. Blake's Command Center was located near both the PWO and the communications center with telephone lines to both. The Command Center's senior officer was authorized to act for the assistant director for

production during nonduty hours. The NSA Command Center was made permanent on 1 March 1963, but once again subordinated to PROD. The PWO was absorbed by the Command Center.

(S//SI//REL) Unfortunately, the Command Center was no more successful than the PWO. The head of the Command Center did not represent the director, only the assistant director for production. Therefore, if significant decisions had to be made during nonbusiness hours, other deputy directors were still called in. Further, the various analytic offices refused to provide staff to the Command Center, preferring to maintain their own watch centers or call in day analysts when crises arose. Local watch centers continued to be established in response to crises. The North Korean capture of the PUEBLO and the Tet Offensive in Vietnam in 1968, for example, each spawned a new crisis center. Thus, the Command Center never became what its founders had envisioned. After all the crises of the late 1960s, and especially after the EC-121 aircraft shootdown, the need to consolidate Agency watch operations and to have someone available during nonduty hours to speak for the director became apparent.

(U) It took three years of debate and disagreement after the EC-121 incident before the National SIGINT Operations Center was formed. General Morrison, who led the fight, wanted this new center to be "a single facility from which to conduct the production and dissemination of current SIGINT information." There was a great deal of resistance because none of the offices outside A Group wanted to release power to an office that appeared to them to be A-controlled. Morrison still charged ahead with the plan and was ultimately successful. Chartered in summer 1972, NSOC was to "act as an authoritative and responsive interface on current SIGINT product and service both between SIGINT users and producers and between various producer organizations." The head of NSOC, the Senior Operations Officer (SOO), represented the director and had true command responsibilities. NSOC went into operation that December.

(U) Few individuals hired since the 1972 founding of NSOC can imagine the Agency without it. NSOC has truly become the "Nerve Center of NSA," as it proudly proclaims itself on its NSA home page. Yet, it took twenty years and several crises to overcome the opposition to its formation.

(U) Author's note: NSOC was renamed the National Security Operations Center in 1996.

(U) Sources:
Hatch, David A. "NSA's first NSOC," *Cryptologic Almanac*, 13 March 1995.
Johnson, Thomas R. *American Cryptology during the Cold War, 1945-1989*. NSA: The Center for Cryptologic History, 1995.

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