



(U) Thoughts on 'Breaking an Old Reporter's Heart'

FROM: Cindy M. Farkus

NSA/CSS Senior Intelligence Authority and Asst. Deputy Director for A&P (S2)

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(U//FOUO) *How to improve the SIGINT report-editing process?*

(U//FOUO) Anyone who has ever written SIGINT reports probably cringes when they hear someone use the phrase "just a reporter" or "just an editor" to describe an intelligence analyst. I know I do. And I am sure many empathized with [REDACTED] [recent SID today article](#) and subsequent discussion on the SID *today* blog that shed light on critical issues facing our community of intelligence analysts, especially the editing/feedback process. Personally, I want to share my three take-aways.

(U//FOUO) First, **the Intelligence Analysts who work as "reporters" throughout the SIGINT system are critical assets for our nation that continuously add value to our products and services.** They are just as important to the SIGINT process as the incredible technology that enables the acquisition of information, the tools used to process and analyze the information, and the linguists that transcribe and translate the data. The notion that "anyone can be a reporter" is simply not true. In addition to requisite writing skills, whether we realize it or not, every report we publish requires a great deal of analysis - even if we do not use a sophisticated tool or technique to assist that analysis. The very act of determining whether a body of traffic is reportable is an analytical act. More importantly, the task of presenting that information in a logical and useful way that enables our decision makers to make the right decisions for the nation is a true art form. If SIGINT reporting involved the mere recitation of information in a transcript, then yes, "anyone" could be a reporter. However, anyone who has written SIGINT products knows that reporting goes well beyond fact documentation.

(U//FOUO) Similarly, **analysts who have the responsibility of editing and releasing SIGINT reports are also valued assets for the nation.** Editors need to do much more than proofread or change "happy" to "glad" because it "sounds better" - they need to look at each product holistically, review the traffic and provide quality control of the analysis, review the presentation of the analysis and ensure that the product delivers its message with impact. Then, most importantly, the editor must ensure that the author understands the rationale for every change deemed necessary (more on that in a minute). Clearly, this is not an easy task and each work center should ensure that their local editors understand the critical nature of their responsibilities, that the work of editors is valued, and the need to mentor and nurture the reporters of the future.

(U//FOUO) Finally, [REDACTED] article described how many reporters are becoming discouraged because of the poor or non-existent feedback they are receiving from their editors. **It is imperative that we eliminate this kind of behavior and develop an editing process that benefits the overall product and nurtures the junior reporters at the same time.** The senior reporters' class under development will help with this. One of the suggestions posted on the SID *today* blog encouraged junior reporters to submit their reports for peer review prior to going to a senior editor. This is an excellent idea. In addition, senior editors should be held accountable on their P3's for providing constructive feedback on the reports they edit. Unless timeliness is a factor, it is unacceptable to hand back a report with multiple changes without explanation or rationale. Even then, editors should go over the report and the changes post publication.

(U//FOUO) I am sure we all have our own personal war stories about editors who were just awful. From my personal experience, early in my career I wrote a report and several changes were made. I looked at the changes and figured I knew how and what to write the next time. I was a bit taken aback when the next report had changes -- and it looked very similar to the first

report I had written! When I approached the editor, I was told "I had to change something - it's my job." I hope we don't see too much of that attitude anymore! And I am sure many editors have their own stories about junior reporters who challenge each and every change suggested in a report because they took too much ownership of their products. In the end we have to realize that it is about putting out the best products possible, improving our processes, developing our workforce, and ensuring that the next generation of reporters does not repeat the mistakes of the past when they become editors.

(U//FOUO) What do you think? Do you have any suggestions for improving editing processes? Please post them on the [SID today blog](#) or, if you wish to remain anonymous, send them to the *SID today* editor (use the "comments/suggestions" button below).

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