National Archives and Records Administration

Bi-annual Report on Operations of the National Declassification Center
Reporting period: July 1, 2013 – December 31, 2013

The National Declassification Center (NDC) has been providing regular status updates on the retirement of the hundreds of millions of pages in its backlog since standing up in 2010. This report addresses the progress in relation to the presidentially mandated deadline of December 31, 2013.

Executive Summary: On December 31, 2013, the NDC met the goal of addressing quality assurance problems within the backlog of accessioned Federal records at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) as directed by the December 29, 2009 Presidential Memorandum accompanying Executive Order (E.O.) 13526. The records had been reviewed (and sometimes re-reviewed) under the automatic declassification provisions established in 1995, but could not be acted upon by NARA because of missed referrals and other problems within the initial reviews. The successful retirement of the 352-million-page backlog means that records within all classified series accessioned prior to January 1, 2010 have been declassified by the equity-holding agencies or exempted for national security information. NARA processing – such as segregation of records exempted from automatic declassification; screening for privacy concerns; and archival processing (description, holdings maintenance) – is still needed in order to facilitate public access to many of the backlog records. NARA will strive to expedite such processing to meet researcher requests, although we are constrained in our ability to do so due to longstanding resource limitations.

The NDC was established by E.O. 13526, "Classified National Security Information." Under the direction of the Archivist of the United States, the NDC coordinates the timely and appropriate processing of referrals of 25-year-old and older classified records of permanent historical value. The December 29, 2009 Presidential Memorandum accompanying E.O. 13526 specified a December 31, 2013 deadline for addressing referrals and quality assurance problems within accessioned Federal records at NARA previously subject to automatic declassification to permit public access to the declassified records.

Each NDC Status Report has contained the following three sections: a narrative highlighting select events and activities of the previous six months; a brief description of the interagency cooperation during the previous six months; and a quantitative update that provides cumulative progress on the backlog.

The successful work of the NDC over the last three years represents not an end, but rather a beginning. Each and every year more records require declassification processing by the NDC as additional records become subject to automatic declassification. The NDC will launch a special effort to apply the higher standards established by the President in 2009 to records among the holdings of NARA that were previously exempted from automatic declassification and will continue to streamline declassification processes, facilitate quality-assurance measures, and implement standardized training regarding the declassification of records determined to have

permanent historical value. We will also expand public participation as we continue our efforts to increase transparency and openness. Future reports providing updates on special reviews, inter-agency collaboration, and progress against new yearly goals will continue to be issued regularly.

Highlights:

- During the reporting period, we provided information about newly released entries, including files from the Atomic Energy Commission, United States Agency for International Development, Department of State, and Treasury. We continue to invite public comments and suggestions by way of the NDC Blog and website: http://www.archives.gov/declassification.

- We completed our declassification review and processing of information relating to life in the shadows of the Berlin Wall (for the 50th anniversary of President Kennedy's summer 1963 visit to Berlin). A seminar, including a panel discussion, related to the opening of these records, was planned for October 16, 2013 at the National Archives building in Washington, DC. Because of the government shutdown, the seminar took place on January 14, 2014, with the web release associated with these records taking place the previous November. Information about these records can be found at http://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/berlin-wall-1962-1987/.

Review:

- As we have noted in previous NDC reports, our greatest challenge for successful backlog retirement involved satisfying the requirements for Restricted Data/Formerly Restricted Data (RD/FRD) review mandated in the National Defense Authorization Acts for Fiscal Year 1999 and 2000 (Public Laws 105-261 and 106-65 respectively, known as "Kyl-Lott") and the Special Historical Records Review Plan Supplement to those two public laws. Addressing RD/FRD typically required page-level review, a time- and personnel-intensive effort, which demanded the greatest resource commitment. Because we have streamlined our approach and expanded both NARA and other government agency staffing, we were able to complete this review by the deadline.

- Although we have de-emphasized the page-by-page equity review for referrals in the NDC Interagency Referral Center (IRC) in order to free up other government agency resources to address page-level RD/FRD review, participation, albeit reduced, in the IRC has continued. During the six-month reporting period (July 1 – December 31, 2013), all referrals were completed for 26,404 pages, and 22,714 of those pages were declassified in full for an 86% release rate. The IRC operation will take on an expanded role during 2014 as we apply 50- and 75-year automatic declassification guidelines to previously exempted records, stand up an automated referral notification system, and prioritize additional special collections.

- Through the NDC, the Presidential Libraries prioritized 1,830,086 pages within certain collections of the Truman through Carter Administrations, as well as the China-associated materials within the Kissinger Personal Papers Collection, for completion of referral review through the Remote Archives Capture (RAC) project. As of December 31, 2013, equity-holding agencies had completed review on 1,651,033 of those pages, and of those, decisions on 993,854 pages have been delivered to the Presidential libraries. RAC-reviewed pages are *not* reported as part of the Federal accessioned-records backlog in the **Status of the Workload and Production** section below.

Process Improvement:

- Our Metrics Team continued to provide end-to-end tracking for all NDC operations, including classified Freedom of Information Act/Mandatory Declassification Review (FOIA/MDR) work, and our current numbers reflect their continuing clean up and analysis of our data. The work of this team is allowing us to pinpoint chokepoints in our processes, report more accurate production statistics, and work toward streamlining all of our data capture efforts. We will continue to rely on this analysis to keep us on track with our declassification processing.

- The NDC FOIA/MDR Division continues to benefit from the improved work processes established during the last year. The effectiveness of these improved work processes is reflected in our metrics: During FY 2011, we closed 753 cases totaling 60,156 pages; of these, 632 cases were for FOIA and MDR requests, 53 were for special 'expedited' requests, and 68 were for deck logs of the US Navy. During FY 2012, we closed 1,270 cases totaling 156,751 pages; of these, 881 cases were for FOIA and MDR requests, 222 were for special 'expedited' requests, and 167 were for US Navy deck logs. During FY 2013, we closed 1,342 cases and requests totaling 1,700,000 pages, the majority of which were for FOIA and MDR requests. This drastic increase in pages processed is a result of the increasing number of processed backlog records, which results in focused, document-based requests, and increased ease in responding to short-turn around requests.

Interagency Cooperation:

- The retirement of this backlog was an enormous effort by all concerned and marks a significant step to expanding public access to valuable historical records. Having built collaborative partnerships with the defense, intelligence, law enforcement, and diplomatic communities, the NDC implemented risk management strategies, streamlined processes, and enacted other efficiencies even while facing unexpected challenges. During the final six-month reporting period, agency personnel from across the government participated in Evaluation (sampling) and/or Kyl-Lott Evaluation (RD/FRD page-level review) Team activities. On any given day, more than 140 other government agency review experts were working together at NARA in multiple inter-agency teams providing consistent assistance to Kyl-Lott page-level review efforts, even for those records typically unlikely to contain their own equities.

- We provided an update on our overall progress as well as addressed specific Department of State concerns at the December Department of State Advisory Committee on Historic Diplomatic Documentation.

- We held meetings with the NDC Inter-Agency Advisory Panel in July and December. The panel is made up of office-level directors and program managers from the departments, agencies and services with original classification authority. Their willingness to support NDC processes, share their equity identification guidance, and work across agency boundaries to address quality concerns resulted in the successful retirement of the backlog. We will be building on this extensive collaboration during 2014, as we prioritize records series for topics of researcher interest, quality assurance evaluation, and expedited referral review and indexing.

Status of Workload and Production:

Because of the increased maturity of our metrics program, we are better able to report our accomplishments. This expanded capability has affected all our numbers from the initial backlog reported to the status of the various stages of processing. With that in mind, unless otherwise indicated, we are reporting cumulative production using a reporting period of January 1, 2010 (establishment of the NDC by E.O.) to December 31, 2013. These production numbers reflect the number of backlog pages evaluated in the NDC for referral quality review. A subset of these pages has been declassified and is available for public use. The remaining pages that have completed NDC referral quality evaluation are in the NDC final indexing queue, have been excluded for RD/FRD, or have been exempted from automatic declassification by an agency.

- Total backlog pages as of NDC stand up on January 1, 2010: 352 million pages. The NDC continued to refine the counts of projects, boxes and pages that comprise the NDC backlog, and a similar process will be applied to those records accessioned since January 2010 that will be addressed starting in 2014. NDC staff deconflict data about series and reconcile legacy processing of series. This work often requires significant investigations using NDC databases, examination of project folders and legacy documentation, coordination with other NARA units, confirmation in the stacks, and final quality assurance review.

- Total pages successfully completing the NDC referral quality review process for national security information, including meeting the Kyl-Lott requirements (January 1, 2010 – December 31, 2013): 352 million pages.

  o Total pages that have completed all processing: 130.3 million pages.

    ▪ Total pages released to the public January 1, 2010 – December 31, 2013: 77.3 million pages.