

2015 Update on Operations of the National Declassification Center

When established in 2010, the National Declassification Center (NDC) provided regular status updates on the retirement of the hundreds of millions of pages in its backlog. When the center reached the 31 December 2013 Presidentially directed goal to address quality assurance problems within the hundreds of millions of accessioned Federal record pages backlogged at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), formalized reporting was concluded. However, the successful work of the NDC was just beginning, so a mid-year 2014 report was issued, and this end-of-calendar-year report for 2015 will provide updates similar to those earlier reports: information on new processes, special review projects, inter-agency collaboration, and quantitative measurements.

Every year, more records require interagency declassification processing by the NDC as they become subject to automatic declassification and are accessioned into NARA. To address those new accessions, referred to as “rollover,” the NDC continues to apply streamlined declassification processes and quality-assurance measures.

To complement that “factory” approach, NDC is offering a more “customer-centric” focus. To deal more effectively with those backlog records that have yet to complete all NARA processes such as segregation of records exempted from automatic declassification, screening for privacy concerns, and archival processing (description, holdings maintenance), the NDC has posted a current listing of all series eligible for final indexing and withdrawal processing on [The NDC Blog](#). We call this Indexing on Demand. Interested researchers have been encouraged to contact us through our email box NDC@nara.gov to request series on this list. A second opportunity for more direct engagement with NDC is through Senior Archives Specialist Stephanie Coon. An experienced expert in NDC, she maintains daily office hours within the reference area at Archives II and is happy to locate otherwise hard-to-find boxes and advise requesters on our process and a potential timeline for declassification and availability when appropriate.

New Processes

- Withdrawn records cannot stay withdrawn forever; they must be subjected to a re-review: NDC completed an inventory of withdrawn, previously reviewed records working with our Metrics team to link legacy data with our current NDC and NARA databases, in order to retain any information that might be relevant. After categorizing older legacy withdrawn items by age, remaining exemption relevancy, equity waivers, and public demand, we conducted three successful pilot projects that declassified and released 32,000 pp of Navy records. As our understanding of these project contents expand, we

may be addressing as many as 7,716 declassification projects from 1973 to 2001 (@640,000 documents, dated 1911 – 1998).

- We successfully stood up our Indexing on Demand process as noted above. As we receive requests for specific series that have completed all quality assurance processes and lack certain final data entry and segregation, we have been able to prioritize those requests, and make records available that might have been further back in the queue. During 2015, 4 million pages were part of this on-demand process, and 3.4 million of them were declassified.

Special Project Highlights:

- This year's NDC public forum, Prioritization: What Secrets do People Want to See, held in April at the McGowan Theater at the National Archives in Washington DC, included an expert panel of representatives from several agencies and open government advocacy groups, and a member of the Public Interest Declassification Board. It was a platform for soliciting expert thoughts on what NDC might focus on. Suggestions included Presidential records, Secretary of Defense and of State files, and Director-level series from the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), and the Intelligence Community. You may watch the entire forum here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABsaEa9v4ik>
In November, we received a request authored by a number of distinguished historians requesting our attention to higher level Office of the Secretary of Defense files. This request will likely be the basis of a substantial special project undertaken during 2016.
- In January 2015, NDC installed four Remote Archives Capture (RAC) terminals onsite to assist four agencies in fulfilling their review of Presidential library records. This successful effort prompted interest by other agencies, so we expanded to five additional agencies' equities, currently including participation by Army, DIA, DOE, DOJ, DOS, DTRA, JCS, NASA, USAF, Navy, and OSD. The focus of this review is on closing out Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford and certain Carter Collections. As of early November, 4,302 referrals had been completed.
- During 2015, NDC provided the final tranches (about 2,500 pages in total) of declassified records to the NSC/White House in response to the NSC request for human rights abuse records for the Brazilian government. These tranches (and any additional pages) are the result of the center-led extensive collaboration with other agencies/departments to coordinate a cross-government response.

- NDC is nearing completion on three additional projects: Treasures from World War II US Navy Command Files (192,500 pp), 100 Years after Construction: Declassified Records and Their Impact on Researching US-Panamanian Canal Relations (292,100 pp), and 444 Days: Records Related to the Iran Hostage Crisis, 1979-1981. (7,497 pp).
- During 2015, NDC completed declassification processes and released files from a number of record groups, including those associated with Navy, Department of State, United States Marine Corps, and United States Agency for International Development (please see our website for details).

Inter-Agency Collaboration:

- NDC worked with the National Security Agency on their well-received release of the William F. Friedman Collection, including participating in an April release event sponsored by the Marshall Foundation Library in Lexington, Virginia.
- With the stand-up of a more automated referral notification process, we have expanded page-level referral review in our Interagency Referral Center (IRC). In conjunction with all agencies reaching their yearly prioritized deadlines, the IRC completed 973,000 pages, declassifying and releasing 486,000 pages in 2015. This number represents only documents that have completed all referrals and are in the process of being re-filed.

Overall Workload and Production for 2015:

As of 28 November, NDC and its inter-agency partners had completed 8,454,480 pages of quality assurance for national security information, and we are on track to reach our goal of 2015 rollover completion by 31 December. NDC completed all processing, including indexing and withdrawal for 13,797,868 pp; 11,941,451 pp of which were declassified.