

## Brief History of AFDO

The Air Force Declassification Office (AFDO) had its roots as the Air Force Declassification Team established in 1989 and initially staffed by Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard members assigned to the Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Air Force. Once located at Maxwell AFB, Alabama their primary responsibility was to develop a declassification plan to facilitate the review and release of classified Air Force documents to Congress and the public. The original team revolutionized declassification decision - making by creating the Air Force's first computer-based declassification guide. The guide enabled trained "declassifiers" to quickly review, coordinate and declassify information in record time.

The team first tackled classified documents from the Vietnam era and was known as the South East Asia Declassification Team. In 1992, came the added challenge of reviewing records of prisoners of war, missing in action, and Japanese & Nazi War Crimes. Later, the team reviewed documents created during the first Gulf War to substantiate veterans' Gulf War Illnesses claims. The team screened 2.5 million Air Force records, determining 24,000 could possibly support Gulf War Illness related claims, and declassified more than 13, 000 other records. The team went on to review operational records of the first Gulf War.

On April 17, 1995, President Clinton signed Executive Order 12958, prescribing a uniform system for classifying, safeguarding and declassifying national defense information. The declassification team expanded to include representatives from the Air Force offices of public affairs, history, security police and the Air Force Historical Research Agency. In October 1995, the first in a series of formal training programs were developed to "Train the Trainers" and in June 1996, AFDO hosted the first joint declassification training which was held at Maxwell Air Force Base with representatives from all branches of military services attending.

On 9 August 1996, after reengineering its processes to quickly and efficiently chisel away at mountains of classified documents, the Air Force Declassification Team received Vice President Al Gore's Hammer Award, recognizing the team for outstanding customer service, cutting red tape, empowering employees and getting back to basics.

In the late 1990s AFDO moved its operation to the Washington DC area with reviewers at the National Archives, Crystal City and the Washington Federal Records Center and began converting from reservists and guardsmen to an all civilian staff.

## Brief History of AFDO

AFDO has reviewed more than 105 million pages of classified documents stored at the National Archives, Federal Record Centers, Presidential Libraries, and Air Force field units and has been involved in several high level/high visibility research and review projects to include Roswell: Case Closed, TAILWIND, the No Gun Ri Investigation, BRAC, Tanker Controversy, and Air Force FOIA litigation cases.

In 2003 AFDO worked with NARA to establish an Interagency Referral Center (IRC) to serve as the central location for review and processing of thousands of agency referrals. The IRC enabled executive branch agencies to review more than 6 million pages and expedited the processing and release of previously classified records to the public.

In 2005, AFDO hosted a classification/declassification conference in Tyson's Corner Virginia that was attended by more than 200 members of the declassification community from around the country. The success of this conference affirmed the need for uniform training, processes and procedures for review and release of government records. In 2007, AFDO co-hosted, with the National Archives and Records Administration, the second classification/declassification conference that broke attendance records and was once again a huge success.

In 2008 AFDO supported NARA's National Declassification Initiative, supported the 2010 opening of the Department of Defense Joint Referral Center at Fort Belvoir and supported the 2010 opening of the National Declassification Center mandated in President Obama's EO 13526, dated 29 December 2009. All of these programs strive to establish a more efficient and effective means for the review, declassification and processing of classified equities within the executive branch.

AFDO established an external training program in 2007 to reach Air Force field agencies responsible for review of classified records and for processing FOIA/MDRs. Composed of two senior reviewers/trainers, the sessions have reached more than 2000 members in the United States and Europe. In conjunction with classification/declassification training, AFDO's top-notch staff includes the Air Force Restricted Data/Formerly Restricted Data Management Official who has also provided training to field units and other executive branch agencies throughout the country on proper handling of this highly sensitive information.

Since the first order was signed, the team has amassed a large collection of classification guides, transformed them into electronic media for on-line use, and authored an electronic declassification guide. Always improving or developing electronic systems to support declassification and automating some processes that

## Brief History of AFDO

used to be done by hand ensuring a more complete review and record of declassification actions.

Today the team is involved in digitizing the Air Force Historical Research Agency's collection of periodic histories and is exploring the use of fuzzy logic to expedite declassification reviews and meet the President's mandate for transparency and openness in government. The team has also launched a new website [www.SECRETSDECLASSIFIED.com](http://www.SECRETSDECLASSIFIED.com) to further meet the President's transparency mandate.