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Unofficial Vocabulary

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~~(FOUO)~~ Recently, when seeking the definition for a traffic analytic term in a well-documented Agency working aid, it occurred to me that NSA is rich in unofficial vocabulary that has yet to make it into any sanctioned publication or official working aid. There is an extensive body of jargon used not only to make the cryptologic business seem arcane and exalted to outsiders but also to describe the many nonprofessional and unprofessional aspects of life at the Agency. The following is a starter list of some of these words, just a few terms that came readily to mind, augmented by suggestions from the imaginative crew at the Center for Cryptologic History (CCH).

(U) This list is admittedly far from complete, and we at the CCH welcome any new additions. Send your candidates, preferably with definitions and anything known or guessed about the word's etymology, to the Chief of Operational History, D93, Room B6424, FANX III. The best of the (printable) submissions will appear in a future *Cryptologic Quarterly*.

ARCHITECT:	v.t.; to structure units to perform a specific function or series of functions. For example: NSA must architect offices to provide support to the U.S. Central Command. The panoply of organizations thus arrayed may be called the "architecture" for that particular purpose, as in the "crisis response architecture."
BADGER:	a worker's clearance status as marked for easy recognition by the color of his or her badge, green, red, or black – for fully cleared, noncleared, or contractor, respectively.
BURN:	to reproduce xerographically; a burn machine was an early office reproduction machine.
BURN BAG:	a heavy paper bag, resembling a grocery bag but without pictures of lost Agency employees on the side, used to collect paper trash for eventual destruction; the term has persisted long after fire was abandoned as a method of disposing of this waste.
CANS:	earphones, especially when used during monitoring duty.
CARDIAC HILL:	the near-perpendicular parking area adjacent to the FANX complex; not for couch potatoes.

CHECKER'S CHOICE: the ultimate recourse on questions arising in translation or transcription of foreign language material, in which the "checker," a senior linguist, makes a decision between two uncertain alternatives; the invocation from which there is no appeal.

CHOP: to initial for approval or as evidence that coordination among offices has been carried out; may be used as noun or verb.

CONSUMER (a.k.a. CUSTOMER): those who receive NSA reports through regular distribution channels. This is an attempt to introduce terminology from business and commerce into the intelligence community.

C-REF: short appellation for the Office of Central Reference (sometimes Central Research). The nickname has continued long after the organization was absorbed into another group and its official name changed.

CRYPPIE: shortened form of "cryptanalyst"; used (and taken) by some as affectionate, by others as derogatory – listen carefully for the tone of voice and check to see if the speaker is smiling or not.

DAY LADY: a mildly pejorative term used by workers on evening or overnight shifts to describe a person of either sex who works only "normal business hours"; often characterized by a compulsive concern for wearing a necktie or avoiding jeans.

DESK RATS: that's OK, you know who you are.

DIDDY BOPPING: copying manual Morse transmissions.

DIP: short for "diplomatic," denoting a type of traffic.

FANFOLD: a method of printing multiple copies of a text; so called because the method used several-ply paper of different colors that resembled a lady's fan when spread out.

FLAG CARRIERS: Agency senior executives, so named because the backdrop for their badge photographs includes an American flag.

FORT FUMBLE: a not altogether affectionate designation for Fort Meade and the NSA headquarters by those stationed elsewhere.

FRIEDMAN: shorthand designation for the largest auditorium in the SIGINT CITY (q.v.); believed to be the only portion of the City actually named after an individual, in this case William F. Friedman (1891–1969), the dean of modern American cryptologists.

GHOST: to float among offices while awaiting a permanent position.

GOLF BALL: the spherical shield placed over antennas or other equipment to protect them from weathering or surveillance. When four of these

were lined up atop the headquarters building in the 1970s, it was common to hear them described as "on, volume, horizontal, and vertical" knobs.

GRAVEL PIT: an unpaved parking area outside Gate 2, which featured either sandstorms or mudholes in season and not much in between; it was paved in 1989.

HALL, THE: short for Arlington Hall in Virginia, once one of the main locations for the National Security Agency, in latter years the headquarters of the Army Security Agency (now Intelligence and Security Command). This was a former private girl's school purchased by the military during World War II. Cf NEBRASKA AVENUE.

HAMMERED: describes text with a significant number of garbles, misprints, or omissions that render it unreadable or call into question its validity.

HOLY JOE: a.k.a. "shotgun envelope." An interoffice distribution envelope with regularly spaced circular holes. The name is a play on the now obsolete nickname for an aggressive religious proselytizer.

HOURS OF BOREDOM/ MOMENTS OF TERROR: an unofficial slogan used to describe duty in NSOC or other watch offices.

KNOBBING: the act of searching for target communications by twisting a dial manually on intercept equipment.

KORLING: acronym for "Korean linguist," an occupational speciality. It would look less like a Scottish sport or Canadian beer if spelled with a hyphen.

LINGIE: an attempt to create a nickname derived from the occupational specialty "linguist." Fortunately, this did not come into common use. Some linguists would prefer the phrase "language engineer" to describe their profession.

MOM'S: a nickname for the cafeteria, possibly derisive.

NEBRASKA AVENUE: Washington, D.C., location that served as headquarters for the Naval Security Group and also at one time as one of the main locations for the National Security Agency prior to its move to Ft. Meade. See also, THE HALL.

NINTH FLOOR: the location of the Director's office during most of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, thus a synonym for the Agency's senior leadership or the final policy decision.

OTHER SIDE: OF THE HOUSE: a relative term, dependent on the wing in which the speaker is located, referring to the dual function of signals intelligence and information security; each is the "other side" to its counterpart – for example, the "SIGINT side of the house." Many, however, regard the cryptologic community as polygonal, and refer to various necessary functions with this term, as in the "communications side of the house."

PROBLEM: a particular target area, e.g., the Poinctesme Problem or, more specifically, the Coastaguena Naval Problem. Cf. SHOP.

RETREAD: to retrain an individual for a different occupational speciality; not to be confused with cross-training, which implied preparation for a position requiring knowledge of two specialities.

SCHOOL, THE: National Cryptologic School or its predecessor organizations; used even during periods when "the School" did exist as a discrete organizational entity.

SHOP: the location – physical or figurative – for analysis of a particular target, as in the "Ruritanian shop"; sometimes also more specific, as in the "Erewhon air force shop." This is another example of the transference of vocabulary from business and industry to the cryptologic organization. Cf. PROBLEM.

SIGINT CITY: a term that came into some currency at the end of the 1980s to refer to the complex of NSA buildings on Ft. Meade, a reflection of the number of facilities and the wide area over which they were spread. While catchy in itself, the term inappropriately slights other important aspects of the NSA mission, for example, information security.

SLIP AND SLIDE: to idle or waste time.

SPACES: shorthand references to "cleared" or "secure spaces," i.e., the place where classified endeavors may be carried out.

STRAPHANGERS: people assigned or involved in a meeting or activity in excess of actual need, and often without responsibility; personnel auditing a meeting but not contributing; those "along for the ride" in any activity.

U STREET U: nickname for the Agency training school overflow building located on U Street in the District of Columbia during the 1950s. In itself, this is a diminutive for the slightly disparaging nickname "U Street University."

WALK THE HALLS: to be without a permanent assignment and in search of one after return from a field or long-term training assignment.

WHIFFLE: to read rapidly through a stack of traffic to cull out usable items; this term is becoming obsolete as computerization reduces the amount of printed traffic routinely delivered to analysts.

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