

Louis C. Grant

Don't Say MUSSO—Say USSID (There is a BIG Difference)

An expanded version of an article that appeared in Dragon Seed

Someone once said, "The field thinks NSA is crazy and they have the papers to prove it." He may be right! We don't always do a very good job of getting good instructions to the field. Yet those instructions can make or break the Director's control of U.S. Sigint operations. And it was to improve both the instructions and the mechanism for getting them out that the Director established the United States Signal Intelligence Directives (USSID) System.

Getting good instructions out is not a new problem. In the early 1950's, changes in the structure of the U.S. Sigint System resulted in a mass of instructional, directive, and guidance data—much of it issued without proper codification. Field units could not tell what was binding upon them and what wasn't. The Agency took steps in 1958 to fix things up by implementing the Manual of U.S. Sigint Operations (MUSSO). It was designed to contain the planning, doctrinal, tasking, and control material governing U.S. Sigint operations throughout the world.

MUSSO was good in that it gave the Director a mechanism for exercising control, and instructions were getting out. But, MUSSO lacked central direction, it was over-engineered, and it bogged down in its own procedures. The Inspector General took a look at the problem in 1969 and found that MUSSO was a mess. At best, it had become more traditional than functional. He stressed the lack of central direction, saying: "One can only surmise how much better the exercise of operational and technical control would be, and therefore how much better the product, if the established means for exercising them were well managed."

To maintain the desired central direction, the USSID System must include all of the means for getting instructions to the field: formal messages, hard-copy USSID, and OPSCOMM. That is why, under USSID, only USSID or issuances authorized in USSID may be used to direct Sigint operations.

The ADP runs the USSID System because he is the Director's agent for day-to-day control of Sigint operations. An element of the ADP's staff, ADPSD, manages the system provisions for him, reviews and issues the directives, and makes sure that he gets in on USSID decisions. This arrangement has gone a long way toward wiping out the "my-document" syndrome. Elements get into the act depending upon the degree of their responsibility or their ability to contribute. But no element has absolute authority over a document. The ADP (or the DIRNSA) owns them all.

The USSID System includes procedures for issuing electrical changes to published USSID, for issuing provisional USSID when a trial period is needed, and for issuing the text of a USSID electrically to start a project as quickly as possible. These procedures are designed to make the system responsive to all managers' needs to put out timely direction. Thus, there is no need to put out messages containing "interim" instructions "pending publication of a USSID," or containing changes that "will be incorporated into USSID ...". Too many "interim" actions can thwart managerial controls, result in direction that confuses rather than guides field units, and generally cause the same kind of problems relating to field acceptance, accuracy, and completeness that plagued the MUSSO. As far as the field is concerned, there is no distinction between direction in hard-copy and that received by message. They must comply with both. Thus, the direction must be equally clear, equally appropriate, and equally accurate.

As we review the draft USSID, ADPSD is making good progress with problems of style, clarity, presentation, etc. But there are some deep-rooted problems that are tough to get at. One is a lack of understanding about what the field

needs. Another is what commercial contest writers call "aptness of thought." And still another is a reluctance to change our way of doing things.

Our managers and action people are close enough to the problems to know the issues and answers. As a result, they often don't push for really good instructions. We have to judge our instructions in terms of what they mean to the guy in the field. First, our instructions are his marching orders. Second, they are his guidance. Third, they are all he has. He must do what we tell him, the way we tell him, without a crew of on-call experts around to interpret for him. We must say what we mean, do what we say, and if we change our minds, we must change our instructions.

"Aptness of thought" translates to "does this make sense?" Before converting a MUSSO document to a USSID, we must take a hard look at what it does to make sure that the directive provides the best way to do the task, that it doesn't conflict with other directives, that the task should be done in the field, and that the field has the resources to do the job. We must not continue, or issue, directives unless they are needed. And we must get the tired, outdated ones off the street. Although there is no "USSID-of-the-MONTH" Award, the quicker we do this, the better for the field.

The chance to change our way of doing things is perhaps the most important part of the conversion from MUSSO to USSID. You can improve your instructions ten-fold and

still have a bad program. The Agency can't afford the old "we've-always-done-it-this-way" attitude. This means we have to incorporate the latest technology and operational thinking into the way we do things. We not only have to encourage people to make known their ideas, we must insure that these ideas are put to work. To give an example of what can be done, ADPSD used an article in a recent issue of *Keyword* as the basis for an entirely new approach to a ten-year-old program!

USSID is indeed more than a new name for MUSSO: USSID is a better mechanism for getting good instructions to the field. But you can bet that it will stay that way only as long as we all give it our attention and support. ADPSD is available to you. If you have any doubts, or questions, talk it over with us before you spend a lot of time writing something. ADPSD has the people and the experience that can make your job easier. Over the past 10 years we at NSA made "MUSSO a mess"; let's not use the next 10 to make "USSID useless."

Lou Grant is a Special Research Analyst with over 22 years Agency experience. For 15 years he worked in B Group as a traffic analyst, reporter, and staff officer. He has since served as Assistant Inspector General and Administrative Chief for NSA Europe. He is now Action Officer in ADPSD.