

OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
MERIT SYSTEMS OVERSIGHT AND EFFECTIVENESS
DALLAS OVERSIGHT DIVISION
CLASSIFICATION APPEAL DECISION

Under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code

Appellants: [the appellants]

Position: Air Traffic Assistant, GS-2154-8
Position Number: 94-128

Organization: Installation Aviation Office
Headquarters III Corps and Fort Hood
U.S. Department of the Army
Fort Hood, Texas

Decision: Air Traffic Assistant, GS-2154-7
(Appeal denied: positions downgraded)

OPM Decision Number: C-2154-07-02

Approved by:

/s/ Bonnie J. Brandon
Bonnie J. Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

10/18/96
Date

copy of decision sent to:

[CCs]

Introduction

The appellants work at [U.S. Department of the Army]. Their positions are classified as Air Traffic Assistant, GS-2154-8. The appellants believe their positions are properly classified as Air Traffic Control Specialist (Station), GS-2152-9. On March 8, 1995, the Defense Civilian Personnel Management Service (CPMS) issued an appeal decision granting the appellants their requested classification. That appeal decision was reversed by a second CPMS decision dated March 1, 1996, which classified these positions as Air Traffic Assistant, GS-2154-8.

This appeal was filed with this office under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code. This decision is the final administrative decision of the Federal Government, subject to discretionary review only under the conditions and time limits outlined in 5 Code of Federal Regulations, sections 511.605 and 511.613. The position description is adequate for classification purposes.

Position Information

The appellants provide assistance to pilots by receiving and reviewing flight plans, assisting pilots in correcting flight plans when necessary, and providing information on changing weather conditions. They record flight plans in an automated system and provide appropriate notifications to air traffic control facilities. They maintain flight data on aircraft departing from and returning to the airfield and on planned arrivals. They provide updated weather reports and weather warnings to aircraft by radio. They post Notices to Airmen (NOTAMs) for pilot information and prepare local NOTAMs as needed (e.g., concerning the operational status of local navigational aids). They assist in aircraft emergencies by notifying crash and rescue units and by initiating search and rescue operations. They maintain information, materials, and forms for use in flight planning.

The appellants perform their work independently according to established procedures, and they refer unusual situations and those not covered by guidelines to the supervisor for guidance or decision. The supervisor spot checks the work for adequacy and compliance with established procedures.

The appellants' positions require knowledge of Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Army regulations and procedures governing the preparation and filing of flight plans. The work also requires knowledge of radio procedures and ability to transmit weather warnings and other information necessary to the safe operation of aircraft within their area of responsibility. The positions do not require FAA certification or training.

Series and Title Determination

The appellants believe that their positions are properly classified in the Air Traffic Control Series, GS-2152. Specifically, the appellants believe that their positions fall under the “station” specialization described in the GS-2152 standard. The “station” specialization pertains to positions concerned with: (1) the control of air traffic to insure the safe, orderly, and expeditious movement along air routes and at airports when a knowledge of aircraft separation standards and control techniques, and the ability to apply them properly, often under conditions of great stress, are required; (2) the providing of pre-flight and in-flight assistance to aircraft requiring a knowledge of the information pilots need to conduct safe flights and the ability to present that information clearly and concisely; or (3) the development, coordination, and management of air traffic control programs.

According to the standard, Air Traffic Control Specialists in flight service stations brief pilots on weather conditions, advise on the existence or development of potentially hazardous weather conditions, suggest alternate routes, and, when appropriate, recommend that flights not be attempted. Based on knowledge of airway route structures and air traffic procedures, Air Traffic Control Specialists assist pilots in planning the route of flight, making flight computations, filing flight plans, and obtaining clearances to fly in controlled air space. They develop, disseminate, and monitor the currency of NOTAMs. They provide current and forecast weather data and flight planning information to en route aircraft and request and disseminate pilot reports of significant weather conditions. They also provide assistance to pilots who are lost or who are in an emergency situation, and they initiate search and rescue operations to locate aircraft failing to report their arrival within prescribed time limits.

Positions in the Air Traffic Control Series require an extensive knowledge of the laws, rules, regulations, and procedures governing the movement of air traffic. The GS-2152 standard identifies certain specific knowledges and skills required of Air Traffic Control Specialists in flight service stations. These knowledges and skills include:

- thorough knowledge of aviation weather including causes, effects, and dynamics of weather systems;
- ability to interpret and interpolate a variety of weather data into information useful to pilots;
- ability to determine the capabilities of a pilot to assure that the information presented is such that the pilot is aware of conditions expected and how they will affect the flight;

- detailed knowledge of the station's assigned area of responsibility, including operational features of assigned airports, location and performance characteristics of associated air navigational facilities, airway structures and routes, topography and factors affecting weather, air traffic control procedures pertinent to the area, applicable airspace restrictions, and emergency service procedures;
- detailed knowledge of procedures related to flight handling, routing, airways and airspace structures;
- general knowledge of the performance characteristics of a wide variety of aircraft;
- skill in communicating effectively with pilots of all level of experience in a variety of situations;
- ability to provide emergency service to aircraft in distress; and
- ability to coordinate actions with other specialists and related air traffic facilities.

To be qualified for work in the Air Traffic Control Series, the GS-2152 qualification standard requires all persons in the GS-2152 series to possess an FAA certification for the type of facility where they are employed. The qualifications standard also requires applicants for positions in the GS-2152 series to meet certain physical standards.

The appellants perform work that is similar to the work described for the GS-2152 "station" specialization. For instance, the appellants review and record flight plans, advise on hazardous weather conditions, and provide assistance to pilots in emergencies. However, we find significant differences between the work of the appellants and the work described in the GS-2152 standard. For example, the appellants do not actually conduct pilot briefings on weather conditions; they simply relay weather updates and warnings to pilots. Pilots receive pre-flight weather briefings twice a day from weather service personnel via closed-circuit television monitors. The appellants do not provide weather information to en route aircraft, and they do not provide assistance to lost pilots. Although the appellants review completed flight plans for adequacy, they typically do not actively assist pilots in the planning of flights.

As a result of these significant differences between the actual work of the appellants and the work described in the GS-2152 standard, there are also significant

differences in the required knowledges and skills. To perform their weather-related duties, the appellants do not analyze and interpolate weather data, and they are not required to understand the causes and dynamics of aviation weather to the extent described in the GS-2152 standard. They are not required to perform flight computations or to have knowledge of operating characteristics of a wide variety of aircraft. The appellants' positions do not require FAA certification for flight service stations, and their positions do not require them to meet the physical requirements specified by the GS-2152 qualification standard. Consequently, we find that the appellants' positions are not properly classified in the GS-2152 series.

We find that the Air Traffic Assistance Series, GS-2154, to be the most appropriate series for the work of the appellants. The GS-2154 series covers work performed to support air traffic control. Positions in this series require knowledge and skill to apply air traffic control procedures, but they do not require the in-depth knowledge of air traffic control functions described in the GS-2152 standard. Positions in the GS-2154 series do not require FAA certification and do not carry physical requirements. In accordance with the GS-2154 standard, the appellants' positions are properly classified as Air Traffic Assistant, GS-2154.

Grade Level Determination

The GS-2154 standard does not provide criteria to determine grade level; the standard instructs the classifier to use other standards providing grade level criteria for similar kinds of one-grade interval work. In its decision of March 1, 1996, the CPMS used the grade level criteria in Part II of the standard for the Meteorological Technician Series, GS-1341. (Part II covers positions at or above the GS-4 level.) The GS-1341 series covers work that requires practical and technical knowledge and that is performed to collect and disseminate meteorological information. The work performed by the appellants is similar to that described in the GS-1341 series in that both involve the collection and dissemination of information based on practical and technical knowledge. We find that Part II of the GS-1341 standard provides reasonable criteria to determine the grade level of the appellants' positions.

The GS-1341 standard uses two factors to determine grade level. These factors are Responsibility and Complexity.

Responsibility

This factor covers the kind and degree of supervisory, technical, and administrative controls over the work. Specifically, the factor measures the responsibility for making recommendations and decisions, the extent of personal contacts and commitment authorities, and the availability of guides. The factor describes three

levels, covering a range extending from the limited responsibility found at Level I to extensive responsibility at Level III. The CPMS decision of March 1, 1996, reflects evaluation of this factor at Level II.

At Level II, the supervisor provides instructions concerning new procedures, departures from established work practices, and any anticipated complications. The supervisor checks the technician's work to ensure that the critical aspects of the work have been completed satisfactorily and that any decisions and recommendations made are appropriate. Personal contacts at Level II usually involve the collection or presentation of technical information that is mostly factual and straightforward, although some interpretation or supplementation to meet user requirements may be involved. The technician makes recommendations and decisions that involve routine matters adequately covered by available guidelines or precedents.

We find that the appellants' work meets Level II. The appellants work within established FAA and Army regulations and standards and within standard operating procedures established by their installation. The appellants are not authorized to significantly deviate from these procedures without obtaining supervisory approval, except in emergency situations when a supervisor is not available. The supervisor spot checks the appellants' work, as described at Level II of the factor. In their contacts with pilots, the appellants give factual information covered by established procedures. For example, they review flight plans for completeness and accuracy, and they recommend changes when necessary (e.g., if a pilot plans to enter an established airway at an unauthorized altitude, the appellants will point this out to the pilot and recommend an alternative). They provide pilots with updated weather reports.

Level III of the factor differs from Level II primarily in increased freedom from technical supervision; added requirements for the planning and scheduling of assignments; and additional demands for resourcefulness and technical judgments to interpret or adapt guidelines, instructions, and precedent material. At Level III, the supervisor provides very general instructions concerning broad objectives and provides general advice on unusual conditions and administrative matters. The technician receives little or no technical assistance. The supervisor's review of the work typically consists of an overall evaluation of adequacy and timeliness.

The relative freedom from technical supervision typically found at Level III includes work situations requiring, on either a fixed or rotational basis, the performance of work when supervision is entirely absent or not readily available. Level III responsibility covers, but is not limited to, situations where technicians make unreviewed decisions alone on a shift, e.g., to provide warnings of hazardous weather based on their judgment concerning the effect of changes in weather

elements. Technicians decide whether to confirm warning conditions by waiting for additional reports or to alert concerned public officials immediately. Personal contacts at Level III typically are extensive and important, constitute a significant aspect of the work, and usually involve the presentation and discussion of complicated technical material that requires considerable supplementation, interpretation, or elaboration to meet user requirements. The technician makes recommendations and decisions that are technically complex. Instructions and informational materials are usually available but are complicated and require interpretation or adaptation in their application to specific work assignments. In many instances, however, demanding production or operational requirements may preclude or severely restrict the practical availability of these guides.

We find that the work of the appellants does not meet Level III. Although the appellants receive little or no technical supervision in the course of their daily assignments, their work is covered by published regulations, standards, and operating procedures that are directly applicable to their work. The appellants do not deviate from these guidelines to any significant extent. Also unlike Level III, the appellants have a supervisor available on each shift except weekends. Although the appellants exercise some judgment (e.g., as in determining when to provide weather warnings to pilots) that judgment is restricted to relaying factual information provided by others. The appellants have few opportunities to supplement or elaborate on the information provided. Similarly, they do not normally need to interpret or adapt guidance materials.

We determine the Responsibility Factor to be properly evaluated at Level II.

Complexity

This factor measures the nature, variety, and difficulty of the work and the knowledges, skills, and abilities required to perform the work. This factor is described by six degrees, ranging from assignments of limited scope and difficulty at Degree A to complicated and technically demanding assignments at Degree F. The CPMS decision of March 1, 1996, evaluated this factor at Degree D.

At Degree D, the work is very technically demanding and requires considerable knowledge of work methods, techniques, procedures, and equipment. The work also requires technicians to apply seasoned judgment and keen skills. At Degree D, the work typically involves complicated methods, use of elaborate equipment or instrumentation, exacting data collection requirements, or heavy public service schedules. Technicians at Degree D must use knowledge and judgment to determine how local conditions affect weather forecasts. They must consider reports and observations from various sources and consider whether to take action to protect life and property.

We find that the appellants' work does not meet Degree D. Unlike the degree of complexity described by Degree D, the judgment exercised by the appellants involve applying established regulations, standards, and procedures to specific situations that are directly related to these guides. Most of the decisions they make while performing their work are based on these established guidelines rather than on the individual assessments. Their data collection responsibilities involve the collection of flight plan information on prescribed forms and in prescribed formats which are normally completed by pilots and only reviewed by the appellants. Most of the judgments made by the appellants concerning the accuracy of flight plan information are based on FAA and Army requirements and on established airways. Their work requires them to use more limited judgment than what is described at Degree D. Degree D describes work requiring judgment based on significant technical knowledge. The technician performing work at Degree D must determine how new technical information affects current information and then must identify appropriate actions to take. The appellants' work, however, primarily involves making judgments about whether information (e.g., flight plans) complies with established regulations and procedures and about what changes, if any, must be made to achieve compliance.

We find that Degree C of the factor best matches the complexity of the appellants' work. Degree C describes work where technicians apply methods and procedures that are less complex and more standardized than the work procedures described at Degree D. Work at Degree C involves considerable planning and scheduling, and it involves using some judgment to determine what actions to take. The appellants' work closely resembles Degree C in that, although the use of standardized procedures characterize the work, the appellants do use some judgment in determining appropriate actions. For instance, when they review flight plans, they consider the experience of the pilot and the details of the flight plan in deciding how to provide assistance and information. Changing weather conditions and changes in the operational status of local navigation beacons may require them to make some modifications in procedures. While the appellants do not have the broad discretion to change work methods as described at Degree D, their work requires them to adapt to changes in external conditions, e.g., flight training activities, air traffic, and weather.

We determine the Complexity Factor to be properly evaluated at Degree C.

Decision

According to the GS-1341 standard, the combination of Level II for Factor I and Degree C for Factor II equates to GS-7. The appellants' positions are properly classified as Air Traffic Assistant, GS-2154-7.