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**Pay Category Appeal Decision
Under section 5103 of title 5, United States Code**

Appellants: [Appellants]

Agency classification: Electronics Mechanic
WG-2604-11

Organization: [Branch]
[Command]
Department of the Navy
[Location]

OPM decision: Federal Wage System

OPM decision number: C-2604-11-03

/s/
Kathy Day
Classification Appeals Officer

8/1/00

Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, this decision constitutes a certificate that is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the government. There is no right of further appeal. This decision is subject to discretionary review only under conditions and time limits specified in the Introduction to the Position Classification Standards, appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

Decision sent to:

[Appellants]

[Director, Human Resources Office]

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Introduction

On April 17, 2000, the Atlanta Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) received a group pay category appeal from [appellants]. The appellants are assigned to jobs as Electronics Mechanics, WG-2604-11, [organizational location], [command], [geographical location]. Their jobs were reclassified from the General Schedule (GS) to the Federal Wage System (FWS) as the result of an agency directed classification consistency review of positions whose work involved test, measurement, and diagnostic equipment (TMDE). The appellants appealed to OPM following an appeal decision by the Department of Defense (DOD) Civilian Personnel Management Service (CPMS) sustaining coverage of their positions by the FWS. We have accepted and decided their appeal under section 5103 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

General issues

In their appeal, the appellants contend that the agency misapplied OPM guidance regarding determination of the proper pay system for their positions. They state that their work requires the performance of engineering duties on a regular and recurring basis to successfully complete their organizational mission. The engineering duties referenced by the appellants in their appeal involve research conducted to gather and compile engineering literature, technical information, manufacturer schematics, technical drawings and specifications, standard operating procedures, etc., to effect repairs to electronic and electromechanical equipment. They further contend that these duties represent the paramount requirement of the work they perform and, as such, warrant the inclusion of their positions in the GS and classification as Electronics Technician, GS-856-9.

We have evaluated the work assigned by management in the job descriptions of record [#s]. The job descriptions are identical for classification purposes and will be discussed as one in the appeal decision. In reaching our decision, we carefully reviewed the information provided by the appellants, their supervisor, and the agency.

Job information

The appellants, their immediate and second level supervisors, and the agency certified the accuracy of the job descriptions.

The mission of the [Branch] is to provide depot level repair support for a full range of test equipment and calibration standards. The Branch operates a certified test equipment depot for the [organization] and [command] and provides specialized test equipment repair support for installation production efforts. The Branch has two sections, each employing two of the appellants: [Sections]. The [Section] provides depot level electronic repair, overhaul, and calibration services for [Command] and fleet systems, equipment, and their components. The [Section] provides DOD-wide depot level repair, rework, and calibration services for precision test equipment.

The appellants are responsible for performing work on complex electronic and electromechanical equipment used onboard ships, submarines, aircraft, and at shore facilities, and designated as repairable at the depot level. They repair, refurbish, modify, calibrate, certify, and return to service equipment and items used in critical weapons and other DOD systems. This includes a wide range of electronic and electromechanical modules, components, assemblies, systems,

calibration standards, pressure transducers, test sets, and TMDE. The equipment and items on which the appellants work generally tend to be those no longer manufactured, or for which manufacturers or contractors no longer provide technical or repair support.

In many instances, the equipment arrives from owners and customers without documentation, diagrams, schematics or other information to indicate its function or the procedural methods or steps required for analyzing, troubleshooting, or repairing it. The appellants exercise independent judgment in using precision measuring equipment and electronic instrumentation to inspect, troubleshoot, and diagnose the equipment. They analyze items and relevant technical information to effect repairs and alignment; develop test and measurement methods to verify established performance parameters; and ensure that operational performance is within design specifications. The appellants perform research to obtain manufacturers' technical information such as diagrams, procedures, requirements, specifications, and performance parameters. The information collected is used in determining whether repair or refurbishment can be accomplished or is economically feasible, or if product improvement would extend the lifecycle of the particular item. This information is also used in the development of effective methods of testing and evaluating the equipment; repair criteria; recommendations for product improvement or modification; and documentation of procedures to be followed by others who may work on the equipment in the future.

The supervisor generally assigns work in terms of overall scope, objectives, and priorities. The supervisor is primarily concerned with coordination of the logistics involved in accomplishing the work. He is responsible for making decisions on matters involving higher priorities, tight deadlines and timeframes, budgetary issues, reassigning work, customer relations, scheduling, tracking work progress, and resolving major issues beyond the scope of the appellants' responsibilities.

Pay category determination

The Department of the Navy and CPMS determined that the appellants' jobs were properly placed in the FWS. We agree.

Section 5102 of 5 U.S.C. requires that a pay category determination be made as the first step in the position classification process. Section 5102(c)(7) exempts from the GS employees in recognized trades or crafts, or other skilled mechanical crafts, or unskilled, semiskilled, or skilled manual labor occupations, and other employees in positions having trade, craft, or laboring experience and knowledge as the paramount requirement. Paramount requirement is defined in the OPM Introduction to the Position Classification Standards as the essential, prerequisite knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to perform the primary duty or responsibility for which the position has been established. The determination that particular types of positions are trades, crafts, or manual labor occupations within the meaning of title 5 is primarily dependent upon the most important requirement for the performance of a primary duty or responsibility for which the position exists.

A position clearly requiring trade, craft, or laboring experience and knowledge as a requirement for the performance of its primary duty is subject to the FWS regardless of its organizational location or the nature of the activity in which it exists. A position requiring knowledge or experience of an administrative, clerical, scientific, artistic, or technical nature not related to

trade, craft, or manual labor work for the performance of its primary duty, even though physical work is required, is subject to the GS.

The Introduction to the Electronic Equipment Installation and Maintenance Family, WG-2600, provides valuable guidance on differentiating between FWS and GS work. In distinguishing between mechanic (FWS) and technician (GS) work, "the difference between the electronic mechanics and electronic technicians is not so much in the types of skills, knowledges, and abilities possessed but in the degree to which they are possessed and the manner in which they are used." In assessing repair work, repair of electronic systems and equipment of the type generally performed in overhaul shops is "characteristically a trade function." Such trades work "includes detecting and diagnosing malfunctions, tearing down equipment, repairing or replacing parts or components, and aligning and calibrating and testing the modified or repaired equipment. Positions in which the performance of such repair function is the paramount requirement are trades positions." Repair work is GS technician work when it is performed in connection with "engineering functions such as developing and designing test and repair equipment, analyzing present repair practices and developing procedural instructions for use by others on methods and steps of equipment repair, or conducting engineering evaluations of the adequacy of such things as the test and calibration equipment used in making repairs."

The guidance further states that the mental approach to the problem faced is a "basic difference between the technician and the mechanic." The technician uses electronic theory, mathematical knowledge, etc., as the basis for 'new thought' to solve engineering problems in conventional areas of endeavor, e.g., design and construction of amplifier circuits, pulse forming networks, etc. The mechanic, on the other hand, uses a similar background of electronic theory, mathematics, and experience as the basis for 'second thought,' i.e., to follow and understand the design concepts of others, to understand the purpose and operation of parts and circuits, to follow signal flow through assemblies and components and recognize proper wave forms and signal values in order to tune equipment for optimum performance and to locate and correct malfunctions.

The distinction between FWS and GS work can become somewhat blurred by the innovative ability of experienced electronic mechanics who develop shortcut procedures or recognize errors in documentation or procedure and recommend corrections; or recommend methods, design changes, etc., to remedy a deficiency. This guidance warns that, although the mechanic's performance tends toward that of a technician, it must be noted that this is in response to a random condition or need. While this is often valuable to, and recognized by the activity, it is not an ongoing need of the activity and should not be interpreted as a paramount requirement or reason for the existence of a position.

The appellants' primary and paramount duties flow from the mission and function of the organization in which they work. Those duties involve the repair, refurbishment, modification, testing, and certification of electronic and electromechanical equipment for equipment owners and customers. This work requires trades knowledge of electronic and electromechanical theories, principles, and practices to identify and repair malfunctions, calibrate equipment to conform to technical and manufacturer's requirements and specifications, and to certify accuracy. The appellants may use their knowledge of electronic theory and experience to modify equipment to use components currently being manufactured, or to develop testing techniques or procedures to determine acceptable performance ranges. This is more closely related to ensuring that repairs and modifications meet manufacturer specifications and user requirements. The

appellants are not required to apply electronic or electrical theories in the design of new and unique systems as is typical of engineering functions. The majority of their work involves the application of established diagnostic and repair methods and procedures that are typical of higher graded trades work.

Decision

The appellants' jobs are properly covered by the FWS.