U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs

Dallas Oversight Division
1100 Commerce Street, Room 441
Dallas, TX 75242

Classification Appeal Decision
Under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code

Appellant:	[appellant]
Agency classification:	Air Traffic Control Specialist (Terminal) GS-2152-11
Organization:	Air Traffic Control, Airfield Operations [installation] Department of the Air Force [city and state]
OPM decision:	Air Traffic Control Specialist (Terminal) GS-2152-11
OPM decision number:	C-2152-11-03

/s/

Bonnie J. Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

October 24, 2002

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. The agency is responsible for reviewing its classification decisions for identical, similar, or related positions to ensure consistency with this decision. 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:

[appellant's name and address}

Civilian Personnel Officer
[installation address]

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Introduction

The Dallas Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [appellant] on July 11, 2002. We received the agency's administrative report, which provides information necessary for analysis of the appealed position, on August 5, 2002. [appellant] is an Air Traffic Control Specialist (Terminal), GS-2152-11, assigned to Air Traffic Control, Airfield Operations, [installation] (AFB), Department of the Air Force, in [city and state]. [appellant] believes his position should be classified as Air Traffic Control Specialist, GS-2152-12. At [appellant's] request, and with the concurrence of his immediate supervisor, the Civilian Personnel Flight revised [appellant's] core personnel document and reclassified the position. The classification of the position remained at GS-11. The appellant disagreed with the classification of the position and filed an appeal with OPM. We have accepted and decided the appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

To help decide the appeal, an OPM representative conducted a telephone audit with the appellant. We also interviewed the appellant's immediate supervisor and the classification section chief by telephone. All of this information was considered as well as written materials provided by the appellant and his agency.

General issues

The appellant cites grade level inconsistencies among Department of Defense (DoD) agencies and the Department of the Army's use of special salary rates for air traffic controllers in specified geographic locations as the motivation for his classification appeal. When adjudicating classification appeals, we are required by law to make classification decisions solely based on comparison of the appellant's current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Army's decision to seek approval of special salary rates is not a matter to be resolved through the classification appeal process. The appellant also cites pay disparities when comparing DoD air traffic controller positions and those in the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The FAA's classification and pay systems are no longer governed by title 5, as are the DoD systems. Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot consider Army special salary rates, pay systems outside of title 5, or compare the appellant's position to others as a basis for deciding his appeal.

Position information

The primary mission of the [numbered] Air Mobility Wing is to provide training to produce combat-ready aircrew members for the United States Air Force. The [numbered] Operations Support Squadron (OSS) provides direct mission support to all operational units assigned to the [numbered] Air Mobility Wing. It provides air traffic services, including radar and approach control (RAPCON) and control tower services, weather observation and forecasting, airfield management, intelligence, life support, tactics, flight records, scheduling, quality assurance, and current operations services. The [numbered] OSS provides this support for [aircraft types] aircrew training at the Air Mobility Training Center for pilots, navigators, flight engineers, loadmasters, and boom operators.

The appellant's position is one of six civilian positions located in the radar approach control terminal. The appellant provides air traffic control services, including sequencing, separation, advisories, vectoring and initiating, relaying, and issuing air traffic control clearances and instructions under normal and emergency flight conditions. On a rotational basis, the appellant is delegated "watch supervisor" duties for approximately two to four hours during a normal tour of duty. As the watch supervisor, the appellant is responsible for overseeing the technical operations of the RAPCON which may, on rare occasions, require up to as many as eight radar positions but normally only require up to four active positions. The appellant does not rotate between the RAPCON and tower positions.

In addition to his operational duties, the appellant provides air traffic controller training to approximately two to three military personnel. Training includes prescribed classroom, simulator, and on-the-job training over approximately 15 months in order for trainees to achieve up to eight air traffic controller position certifications. The appellant also is responsible for supervising two E-2 and one E-5 military personnel who are in training to receive air traffic controller certification. The appellant believes these duties and the watch supervisor designation warrant his position being classified as a Supervisor.

Additional duties of the appellant include serving as Nonradar Program Manager; Assistant Chief of Standards and Evaluation; Chairman, Pilot-Controller Liaison Program; and administrator for two pieces of RAPCON equipment. Though the appellant's involvement in these programs has been regular and recurring, it constitutes a low percentage of his time and therefore would have no impact on the grade determination of the appellant's position. The appellant's position description (core document number [number]) and other material of record provide more information about his duties and responsibilities.

Series, title, and standard determination

We agree with the agency's classification of the appellant's position to the Air Traffic Control Series, GS-2151.

The objective of air traffic control is to ensure the safe, orderly, and expeditious movement of aircraft through the nation's airspace. This is accomplished along three major functional lines: preflight briefing and assistance, and advisory services to pilots during flight; providing control and separation of en route air traffic; and control and separation of air traffic at airports. The appellant's position provides air traffic control services, including issuing air traffic control instructions and providing flight assistance to aircraft operating in or transiting through the airspace controlled by the terminal. The GS-2152 classification standard specifies the title of Air Traffic Control Specialist (Terminal) for such positions.

In addition to operational duties and duties as principal trainer for two military personnel, the appellant is responsible for supervising three military personnel, two E-2 personnel and one E-5. The General Schedule Supervisory Guide (GSSG) requires that not only must supervisory authorities fully meet the intent of Factor Level 3-2, (i.e., plan work and prepare schedules for completion of work, evaluate work performance of subordinates, counsel or instruct employees on both work and administrative matters, interview candidates for positions, effect minor

disciplinary measures, and develop performance standards), exercising these authorities must also constitute a major duty which occupies at least 25 percent of the time.

The appellant has limited authority over the three military personnel. He recommends ratings/evaluations and disciplinary actions rather than taking them and ensures that personnel meet training requirements set forth by Air Education and Training Command (AETC) policy, etc. The duties involved in supervising those personnel comprise approximately 20 percent of the appellant's time on a regular and recurring basis. These duties do not meet the 25 percent minimum requirement for coverage under the GSSG.

On a rotating basis, the appellant may be designated as a watch supervisor for approximately two to four hours during a normal tour of duty. These duties include responsibility for the overall operations of the facility for the shift, requiring a general situational awareness of air traffic. If necessary, the watch supervisor may limit or disapprove operations based on traffic congestion or complexity, staffing, weather, and individual controller training and experience. While these duties do involve technical oversight of the operation for a portion of a shift, they do not meet the level of supervision criteria established in Factor Level 3-2 of the GSSG. Therefore, the appellant's position is properly titled Air Traffic Control Specialist (Terminal). The grading criteria in the GS-2152 standard are used to evaluate the appellant's duties.

Grade determination

To evaluate positions responsible for issuing air traffic control instructions and providing flight assistance to aircraft within designated airspace, Part II of the GS-2152 standard is used. The duties, responsibilities, and qualifications required to control air traffic in terminals vary according to the type of aircraft operations, i.e., visual flight rules (VFR) or instrument flight rules (IFR) and whether radar is used. Air traffic control terminals are divided into four major categories based on the primary type of control services provided. These categories are nonapproach control terminals, nonradar approach control terminals, limited radar approach control terminals, and radar approach control terminals.

There are two classification factors that differentiate work at the various grade levels for air traffic control positions in terminals: knowledge, skills, and abilities required of the controllers; and the complexity of the control environment. The knowledge, skills, and abilities factor is directly related to the type of control services provided by the terminal and the various procedures and techniques that the controller must know and apply. The complexity of the control environment is influenced most significantly by the demands which the density and congestion of aircraft place on the skills, abilities and judgment of the controller.

The GS-2152 standard provides guidance for measuring traffic density. For radar approach terminals, traffic density is based on the facility's total instrument operations count. Traffic density is expressed in terms of the average hourly instrument operations handled during the day and evening shifts for the terminal's 183 busiest days of the year. This average of hourly instrument operations is computed by taking the total RAPCON air traffic count for the 183 busiest days of the year, dividing that number by 183 and then dividing that result by 16 for terminals which are open from 16 to 24 hours. For the appellant's position, the RAPCON traffic

count was 40,525 for the period of January to September 2001 and results in 13.84 average hourly instrument operations.

The appellant states that he monitors VFR traffic in addition to IFR traffic. However, this occurs on a contingency basis only. The tower regularly handles VFR traffic and the appellant's position does not rotate between the RAPCON and the tower. When positions such as the appellant's do not rotate between the tower and the RAPCON, the standard cautions that those positions must be evaluated with due consideration of the grade level relationship to the highest level of control work in the terminal.

Knowledge, skills, and abilities required

This factor is directly related to the type of control services provided by the terminal and the various procedures and techniques that the controller must know and apply. In addition to the knowledge indicated for nonapproach, nonradar, and limited radar approach control terminals, controllers in terminal facilities providing full radar approach control services for air traffic are required to possess a comprehensive knowledge of the operational requirements and techniques for providing radar control and separation of aircraft. Controllers in radar terminals must apply knowledge of the function and operation of the radar equipment, its various displays, the adjustment of the equipment, and the ability to detect malfunctions and interference.

GS-11 is typically the first full performance level of control work in radar approach control terminals. Radar control of air traffic is more difficult than the nonradar control described at GS-10 because, in addition to detailed knowledge of nonradar air traffic control, it requires a thorough knowledge of the functions and interference characteristics of radar systems, knowledge of and the ability to apply the reduced aircraft separation standards possible under radar, and the requirement to maintain a more positive and continuing control of aircraft.

At GS-12, the kinds of knowledge, skills, and abilities are similar to the GS-11 level. However, in comparison with the GS-11 radar controller who typically handles a light to medium density of traffic, the GS-12 controller is faced regularly with peaks of heavy traffic. Under the more restrictive time and space limitations imposed by the greater density of traffic there is the requirement for greater precision in determining appropriate aircraft movements and formulating control instructions, more intense and precise coordination among the controllers, consideration of the effect of action by any specific aircraft on a larger number of other aircraft in the terminal airspace, and consideration of a larger number of more rapidly changing aircraft positions and a greater variety of alternative actions for individual aircraft.

The appellant has detailed knowledge of nonradar air traffic control such as the knowledge and ability to apply the procedures and techniques for controlling air traffic based upon flight progress information on the speed, altitude, and direction of aircraft operating under instrument flight rules. The appellant must issue instructions that consistently meet FAA, Department of the Air Force, installation, and local guidance for safe and expeditious air traffic movement, separation, and sequencing.

Additionally, the appellant has a thorough knowledge of the functions and interference characteristics of the radar system. The appellant operates communications and radar equipment for use in approach and departure control, arrival control, radar final control, and precision approach control. He also troubleshoots any equipment problems or interference to ensure the radar system performs optimally. The appellant's knowledge and skill with the radar system allows for reduced levels of aircraft separation within the terminal airspace and allows him to maintain a more positive and continuing control of aircraft as required for GS-11.

As with many Air Traffic Control Specialists, the appellant provides on-the-job training in live traffic situations and certification to student air traffic controllers. In the appellant's case, he also provides classroom, simulator, and on-the-job instruction for up to three active-duty Air Force enlisted personnel. As many as 18 trainees may be assigned to the AETC prescribed air traffic controller certification program at [name] AFB, with up to three trainees assigned to each fully qualified air traffic controller, either Federal civilian or active duty military. The appellant must monitor the student's training and report on his or her certification progress to the chief controller and program training officer. The GS-2152 standard recognizes that full performance level controllers are generally required to provide training for trainee and developmental controllers. However, there is no provision in the standard for increasing grade levels of positions providing instruction above the level necessary to perform the work of the position. The knowledge, skills, and abilities required by the appellant's position fully meet GS-11.

The appellant's position does not meet the level envisioned at GS-12. At this level, controllers routinely experience a heavy traffic density of 20 to 59 hourly instrument operations. The RAPCON regularly handles light to medium density traffic with the average equating to 13.84 hourly instrument operations. The lighter traffic density experienced by the appellant's position does not result in as restrictive time requirements and space limitations that are imposed by greater traffic density. The greater traffic density imposes more restrictive time and space limitations that require greater precision in determining aircraft movements and issuing control instructions. It requires more intense and precise coordination among controllers and consideration of the effect of action by any specific aircraft on a larger number of aircraft in the terminal airspace.

Complexity of the control environment

The complexity of controlling air traffic in terminals is influenced most significantly by the demands that the density and congestion of aircraft place on the skills, abilities, and judgment of the controller. As the level of air traffic increases significantly, there is a proportionally greater increase in the amount of coordination required among the controllers. Decisions on instructions to be issued to pilots become more critical. As the airspace becomes more congested, optional plans for the movement and control of aircraft are reduced. Increased numbers of aircraft require that controllers maintain increased alertness to a highly dynamic traffic picture.

The complexity of terminal controller positions may be further influenced by a number of environmental and operational factors which controllers must deal with in assuring the safe, orderly and expeditious movement of aircraft. These factors include the varying mix in speed and performance characteristics of aircraft using the airport; limitations on the use of airspace

imposed by such factors as noise abatement procedures, terrain, proximity of other airports, or the use of restrictive arrival and departure corridors; airport configuration in terms of runway and taxiway layout, lengths, and capacities; and provision of control services for satellite or secondary airports.

At GS-11, radar terminals typically require only a limited number of radar positions of operations, although some facilities may have larger number of radar positions established, but are not operated during several hours of the day and evening shifts. Traffic demands are such that individual radar positions may handle more than one control function or assume responsibility for a relatively large segment of the terminal's airspace. Radar terminals at this level typically have fewer and less complex configurations of airspace than terminal control situations at higher levels. As a result, coordination for the use of airspace is more readily achieved at the GS-11 level.

Radar terminals at GS-12, because of the heavy density of traffic present, generally require four to six radar positions to be operational during the day and evening shifts. Because of the traffic demands, these positions tend to become more specialized in the particular control functions that they perform, e.g., a particular position may handle only arrival or departure traffic.

More complex divisions of the control work and the assigned airspace are required at GS-12 than in the GS-11 work situation. Thus, more intricate procedures must be developed to ensure that the necessary coordination is effected among controllers. The complicating environmental and operational factors described at the GS-11 level are further intensified by the heavy density of traffic characteristic of the GS-12 level, normally 20-59 hourly instrument operations. Such factors as crossing or converging runways, a substantial volume of helicopter traffic, provision of radar service to a number of satellite airports, and restrictive noise abatement procedures influence the already high level of difficulty and complexity characteristic of the GS-12 level.

The air space under RAPCON extends upward to 9,000 feet from the surface within a 25 to 30 mile radius of [name] AFB. Environmental factors include three parallel runways on the base, two restricted areas, three military operations areas, 10 small satellite airports, and noise abatement procedures. There are eight radar positions established in the Airfield Operations RAPCON; however, normally only up to four are in operation. The level of air traffic (13.84 hourly instrument operations) is such that one controller may handle more than one position, i.e., controllers at [name] AFB regularly handle both approach control and departure control.

The terminal airspace at [name] AFB does not include crossing or converging runways; there are three parallel runways. These runways are of varying lengths, requiring the appellant's position to have thorough knowledge of precise aircraft arrival and departure profiles, including wake turbulence and speeds and distance necessary to prepare for aircraft take-off and landing, to ensure separation.

The appellant's position regularly provides control services to the [number] Air Mobility Wing's assigned [aircraft type] military aircraft. They also provide control service to transient military aircraft such as Boeing 707's. Included in these services is initial sequencing, setup, separation, and hand-offs to the tower or other centers or stations, weather updates, and Notices to Airmen.

On occasion, the appellant's position may provide approach control services to light aircraft that enter [name] AFB airspace.

The appellant's position fully meets the GS-11 grade level. However, the lower level of traffic density, number and scope of the radar positions required, and the relatively less complicated environmental and operational factors at Altus AFB do not require the appellant to regularly use the higher level of knowledge, skills, abilities, and judgment typical of the GS-12 grade level.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Air Traffic Control Specialist (Terminal), GS-2152-11.