

8 FEB 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Review Staff

SUBJECT: SSC/HSC Request

REFERENCE: Memo for SSC, Subject: Policy and Guidelines for Microform Production and Storage, dated 28 January 1976

1. Before commenting specifically on the questions raised in referent memo, I feel it important to provide a perspective for understanding details of the Agency's micrographic activities.

2. Micrographic technology, as is perhaps well known, which involves basically the miniaturization of documents has been used widely in the intelligence profession for years. It is an old technology which continues to be useful operationally, albeit classically, as part of our tradecraft. However, through the years and especially during the incipient period of the Agency, microfilm was used more generally as strictly a medium for the long-term storage of paper records, some of which were deteriorating and others to reduce their great bulk since microfilm offers the extraordinary advantage of approximately 98% space savings. Thus, up until only recently--about the last half dozen years--microfilm activity in the Agency was limited primarily to its use in operations and quite passively as a records storage medium.

3. With the introduction of computer output microfilm (COM) technology around 1969, a cost effective way was discovered to take output directly from the computer (either roll film and later microfiche) without any paper intermediary. This signalled the dawning of the age of microfilm as an active information handling medium. And since about that time the Agency has witnessed an ever increasing volume of microforms produced each year.

4. The Deputy Director for Administration coordinates Agency micrographic activities and provides a framework within which this coordination can take place. Thus, an

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Agency Micrographics Program was formalized to enhance information handling by applying micrographic technology where feasible. The DDA, then, develops and conducts Agency training courses on micrographics, establishes standards and guidelines, disseminates Agency policy regarding the production and use of microforms and equipment, and maintains an Agency service facility for the conversion of either paper records or computer produced magnetic tapes to microforms.

5. The records management channels of the Agency generally are used in the evaluation process of whether or not to implement new micrographic applications. Depending on the application, of course, feasibility studies and systems analyses and designs are undertaken to insure the development of an optimum micrographic application. In some instances this can be a protracted and complicated exercise as was the case when the Directorate of Operations acquired the WALNUT system in the late 1950's, a unique high-reduction photographic document storage and retrieval system. Likewise, a very detailed study was made by the Directorate of Intelligence years ago which culminated in a decision to convert its intelligence reference collection to the aperture card microform. In other cases involving the more routine administrative files held by various components across the Agency, paper records have been converted to microforms primarily to accomplish a specific objective: to conserve space, to provide easier and/or more rapid access to the information, or to provide a back-up or vital record copy. When microfilm conversions take place, records officers insure that the records control schedules are amended and that there is proper disposition of the paper records.

6. With the above as a backdrop, let me now address the specific questions raised in reference. First, the Directorate of Administration and its predecessor organizations in the early years used a 40 year minimum retention period as a break even point for determining when files could be considered candidates for microfilming. This rule of thumb was later shortened to 12 years, but as microfilm became more accepted as an active information handling tool, there has been a tendency to convert paper records to microfilm that have even shorter life cycles for the reasons listed above. Also, data from the computer is being output directly on film and in many cases, of course, this data may have a life cycle of only a few weeks or a month before it is updated, as is the case with the Agency payroll and certain other personnel and financial reports.

7. Second, the guidelines for what materials are placed on microfilm or microfiche are broad to include just about anything that can be photographed. However, because of the inherent difficulty of high resolution microfilm to capture well grey scales in tonal images, photographs, color materials, and the like may be excluded. The attitude of the user relative to his acceptance of the microform as an adequate substitute for his paper records is our prevailing guideline.

8. Third, microfilm/microfiche records are stored in accordance with Federal Property Management Regulations  or in an office area depending on their use and desired accessibility. Access to them regardless of where they are stored is subject to the approval of the custodian or originating office on a need-to-know basis, and in any case access controls are the same for microform records as they are for paper records.

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9. Finally, the Directorate of Administration has no microform records relating to Project MKULTRA.

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