

NSA Whistleblower: Snowden Never Had Access to the “Juiciest” Intelligence Documents

NSA Spying On Congress, Admirals, Lawyers ... Content As Well As Metadata ... Cheney Was Running the Show

By [Washington's Blog](#)

Global Research, June 09, 2014

[Washington's Blog](#) 7 June 2014

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

NSA whistleblower Russel Tice was a [key source](#) in the 2005 New York Times [report](#) that blew the lid off the Bush administration's use of warrantless wiretapping.

Tice told PBS and other media that the NSA is [spying on – and blackmailing – top government officials and military officers](#), including [Supreme Court Justices, highly-ranked generals, Colin Powell and other State Department personnel](#), and many other top officials:

He says the NSA started [spying on President Obama](#) when he was a candidate for Senate:

Many of Tice's allegations have been [confirmed by other government whistleblowers](#). And see [this](#).

Washington's Blog called Tice to find out more about what he saw when he was at NSA.

RUSSELL TICE: We now know that NSA was wiretapping [Senator] Frank Church and another Senator. [That has been [confirmed](#).]

And that got out *by accident*. All the information the NSA had back then – and probably many other senators and important people too, back in the 70s – they *shredded* and they *destroyed* all of that evidence. As much as they could find, they destroyed it all. By accident, something popped up 40 years later.

And, in fact, they were asked 40 years ago whether NSA had bugged Congress. And, of course, they lied. They *lied through their teeth*.

NSA Has Hidden Its Most Radical Surveillance Operations ... Even from People Like Snowden Who Had General “Code Word” Clearance

WASHINGTON'S BLOG: Glenn Greenwald – supposedly, in the next couple of days or weeks – is going to disclose, based on NSA documents leaked by Snowden, that the NSA is spying on all sorts of normal Americans ... and that the spying is really to crush dissent. [Background [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).]

Does Snowden even *have* documents which contain the information which you've seen?

RUSSELL TICE: The answer is no.

WASHINGTON'S BLOG: So you saw handwritten notes. And what Snowden was seeing were electronic files ...?

RUSSELL TICE: Think of it this way. Remember I told you about the NSA doing everything they could to make sure that the information from 40 years ago – from spying on Frank Church and Lord knows how many other Congressman that they were spying on – was hidden?

Now do you think they're going to put that information into Powerpoint slides that are easy to explain to everybody what they're doing?

They would not even put their *own NSA designators* on the reports [so that no one would know that] it came from the NSA. They made the reports look like they were Humint (human intelligence) reports. They did it to hide the fact that they were NSA and they were doing the collection. That's *40 years ago*. [The NSA and other agencies are still doing ["parallel construction"](#), ["laundering" information](#) to hide the fact that the information is actually from mass NSA surveillance.]

Now, what NSA is doing right *now* is that they're taking the information and they're putting it in a much higher security level. It's called "ECI" – Exceptionally Controlled Information – and it's called the black program ... which I was a specialist in, by the way.

I specialized in *black world* – DOD and IC (Intelligence Community) – programs, operations and missions ... in "VRKs", "ECIs", and "SAPs", "STOs". SAP equals Special Access Program. It's highly unlikely Mr. Snowden had any access to these. STO equals Special Technical Operations. It's highly unlikely Mr. Snowden had any access to these.

Now in that world – the ECI/VRK world – everything in that system is classified at a higher level and it has its *own computer systems* that house it. It's totally separate than the system which Mr. Snowden was privy to, which was called the "JWICS": Joint Worldwide Intelligence Communications System. The JWICS system is what everybody at NSA has access to. Mr Snowden had Sys Admin [systems administrator] authority for the JWICS.

And you still have to have TS/SCI clearance [i.e. [Top Secret/ Sensitive Compartmented Information](#) – also known as "code word" – clearance] to get on the JWICS. But the ECI/VRK systems are *much higher* [levels of special compartmentalized clearance] than the JWICS. And you have to be in the black world to get that [clearance].

ECI = Exceptionally Controlled Information. I do not believe Mr. Snowden had any access to these ECI controlled networks). VRK = Very Restricted Knowledge. I do not believe Mr. Snowden had any access to these VRK controlled networks.

These programs typically have, at the least, a requirement of 100 year or until death, 'till the person first being "read in" [i.e. sworn to secrecy as part of access to the higher classification program] can talk about them. [As an interesting sidenote, the Washington Times [reported](#) in 2006 that – when Tice offered to testify to Congress about this illegal spying – he was informed by the NSA that the Senate and House intelligence committees

were *not cleared to hear such information.*]

It's very compartmentalized and – even with stuff that they had – you might have something at NSA, that there's literally *40 people* at NSA that know that it's going on in the entire agency.

When the stuff came out in the New York Times [the first big spying story, which [broke in 2005](#)] – and I was a source of information for the New York Times – that's when President Bush made up that nonsense about the “terrorist surveillance program.” By the way, that *never existed*. That was *made up*.

There was *no such thing* beforehand. It was made up ... to try to placate the American people.

The NSA IG (Inspector General) – who was not cleared for this – all of a sudden is told he has to do an investigation on this; something he has no information or knowledge of.

So what they did, is they took a *few* documents and they downgraded [the classification level of the documents] – just a few – and gave them to them to placate this basic whitewash investigation.

Snowden's Failure To Understand the Most Important Documents

RUSSELL TICE: Now, if Mr. Snowden were to find the crossover, it would be those documents that were downgraded to the NSA's IG.

The stuff that I saw looked like a bunch of alphanumeric gobbledygook. Unless you have an analyst to know what to look for – and believe me, I think that what Snowden's done is great – he's not an intelligence *analyst*. So he would see something like that, and he *wouldn't know* what he's looking at.

But that would be “the jewels”. And the key is, you wouldn't know it's the jewels unless you were a diamond miner and you knew what to look for. Because otherwise, there's a big lump of rock and you don't know there's a *diamond* in there.

I worked special programs. And the way I found out is that I was working on a special operation, and I needed information from NSA ... from another unit. And when I went to that unit and I said “I need this information”, and I dealt with [satellite spy operations], and I did that in the black world. I was a special operations officer. I would literally go do special missions that were in the black world where I would travel overseas and do spooky stuff.

Cheney Was Running the Show

WASHINGTON'S BLOG: You said in one of your interviews that Dick Cheney ordered the intercepts that you found in the burn bags [the bags of documents which were slated to be destroyed because they were so sensitive].

Is that right ... and if so, how do you know that?

RUSSELL TICE: I did not know one way or the other until I talked to a very senior person at NSA who – much later – wanted to have a meeting with me. And we had a covert, clandestine style meeting. And that's when this individual told me that the whole thing was

being directed and was coming from the vice president's office ... Cheney, through his lawyer David Addington.

WASHINGTON'S BLOG: It sounds like it wasn't going through normal routes? It's not like Cheney or Addington made formal requests to the NSA ... through normal means?

RUSSELL TICE: No, not normal at all. All on the sly ... all "sneaky pete" under the table, in the evening when most NSA employees are gone for the day. This is all being done in the evenings ... between like 7 [at night] and midnight.

NSA Is Spying On CONTENT as Well as Metadata

WASHINGTON'S BLOG: And from what you and others have said, it's content as well as metadata?

RUSSELL TICE: Of course it is. Of course. [[Background](#). But [see this](#).]

NSA Spying On Journalists, Congress, Admirals, Lawyers ...

RUSSELL TICE: In 2009, I told [reporters] that they were going after journalists and news organizations and reporters and such.

I never read text of Congressman's conversations. What I had was information – sometimes hand-written – of phone numbers of Congressmen, their wives, their children, their staffers, their home numbers, their cellphone numbers, their phone numbers of their residence back in Oregon or whatever state they're from, and their little offices back in their state.

Or an Admiral *and his wife, and his kids and his staffers* ...

The main thing I saw more than anything else were *lawyers and law firms*. I saw more lawyers or law firms being wiretapped than anything else.

These are the phone numbers I saw written. And then I would see those numbers incorporated into those lists with the columns of information about the phone number, and the serial number and the banks of recorders and digital converters and the data storage devices. I could see handwritten phone numbers and notes, sometimes with names, sometimes not.

Snowden and Greenwald's Whistleblowing Was Done In the Right Way

RUSSELL TICE: If Mr. Snowden would have had access to VRK, ECI, SAP, STO (and a few others that I will not mention here), and he released them *en masse* to the press, I would volunteer to shoot him as a traitor *myself*.

But this is *not* what he did.

He gave up JWICS info that he insisted be vetted for sources and methods, and true damage to national security. Mr. Greenwald and company should be congratulated on the restraint that they have shown with the JWICS documentation that they have in hand via Mr. Snowden.

Postscript: When Tice started blowing the whistle on NSA mass surveillance in the early 2000s, the NSA all of a sudden decided that Tice was "crazy". As Tice told us:

For many years, I was the only NSA whistleblower in public.

And what they did is call me in – 9 months after my routine psychological evaluation – which I passed with flying colors, like every other one I've had in my entire career, passed with flying colors.

They called me in for an “emergency” psychological evaluation, and they declared me nuts.

I am a fairly good judge of character, and I found Tice to be humorous, self-deprecating in a healthy and light-hearted way, and consistent on the facts. Tice talked about how he was a pretty darn good football player in junior college, but no star athlete. He talked about how one reporter tried to make him out to be James Bond with leading man looks, and he thought that was ridiculous. We shared some normal “guy talk” about women. Tice has a little anger at the way the NSA tried to whitewash the mass surveillance that he uncovered (wouldn't you be?), but he wasn't enraged or over-the-top. Tice is also a patriotic American, not a subversive. Specifically, we spent a long time talking about the importance of the Constitution and the rule of law. In other words, Tice seems “oriented to reality”, completely sane, normal, ethical and bright to me.

And the following facts are more important than my personal impression:

- Many of Tice's allegations have been confirmed by Snowden and [other government whistleblowers](#). And see [this](#)
- Soviet leaders were famous for throwing dissidents into psychiatric wards. Unfortunately, the [same thing sometimes happens in modern America](#)

Given the way that the NSA has been [repeatedly caught in lies](#) about its surveillance programs – and the way that it has [attacked whistleblowers](#) – I believe Tice over the NSA.

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