

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Division for Human Capital Leadership & Merit System Accountability
Classification Appeals Program

Dallas Field Services Group
1100 Commerce Street, Room 4C22
Dallas, TX 75242

Job Grading Appeal Decision
Under section 5346 of title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [appellant]

Agency classification: Aircraft Mechanical Work Inspector,
WG-8852-10

Organization: Tanker Quality Section
Quality Assurance Branch
Aircraft Production Division
Maintenance Directorate
[#] Mission Support Group (AFMC)
[name] Air Force Base
[location]

OPM decision: Aircraft Mechanical Work Inspector,
WG-8852-10

OPM decision number: C-8852-10-01

/s/ Judith L. Frenzel

Judith L. Frenzel
Classification Appeals Officer

June 2, 2003

Date

As provided in section S7-8 of the *Operating Manual: Federal Wage System*, 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 section 532.705(f) of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (address provided in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*, appendix 4, section H).

Decision sent to:

[appellant's name and address]

Chief, Plans and Requirements Branch
Civilian Personnel Division
[#] Support Group (AFMC)
Department of the Air Force
[location]

Director, Civilian Personnel Operations
HQ AFPC/DPC
Department of the Air Force
550 C Street West, Suite 57
Randolph Air Force Base, TX 78151-4759

Chief, Civilian Policy
HQ USAF/DPFC
Department of the Air Force
1040 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1040

Classification Appeals Adjudication Section
Civilian Personnel Management Service
Department of Defense
1400 Key Boulevard
Arlington, VA 2209-5144

Introduction

On February 11, 2003, the Dallas Oversight Division, now the Dallas Field Services Group, of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, accepted a job grading appeal from [appellant]. Mr. [appellant's] job is presently graded as Aircraft Mechanical Work Inspector, WG-8852-10, assigned to the Tanker Quality Section, Quality Assurance Branch, Aircraft Production Division, Maintenance Directorate, [#] Mission Support Group, Department of the Air Force, located at [name] Air Force Base in [location]. The agency's administrative report was received March 6, 2003. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5346 of title 5, United States Code.

Background

The installation graded the job as Aircraft Mechanical Work Inspector (Sheet Metal Mechanical [Aircraft] Work Inspector/Aircraft Electrical Work Inspector), WG-8852-10. The appellant disagreed with the installation's determination and filed an appeal with the Department of Defense's Civilian Personnel Management Service (CPMS). The CPMS decision, dated January 22, 2003, found the job to be an Aircraft Mechanical Work Inspector, WG-8852-10. The appellant believes his job should be a WG-2610-15, based on inspection of avionics work.

To help decide this appeal, an OPM representative conducted a telephone audit with the appellant on May 14, 2003, and interviewed his supervisor on May 15 and 21. In reaching our decision, we have carefully considered all of the information provided in the interviews as well as the information provided by the appellant and his agency that is included in the written record.

Job information

The job is assigned to the Tanker Quality Section that oversees depot level maintenance on KC-135 tanker aircraft. These aircraft are sent to a depot on a 5-year basis for major overhaul and repair. The aircraft are defueled, cleaned, stripped of removable components, and thoroughly inspected. Most of the items for overhaul/replacement are prescribed for the cycle, but the entire aircraft is inspected to assure there are no other problems such as corrosion or other damage. The appellant is one of 17 wage system inspectors assigned to the tanker quality section. The purpose of the position is to inspect work products and processes during and after completion of the depot level maintenance. Currently, the inspectors rotate periodically to the various docks where different phases of the overhaul are being worked, e.g., initial inspection, electrical rewire, sheet metal, hydraulics, fuel systems, operational checks, and pre-flight checks prior to test flight.

As part of the overall quality assurance plan, the appellant conducts different categories of inspections. Task evaluations involve observation of a mechanic performing a job and determining if it is performed in accordance appropriate directives and technical orders, and grades the mechanic. In quality verification inspections, he evaluates a maintenance procedure, process, or product to determine if it is being accomplished in accordance with standards, codes, technical orders, work specifications, drawings, and work control documents. The appellant also performs a variety of core and other inspections that may involve such things as work control documents, safety practices, maintenance of a clean work area, and maintenance and control of tools and equipment. He uses checklists, rating instructions, technical data, and other guidelines in performing these inspections.

The appellant reports to a Supervisory Quality Assurance Specialist (Aircraft), GS-1910-11, in the Tanker Quality Branch. The Branch includes Wage Grade Inspectors and General Schedule Quality Assurance Specialists who are responsible for carrying out the Division's Quality Assurance Plan for KC-135 aircraft. The job description and information in the record provide more detailed information.

Pay plan determination

The primary purpose of the appellant's job is to inspect work products and processes during or after completion of depot maintenance on assigned aircraft. That work is primarily performed by Federal wage system mechanics. The job requires knowledge of the makeup, operation, installation, and adjustment of a variety of aircraft systems, subsystems, and assemblies that is considered trades knowledge. As the paramount requirement for the appellant's primary duties is trades knowledge, the work is exempt from the General Schedule and is assigned to the Federal Wage System.

Occupation, title, and standard determination

The Job Grading Standard for Inspectors is used to grade nonsupervisory jobs that involve examining services, materials, and products that are processed, manufactured, or repaired by workers performing trade or craft work to determine that the physical and operating characteristics are within acceptable standards, specifications, or contractual requirements. The appellant's work is covered by this standard.

The occupational code of an inspector job is determined by the occupation of the kind of work inspected. As indicated, the primary purpose of the appellant's work is to inspect a number of aircraft systems such as the airframe, landing gear, fuel and hydraulic systems, pressurization, flight controls, instrumentation, and electrical systems. The appellant primarily inspects work accomplished by aircraft mechanics, aircraft sheet metal mechanics, and aircraft electricians. The proportions of that work are evenly divided. The journey level grade for these jobs is WG-10. While the appellant does perform some inspection of the installation of avionics equipment, that work is limited in time, e.g., less than 5 percent. It is also limited in scope, e.g., assuring the correct removal and reinstallation of equipment after aircraft is rewired and/or equipment is overhauled and checked in the avionics shop. This work is comparable to that performed in the 2892 aircraft electrician occupation. It does not require the level of skill and knowledge of electricity, electronics, and physics required for coverage by any occupation in the 2600 Electronic Equipment Installations and Maintenance Family.

The WG-8852 Aircraft Mechanic occupation covers work involved in maintenance and repair of fixed and rotary wing aircraft systems, airframes, components, and assemblies. WG-8852 mechanics must have knowledge of how these systems, assemblies, and surfaces fit and work together. The record indicates this was the occupation used to recruit for this position. As the grade levels of the work inspected are the same, the WG-8852 occupation is the most appropriate. The title is Aircraft Mechanical Work Inspector.

Grade determination

The Job Grading Standard for Inspectors is used to grade the appellant's job. This standard is divided into two parts. Part I provides guidance on the use of three factors and grade determination charts to convert the factors into grades levels. Each of the three factors: situation, responsibility, and skill and knowledge are divided into three parts. Part II provides examples of job descriptions for additional guidance.

Factor 1 – Situation

The first step is to determine which situation is most typical of the inspector job. Situation A involves less complex inspection work with basic and simple products to inspect using a limited variety of inspection methods and techniques.

Situation B involves more complex inspection work of manufactured or repaired products using a wide variety of inspection processes and techniques. Typically, jobs have the following characteristics. (1) The product has a variety of quality characteristics, usually consisting of components and assemblies, undergoes several steps in the manufacture or repair process, and has rigid specifications and close tolerances. (2) Guidance material is complicated, requires interpretation and application to various situations, sometimes involving general performance-type specification that are not always fully applicable and may require modifications by the Inspector. (3) Inspections are performed by using a variety of standard precision instruments, gauges, and methods. Judgmental decisions are used concerning the proximity to tolerances and the fit of interrelated dimensions or the use of specially designed testing methods.

Situation C involves highly sophisticated and complex inspection work, using not only a wide variety of inspection processes and techniques but many unique and specially designed precision instruments and gauges. The skill to inspect requires indepth knowledge of several trades or knowledge of a highly skilled trade. Typically the product has a wide variety of quality characteristics, consists of a complete system or variety of components and assemblies, undergoes many steps in repair process, and has highly critical tolerances. Guidance material is highly complicated and must be frequently modified to fit the situation. Inspections are performed by using a variety of precision instruments, gauges, and methods. Many checks have to be accomplished at critical points in the process. Judgmental decisions are used concerning proximity to tolerances and fit of interrelated dimensions and the effect on the completed system. Specially designed testing methods must be reviewed and judged appropriate.

The appellant is responsible for inspection of KC-135 aircraft from the basic stripped airframe through installation of new electrical wiring; overhauled components such as landing gear, fuel tanks and systems, flight control surfaces, instrumentation, etc. Removable components are overhauled in other shops and inspected at that location during that process. For example, flight control surfaces are repaired and balanced in the shop, then installed on the aircraft and rigged, then inspected by the appellant. As in Situation B, the depot maintenance process involves multiple steps and processes and has rigid specifications and close tolerances. The Air Force and manufacturer technical orders and other material are complicated and require some interpretation. However, unlike Situation C, modifications to that technical guidance may not be made an inspector but must go through the engineering office for approval.

The appellant's position does not meet Situation C. The work does not require the in-depth knowledge of several trades as typical of Situation C. A management decision was made to use more generalized skills for the inspection workforce rather than each inspector working only his/her area of specialized experience. The appellant, as well as other inspectors, attended classes to learn the skills to inspect in other areas. The inspections performed do not require the variety of precision instruments, gauges, and methods typical of Situation C. The appellant stated that he uses a flashlight, mirror, and the computer information on technical orders, specifications, and procedures. He indicates that he rarely performs any tests personally but that he checks the mechanics while they perform any tests required. Those mechanics use the standard tools of the trade, such as depth gauges, dial calipers, micrometers, cable tension meters, protractors, and various meters for checking electrical system to perform and check their work. While some inspections may need to be done at certain times during the repair process, e.g., the area may not be easily accessible after further work is completed, it is not necessarily at a critical point in the repair process, as in Situation C. While the complete aircraft is a complex piece of equipment, the inspection process is accomplished in a series of component and systems inspections and examination by multiple inspectors at various stages in the maintenance/overhaul process. Situation B is appropriate.

Factor II - Responsibility

The next step is to determine the level of responsibility. This factor consists of three levels.

At Level II, the supervisor provides general instructions that concern the broad objectives and expected results of the assignments, deadline requirements, reporting formats, and other administrative matters. The Inspector receives little technical assistance during the assignment. Review of completed work is concentrated on adequacy and conformance with desired objectives. Instructions and guides are usually available but are complicated, require careful interpretation, and may involve modification in specific assignments.

At Level III, after a brief outline of priorities, work sequences, and pertinent policy has been given, the employee independently performs the assignment, usually at a site where the supervisor is not readily available (such as at a contractor's plant). Completed work is reviewed for adherence to inspection policy to assure program objectives have been achieved. The Inspector makes decisions on a range of matters that may involve deviations from past precedents and accepted practices. Instructions and guides, when available, are generally not directly applicable.

The appellant's level of responsibility is comparable to Level II. He receives weekly work assignments from the supervisor including those for special inspections of certain critical areas focusing on customer problem issues, e.g., wheels, tires, brakes. Comparable to Level II, the appellant works independently, carrying out both regular and special inspections as requested. Review of work is primarily accomplished by the data gathered, and the report forms completed and reported into the work control system. Problems/discrepancies are reported to the quality staff for review and resolution. Questions or problems with the technical data must be resolved through the engineering office. Depending on the assignment, the supervisor may not be near the appellant's immediate work vicinity. However, the supervisor is located on the base and can be contacted if needed. Quality assurance specialists, engineering staff, and/or equipment specialists in the specialized areas are also available for assistance if needed.

The appellant is not authorized to make decisions that deviate from technical orders or other guidance, including precedents and past practices, as described in Level III. As indicated earlier, deviations from technical orders must be approved by the engineering staff. The guidance used by the appellant, while complex, is generally applicable to the project at hand.

Factor III - Skill and knowledge

The next step is to determine the degree of skill and knowledge needed to inspect in relation to the complexity of the product inspected and the nature and variety of inspection techniques that are applied. This factor is used in accordance to the situation previously selected in Factor I.

Situation B was credited under Factor I. This situation involves inspection of manufactured or repaired products having a variety of interconnecting parts, components, and assemblies with a variety of quality characteristics, rigid specifications, and close tolerances, using standard measuring and testing instruments comparable to the type the trade worker uses to check his/her own work.

Degree B of Situation B involves application of a variety of difficult techniques to examine complicated and interconnecting components such as engines, transmissions, carburetors, and ignition systems, and machinery that are manufactured or repaired to close tolerances and rigid specifications. These examinations use standard inspection and measuring devices such as feeler gauges, micrometers, circuit testers, dwell meters, and a variety of dial indicators.

Degree C describes applying a wide variety of complex inspection techniques to examine complete assemblies such as general purpose vehicles, ordnance and heavy artillery, aircraft and ship assemblies, and other equipment using special inspection and measuring devices such as chassis dynamometers, torque wrenches, surface finish analyzers, oscilloscopes, calipers, and screw-pitch gauges.

As comparable to Degree B, the inspections are accomplished on a series of components and systems as the aircraft is reassembled after overhaul. There are multiple steps and inspections during the repair/overhaul process performed by inspectors in the component shop areas as well as by the appellant. The appellant does inspect systems, for example, do the landing gear, flight controls, refueling probe operate correctly? The appellant is not responsible for inspection of the complete aircraft assembly nor is he required to use the wide variety of complex inspection techniques or special inspection and measuring devices as described at the Degree C level. Degree B is credited.

Using the Grade Determination Charts in the standard, jobs at Situation B, with a level of responsibility at Level II, and degree of skill and knowledge at Degree B converts to the grade 10 level.

Decision

The position is properly graded as Aircraft Mechanical Work Inspector, WG-8852-10.