

DATE: January 7, 2005

In Re:

SSN: -----

Applicant for Security Clearance

ISCR Case No. 02-21385

APPEAL BOARD DECISION

APPEARANCES

FOR GOVERNMENT

Peregrine D. Russell-Hunter, Esq., Chief Department Counsel

FOR APPLICANT

Pro Se

The Defense Office of Hearings and Appeals (DOHA) issued the Applicant a Statement of Reasons (SOR), dated September 15, 2003, which stated the reasons why DOHA proposed to deny or revoke Applicant's access to classified information. The SOR was based upon Guideline H (Drug Involvement) and Guideline E (Personal Conduct). Administrative Judge James A. Young issued an unfavorable security clearance decision, dated September 2, 2004.

Applicant appealed the Administrative Judge's unfavorable decision. The Board has jurisdiction on appeal under Executive Order 10865 and Department of Defense Directive 5220.6 (Directive), dated January 2, 1992, as amended.

Applicant's appeal presents the following issues: (1) whether the Administrative Judge's decision with respect to the drug involvement allegations is arbitrary, capricious, or contrary to law, and (2) whether the Administrative Judge erred by finding the Applicant's falsification of his security clearance questionnaire was deliberate. For the reasons that follow, the Board affirms the Administrative Judge's decision.

Scope of Review

On appeal, the Board does not review a case *de novo*. Rather, the Board addresses the material issues raised by the parties to determine whether there is factual or legal error. There is no presumption of error below, and the appealing party must raise claims of error with specificity and identify how the Administrative Judge committed factual or legal error. Directive, Additional Procedural Guidance, Item E3.1.32. *See also* ISCR Case No. 00-0050 (July 23, 2001) at pp. 2-3 (discussing reasons why party must raise claims of error with specificity).

When the rulings or conclusions of an Administrative Judge are challenged, the Board must consider whether they are: (1) arbitrary or capricious; or (2) contrary to law. Directive, Additional Procedural Guidance, Item E3.1.32.3. In deciding whether the Judge's rulings or conclusions are arbitrary or capricious, the Board will review the Judge's decision to determine whether: it does not examine relevant evidence; it fails to articulate a satisfactory explanation for its conclusions, including a rational connection between the facts found and the choice made; it does not consider relevant factors; it reflects a clear error of judgment; it fails to consider an important aspect of the case; it offers an explanation for the decision that runs contrary to the record evidence; or it is so implausible that it cannot be ascribed to a mere difference of opinion. *See, e.g.*, ISCR Case No. 97-0435 (July 14, 1998) at p. 3 (citing Supreme Court decision).

In deciding whether the Judge's rulings or conclusions are contrary to law, the Board will consider whether they are contrary to provisions of Executive Order 10865, the Directive, or other applicable federal law. Compliance with state or local law is not required because security clearance adjudications are conducted by the Department of Defense pursuant to federal law. *See* U.S. Constitution, Article VI, clause 2 (Supremacy Clause). *See, e.g.*, ISCR Case No. 00-0423 (June 8, 2001) at p. 3 (citing Supreme Court decisions).

When an Administrative Judge's factual findings are challenged, the Board must determine whether "[t]he Administrative Judge's findings of fact are supported by such relevant evidence as a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion in light of all the contrary evidence in the same record. In making this review, the Appeal Board shall give deference to the credibility determinations of the Administrative Judge." Directive, Additional Procedural Guidance, Item E3.1.32.1. The Board must consider not only whether there is record evidence supporting a Judge's findings, but also whether there is evidence that fairly detracts from the weight of the evidence supporting those findings, and whether the Judge's findings reflect a reasonable interpretation of the record evidence as a whole. Although a Judge's credibility determination is not immune from review, the party challenging a Judge's credibility determination has a heavy burden on appeal.

When an appeal issue raises a question of law, the Board's scope of review is plenary. *See* DISCR Case No. 87-2107 (September 29, 1992) at pp. 4-5 (citing federal cases).

If an appealing party demonstrates factual or legal error, then the Board must consider the following questions:

Is the error harmful or harmless? *See, e.g.*, ISCR Case No. 00-0250 (July 11, 2001) at p. 6 (discussing harmless error doctrine);

Has the nonappealing party made a persuasive argument for how the Administrative Judge's decision can be affirmed on alternate grounds? *See, e.g.*, ISCR Case No. 99-0454 (October 17, 2000) at p. 6 (citing federal cases); and

If the Administrative Judge's decision cannot be affirmed, should the case be reversed or remanded? (Directive, Additional Procedural Guidance, Items E3.1.33.2 and E3.1.33.3).

Appeal Issues ⁽¹⁾

1. Whether the Administrative Judge's decision with respect to the drug involvement allegations is arbitrary, capricious, or contrary to law. In his brief, Applicant states that he does not seek reversal of the Administrative Judge's overall security clearance decision, but instead seeks to correct the record with respect to multiple purported errors in the Judge's findings fact as to Applicant's prior drug use. Specifically, Applicant contends that: (1) the marijuana use in 1997 and 1998 did not take place, (2) the use of LSD in 1993 or 1994 was accidental, and (3) the use of cocaine in 1993 or 1994 involved such a minute amount of the substance that it could not really be classified as use.

The Applicant has not met his burden of demonstrating that the Judge's material findings do not reflect a reasonable or plausible interpretation of the record evidence. *See* ISCR Case No. 02-07751 (December 22, 2004) at p. 4. Considering the record evidence as a whole, the Judge's material findings of fact are sustainable. *See* Directive, Additional Procedural Guidance, Item E3.1.32.1.

2. Whether the Administrative Judge erred by finding the Applicant's falsification of his security clearance questionnaire was deliberate. The Applicant contends that he did not deliberately falsify his security clearance application by failing to disclose his drug usage. Rather, he contends the omission of the information in question was the result of an accidental omission. Applicant's arguments do not persuade us that the Judge erred.

The Administrative Judge had the opportunity to consider Applicant's explanation for why he failed to disclose the drug use in question. The Judge was not bound--as a matter of law--to accept or reject Applicant's explanation. Rather, the Judge had to consider Applicant's explanation in light of the record evidence as a whole. Considering the record as a whole, the Judge had a sufficient basis to find that Applicant's omissions were deliberate. Accordingly, the Judge's finding of falsification is sustainable. *See* Directive, Additional Procedural Guidance, Item E3.1.32.1.

Conclusion

Applicant has failed to demonstrate error below. Therefore, the Board affirms the Administrative Judge's adverse security clearance decision.

Signed: Michael Y. Ra'anan

Michael Y. Ra'anan

Administrative Judge

Member, Appeal Board

Signed: Jean E. Smallin

Jean E. Smallin

Administrative Judge

Member, Appeal Board

Signed: William S. Fields

William S. Fields

Administrative Judge

Member, Appeal Board

1. The Administrative Judge found in favor of the Applicant with respect to SOR paragraph 2.c. That favorable finding is not at issue on appeal.