

EDWARD SNOWDEN:
American-Russian Technology Specialist

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CYSE 300: Introduction to Cybersecurity

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Edward J. Snowden was a Systems administrator who was born in Elizabeth City, NC but moved to Central Maryland in grade school. Snowden was a high school dropout due to having to work at a young age to provide for his family. He received a GED at a Community College but did not obtain a college degree. He was discharged after 4 months of being in the Army Reserve for special forces. Snowden picked up computers in his free time and although he did not have formal training obtained a Top-Secret security Clearance and joined the CIA by 2007. When he left in 2009, he became a contractor for different companies that work with the NSA directly.

There are many speculations on how Snowden gained access to these files that were released as they were out of certificates/department. Snowden did clear up a few items in his book Permanent Records and the NSA Director General Alexander did release some information in press conferences later. Back in 2013, the NSA was still using 2003 technology said an official. He has access not only to the data regarding his work, but he was able to see other credentials and use their access to get even more information than what should even be allowed. He was able to use thumb drives because of his role allowing him to secretly download the files off his and the other credentials he had access to under the radar. There were so many system administrators at the time it was easy to fly under the radar and the NSA had no idea it was even done let alone what was taken. He was able to sneak this information onto chips and hide them in a Rubrics cube. If he had not gone public, it is unknown whether he would have been caught at all or if so, how long it would've taken. The only reason the NSA was able to figure out the person responsible was because of Snowden coming forward to protect his colleagues from facing the interrogations.

Snowden leaked the documents of the black cover-ops budget, exposed the success, and failures of spy missions, and revealed what and who the NSA was paying for access to

communications networks. More items were also taken that Snowden requested stay private and the government is still unsure of all the data that was compromised. Snowden wanted the public to know that their rights in the constitution were being violated specifically the 4th amendment. In that amendment search and seizure is only allowed when approved by a judge with probable cause. The issue with this is that the government was collecting the data by turning cameras on without the person knowing and watching everything you do even if it's not public information. The justification is because of 9/11 and instead of searching when a situation arises, they have the information ready and can stop it before it happens.

The result of these documents going public was a mass debate of the public. Snowden states he did not do it for fame or money, but instead to let the people know what is really happening against them and to encourage more people to “whistle blow”. He told his supervisor he needed a few weeks off work and flew to Hong Kong to meet with editors at the Guardian. After the articles and interviews were published the US charged Snowden with espionage and tried to extradite him back to the States so he could be tried in the US. Snowden was able to fly to Russia with help and was later allowed citizenship in 2022. In 2019, Snowden published his book “Permanent Record” a memoir of what motivated his actions and how it happened.

Thousands of systems administrators and access to information were cut and restricted. Thousands of companies have no idea where keys and certificates are being used and that is a major problem. The NSA spent millions of dollars to gather information on the public but paid no attention to who was accessing the information from the inside. The fact that a contractor at the time knew that the NSA would have no way to track him and could get all this information and sneak it out shows a major problem. A potential breach from the inside should be monitored just as much as a potential breach from outside of the company.

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