

“HE’S SURE AS HELL NO TRAITOR”

Fortune has an interview with a former colleague of Edward Snowden’s in Hawaii (some have questioned its provenance, but details in the interview accord with other stories about Snowden at NSA; even Keith Alexander said he was very good at his job).

One of my favorite details describes how Snowden repeatedly alerted NSA to security problems in their code, but they didn’t always fix it.

He also frequently reported security vulnerabilities in NSA software. Many of the bugs were never patched.

This is consistent with a story describing him trying to fix a CIA security problem when he was in Europe, so it rings true. But it also reveals the NSA’s own lax concern for security.

But I’m most interested in this paragraph:

Snowden’s former colleague says that he or she has slowly come to understand Snowden’s decision to leak the NSA’s files. “I was shocked and betrayed when I first learned the news, but as more time passes I’m inclined to believe he really is trying to do the right thing and it’s not out of character for him. I don’t agree with his methods, but I understand why he did it,” he or she says. “I won’t call him a hero, but he’s sure as hell no traitor.”

I have been tracking the apparent concern on the part of top NSA officials that employees will learn something that disturbs them. This is – if authentic – one of the first descriptions we have of an NSA employee reacting to Snowden’s leaks (albeit from one who seemed to admire him).

But it describes this employee beginning to understand Snowden's underlying point, though not his methods (and perhaps not his ultimate judgement it was unconstitutional).

This is the battle Keith Alexander seems most afraid of, the battle over the belief of NSA insiders.