



Exploding The Phone

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'Phone freaks' still pursuing their calling

By Carol Oppenheim

NEW YORK—An electronics whiz kid discovered that the plastic whistles packed inside boxes of breakfast cereal produced the same sound as the signal used by the telephone company to activate its long-distance lines.

The makers of Cap'n Crunch cereal discontinued the whistles, but John T. Draper, 34, a former Air Force radar technician, went on to devise new and more sophisticated methods for making absolutely toll-free—and completely illegal—phone calls around the world.

Draper, convicted three times of fraud, is in a California prison work-release program. However, he managed to send a message to a convention held here by the technological underground and fellow phone freaks.

"I am resigning from your organization," Draper was reported to have said, "on the grounds that it is hazardous to my legal health."

THE CONVENTION was sponsored by the Technological American Party (TAP), a group founded by Abbie Hoffman and other remnants of the Yippies in 1971 to provide tips on how to rip off the phone company, the utilities, the Postal Service, Western Union, university computers, vending machines, and cable TV operators.

Hoffman, who is being sought on a drug charge, did not show up, but about 75 other persons, many hiding behind Lone Ranger masks and a few sporting false beards, sat around watching phone company films, discussing computer circuitry, and buying posters detailing the construction of a nuclear device.

The convention organizers had predicted that telephone security personnel and law enforcement agents also would attend, but none were spotted. Most of the information from the session eventually will be re-hashed in TAP's newsletter, so the agents, along with thousands of other subscribers, probably will get it, anyway.

"I'll grant you that the free phone calls come in

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'Phone freaks': Smooth operators pursue their calling

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handy occasionally," said a convention participant who gave his name as Cheshire Catalyst. "But the true freak really just wants to climb through the network and see how it works.

"It's a power trip, a fascinating game. By doing it, we show that we know the system as well as the designer, and even better, since we're the ones that expose the bugs."

The technological underground says that the equipment and the information they use is readily available to anyone who knows where to look for it.

For example, the codes and tone cycles used by phone companies worldwide are controlled by the Consultative Committee for Telephony and Telegraphy and published in a manual that sells for \$110 at the United Nations bookstore.

And the parts for a small computer, the type that can be programmed to play games or to confuse Ma Bell's computers, can be bought in an electronics store for \$1,000 retail.

The infamous "blue box," a device publicized for its use by show business personalities, sports stars, and businessmen such as financier Bernard Cornfeld to circumvent long-distance charges, can be made for \$30—not counting fines and jail time if you're caught.

MANY OF THE freaks say they would like to help the phone company improve the system, and have even done so by calling strictly in-house lines to report a problem.

"Some of us got caught that way," complained "Captain Cheeseburger," convicted of telecommunications theft after three months of surveillance. The court ordered him to pay \$13.84 for illegal calls and placed him on probation.

"There ought to be a way we could drop our suggestions in a box," said Wizard, a government computer programmer with a high security clearance. And Wizard added that his suggestion was no joke.

To hear members of TAP tell it—and when they're not doing it at conventions or through the newsletter, they're doing it at weekly meetings in an office building near Madison Square Garden—there's very

little that dedicated amateur technologists can't crack.

They have found ways to divert the "800" and WATS lines used by paying customers for their own free phone calls, and developed a gadget called the red box that simulates the sounds of coins being dropped in a public phone and another known as the black box that allows any phone to receive calls without being billed.

SIMPLE COMPUTERS such as the Commodore and the Apple have been programmed to scan the network for available lines and access to other computers and to analyze the frequencies required to operate the circuits.

"The interfacing of computers and phones is simple," Wizard said, "and once you erase the program, there's no way to tell you've done it."

Now the freaks are talking about breaking into the new 50-channel microwave long-distance system and using 20 millisecond tone bursts to piggyback their own calls onto calls in progress.

They already know how to hook into communication satellites to make ship-to-shore calls, and how to send telegrams at a small fraction of the regular cost. They have devised ways to reuse postage stamps, fiddle electric meter readings, and food vending machines.

AMERICAN TELEPHONE and Telegraph Co. said its investigators detect about \$1 million worth of stolen telecommunications each year, but the actual amount of phone fraud may be 10 to 20 times greater.

"It's not just the phone freaks," said spokesman Dick Gray. "It's people in all walks of life, and it's very serious, so serious that 30 states have made it a criminal matter."

Participants in the technological underground are aware of the penalties, and do their phone tripping from hard-to-trace pay phones. What seems of greater concern to them at the moment is a bill pending in Congress that would make unauthorized use of computers punishable as a felony.

"THE WAY the bill is written," said Aubrey Phillips, "it would make even personal computers illegal without written permission. And that means

that all bootleg research would stop. "You can't pay people to be creative, and not every piece of research is done in a lab. If this bill passes, it'll be disastrous."

Speaking of research, several freaks reported their own recent research showed that the Cap'n Crunch whistle still activates long-distance lines in some phone systems. But you'll have to figure out which ones.

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