



Exploding The Phone

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Bibliographic Cover Sheet

Title **Letter - Wrong Number**

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Abstract A reader who signs himself "The Buddha" writes to complain that a recent article contained incorrect frequencies in its instructions for building a blue box, and did not contain instructions about how to use it. The writer points to the Esquire article and the 1960 Bell Systems Technical Journal article for further information. He brags about the operation of his blue box, and claims to have no phone phreak connections. Chuck Fager replies on behalf of the paper, apologizing for the typos and saying that the information was not included because it had already been published in earlier articles.

Keywords blue box; Esquire article; Bell System Technical Journal; phone phreak

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WRONG NUMBER

I must say that your article (Real Paper, September 27) on ripping off the phone company was not as good as it should have been. I can understand why with one eye on the "underground" and another on the profit-loss sheets you would be wary of giving out too much information for which you might even be sued by Ma Bell. However, in addition to giving out wrong information (two digit frequencies; 3 and 0, are wrong) — 3 is 900 and 1100 and 0 is 1300 and 1500; not 900 and 1300 and 1300 and 1700, as you printed. You are guilty of the even greater sin of saying how to make (almost) a blubox without giving the even more important details of how to use it. From many years of reading scientific papers I expect to see a bibliography at the end of all I read. I'd like to suggest two articles which you should mention in your next issue. The first, which is the more general, is: "Secrets of the Little Blue Box" by Ron Rosenbaum in the October, 1971 Esquire. It gives the fine details of using the blubox including how to call England and France with one. It is also an interesting history of the development of the blubox and other forms of phone phreaking. The second is the article which made the blubox possible, thoughtfully (or thoughtlessly) provided to us all by Ma Bell herself. It's called "Signalling Systems for Control of Telephone Switching" by C. Breen and C.A. Dahlbom in Bell System Technical Journal, November 1960, Volume 39 No. 6. For those with electronic or scientific backgrounds the whole thing is pretty good. For those who are lazy page 1427 has the official, Ma Bell certified, blubox frequencies. I'm sure it can be found in most college libraries, especially at MIT. It took me

less than an hour's search, at the Georgetown University (D.C.) Library, to find it with just the hints given in the Esquire article. The blubox itself is not difficult to build except for the calibration; mine puts out a "sine" waveform (like Ma Bell) and mixes the two frequencies electronically for better conformity. I also practice the numbers for speed to match (somewhat) the speed of Ma Bell's blubox. The amplitude I sort of estimate with a volume control. And so far no problems in getting my call through. By the way, the tones in a touch-tone phone are in no way related to the long distance tones which is really too bad. The conversion is rather involved and not worth the trouble. I have no "underground" or "Phone-phreak" credentials or connections, it's just that I have a low curiosity threshold. My whole blubox "network" is limited to less than half-a-dozen close friends. Keep the information coming.

For obvious reasons, if you publish this letter don't use my name, just sign me:

"The Buddha"

Chuck Fager replies: Sorry about the typos, and thanks for the references. We have been told that Ma Bell is trying to cut down on the number of copies of the journal article, but we recently received a xerox of it through the mail, and phreak library-watchers report that it is available in several university libraries in this region. The reason we didn't talk more about how to use the blue boxes is because our earlier articles discussed the procedure in some detail, and we don't like to rehash stuff any more than necessary. I hope other phreaks will continue to advise us, and where necessary, straighten us out.