



Exploding The Phone

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Abstract General Telephone and Electronics (GTE) employs a former Assistant Director of the FBI as its head of security; article alleges improper collaboration between FBI and telephone companies.

Keywords William D. Griffith (head of security, GTE); General Telephone and Electronics (GTE): FBI

Notes Publication date may be 1975 rather than 1974; two pages in our archive, one page in the paper

Source An anonymous phone phreak

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FBI asst. deputy director became General Tel's security chief

Ex-FBI agents head phone spy units

Dave Lindorff

If you are concerned about recent revelations of phone company invasion of your privacy, don't take heart. The worst is yet to come.

In its ongoing investigation of the secret police activities of the phone companies in California and the nation, the *L.A. Vanguard* has been uncovering some disturbing links between the phone companies' so-called "security departments" and the FBI.

While it has been common knowledge that rather than fading away, old FBI agents just fade out of sight into private security work, we now have learned that an inordinate number of high-ranking agents move from the FBI into the phone system, where they assume the direction of the phone companies' security apparatus.

Fifty-two former agents now

operations.

Griffith was one of the FBI's old guard. He joined the agency in 1942 and worked his way up under J. Edgar Hoover. In an 8:30 a.m. surprise interview with the *Vanguard* in front of his Pacific Palisades home, Griffith, who described himself as having been "a generalist with the FBI—I did a little of everything," explained why he had come to the phone company.

"It's my trade," he said. "Both jobs are security related."

Griffith said that he had recently advanced in the phone company and is now in charge of "governmental relations." He said

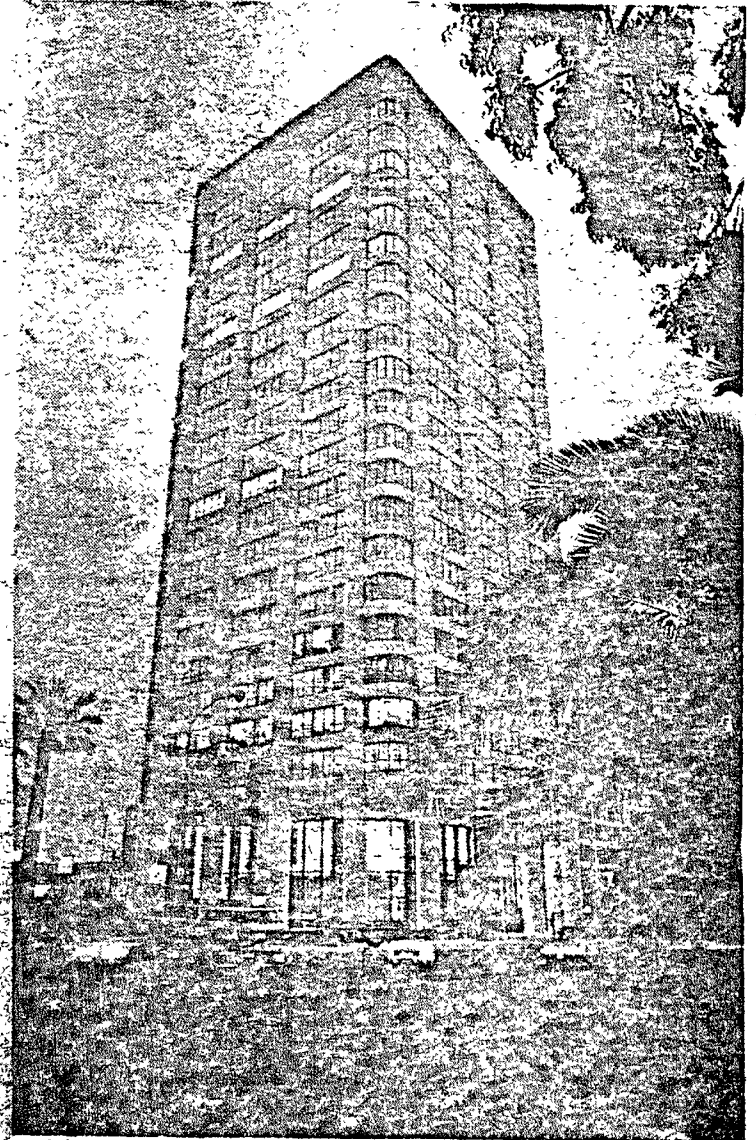
interview with the *Vanguard*, "One thing the computer division was doing was going over the massive number of tapes to separate the important conversations." The FBI has been moving full speed ahead to computerize all of its dossier material, with one of its prime goals being to make instantly available to local police the arrest records of all individuals.

In all of this, Griffith had to have been a prime mover.

Of immediate concern, though, is the access the FBI and other police-type agencies have to phone taps and phone tap information by having one of their own in a top spot in phone "security."

Testimony in Congress in recent months has disclosed that the phone companies across the nation have been going beyond the call of duty in assisting the government in tapping its customers. Phone company officials have testified that they would install taps for the FBI and others without court authorization, and that when they didn't do the work themselves, they would make it easy for the agency involved.

Moreover, recent testimony before the California Public Utilities Commission (PUC) by phone company officials and members of the Communication Workers' union which represents most workers in the system, shows that in California, your chances of being tapped just at random here are as high as 40 percent in a single year! This is because you can be tapped not only by the security offices, but also by repair crews and operator supervisors, many of whom had conversations about sex and personal lives so interesting they switch them onto loudspeakers to entertain the other



Why does General Tel (and Ma Bell) need a secret police force run by ex-FBI agents? (Photos by Mark Jones)

'An old-boy network makes it easy for the FBI to have illegal things done for it.'

work for the Bell System, 37 of them in security-related positions. And at General Tel, a much smaller company, there are 28 former agents, 21 of whom are in security.

A prime local example of this G-string connection between America's main means of interpersonal communication and the government's main source of domestic intelligence gathering is at the security office of General Telephone of California, the largest single "independent" phone company outside the Bell system.

In 1973, the directorship of General Tel's security operation was assumed by former FBI agent William D. Griffith. Griffith, at the

he now deals with congresspersons and other government officials for General

One of the dealings he had with government was last year, when he was testifying before the National Wiretap Commission. Former FBI agent and wiretap commission member William Turner described Griffith's testimony, which concerned the phone company's role in the quasi-legal "national security" wiretaps as "very formal and uninformative."

While Griffith's name was conspicuously absent from the scandals which surfaced in the Watergate hearings, which forced the resignation of FBI director Patrick Gray, he was operating at

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And as Turner said in an



William D. Griffith, former asst. deputy director of the FBI, now piles his trade with General Tel in Santa Monica.

most workers in the system, shows that in California, your chances of being tapped just at random here are as high as 40 percent in a single year. This is because you can be tapped not only by the security offices, but also by repair crews and operator supervisors, many of whom find conversations about sex and personal lives so interesting they "switch" them onto loudspeakers to entertain the other phone company employees.

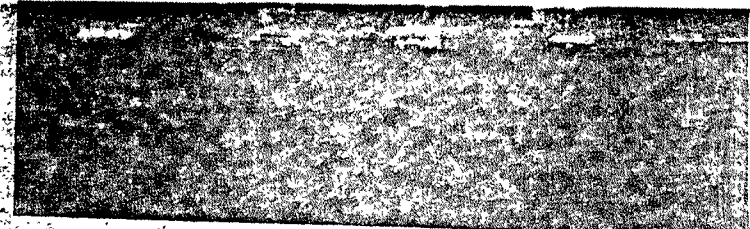
But by far the most serious form of phone tap is being done by the security office. And it is indeed ominous that the people capable of installing these undetectable taps are ex-FBI agents.

As Turner explains, there is no such thing as an ex-agent. "You have an old-boy network," he said, "which makes it easy for the FBI to have illegal things done for it." He said an ex-agent in the phone company security office would find it hard to turn down a former colleague's request for a wiretap, legal or not.

With respect to Santa Monica and ex-agent Griffith, this could be of considerable concern to a number of people. Santa Monica is after all the base for the Rand Corporation (remember Dan Ellsberg?). The government has good reason to be concerned about the private lives of Rand employees, who are privy to considerable top-secret information.

On the other side of the coin, neighboring Venice has long been a haven or temporary port of refuge for members of the left and the underground like David Fine, one of the bombers of the Math Center at the University of Wisconsin. By just living there, you could become the victim of phone company surveillance designed to detect the presence of a "terrorist."

The PUC, which in theory is the public agency which controls the phone companies and other utilities, has done next to nothing to exercise its power. Every year for years, the Communications Workers and various citizens



Why does General Tel (and Ma Bell) need a secret police force run by ex-FBI agents? (Photos by Mark Jones)

action groups have disclosed the practice by the phone company of tapping lines without first using a warning beep. Although even the phone company has admitted this, the PUC has failed to take action.

However, according to PUC commissioner Leonard Ross, this may be changing soon. Ross said that now that the PUC has turned down Pacific Telephone's request for permission to charge for information calls, the PUC staff will be able "to concentrate on the truly important issues." One of these important issues, Ross said, is privacy and monitoring. "There are disturbing charges that there has been widespread illegal

monitoring of telephone conversations between private parties," Ross said.

In a phone interview with the Vanguard, he said, "I am very concerned about the whole phone company security apparatus. There has been some very menacing testimony, and I want to have a close look."

He said he had assigned several people to the matter and was preparing "a major investigation." As to actions the PUC could take to curb the spying activities of the phone companies, Ross said simply, "We have enormous power in the PUC, but I don't think it's been exercised."

Secret Police 1984 closer

Griffith has apparently gotten the best of the security agents at Pacific Telephone and the spirit of Los Angeles.

The L.A. Herald reported that the security office has been giving out military information to every government agency under the California star and as we report in this issue it has been tapping lines right and left for the government and itself.

One thing of the resignation of Griffith must have felt when he left the security office. He said he had no one would answer "They wouldn't know who was calling."

Unable to break the connection the company's security involved the security funds of the company to handle a new security to the building.

Bill Starr, according to Vanguard sources inside the company. These sources provide "evidence" with the capability of instantly knowing the origin of a call, whether or not it was answered.

Only Santa Monica Press spokesperson for PUC, who denied the existence of the computer, said that when he was asked about them, he came back to say "I haven't been able to find them. I don't know."

It should be noted that the phone company also originally denied that TET was releasing related information to non-police agencies. They were wrong and our readers' sources were right that time.