



# ***Exploding The Phone***

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Mapping Ma Bell

# CAPTAIN CRUNCH

PROFILE BY  
ZBIGNIEW KUNDLIK

It's one o'clock in the morning, and I'm standing in the TWA arrival-departure hub of Los Angeles International Airport. I'm waiting to meet John Draper (known as Captain Crunch to his select group of peers), and I'm wearing a red HUSTLER T-shirt so he can spot me easily. I don't know what to expect. Off and on for several years I have followed Crunch's career as the nation's foremost rapist of Ma Bell—the telephone company—and I have this superhero image of him, an image cultivated by the media coverage he has received.

The 35-year-old Crunch is the creator of the "blue box," a device that allows its user to gain access to nearly all the telephone company's transmission equipment—simple lines, microwaves and even the communications satellites—as long as the user knows the proper codes. Crunch claims that given enough time, three such good blue boxes could tie up America's entire phone network in such a way that no calls can be placed. No one knows for sure if this is possible, but even so, cities—such as Santa Barbara, California—have been tied up for as much as an hour.

But then Captain Crunch usually knows what he is talking about. He knows more about the intricacies, idiosyncracies and secrets of the world's telephone system—information he has picked up without direct help from Ma Bell—than practically anyone else alive. Crunch is also one of the first Americans to have gone to prison because of what he knows. And he owes it, in part, to Cap'n Crunch, the breakfast cereal from Quaker Oats.

During the late '60s each box of Cap'n Crunch cereal contained a plastic toy whistle as an inducement to purchase the product. The note, or tone, produced by the whistle when it was properly blown into a phone receiver could get a toll-free call. When Denny, a blind "phone phreak" (the name adopted by those who secretly and illegally play with the telephone company's equipment) discovered the whistle's capability, he turned on his other blind friends. Then, in 1970, Denny gave John Draper the secret of the Cap'n Crunch whistle, christened him Captain Crunch and, in effect, gave birth to the first sighted phone phreak. In short order, Crunch was transformed into a villain of telephony.

Until he was 12 years old, Captain Crunch lived amid the chicken farms of Petaluma, California. Long before he turned into a full-time phone phreak employing blue boxes and computers in search of "information" (or telephone-company codes allowing him access to specialized communication networks), Crunch showed a decided interest in science and math. While in England, where he spent several years with his Air Force family, he conducted his first experiments: At one point he converted a bicycle generator into one capable of producing 10,000 volts.

By the time he was ready to enter high school, the family had returned to the States. He enrolled in a high school in Vacaville, California, where—during the first month—he got into nearly 100 fights. He was harassed by the school thugs until he began lifting weights and developing his small frame. His senior year was spent at yet another high school—in San Jose this time—and it was here that his brilliance began to show. Crunch built a small radio transmitter, which he operated until a Federal Communications Commission agent shut it down.

Undaunted, Crunch continued his pirate-radio venture several years later while in the Air Force. Stationed as a radar technician in Alaska, Crunch built a 200-watt transmitter with a range of 450 miles. This time, however, he wasn't busted. "I got a call from the FCC monitoring station, saying they enjoyed my show and asking me not to use profanities," he says. "Up there nobody cares."

In 1970 he left the Air Force and got a job with a company that built radar systems. That same year he also picked up the Captain Crunch moniker and was on his way to becoming Phone Phreak Number One.

The cereal-box whistles were mere toys with limited capability. Since they could produce only one tone, while the phone company's network relied on many tones and combinations thereof. One of the blind phone phreaks realized he could produce several tones on his small home organ by pushing the appropriate keys. All he had to do was play a particular sequence into the mouthpiece of the telephone, and he could call anywhere in the world without charge as long as he used the proper sequence. Phreaks would sit at their phones dialing ran-



dom numbers in sequence, listening to the various tones. When an unusual tone was reached, it was logged, and later, through a process of elimination, several codes were finally cracked.

Shortly, various phreaks were making tape recordings to play into phones or were giving the recordings to other phreaks, until it was routine procedure to call a pay phone at Waterloo Station in London, or to call South Africa for the correct time there. But the process had a long way to go. Based on information obtained from a phreak, Captain Crunch began designing a device that could duplicate all of the necessary tones. In due time he had built the first blue box. Its face contained tone buttons similar to those of a touchtone telephone. When this first blue box became a reality, the era of whistles, tapes and organs was over.

At one point organized crime found out about the blue boxes and asked one phreak to build a thousand devices for \$300,000. The Vegas Syndicate was going to use the boxes for placing bets undetected (and free of charge). It is this type of phone phreak that Crunch considers "the lowest scum in the phone-phreak community," largely because they don't follow the ethical standards set up by the "Top Ten Phreaks," as the best minds in the community are called.

These top ten seek only to acquire information, or more access codes, which they then share with one another. It was through such information that Crunch was able to call around the world clockwise and counterclockwise several times on one occasion, while on another he used two adjacent phones to call himself through Japan, India, Greece, South Africa, Brazil and New York City from San Francisco. It took his voice 20 seconds to complete the trip.

Then, in 1972, Crunch was turned into the FBI by two phone phreaks—"snitches" as he calls them. Charged with fraud by wire, he was fined \$1,000 and put on five years' probation. After having spent thousands of patient hours trying different combinations of phone numbers in order to find access codes, Crunch's telephone bill under the violation amounted to \$30.

And this is the hero of the underground telephone network I am to meet. His plane finally arrives, and amid a chorus of sheep bleatings from passengers and greeters alike, I spot what appears to be a human—though I am struck by the image of an anteater—gawking about. He is wearing a wrinkled Ban-Lon shirt, festering with fuzzi balls. His wide-pin-striped pants—also wrinkled—ride at least three inches

above the tops of his scuffed and boots, while his socks (lacking any vestige of elastic) are rolled down revealing vampirish-white skin and sporadic patches of black hair. I know it's Captain Crunch.

I suddenly realize I don't want to meet him. Should I grab the first female to walk by as if I'm there waiting for her? But it's too late. He spots me in a HUSTLER T-shirt, and his hand—w/index finger extended—shoots upward. He lopes over, as the other hand holds a portable radio to his ear.

"I picked up a great pirate station there. Clear as a bell for hundreds of miles," says the creature who has just shattered all of my expectations.

"You John Draper?" I ask, hoping against the inevitable.

"Yeah. The station played some good music. The jockey must have a powerful transmitter. Sure'd like to see it. . . ."

"This way, John," I interrupt. Taking his pallid arm, I lead him to the baggage-claim area. I had envisioned a Justice League of America here, and I am confronted with a babbling lunatic.

I quickly grab his bag, walk to my car and begin driving to his lodging for the night. It disturbs me that I can't wait drop him off, that I don't want to talk to him, that I don't want to be seen with him, even driving late at night.

Abruptly, he takes off on a new jolt. "Before I leave, I'll show you some great relaxing exercises."

I play coy. He hasn't actually asked a question, I reason. Keep quiet, I tell myself, maybe he'll shift subjects again.

As he winds up for the second in an attempt, I cut him off. "Look, John, I'm not a physical-fitness weirdo. I drink a lot of beer, and I do my exercising either under or over a woman. No personal offense, OK?"

His sudden silence, ironically enough, makes me feel guilty—or at least ambivalent toward him. I turn on my radio, saying, "You don't mind, do you?" He doesn't say a word.

Even though the trip to his hotel only takes 30 minutes, it seems as if several hours of this nonverbal penance have elapsed before we finally arrive. In the hotel lobby a premonition—though undecipherable—overtakes me. I realize that it's the night clerk, whose eyes are popping froglike out of his head.

Between Crunch and Froggy I feel spooked. And adding to that, the clerk can't find a reservation for the electro-wizard.

As Crunch and I drive off, I ask, "This happen to you often?"

"All the time" is his only response.

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I entertain a paranoid fantasy that every hotel and motel in Los Angeles is onto Crunch's bag of telephonic tricks and, as a consequence, he'll have to spend the night at my place.

"I'll drive all night if I have to," I say through clenched teeth. "I've got \$20. That should be enough."

I finally find a place on Santa Monica that seems open for business and looks as though a room will cost under \$19. I pound on the door for several minutes until a bleary-eyed Arab opens it. I ask for a single. The manager looks at me bewildered, sticky sleep glued to the corners of his eyes. "The money? You got it?" he asks suspiciously.

"How much?"

"\$18.76," he replies in perfect English, as I'd expected.

"Does it have a phone?" Crunch chimes in.

"No, sir. Pay phone there," says the Arab, pointing to a booth.

"He'll take it," I yell out, and turning to Crunch I hiss, "Just shut up! Who do you have to call at this hour? I'll pick you up at 11 tomorrow."

Captain Crunch is an addict. Instead of being strung out on dope, however, he is hooked on the crackle and beep of telephone lines. Small wonder that his 1972 conviction didn't straighten him out. Rather, he kept phreaking, although he says he has avoided using the blue box. In 1975 Crunch found the code giving him access to the phone company's auto-verify circuit, which allows a phone to be tapped. Somehow the code was released to the phone phreaks—Crunch claims it was done by an unethical, low-level phreak—and shortly it became a game among the many phreaks to listen in on the San Francisco FBI office, the Federal Communications Commission, various police calls and even the CIA.

During this same period Crunch managed to obtain a copy of the operating manual for the National Crime Information Center computer. The manual had "everything I needed to know to get into NCIC," Crunch says, although he vows he has never tapped into it. Regardless, the FBI was interested, since the computer contains all of the information ever gathered about anyone—criminals and noncriminals—by the FBI, and Crunch had a computer terminal hooked to a master computer. The terminal in his possession, he says, was for legitimate use—he was working for an independent firm as a "computer

programmer/systems analyst."

As with his first bust, Crunch claims to have been set up by a phone-phreak-turned-informer-and-provocateur for the FBI, which allegedly gave the informer a blue box with which to entrap Crunch. Captain Crunch claims that the entrapment worked, and in 1976 he was indicted a second time. Since he was still on probation, he made a deal with the FBI to supply them with all the information he had. The FBI rented a hotel suite and interviewed him from four to six hours a day for five days. Crunch is proud that he went the distance without snitching on a single phreak.

Due to his cooperation, the judge sentenced Crunch to four months instead of the five years he could have gotten.

Crunch did his time at the Federal Correctional Institution in Lompoc, California, a minimum-security facility where Nixon's former chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, currently resides. While incarcerated, Crunch was periodically tormented by the inmates, who would blow smoke in his face while threatening to give him a "blanket party" if he didn't teach them how to make free telephone calls. Being allergic to cigarette smoke, Crunch naturally obliged them.

"I can't take it," says Crunch's voice over the telephone the following morning at 9:30. "There's no phone in here. I'm chacking out. If I don't, I'll go crazy."

His last sentence makes me feel as pleased, I imagine, as a sadist with his pleading slave.

In 25 minutes Crunch arrives at the office, and no sooner does he arrive than I drag him off to another motel—the Tropicana, rumored to be the scene of Janis Joplin's last big night. I register him again—he gets his own phone, although I don't clue him in that he's got to go through the motel switchboard—and tell him that I'll pick him up after lunch.

When I return, Crunch is not in his room. I find him lying spread-eagled beside the pool. His shirt is off, and the bright sun only makes his skin look ghostlier. Even the three or four homosexuals around the pool seem to be making a concerted effort to avoid looking in his direction.

After Crunch settles in at our offices, the first thing he asks for is a telephone, a request that creates some warranted nervousness among those present. He is promptly dissuaded (the time is running late), the tape recorder is flipped on, and he begins his revelations, which may not

hate particularly well for America:

"The telephone company has 722 security agents with certain wiretapping privileges, and perhaps as many as 90,000 employees involved in monitoring calls. No court orders are necessary for "mechanical or service quality control checks" or "the protection of rights or property"—a vague clause used as an excuse for blanket monitoring on the grounds that the phone company alleges you are ripping them off.

"Roughly 70 percent [*Editor's Note: An AT&T spokesman claims only 12 percent*] of the phone company's security force has at one time worked for a law-enforcement agency, including the FBI, leading one to speculate about the possible ties these agents still maintain with their previous employers.

"Between 1964 and 1970, 1.8 million phone calls were recorded (out of the 30 million calls electronically monitored during the first minute of the call) to determine if any of them were of blue-box origin.

"For years now the National Security Agency has been monitoring microwave communications in this country. Computers have been programmed to listen for key words, such as *cocaine, dope, conspiracies*. When a coded word is registered during a monitored conversation, the

computer will start taping the call.

"When all of the new telephone systems are implemented, the police will get instant identification of your phone number when you call them—or when you call the White House or a prominent figure.

"But the most frightening invention to come along, claims Crunch, is REMOB (or remote observation). Anyone with the proper code will be able to monitor calls from anywhere in the country, while also holding the power to censor the call. Furthermore, no existing form of telephone communication—trunk line, microwave or satellite—can escape the remote-observation system.

"REMOB will create 1984," Crunch says. "The phone company will provide the government with the proper access codes." Most Americans will say that since they're not criminals, they have nothing to hide, which is true. However, they stand to lose their right to privacy and their right to talk to friends and relatives—often about private matters no other person has a right to hear. The question is, do Americans want their private sex lives or business dealings known by various federal agencies?

Fearing such a potential for abuse with REMOB, Crunch recently called a press conference in New York in order

to warn the public. In short order the phone company received its equal time and denied the existence of such a tap-fingers ring device. "But with everything I know about the phone network, and all of the verifications I've done on this REMOB, I feel that it does exist," states Crunch.

While completing this profile, I received a telephone call, and subsequent letter, from Crunch. This telephone addict—who no doubt has logged countless thousands of hours hunting for information in Ma Bell's spider-web network—had been busted again. Under a questionable Pennsylvania law, Crunch was found in violation of a prohibition against "manufacturing, distribution or possession of a device capable of theft of telecommunications services."

Crunch owned a simple home computer, called the Apple II, which he had programmed to systematically dial every possible telephone number and "listen" for any unusual tones a given number might produce. Having a computer do this is not illegal, claims Crunch. But the Pennsylvania law stipulates that it is. The irony here is that a cassette recorder (because its tape can contain "tones" needed to obtain free calls) and a home organ (because it can produce "the tones" are also capable of "theft of phone-company services" and are therefore technically illegal to own under this Quaker State law.

At any rate, Crunch found that a simple home computer could turn up 15 computer accesses at Moffett Naval Air Base, access to the Federal Telephone System (a federally used network), access to Comsat (Communications satellite), more than 100 computer accesses in Washington, D.C., alone, and the White House and CIA hot lines. These were discovered in three short weeks by running the computer for only eight hours each evening.

During one of his trial runs, Crunch found an unusual number, which he didn't recognize. He dialed the number 50 times in an attempt to find out what it was, eventually giving up to pursue more productive work, he points out. Subsequently, he came to believe it was a remote-observation (REMOB) access. During his preliminary hearing the phone company mentioned that he was trying to gain access to a secret number.

Late in the summer of 1978—before his trial—Crunch testified about REMOB before the Government Operations subcommittee on Freedom of Information and Privacy, chaired by Representative Paul N. McCloskey, Jr.



(Republican-California). Even though Crunch feels he had trouble convincing the staff he had found a REMOB number, Representative McCloskey wrote the following about him: "... In our search for a balance between privacy and freedom of information in the computer field, I am frank to say that John's advice is probably more valuable than any other witness we have had the privilege to hear."

Crunch is modest about his achievements, however. "I didn't use super talent or super genius. All I did was program a simple home computer," he says. "If I had thought of turning it on the Soviet Embassy, I'm sure it would have found out a lot of interesting stuff. The possibilities with home computers are unlimited."

But the harm from such possibilities worries Crunch. In prison—if he doesn't win a appeal—it will be only a matter of time before he is forced to give up his "new" information to his fellow prisoners, as was the case during his previous incarceration.

"So, in the next few months Apple Computer will be getting about 500 orders from underground types, and shortly all secret phone numbers will be available," he predicts. Computers will be quietly penetrated, money will get transferred from one bank account to another, and intelligence secrets will become public domain. In an attempt to lock up one Captain Crunch, he says, "they will eventually release many people with my information, who are more criminally inclined than I could ever be."

And this is the enigma of Captain Crunch. Should he be locked up only to have all of this data extracted by criminals? Should he be hired by the phone company or federal government to make these "questionable" systems, such as REMOB, impenetrable? Is Crunch being locked up because his acts were criminal—he's never made money from his information—or because the information he uncovered makes him dangerous politically?

It's difficult to understand a man who spends nearly all of his time dealing with electronics to the exclusion of virtually everything else simply because he finds it a challenge, a labor of love. True, he has his moments when one wants to strangle him. But he also displays a basic emotional frailty that we each possess.

As John Draper told me: "Sometimes I have problems relating. Maybe it's because I have associated with these intellectual phantoms for so long that I haven't had much chance to deal with real-life people."

**POLITICS OF COAL**

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was acquitted in May 1975.)

The Brookside miners' dissatisfactions leading up to the strike were numerous. Many of the miners lived in company houses with little or no plumbing, while drinking water was contaminated with fecal material. They worked in a mine that in 1972 (the year before the strike) had an injury rate nearly double the national average of 45.4 per million man-hours. They worked for \$25 a day compared to the UMW scale of approximately \$35 a day, wages the miners deemed barely adequate.

Some frame of reference is given to the strikers' anger when you consider the fact that Eastover Mining Company is, in turn, owned by the Duke Power Company of North Carolina, which had reported assets of \$2.9 billion and in 1973, the first year of the strike, enjoyed \$96 million in profits.

**THE UNITED MINE WORKERS OF AMERICA: ON THE ROCKS?**

The heyday of the United Mine Workers of America—when its head, John L. Lewis, could make presidents shiver by threatening to call his rank and file out on strike—seems gone forever. UMW membership now stands at 293,000, down from 600,000 in Lewis's time. Today only about 50 percent of U.S. coal is mined under UMW contracts—down 20 percent from just five years ago.

Over the years the UMW, like the miners themselves, has been at the mercy of the boom/bust ebbs and flows of the coal market. When coal prices plummeted in the '50s and '60s, the UMW pulled back and cut its losses in Harlan County and other coal-producing areas.

Under the leadership of Tony Boyle (1963-1972) the UMW became a hotbed of corruption, and the most notoriously dictatorial union in America. The union began signing "sweetheart" contracts with mining companies, and union field workers became increasingly indifferent to the demands of rank-and-file miners. Resentment over this still smolders in the memory of many older miners.

Under UMW President Arnold Miller—a former rank-and-file miner who himself suffers from black lung—a more democratic spirit has pervaded the union. But that's one of the few positive things that can be said. Lacking the charisma of the late John L. Lewis, or

the dictatorial guile of Tony Boyle, Miller has recently faced a severe crisis in confidence. In June 1977 he was re-elected to the presidency by only a 5-percent margin in a three-way race.

By early 1977 the UMW's health and retirement funds were almost depleted—some say due to poor management and bookkeeping. When some medical benefits were curtailed in the summer of 1977, ten weeks of wildcat strikes further reduced the funds. (Strategically, the highly unpopular benefit cuts were announced just six days after Miller's reelection to a five-year term. Though Miller claimed to have had no previous knowledge of the impending cuts, *Coal Patrol*, a widely respected coalfield publication, reported that the actual decision to reduce the benefits was made some time previous to Miller's reelection.)

All of this was closely followed in December 1977 by the UMW national strike. (The 160,000 working UMW miners walked out over wages, benefit cuts and the right to strike individual mines while a national agreement is in effect provided that a majority of a local's rank and file approve the action.) With the steel industry—a major coal consumer—in recession, with many other industries holding huge coal stockpiles and with most non-UMW mines in full swing, many agree that the strike was probably futile at first, but ultimately effective.

**SWEETHEART CONTRACTS: TRADING HUMAN LIVES FOR COAL**

Almost since coal mining became a major industry in the early 1900s, America has been trading human lives for coal—burning up people to make electricity. During this century more than 100,000 men have been killed in mining accidents, and more than a million others disabled. Since 1970 an estimated 125,000 have been injured. Statistics compiled by the National Safety Council show underground coal mining to be the most dangerous profession in America, with a fatality and permanent disability rate higher than any other industry.

In 1976, on a nationwide basis, 144 miners were killed (111 law-enforcement officers were killed that year), and 13,944 suffered disabling injuries. In 1977 another 139 miners died.

Mine owners and operators, when confronted with such statistics, have a tendency to look beyond them and ques-

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