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Bibliographic Cover Sheet

Title **Electronic Sleuth Sniffs Out Illegal Free Phone Calls**

Publication *Los Angeles Times*

Date 1973-12-23

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Abstract Telephone company has new equipment and methods to detect blue box use. Article includes short history of phone phreaking and arrest statistics for 1972 and 1973.

Keywords San Rafael, CA; Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company (PTT); phone phreaks; Sanford Herschel Kosman (suspect); blue box; Los Gatos, CA; John T. Draper; Captain Crunch; Joseph C. Engressia; The Whistler; Cyrus C. Hiester (PTT security agent); Susan Kosman (suspect's wife)

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Electronic Sleuth Sniffs Out Illegal Free Phone Calls

BY PHILIP HAGER

Times Staff Writer

SAN RAFAEL—Its records, the telephone company said, showed something abnormal about some of the calls being placed from a San Rafael number.

Nine toll-free calls to the information operator in San Diego were made from Oct. 10 through 29.

Not too unusual in itself, according to the company, but the shortest of these calls was six minutes and the longest 38 minutes—an unlikely length, to say the least, for an information call.

At this point, the Pacific Telephone Co. said, it began to use a new and little-publicized method to combat "phone phreaks," the electronic wizards who have found ways to make free calls around the world.

The company acknowledged last week it was using a new device designed to detect when special equipment — the kind the so-called phreaks use—is being employed to make a free long-distance call.

The new procedure, coupled with a telephone tap, resulted in the arrest here of Sanford Herschel Kosman, a 32-year-old motorcycle parts maker, on misdemeanor charges of using a device to defraud the phone company.

According to the Marin County sheriff's department and Pacific Telephone investigators, 187 illegal calls—some to as far away as India and Japan—were made from Kosman's home in a little over a month.

Kosman is accused of using what is known as a "blue box"—a device the size of a small transistor radio that duplicates the telephone system's signals, producing the same calliope-like tones that can be heard on long distance calls.

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'PHONE PHREAKS'

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According to the telephone company, users of the illegal device can first dial a long-distance, toll-free number—such as an "800" prefix or information—and then punch out a code on the tiny keys of the blue box. The device emits a tone of 2,600 cycles per second, "capturing" the telephone trunk line. The procedure enables the user to bypass toll measuring equipment.

The use of blue boxes has grown in recent years and produced minor counterculture celebrities.

A design engineer from Los Gatos named John T. Draper became known as "Captain Crunch," a sort of king of the phone phreaks, after it was disclosed in U.S. District Court that he had made free calls to such distant points as Sydney, Australia. Draper was fined \$1,000 and placed on five years probation in November, 1972.

The year before, a 22-year-old blind student, Joseph C. Engressia, gained a certain fame for his remarkable ability to whistle the tones necessary to complete a (free) long-distance call. Engressia—known as "The Whistler" to his college dormitory chums who paid him \$1 apiece to make their long-distance calls—was eventually convicted and fined \$10 for malicious mischief, and, after a promise of good behavior, offered a job with the telephone company in Memphis.

While a phone phreak still can make free calls with the blue box, telephone company records, now automated, will disclose an unusual number and/or length of calls made in this manner.

The "800" or long-dis-

tance information calls, for example. The calls are toll free and users are not billed for them, but they do show up on telephone company records.

When such a pattern is noted, according to the company, its new device can be attached to the line in question to see whether the blue box is being used.

The company's investigators say that this was done in the case of Kosman. According to an affidavit filed in Marin Municipal Court by Cyrus C. Hiester, a security agent for Pacific Telephone, the company's device revealed the use of a foreign tone 187 times between Nov. 9 and Dec. 12.

In mid-November, according to Hiester, "additional equipment" was placed on Kosman's line to record illegally placed calls.

Tape recordings of such calls identified the callers as "Sanford," "Sandy" and "Susie," the investigator said.

(A spokesman for Pacific Telephone said that under federal antitrust laws the company is permitted to tap telephone lines of

persons it suspects of defrauding the company).

Deputies obtained a search warrant for the home inhabited by Kosman and his wife Susan. According to Sgt. Garrett McDonald, deputies found a blue box and literature explaining its operation.

Following arrest, Kosman was released on his own recognizance and is now awaiting arraignment. Contacted Friday, he declined to comment on the case.

A spokesman for the telephone company in San Francisco said losses at the hands of phone phreaks would be difficult to estimate.

For the first nine months of this year, 85 arrests and 49 convictions were obtained throughout the United States for illegal use of long-distance call devices, according to the Bell System.

In 1972, there were 57 arrests and 26 convictions nationwide and in 1971, 43 arrests and 35 convictions.

Does the new device combatting blue boxes mean an end to phone phreaks?

"We can't go that far," the spokesman replied. "But we can say it's been effective and it is doing what it was designed to do."