

Phone Phreaks Ripping Off Pa Bell

R. Volvox

1972

(Underground Press Syndicate) Phone phreaking is a rapidly-growing sport among the radical left, and even among a few with more conservative viewpoints. There are few rules to the me, and your opponent can be either the phone company and what it represents, or just the computers. The chance of arrest provides the kick.

A few phreaks have gotten the boot. John Draper was arrested in July and accused of being Captain Crunch, the famous phone phreak electronic genius. Draper, an electronics engineer, allegedly schemed to defraud the telephone company by "causing to be transmitted by wire signals to enter the long-distance circuits to avoid lawful charges from April 27 to May 1." He faces a possible five years and/or \$10,000 fine.

Captain Crunch, one of the older phreaks, took his name from the discovery that the whistle given away in Captain Crunch cereals several years ago plays the triggering frequency to connect into long-distance, toll-free circuits. Crunch is supposed to have a van jammed with electronic equipment which can be backed up to a phone booth to make free phone calls to any place in the world. He claims to have better equipment than the phone company.

But no matter how much Draper has used phones in the past, he won't say much over them now. He and his lawyer are going over the case when I call. Paranoia flashes as he consults his lawyer on each of my questions, finally handing him the phone. But John picks it up a in a few moments later when I ask him about his life and hard times.

"I worked in electronics in the service, and when I got out I used my service experience to get a job as an electronics engineer," he says. "But then inflation threw me out of a job. I spent two years looking for another. I just had too much time on my hands."

Bill Moorefield, 22 years old, is facing 25 years and/or \$5000 on five felony counts. He was picked up outside the YIP office in Miami Beach just before the Democratic Convention.

Where John was reticent to talk, Bill is more than willing. And that's probably what netted him several of the felony counts. With a slight Southern drawl he explains that one of the charges came after talking with an operator about new tones. "I got to talking with her, and she was friendly, so I told her about the tones. In fact, I played her tapes of them."

Moorefield has been involved in radical politics and phone phreaking for some time. He was thrown out of the army a couple of years ago, then got busted in Atlanta for phreaking.

After being busted in July, he was picked up a in between conventions in his home town in South Carolina by the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) and the phone company. "Remember me from Miami?" asked one agent. They threatened to put him in jail for years for installing an extension phone for a friend, but "if you'll cooperate, we won't bust you. Are there any assassinations planned in Miami?"

Moorefield says Bell Telephone's intelligence unit is extremely efficient. "I bought parts for a black box in a Radio Shack store a year ago under the name George Metesky from New York City. They knew about it." He says the FBI was in on his investigation. "Maybe they're pissed at me because I used to bill calls to the FBI's credit card number."

His voice grows excited as he describes his latest project. "I'm working on a voice scrambler. There are so many taps on so many lines that phone phreaks will have to start using scramblers real soon." He gives me the numbers of some other phreaks before I hang up.

Joe Engressia is blind, but he is known to phone phreaks as the number one authority on North American phreaking.

I introduce myself and Joe gives me a few blue box chirps. "But I'm not making free calls any more, now that I'm working for the Millington Telephone Co.," he says. "It's not worth it any more. I value my job too much."

I ask him about people the phone company has harassed. "Well, the guy who wrote the Ramparts article on black boxes was busted only weeks later on 26 counts of felony," he says. "He pleaded guilty to four of them and got five years probation. That's the highest probation I've heard of for any crime."

"And then there's this company in Dallas that was selling blue boxes for \$3000 to businesses, saying they were undetectable. Several of the company officers were picked up."

I ask Joe if he really is number one. "That's what everybody tells me," he replies, obviously pleased. "I was M-Fing (using a multi-frequency blue box) in the early '60s. When I met phone phreaks, it was like opening up a new world. The phone was a shaping force on my whole life."

"But I couldn't get a job. I applied at several phone companies; I wanted to work around phone. Finally I got myself arrested for phreaking. I got five job offers that week."

"I was just in London," he says proudly. "Independent TV wanted to do an interview with me on how blue boxes work." His voice grows awed. "I even met a member of Parliament on the show."

I mention fake credit cards. "I think it's unethical," he pronounces. "The biggest thing is that it affects an operator's billing index. The operator gets fired if too many uncollectable calls are made through her. Boxing doesn't do that. You're outwitting totally automatic equipment. It's the human element."

I ask Joe about politics and he replies quickly, "A few years ago I was really conservative, but now I've swung the other way because of the phone company's behavior toward phone phreaks. Jails just are not correctional."

Joe continues on another vein. "Feel free to publish my number." (It's (901) 872-0780.) "I really like getting calls." Then he whistles me off (Joe has perfect pitch) and I hear the connection breaking down and finally the deadness of the dial tone.

Bill Acker, also blind but known among phone phreaks as the overseas switching expert, has been hassled too. He doesn't phreak any more.

"The phone company confiscated a lot of my equipment and put me on manual service," he says angrily. "Now I get an operator instead of a dial tone. The company even came down to the school I go to and harassed the officials there."

"I was never prosecuted," he continues. "Anyone who's afraid of being arrested shouldn't be phone phreaking."

I ask about switching systems. "First of all," he responds, "that thing Crunch said in Esquire about three phreaks tying up the entire phone system just isn't true. There are too many trunks, and it's impossible to know which are busy already. But the phone company keeps the rumor alive for public hysteria by not confirming or denying it. They figure they can get more support for harsh sentences for phreaks if the public considers them a danger to the country."



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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/173-december-16-1972-january-5-1973/phone-phreaks-ripping-off-pa-bell>
Fifth Estate #173, December 16, 1972-January 5, 1973

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