

Which it promptly does. As soon as your party picks up the phone in New York, the side of the New Orleans tandem facing you stops sending 2600 cycles to you and starts carrying his voice to you by way of the LA tandem. A notation is made on the accounting tape that the connection has been made on the 800 call which had been initiated and noted earlier. When you stop talking to New York a notation is made that the 800 call has ended.

At three the next morning, when the phone company's accounting computer starts reading back over the master accounting tape for the past day, it records that a call of a certain length of time was made from your New Orleans home to an LA 800 number and, of course, the accounting computer has been trained to ignore those toll-free 800 calls when compiling your monthly bill.

"All they can prove is that you made an 800 toll-free call," Gilbertson the inventor concludes. "Of course, if you're foolish enough to talk for two hours on an 800 call, and they've installed one of their special anti-fraud computer programs to watch out for such things, they may spot you and ask why you took two hours talking to Army Recruiting's 800 number when you're 4-F.

But if you do it from a pay phone, they may discover something peculiar the next day -- if they've got a blue-box hunting program in their computer -- but you'll be a long time gone from the pay phone by then. Using a pay phone is almost guaranteed safe."

"What about the recent series of blue-box arrests all across the country -- New York, Cleveland, and so on?" I asked. "How were they caught so easily?"

"From what I can tell, they made one big mistake: they were seizing trunks using an area code plus 555-1212 instead of an 800 number. Using 555 is easy to detect because when you send multi-frequency beep tones of 555 you get a charge for it on your tape and the accounting computer knows there's something wrong when it tries to bill you for a two-hour call to Akron, Ohio, information, and it drops a trouble card which goes right into the hands of the security agent if they're looking for blue-box user.

"Whoever sold those guys their blue boxes didn't tell them how to use them properly, which is fairly irresponsible. And they were fairly stupid to use them at home all the time.

"But what those arrests really mean is that an awful lot of blue boxes are flooding into the country and that people are finding them so easy to make that they know how to make them before they know how to use them. Ma Bell is in trouble."

And if a blue-box operator or a cassette-recorder phone phreak sticks to pay phones and 800 numbers, the phone company can't stop them?

"Not unless they change their entire nationwide long-lines technology, which will take them a few billion dollars and twenty years. Right now they can't do a thing. They're screwed."

#### Captain Crunch Demonstrates His Famous Unit

There is an underground telephone network in this country. Gilbertson discovered it the very day news of his activities hit the papers. That evening his phone began ringing. Phone phreaks from Seattle, from Florida, from New York, from San Jose, and from Los Angeles began calling him and telling him about the phone-phreak network. He'd get a call from a phone phreak who'd say nothing but, "Hang up and call this number."

When he dialed the number he'd find himself tied into a conference of a dozen phone phreaks arranged through a quirky switching station in British Columbia. They identified themselves as phone phreaks, they demonstrated their homemade blue boxes which they called "M-Fers" (for "multi-frequency," among other things) for him, they talked shop about phone-phreak devices. They let him in on their secrets on the theory that if the phone company was after him he must be trustworthy. And, Gilbertson recalls, they stunned him with their technical sophistication.

I ask him how to get in touch with the phone-phreak network. He digs around through a file of old schematics and comes up with about a dozen numbers in three widely separated area codes.

"Those are the centers," he tells me. Alongside some of the numbers he writes in first names or nicknames: names like Captain Crunch, Dr. No, Frank Carson (also a code word for a free call), Marty Freeman (code word for M-F device), Peter Perpendicular Pimple, Alefnull, and The Cheshire Cat. He makes checks alongside the names of those among these top twelve who are blind. There are five checks.

I ask him who this Captain Crunch person is.

"Oh. The Captain. He's probably the most legendary phone phreak. He calls himself Captain Crunch after the notorious Cap'n Crunch 2600 whistle." (Several years ago, Gilbertson explains, the makers of Cap'n Crunch breakfast cereal offered a toy-whistle prize in every box as a treat for the Cap'n Crunch set. Somehow a phone phreak discovered that the toy whistle just happened to produce a perfect 2600-cycle tone. When the man who calls himself Captain Crunch was transferred overseas to England with his Air Force unit, he would receive scores of calls from his friends and "mute" them -- make them free of charge to them -- by blowing his Cap'n Crunch whistle into his end.) "Captain Crunch is one of the older phone phreaks," Gilbertson tells me. "He's an engineer who once got in a little trouble for fooling around with the phone, but he can't stop. Well, the guy drives across country in a Volkswagen van with an entire switchboard and a computerized super-sophisticated M-F-er in the back. He'll pull up to a phone booth on a lonely highway somewhere, snake a cable out of his bus, hook it onto the phone and sit for hours, days sometimes, sending calls zipping back and forth across the country, all over the world...."