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THE FUTEL PARTY LINE

JULY 1961 - DECEMBER 1961



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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
John Edgar Hoover, Director

FUTEL

Party Line

Official Organ of Futel



Acknowledgements

Operators

KRA, Tishbite, operators. B. Casey, physical plant. D. Wager, HR.
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Contributors

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What will Futel's role be in the coming end times? As an organization whose core strategy is to glean discarded equipment on its way to the smelter and the toxic waste dump and turn it into installations which provide tools, information, and entropy to anyone who walks up to them, we are familiar with operating in the margins. Our users, also, tend to occupy several fringes of humanity, and we have seen them get erased from the city with each season.

Our position is a reminder that while local conditions may change radically, this day is not significantly more apocalyptic than any other we have experienced in our lifetimes. The devices we use and the specifics of how we encourage our users to use them will necessarily adapt, as will our message and attitude, but our mandate will not. We will establish a new era of communication, one in which reaching out is not only desirable, but mandatory.

Are we expending all of this effort only to see our payphones gleam in the rubble of the depopulated cities? Perhaps, but this was always a possible outcome. Are we jaded due to growing up in a decade when the imminent end of the world was promised to us weekly? Probably, but this outlook has allowed us to survive and do our work. Are our motives good and our results positive? Close enough.



2016 In Review

2016 has been an excellent year for Futel.

We installed three new phones, two of which are still standing on NE Ainsworth St and SE Taylor St, and continued service to our existing phones on SE Clinton St and at Right To Dream Too. By the end of the year, over 750 free outgoing calls were initiated per month.

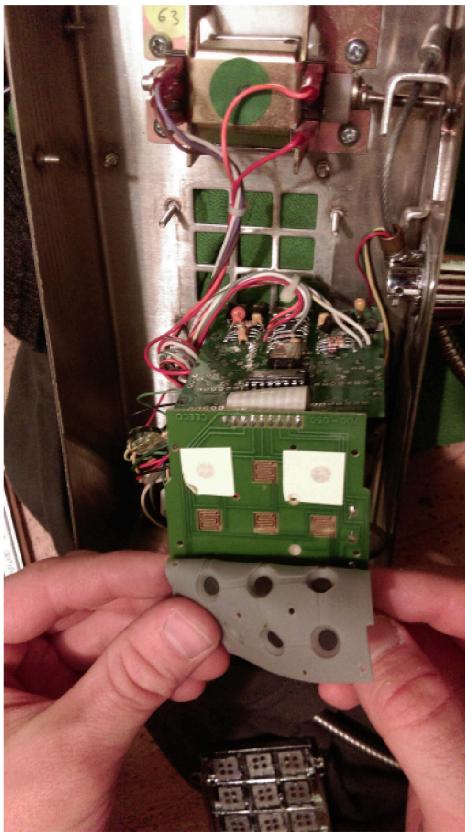
Two new operators joined Futel. Over 50 complete operator calls were logged throughout the year.

An incoming line now extends the usefulness of several features of our street-facing phones. Our new interactive feature, the “Wildcard Line”, has collected contributions from Futel users, with which we have produced a number of amusing and instructive episodes. And as usual, there are random new experiences to experience, including a voice conference occasionally inhabited by helpful entities.

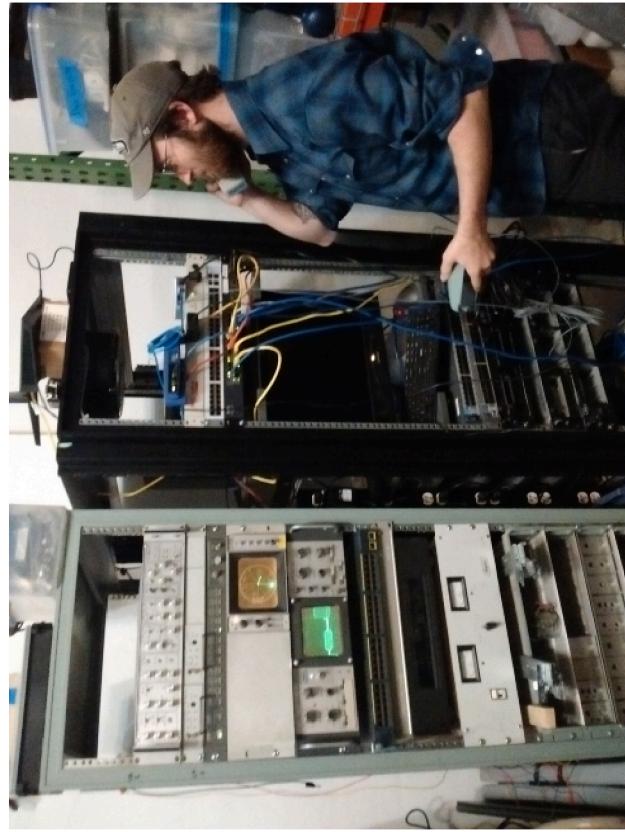
Futel operators have given talks, hosted outreach events, and produced installations at AFRU gallery and ToorCamp. Hours of ads have been dragged around town by surly bike couriers.

Our 2016 expenses were paid for with a grant by the Regional Arts and Culture Council, a grant from an anonymous individual, and many small donations. Equally important, many volunteer hours of effort and skill have kept us operating.

Our community influence and positive public impact have grown exponentially, and there can be no doubt that both will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

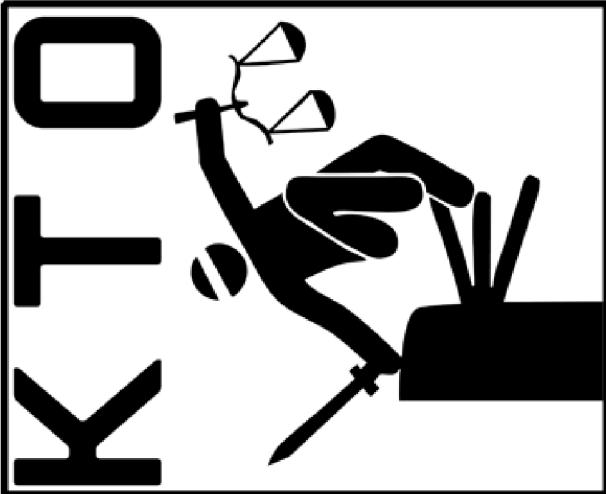


Above: We got some nice Ceeco vandal-resistant phones, supposedly from a school, but xnor and Tishbite were getting failing # and * keys in testing. They took them apart expecting to have to repair the keyboards, and found that the keys had been disabled with post-it notes. This is funny because we all carried tone dialers when we were in school. Photo by xnor. Below: Ctrlh.



New Phones

considered part of the fight against the gears of the war machine, with phreaker groups organized as offshoots of the Yippies.



I have always considered phreaking to be similar to fare evasion on public transportation. When I was hopping turnstiles in Chicago as a youth, there was a push to make the CTA free as a social service, with claims that 90 percent of fare money collected being spent to handle the money itself. Planka, a modern-day group in Sweden an Norway, has a similar agenda. Members pay dues and commit to sneak on to public transportation whenever they can, and in return get legal assistance if they are caught. If the government doesn't want to socialize a service, fine - the people can do it for them. The feeling of stealing service with one's wiles is a rush, especially if it can be justified with logic, however tortured, and now that I have fully repented of my sordid criminal past, I will miss the secret passages I ferreted out on the El and the payment card hacks I learned on the Bart.

Futel is quite different from phone phreaks and other urban hackers in its most basic operation, of course. For one, we buy our service and give it away. But we are inspired by them and share similar motivation, in exploring ways to use the machine we all live in by repurposing its parts.

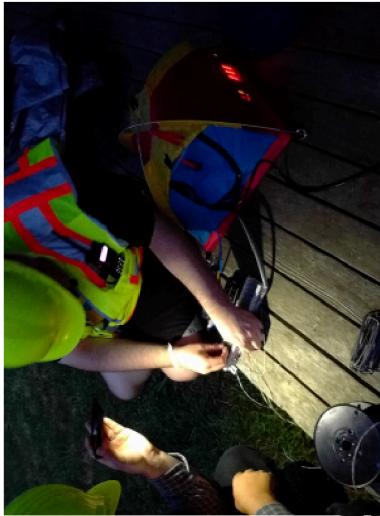
For an excellent history of the phone phreak movement, read [Exploding the Phone](#) by Phil Lapsley.



We installed two new phones this year in Woodlawn and Buckman. A third phone at Ctrlh on Interstate saw excellent use while it was installed.

ToorCamp 2016

We had some phones at ToorCamp again this year. Our connection to ShadyTel was intermittent, their lineworkers were kept busy in our neighborhood, but we did have a line out, somewhat dependent on internet weather, which people eventually found.



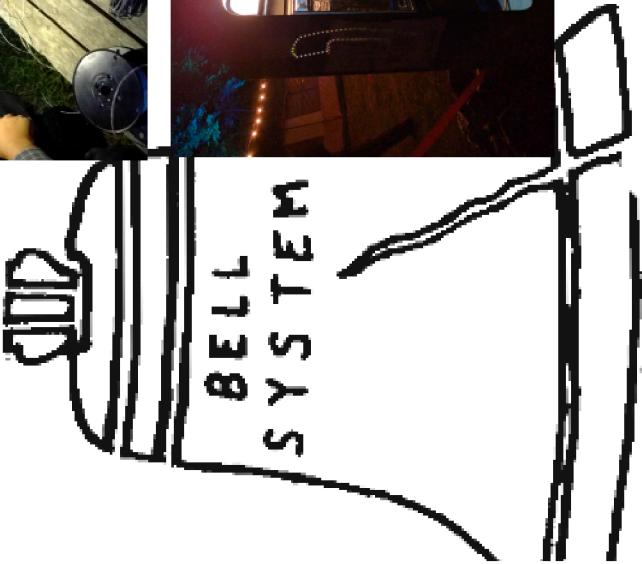
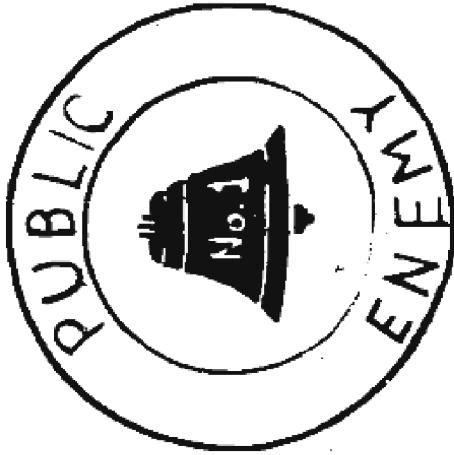
Why Phones?

What made people into phone phreaks? What was their motivation for hacking the phone system, even when some of them faced harsh consequences?

One reason was simply to explore. The phone system was the only computer network accessible to most people in the 60s and 70s, and their hacker nature compelled its exploration. It was accessed using audio signals, so they could make their own equipment. It was shoddily protected, and when exploits were found, the providers often tried to guard it with legal threats, making it almost mandatory to look for further compromises.

Another reason was to steal service for whatever reason, of course, including getting free calls and creating community spaces for them to interact.

A further well-publicized reason was the justification of fighting The Man. There are always reasons to hate the phone company, of course, including civil liberty violations which continue today. The monopolistic nature of the providers in the 60s and 70s made it easy to regard the phone company as another tentacle of the government, and phreaking was



2016 Operator Log Excerpts

Futel operators fielded over 50 operator calls in 2016. These ran the gamut from boring to exciting and amusing to annoying. Here is a sample of logged calls, with some sensitive and many less interesting examples removed.

2016-01-06 Caller asked for the address of Transition Projects, including zip code, which I provided.

2016-01-16 Answered call only to hear someone pounding keys repeatedly.

2016-01-16 Caller needed help making an outbound call.

2016-01-16 Another key pounder.

2016-01-17 Caller asked for the incoming number of the Clinton Street phone, which I provided. Advised caller that the ringer was out of order.

2016-02-24 Caller wanted to know what would happen. I told them that they now did.

2016-02-28 Caller was trying to make a call. I encouraged them to keep trying.

2016-03-15 Answered call and heard some random yelling. As soon as I said "Hello, Operator" they hung up.

2016-04-03 Person wanted to know how to call 911, I told them to dial 1 then 911, they thanked me then hung up.

2016-04-04 Caller asked what phone does. Advised that can be used for making free domestic calls. Caller asked how to pay for call, multiple times. Eventually realized was actually free and advised to try making call from main menu again. Caller replied "That is awesome."



"....." "No, but you can call that number yourself after hanging up and selecting 'one' for a dial tone." "Well, but I have to dial a one and then an eight eight eight, is that going to work?" "I don't know. I can't predict the future." "
" "Why not try it and call back if..." "Wait, wait, okay, okay. Okay. I know you
don't have a crystal ball, I mean, who does?" "Who does." "Have a good one."
"Good luck"

2016-12-22 Caller wanted the number for Corbett Farms, which I supplied.

2016-12-30 Caller inquired about my location, I replied that I was an operator. Caller asked if they should return to their job next week, I replied no and hung up.



Thank you.”

2016-04-19 Answered call and got Ipanema. After a few seconds a person flashed onto the line and said “Hello?”, I responded “Futel, can I help you?” and they hung up.

2016-04-21 Caller needed 911. Was unable to make call. I took down info and called emergency in for them.

2016-04-21 Caller needed the number for DHS on Lombard. Commented that they appreciate Futel more than we can know.

2016-05-03 Caller asked if this was a real phone, I confirmed and asked if caller needed an operator. Caller said they thought it was an art installation. I asked if I could help caller, they replied no, I hung up.

2016-05-05 Answered call only to hear Ip- anema. After about 30 seconds the line went silent and I hung up.

2016-05-10 Caller needed number for Oregon EBT balance check.

2016-06-02 Caller needed number for Transition Projects.

2016-06-05 Caller wanted number for OHSU emergency room, I gave them the number for the OHSU hospital and OHSU emergency care.

2016-06-16 Caller wanted me to make a phone call, I told them how to do so.

2016-06-22 Caller wanted the number for pretrial release at the justice center. Gave them the number for Multnomah County Pretrial.

2016-07-01 Static and a distorted voice.

2016-07-13 Caller wanted number for Multnomah County Public Defender. Provided.

2016-07-29 Amused neighbor- hood children who were playing with the phone.

2016-08-04 Caller requested to be transferred to Providence Medical. I explained that I could look up the number but not transfer. Caller was distressed because they did not have a pen but was elated to find one in the phone booth and wrote down the number.

2016-08-08 Caller wanted number for a cab company, I provided the Radio Cab number.

2016-08-18 Caller sought to make a phone call. I explained that I could not make a phone call, but that they could hang up and dial the number. Caller re-peated their question, I repeated my answer, and they hung up.

2016-09-15 Caller wanted a number for a lawyer in Baltimore. Looked it up and gave it to them.

2016-10-29 Caller encouraged a child to talk into the telephone. Child laughed and said nothing and pressed buttons.

2016-11-14 Caller wanted the number to the North Portland child welfare office. Give it to them.

2016-11-29 Caller wondered if we provided directory assistance, I replied that we did. Caller added that they didn't know if it cost money, I replied that it did not. After a short silence and some smalltalk, caller said that they were looking for a Portland number, and began spelling out a name, but could not agree with another person on how it was spelled. Caller said never mind, I hung up.

2016-12-13 “Operator.” “Can you connect me to one... eight... eight... eight... ”

Futel

