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Defending Our Nation. Securing The Future.

(U//FOUO) History Today - 13 October 2009

Run Date: 10/13/2009

TELEPHONE DIRECTORY



(U) For decades the "688" telephone exchange has been synonymous with NSA. In the days when Agency employees identified their place of employment only as "Department of Defense," the 688- telephone number was always recognized as the NSA number in the local area and could prompt a reply of "oh, you work at NSA." But in the first decade of NSA's life at Ft. Meade, the Agency had a different number using the old system of telephone exchange names -- Parkway 5-4400 (or WOODland 9-9524 when calling from Baltimore or Annapolis).

(U) Telephone exchange names (such as PARKway) came into existence in the early years of telephone service for communities that required more than 10,000 telephone numbers; customers would dial the first two letters of the exchange name, followed by the digits of the phone number. The PARKway (72) exchange was probably established at the same time the Baltimore-Washington Parkway was built and served much of the area around Ft. Meade, including parts of Laurel.

(U) The expansion of telephone service doomed the system of exchange names and in the late 1950s the Bell System/American Telephone and Telegraph (ATT) introduced what was called the All-Number-Calling Plan. By early 1962, 11 million of 76 million telephones were using the system and, according to a *Time* magazine article of May 1962, Bell and 3,000 independent phone companies expected to have complete conversion by 1967. *Time* called the system "Orwellian," but Bell spokesmen said there was "no other choice in the face of rapidly expanding dialing facilities and the increase in the number of telephone sets across the nation."

(U) It was a mathematical problem: there were only eight holes on the dial that had three letters each, which produced 64 possible two-letter combinations that could begin a recognizable word or name for an exchange. Four of those -- YP, YL, WR, and KR -- were deemed useless (after all, who wanted the exchange name KREmlin?). By adding a number at the end of the two-letter codes, there were only 540 usable combinations. This was more than adequate until "Direct Distance Dialing" (long distance dialing) was introduced in 1951 and divided the U.S. into 105 area codes. ANC was introduced to expand the possible number of telephone numbers and eliminate dialing errors generated by "sound-alike" exchange names.

(U) An ATT spokesman claimed "This is the least undesirable way of increasing combinations " Dr. Leo Goldberger of NYU's research center for Mental Health told *Time*, "Long series of numbers, such as Army serial numbers, have come to connote loss of individual identity: one becomes -- to add insult to injury -- not only an insignificant cog in a great machine, but anonymous as well."

(U) NSA changed over to the new system on July 31, 1965. The July 1965 Agency telephone book notes that effective that date the Bell system assigned the telephone exchange prefix "688" to NSA, and "Direct Inward Dial" service would take effect. All inward calls could now be made directly to employees' extensions without going through the NSA operator. (The NSA operator could be reached at 688-6311 and could still direct phone calls as required.)

(U) The photograph shows the cover of the January 1961 NSA telephone book with the exchange name clearly evident. The classification markings refer to the contents, not the cover.

Approved for Release by NSA on 02-13-2015. FOIA Case # 80187

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Page Publisher: Corporate Web Solutions, DN22, 963-8642 ([email](#))

Last Modified: 01/23/2015 | Last Reviewed: 01/23/2015

[508 Accessibility]

DERIVED FROM: NSA/CSSM 1-52, DATED: 20130930, DECLASSIFY ON: 20380930

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