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NSA TECHNICAL JOURNAL

SPECIAL ISSUE

Collected Editorials of Sydney Fairbanks

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Sydney Fairbanks

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Sydney Fairbanks

There are probably not many civil servants who are members of the Frisian Academy. The number may well be not much greater than the number of those who have ever heard of it. Yet we have had one such among us for sixteen years past, though no one would ever have known it from any outward sign of manner or speech.

Indeed, it is not surprising, for we know that in this odd corner of the bureaucracy there are many who could hold honored place, and who have done and still do so, in pursuits far removed from the one in which they now earn their living. It is these multifaceted people, these latter day Michaelangelos and Thomas Jeffersons, who give the leaven to this place, who account for the hold that the business has on many a man who might earn more elsewhere, and who are responsible for many of our successes and for much of the esteem in which the Agency is held. These people are not hard to find.

There is one whose boast is that he was not always a cryptologist. In fact, he was in earlier days a world renowned musician who could hold an audience in thrall with his flute. And just down the hall is a modest man, a former teacher at St. John's, one of the few men in the history of that eminent school who could teach the entire curriculum—Greek, Latin, French, German, mathematics, physics, and chemistry—and *did*.

On the second floor lives a brilliant linguist who is known to the academic world as an expert in the esoteric field of ancient numismatics. And not far away we can find a tall man who was once private secretary to an ambassador and who, having attained the eminence of the *Harvard Law Review*, served as law clerk to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court.

A few doors down the hall is one who by day struggles with case figures and personnel charts but is also an accomplished trombonist and has just published his translation of *Anna Karenina*. You may find him in the dining room sitting near a soft-spoken man who is working crossword puzzles and who once taught Gothic and English at Harvard.

Away then with the charade. The Frisian academician, the brilliant law student, the ambassador's secretary, the teacher at St. John's

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and at Harvard, the solver of acrostics—they are all the same man. They are Sydney Fairbanks, Ph.D., man of many talents, an extraordinary man even in this company of extraordinary men.

To know him a little better, you need to know a little more. After early years in England, Sydney Fairbanks went to Harvard at the age of fifteen. Before he bade farewell to the undergraduate state on the square, he had been back to school in England where his skill at Greek verse won him a scholarship to that other Cambridge; had driven an ambulance in France, Italy, and Palestine during World War I (and been awarded the Croix de Guerre for courage under fire); had served as interpreter between French and Italian troops; and had accompanied Ambassador Johnson to Rome as private secretary (from whom he was to receive subsequently a letter saying: "This will introduce Sydney Fairbanks who can do anything he says he can.").

When that period ended, he went on to Harvard Law School where he stayed long enough to prove that he was an exceptional law student and to learn that the law was no place for him in the long run. Before he doffed the coif and robe, however, he managed to see a good piece of the upper crust of the American legal world, first with the highest court of Massachusetts and then in the Cleveland law firm of Newton Baker. Felix Frankfurter once said to him: "The trouble with you, Fairbanks, is that you thought the law was a learned profession." When he became convinced that it wasn't—and that a learned profession was what he wanted—he went back to Harvard.

This time he took his doctorate in Middle English and published his *Old West Frisian Skeltanariucht.* It was then that he was elected to the Frisian Academy and entered on a highly successful teaching career culminating at St. John's.

On the outbreak of the Korean War, Dr. Fairbanks gave up Academe and came to NSA. As writer, editor, teacher, counsellor, and friend, he has left an impression on this generation that will not soon be erased.

One of his first jobs was to give body to the idea that an establishment which employed the minds and skills of so many members of so many professions owed it to itself to sponsor a journal to help them communicate with each other. Dr. Fairbanks was named as the first Editor, and he created the *Technical Journal* out of the fabric of his disciplined mind, his wide-ranging knowledge, and especially his understanding of the monumental difficulty with which people talk to people.

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The present small volume, which his colleagues offer him with homage and respect, is a collection of the editorials Dr. Fairbanks wrote for the *Journal*. We who salute him believe they constitute a unique text-book for writers, a manual for scholars, a vade mecum for those who would be precise in thought, clear in expression, human and humorous yet profound in speech.

Dr. Fairbanks takes with him on his retirement the esteem and affection of all who know him—who are many—and of all who have read him—who will never be enough.

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THE NSA
TECHNICAL JOURNAL

VOL. I APRIL 1956 NO. 1

Editorial Comment

The history of technical magazines at NSA is not unlike that of the city of Troy, which was, we understand, destroyed by fire and rebuilt on at least five different occasions. This is a matter from which both pessimist and optimist can draw legitimate inferences, but speaking for the latter we say that the idea evidently has extraordinary vitality, and we hope that its latest incarnation will be welcomed.

Part of this vitality may be due to a certain fortunate fuzziness that shelters any ideal until the time comes to embody it. There is always the danger that what the supporter has in mind is a journal full of articles on his own specialty—which, of course, any right thinking person will understand and enjoy—plus a few outlandish disquisitions on other subjects, which he needn't read. "Even with a Technical Journal devoted to one specialty," we are told, with perfect truth, "no one reads *all* the articles." Unfortunately, any attempt to edit the Journal on this basis, but without bias, would result in perhaps five little quarterlies each containing about one-and-a-half articles, and united by nothing but the cover. It does not seem difficult to prophesy that such a publication would fall apart. Unless at least half our articles are interesting to at least half our readers we shall be hardly more than a rather clumsy unofficial adjunct to the existing system of reports.

To concede or admit this, however, is apt to fill the air with such choice missiles as "popularizers," "intermediate training pamphlets," "writing down," "Do you mean a Technical Journal or a *Scientific American*?" . . . all of them carrying a certain barb of truth, but shaped we believe from a misunderstanding. At least two-thirds of the unreadability of the average technical report is due not to unavoidable sophistication but to casualness. An expert writing for other experts in the field can organize his material poorly, express himself badly, avoid deciding what his basic assumptions are, and still be read with interest, because they can almost unconsciously

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supply what is missing. To reach a wider audience he need not "write down"; he need only write better. If enough of our contributors have the time and the energy to do this—and let no one underestimate the time and the energy that it takes—we believe that we can achieve the necessary level of general interest.

As for the remaining obscurity, due to what we have called unavoidable sophistication; obviously it is no bar to publication. The Journal has been urged to avail itself of the best minds in the Agency as specialists and referees, and readers can be confident that they will not be deprived of any article merely because the Editor is not bright enough to understand it.

THE EDITOR.

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THE NSA
TECHNICAL JOURNAL

VOL. I JULY 1956 NO. 2

Editorial Comment

A Journal, like other young organisms, may or may not grow up, but in any case it has difficulty in growing down. If we are willing to begin by explaining elementary terms and concepts we may in time build up in our readers—including, one need scarcely add, the Editor—a substantial knowledge of the shorthand used in other fields than their own, and a reasonably large list of things that may be taken for granted. If, on the other hand, we set out with a policy of taking things for granted, it is extremely difficult to retrace our steps in later issues, and sheepishly start again at a lower level. With this in mind we continue to press for scripture in a language understanded of the people, and until our readers themselves start to complain of being babied or bored we shall not worry about that possibility.

There is, however, one consolation that can be offered to the sensitive contributor, and, it may be, one warning to the reader. If there is to be any progress of the sort outlined above, elementary explanations should be made only once; thereafter we proceed on the well known principle that everyone is presumed to know the law or, more accurately, that ignorance of the law excuses no one. A writer's embarrassment at developing—as it seems to him—the thesis that two and two make four, may be somewhat mitigated if he realizes that he is doing so not for a paragraph or an issue, but for all time—or at any rate for the Duration.

We do not expect to define again, for instance, "on line", or a modulus or binary notation or a channel filter or a time-division multiplex: their little skeletons have already been added to the coral reef. And for any further clarification we urge upon the reader the time-honored device of asking somebody who knows.

As in the previous issue, we have printed some articles—there should be little difficulty in picking them out—which could not be written at the common-denominator level, and must be left to the experts in the field. No such articles have, as yet, been written

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expressly for the Journal, and it is perhaps inevitable that a writer who has something to say that is new, true, relevant and abstruse should not wait for the publication of a Quarterly, but convey it to his colleagues as quickly as may be. Nevertheless, as anyone who has worked here for a few years is well aware, there is a crying need for careful syntheses of such timely reports, and it is a principal purpose of the Journal—within the limits of its security classification—to provide an outlet for them. If our readers will take the trouble to ask for the really important, hitherto unwritten, papers that they want to see in their own fields, they may perhaps get them.

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THE NSA
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VOL. I OCTOBER 1956 NO. 3

Editorial Comment

Four times a year the Editor is supposed to address the Journal's readers, after spending all the rest of his time with contributors. As a result his sensations have been very much those of broadcasting from a sound-proof studio. Readers, so far as his experience goes, are people who complain, often with justice, about not getting the Journal, and submit, at a later date, a certificate that they have destroyed it. The interval between these somewhat depressing end-points is wrapped in mist.

After two issues, however, we are beginning to get a little criticism, and a few suggestions. The criticism runs very much along the lines that we have anticipated: the articles, it is said, are unnecessarily difficult to understand, and the difficulty arises very largely from the failure to orient the reader in the opening paragraphs. Readers of previous editorials will suspect that we do not resent this criticism; we say only that this task of summarizing the essential elementary information is the most difficult part of almost any article, and that our contributors will, we are sure, try to do even better than they have hitherto.

Readers have furnished two suggestions, which are in a sense alternatives. One is that we should follow the practice of other Technical Journals which draw material from all parts of the Nation or even of the world, and publish short identifying paragraphs summarizing the education and experience of the contributor. After some hesitation, we are disposed to reject it. In our particular case the need for such identification is negligible, and the Journal does not increase its stature by adopting unnecessary trappings. Incidental advantages, such as that of making it easier for brother conchologists to learn of each other, seem irrelevant.

The rival suggestion, on the other hand, that we publish the extension number of the author's telephone, seems entirely apropos. Nothing is more conducive to the aims of the Journal than to have

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the interested, or even the infuriated, reader call up the author and arrange a conference, and we are glad to do anything we can to make it easier. The directory, correct as of the date of going to press, appears on the last page.

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THE NSA
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VOL. II JANUARY 1957 NO. 1

Editorial Comment

So many kind inquiries after the Journal's health have been made of late—stimulated apparently by rumors of its early death—that we take the liberty of being rather specific on the subject. The number of articles promised has roughly doubled with each successive issue, and the mortality from all causes (most of them "classification" difficulties) has been less than one in three. Because it is extremely difficult to get the average article written, independently criticized, checked for security, discussed, rewritten, illustrated and typed in final form, all within three months, we are still operating in an economy of scarcity; but the transition to an economy of plenty, when the articles that were not ready in time for the last issue are enough to fill the next one, may arrive quite soon. When it does, the Journal will be on an adequately firm footing, and we find our progress in that direction gratifyingly rapid.

The difficulties attendant on printing the fourth issue have finally been solved. We apologize for the delay, and wish to thank our readers for their patience.

Please note that this is not, as would be expected, Volume I, Number 4, but Volume II, Number 1. The ordinary periodical in our situation has to weigh the reasonableness of having the first numbers appear in January against the inconvenience of mailing out form letters for the next century explaining the break in sequence. Because of our limited distribution we hope to escape most of this. Nevertheless: Readers please note: There is *no* Volume I, Number 4.

It is impractical to list by name all the kind and patient people who have spent hours in advising us informally on specific points, but without them there would have been no Journal, and we hope they will accept a blanket recognition.

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THE NSA
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VOL. II APRIL 1957 NO. 2

Editorial Comment

The last editorial was written in December and will have appeared, if all goes well, in March. This one is written in March, and may quite conceivably appear early in May. It would be too rash to say that the July issue will appear in July, but that is our intention. Emerging from the recent flood, the Journal shakes itself briskly, and trots off after the man with the scythe and the hour-glass.

Since our six hundred and fifty readers have had nothing to comment on during the last three months, we cannot well rebuke their silence, but we suffer from curiosity about the six hundred of them whose names are unfamiliar. How many articles does the average reader read? How many readers read articles on cryptology? On computers? On engineering subjects in general? On mathematics? On languages? How many turn the page hastily at sight of an integral? How many get a pleasant thrill out of words like "presently", "overall", and "implementation", and how many feel a slight nausea? How many can read with pleasure: "Too, this type commutator behaving like it did convinced them to change it, and we will likely do the same," and how many suffer seven separate wounds? How many understand (a) completely, (b) partly, (c) not at all, the terms: Abelian, epenthesis, single side band, generatrices, . . . ? Already one can see the outlines of a classification test which will enable the Editor to say, "137 readers will be bored by this article, 250 will find it reasonably interesting, and 263 (including ourselves) won't understand it at all." Perhaps Personnel will construct such a test; in the meantime we stretch blind hands and grope.

Of one thing, however, we are still convinced. What our readers collectively want and need is articles similar to the mathematical essays published by James Newman in his new four-volume anthology—the one that is selling as he puts it, in "indecent quantities." A very little examination of the list of authors should convince contributors that simple expository writing "from the ground up" is not beneath the

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dignity of anyone, no matter how deep his knowledge of the subject. Unfortunately, material of this caliber is in very short supply. Holding up for the average scientist's emulation an elementary essay by, say, Alfred North Whitehead, is a little like hanging an ostrich egg in the hen-house with a label reading—"Look at this and do your best." Yet there are some pretty large birds in our aviary, and some of them, as readers will have noted, are even obliging. In any event, there is much to be said for the concrete example.

In conclusion, we have a favor to ask of our readers. Will they be so kind as to return copies of the first two issues instead of destroying them? The fact that only 600 copies of these were printed leaves us in short supply, and we have run into a surprising number of legitimate but unforeseen demands. While we shall naturally make a permanent record of the transaction to keep our books in order, the reader may prefer to include a return receipt for his own protection. And your petitioner will ever pray, etc.

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THE NSA
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VOL. II JULY 1957 NO. 3

Editorial Comment

The secretary's shoulder has barely recovered from operating the lever of the stenciling machine, and telephone calls are still coming in from ladies who have left the Army, changed their names, and moved to a different department of the Agency and now wish to know what has happened to their copies of the April issue, when the Assistant Editor, in his capacity of printer's devil, demands copy for an editorial to appear in July.

Reader assistance failing, we continue to debate the Editorial Problem alone. There is a tendency for one unfamiliar with the trade to think of editing as a process of running through a manuscript, inserting commas, changing commas to semicolons, unsplitting certain infinitives, correcting spelling, changing verbs with plural subjects to plural forms and so on—matters which may call for concentrated attention and even a certain low cunning, but are scarcely mysteries. In the case of what this office usually calls "hippopotamus" articles—those that deal with questions "of no interest save to another hippopotamus"—this picture comes fairly close to the fact. We can still insert the non-restrictive comma, but only another hippopotamus (by which, of course, we mean another distinguished expert in advanced science or mathematics) can tell us whether these are indeed the proper and authentic grunts.

When we turn, however, to the typical article addressed to the "average intelligent reader, working in a technical field other than that of the writer", the situation is quite otherwise. The faintly implied major premise, the unfamiliar term (used on page 2 but first defined on page 4), the deductions of which one of our law-professors used to say, "I see it all, except the 'therefore' ", the sentence that simply *can't* mean what it says ("I wonder if the typist left out a 'not' "), all become, if not obvious, at least accessible to careful reading. If the author is trained both in exposition and in his subject, or if the referee is so trained and is also willing to take the trouble to make the necessary

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corrections, the Editor's burden is still light, but in the remaining far-too-many per cent of the cases he is bound to suffer severely from lack of omniscience. Unless you have an understanding of what a writer is trying to make clear, you cannot help him; and unless you are familiar with his field, or have time to educate yourself in it, or can—oh, wonderful!—persuade him to educate you, you cannot have that understanding. Such is the literary doctor's dilemma.

The ideal solution—and it is one closely approximated by the journals with similar problems which we have recently consulted—is to have a pool of unofficial technical editors: men who have enough technical and literary ability to join the Editor and author in a triangular conference and interpret soothingly between them. A few members of the Agency have been willing to do this, and whenever they have the results have been highly satisfactory. Unfortunately we cannot offer them anything but esteem, but to a man who takes an interest in the younger men in his own field the intangible advantages are considerable.

Turning to other matters, we wish to thank the first reader who has been kind enough to comply with our request for copies of Volume I, Numbers 1 and 2, thereby reassuring us that somebody listens to these broadcasts. We acknowledge an infinitely courteous suggestion that we clarify the classification of articles when it differs as between different parts of the same article, and are asking our contributors to do this where it is practicable—it often isn't. And we are moved to cite the Letterpress Section in COMSEC MAT for cooperation, during this period of adjustment, above and beyond the call of duty.

"Peace."

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THE NSA
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VOL. II OCTOBER 1957 NO. 4

Editorial Comment

We have decided that an editorial should not be mere persiflage. It should initiate reforms, strike blows for freedom, speak for the oppressed,—that sort of thing;—provided always that the Editor sticks to what concerns him. The matter of English as she is wrote in the Agency is something that inevitably concerns him. We have therefore purchased a small red flag, and are planning a series of manifestoes.

The other day a D/F crossed our desk. It has been said that everything in Government is done by a D/F, but you have to be here a year or two to appreciate what a d. f. he is. This, however, is beside the point. The D/F in question was probably highly practical and intelligent, and it bore a rubber-stamp signature of an altitude that virtually guaranteed that the signatory neither wrote it nor read it. Nevertheless *someone* must have written it, and it is to be hoped, or feared, that someone read it. The third paragraph runs: "It shall continue nailed to the skull, however it will be removable with patience and a corkscrew." Or at least . . . perhaps we should explain that tact has prompted us to alter everything but the sentence structure, the comma, and the "however." It is these that we wish to discuss.

Of course there would be no point in such a discussion if the error in question were not extremely common. A friend who has to waste a large part of his time revising reports and letters written by subordinates tells us that he expects to meet it at least once a day, and wonders why this particular comma splice is preferred above all others.

Alas, the answer is fairly clear. The sentence in question reads perfectly well if "but" is substituted for "however," and the question boils down to why the typical composer of D/F's says "however" when he means "but." He does it for the same reason that he says "presently" when he means "now." All you have to do is to count the syllables. If—and such things have happened—he wants to tell

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people to stop using long words in their letters, he will write, "discontinue the employment of ultra-lengthy terms in the correspondence presently emanating from your organization," without a qualm. Nothing less than a time-tested trisyllable is an adequate figleaf for his literary modesty, and the demand has created the supply.

Instead of working against nature, by trying to substitute the short word for the long, the general tendency of those who edit has been to modify the punctuation: ". . . nailed to the skull. However, it will be removable . . . "; thereby producing something that is merely clumsy. There is a legitimate use for "however" at the beginning of a sentence, where the essentially contrasting nature of what follows is to be not merely indicated but emphasized. There may even, conceivably, be an appropriate occasion for starting a sentence with "Therefore," although it is roughly equivalent to entering a room by flinging the door open with a crash and stamping on the threshold. But some deep and inscrutable instinct, like that which drives the lemmings to commit suicide, urges the D/F writer to begin every sentence with one of these two. Given the idea: "It is strong enough, but it is too large; better try something else," he can be counted on to express it: "It is strong enough. However, it is too large. Therefore, you should try something else."

If we were—fond, impious thought—one having authority, saying to one man Spell, and he spelleth, and to another Punctuate and he punctuateth, we would issue a D/F decreeing—in appropriate terms of course—that in future no sentences would start with the words "however" or "therefore",—and then sit back and listen in grim glee while the electric typewriters ground to a halt and silence settled in the corridors. Some mute inglorious Milton would then discover for himself the possibility of writing, "We have, however . . . " and "It is, therefore . . . " and presently everything would start humming again. But the quality of the product would be, to our mind, appreciably improved.

Selah.

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THE NSA
TECHNICAL JOURNAL

VOL. III JANUARY 1958 NO. 1

Editorial Comment

The *Journal*, we learn by consulting the minutes of ancient committee meetings, was to have been equipped with a Latin motto—"*Quod faciendum fiet.*" or words to that effect, signifying that whatever *must* be done *will* be done. Contemplating our two-and-a-half years of activity we feel that "*Forsan et haec . . .* " would be altogether more appropriate, and we regret that our self-appointed license to add sweetness and light to the high seriousness of these pages cannot be stretched so far. At the moment, the things that will one day be a pleasure to remember consist chiefly of the move to Fort Meade, which is going on all around us in a welter of packing cases and a sea of suppressed fury. Word has just been passed that chairs, desks, and typewriters are to be, as the lawyers say, "fungible": You give one up here and get one back there; but not the same one. "*I need a clean plate,*" *said the Mad Hatter.* "*Let's all move up one place.*"

Ultimately, we have no doubt, the whole menagerie will somehow get itself out to Fort Meade, arrange itself in long straight lines, scrub off its alien desks, indulge in an extensive swapping of chairs, learn the manage of strange typewriters, and settle down to its true business of deciding what to reorganize next. In the meantime we bethink ourselves of certain accumulated days of annual leave that must on no account be wasted.

To return to our sheep: we promised last time to write a series of notes on the grosser abuses of the language to which the job exposes us. Our text for today will be the curious locution "this type thing." No one says, we believe, "variety thing," or "sort thing," and there is a natural bar against saying "kind thing" (consider, for instance, "I hate your kind letter."), so that this cannot be a mere extension of a Milt Gross idiom ("With your pie you want it a piece cheese?") nor an offshoot of the sort of telegraphese that omits all connectives ("Reference your message"). We think the main culprit is the technical writer.

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An English epigram which is still going the rounds—last seen in *Missiles and Rockets*—defines an engineer as a man who says "a coffee-containing cup" when he means "a cup containing coffee." If, one may add, he wishes to talk about a description of the methods used in teaching the design of gadgets to be used on widgets, he will write "a widget-type gadget design instruction methods description." We have had the equivalent of this submitted to us for publication. As for writing "widget-type gadget" rather than "widget type of gadget," he does it every time. It is, after all, not incorrect though a trifle monotonous. And since he has little use for hyphens, he writes "widget type gadget." From this some illiterate soul concludes that "type" *means* "type of," and the step to "this type thing" is immediate. Since it is well known that no error is stupid or vulgar enough to guarantee that it will not become respectable, we refrain from rending our garments. But we submit that at this period English this type writing is not appropriate to this sort Journal.

And so to bed.

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THE NSA
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VOL. III APRIL 1958 NO. 2

Editorial Comment

We continue to be very much concerned about the failure of the *Journal* to reach enough of the readers for whom it is intended. It is tempting to look for scapegoats, and to write scathingly of Abecedarian attitudes, but this would be misleading. Essentially there are no villains in the piece, and it is foolish to ignore the complications involved in the appearance of a type of secret document with respect to which every fully cleared and indoctrinated member of the Agency has a "need to know." On the other hand, there are too many obviously suitable candidates, both newcomers and old hands, who have never heard of the *Journal*; too many more who know all about it, but get no adequate opportunity to read it; and too many copies of the *Journal* returned to us for various reasons by those charged with the responsibility of deciding who is to receive it; for us to accept the current system as satisfactory.

An editorial, which reaches in the first instance only those who are receiving the *Journal*, is perhaps not the best place to call attention to these matters, and we are taking other steps to get at the facts. Nevertheless, we do urge our readers, and more particularly those who are administrators and supervisors, to look about them and see what can be done. Our telephone is 4980.

No violent protests having been received, we continue our remarks on how not to write English. A sentence—suitably disguised, we trust—in a recent contribution, runs something like: "The machine has the power of selecting the ripe apples and throw away the others." Most readers will conclude that the typist forgot to type an "ing", and so what. But our calling has made us so suspicious that we are inclined to see in this a first seeping into written English of something that is rapidly becoming a standard colloquialism. Observe its history. The verb "to go" has two functions in English—one to express the future: "I am going to do what he asks"; and another to express

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motion: "Where are you going?" Another way of expressing the future is by using the continuous present: "I am driving out there tomorrow". Out of a horrid amalgam of these has grown up the very common, but indefensible, "I am going upstairs and take a nap", meaning "I am going to go upstairs and take a nap" or "I am going upstairs to take a nap" or even, "I am going upstairs (this afternoon) and taking a nap." But there is no use in trying to make a chart of chaos.

Even though "I am take a nap" and "I am going take a nap" are both very queer, it might be possible to put a fence around the monster and say, "This is something peculiar that happens with the verb 'to go'." But alas, the spirit of the language is never more logical than in extending its mistakes. If Momma is going upstairs and take a nap, what is more natural than that if Willie disturbs her she is coming downstairs and beat his ears in, or that she is running through her mail and throw the advertisements in the trash, or taking a bus downtown and buy a hat, or for that matter joining the Navy and see the world.

A reader told us recently that on encountering our remarks about "this type thing" he couldn't imagine what we were talking about; never in his life had he heard anybody say anything like that; but that in the next twenty-four hours he had heard it four times. In the same spirit we direct the attention of our word-watchers to this new idiom that is creeping into the language and poison our intellects. There is no sense in temporizing and let it get established. It . . .

Ugh!

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THE NSA
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VOL. III JULY 1958 NO. 3

Editorial Comment

Two different garage mechanics have assured us that the starter on the car is suffering from a defect in the "cellunoid." After due inquiry we incline to the belief that the word is the offspring of "celluloid" and "solenoid." With the advent of plastics, "celluloid" must be disappearing rapidly from the popular vocabulary and it is pleasant to think that it leaves one descendant, however illegitimate. If the object in question were a solenoid made out of celluloid—but the engineers tell me this is improbable—we should have a case of a "portmanteau" word generated, as it were, spontaneously, whereas most such words are deliberate acts of creation. Lewis Carroll, who christened them, exploited the idea more fully than anyone else—except of course, James Joyce—and the preface to *The Hunting of the Snark* is recommended reading for those who plan to embark with *Ulysses*. But the whole point of Carroll's inventions, such as "frumious" for "fuming-furious", is that they are self-conscious. In only one case—"chortle"; presumably from "snort" and "chuckle"—has the creature sneaked through the barrier of literature, and moved into the outside world where *Jabberwocky* is no longer a part of the scenery.

The same may be said of like inventions of humbler origin. "Aggranoying", of obvious parentage, enjoyed a somewhat dreary vogue in England shortly after the death of the Great White Queen, being used chiefly in discourses addressed to the very young. It was in a class with "thusly", which was likewise intended to be recognized as an amusing blunder. But we cannot remember that "irregardless" (by "irrespective" out of "regardless") was ever a humorous invention, although Webster (*"Erron. or humorous, U. S."*) gives it the benefit of the doubt. In our editorial capacity, alas, we meet with both "thusly" and "irregardless", employed totally without humorous intent. The word "insinuendo", offered by a friend of ours, seems to us full of charm

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and deserving of an appreciative audience, yet the thought of having it pass into the "irregardless" group acts as a serious deterrent. Better perhaps to strangle it at birth.

What chiefly daunts the editor, however, in that endless, hopeless, rearguard action against neologism to which all his kind are dedicated, is not the hybrid word but the hybrid construction.

"Termed incorrect", for instance, and "described as incorrect" meet each other in some ninth circle of the popular mind, and "termed as incorrect" emerges. "He said he was going" and "He stated that he was going" give "He stated he was going" or even "Good bye, he stated." "I convinced him that he should go" and "I persuaded him to go" produce "I convinced him to go." "I saw him going downstairs" and "I was told of his going downstairs" combine in "I was told of him going downstairs". "Other than" and "different from" beget "different than." "Much alike" and "very different" yield "much different." "As regards" and "in regard to" create "in regards to". "Equals" and "is equal to" give rise to "equals to". And so on, from here to Mesopotamy. The general principle, that if two words are equivalent in any respect they must be equivalent in all respects, moves on remorselessly, and the world has grown grey at its breath.

In such moods we try to take comfort in the historic approach. Dean Swift felt with perfect justice that "mob", a slang abbreviation of a stale classicism, *mobile vulgus*, was the sort of word that no one with any sense of style would permit himself to use; but the earth continued in its orbit, the equinoxes no doubt precessed, and "mob" became one of our better monosyllables. The whole English language, if it comes to that, is an undignified sloughing off of fine old Germanic terminations, made possible by the adoption of a monotonous, standard word order in place of the ancient freedoms. And even before that, if good little Indo-Europeans had listened more carefully to the (starred) forms used by their mothers there would have been no vulgar sound-shift, and we should all be talking a pure and original tongue. If good little apes . . . but by now we have had all the comfort we can take at one time.

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THE NSA
TECHNICAL JOURNAL

VOL. III NOVEMBER 1958 NO. 4

Editorial Comment

Readers will have noticed that we have a new cover decoration, born, like most innovations, of both hopes and fears. We shall not discuss the fears, chiefly because problems of security classification are like love—to talk of them is to make them—but we should like to say something about the hopes. The important aspect of the change is not that it removes a major nuisance (for indeed the worries and debatings over whether a given phrase overstepped the shadowy upper bound of the "SECRET" classification had become just that) but that it opens up to our contributors a vast new territory which they will, we trust, make haste to occupy. The cynic will no doubt point out that the new tract also has its boundaries, which can in due course give rise to the same irritations and exhaustions, but we remain unimpressed. The *Journal* should, we think, be able, like Malcolm, to convey its pleasures in a spacious plenty without scandal or trespass. And it has now, far more than before, the opportunity to be what it set out to be: a fitting repository for the best and completest expositions of our activities in each field, written for the necessary education of experts in other fields.

From creation, we turn our attention to destruction. We are, of course, wedded to the *Journal*, and cannot be blamed for feeling that the lady is not for burning. If we had our way, copies would remain in appropriate circulation until layers of Scotch tape had rendered them illegible, they would be led to the burn-bag as one takes an old dog on his last journey to the vet's, and Taps would be sounded as the bag itself crashed on the reverently bowed head of the man at the foot of the chute. (The ceremony would, of course, be announced over the public address system and visiting VIP's would be urged to observe a minute of silence). Unfortunately, however, these ideas are not really practical, and we are reconciled to the sluggish stream of cremation certificates, in various colors and sizes, that moves across

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our desk on its way to the proper files. The only event that really depresses us is the advent of a certificate, singly or as part of a set, recording the demise of a copy of Vol. I, No. 2. A recent notice in our esteemed contemporary, the Daily Bulletin, urging readers to bring this issue back alive, so to speak, has produced three copies, but they do not breed in captivity and we feel that the species is still in danger of extinction. Thus we hope to be excused for bringing the matter again to your notice.

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THE NSA
TECHNICAL JOURNAL

VOL. IV JANUARY 1959 NO. 1

Editorial Comment

We have just learned that the October issue, now slated to appear in March, is dated "December" on the cover and "November" on the editorial page. No one can be found who made or authorized the changes. Up to this time the editorial *profanum* has been singularly free of little green men—we had hoped that they were sufficiently human to be repelled by "Musak"—but in any case we shall redouble our efforts to detect and defeat them. In the interest of posterity we suggest that at least the cover date be altered, legibly, to "October".

One of our readers, stung by some peculiarly noxious idiot's-idiom that had crept into an official communication, called up the other day to ask, almost tearfully, if we thought he could volunteer to write all the D/F's put out in the Agency. No, we told him, the suggestion would probably not be well received; but we too, we confessed, had had day-dreams of a similar czardom, lightened in our case by the imposition of a scale of penalties. Omissions of the definite article ("subject memorandum is reprinted in referenced document") would call merely for confinement to barracks; references to the "overall picture" would involve a substantial fine; statements as to "the capability of the facility to become operational transmission-wise on a continuing basis," necessitate a painless beheading; and naturally anyone writing "the reason why this is so is because of the fact that" will be hanged, drawn, and quartered. Beyond these we progress to actual errors: "We hope you shall"; "like he did"; "this is a new one, and which"; "oil the bearings, such as we did yesterday"; and, of course, our friends "(comma) however", "this type thing", and "they are writing and notify the contractor." We are sorry, but we cannot tell you the penalties for these.

There are also the people who write, "this phenomena is noted in more than one media, and the discoverer is worthy of several kudos,"—but we are becoming a common scold. Actually the matter of

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foreign plurals is not quite so simple as the purists would have us believe. "Data" which started life as a proper little plural is rapidly becoming a collective singular, and anyone adopting a holier-than-thou attitude about it should be asked how his stamina are this morning. Back-formations of singulars are even more confused. A "tactic" or a "statistic" has no more right to exist than a "mathematic" or a "calisthenic"; but it does. A man joining the commandos should no more become a commando than a man joining the troops becomes a troop; but he has. And so . . . we suppose . . . from a purely scientific point of view . . . one has to admit the possibility that a time *may* come when something called a "kudo" can exist naked and unashamed; but not, we hope, until we are dust before the doors of friends, or radioactive matter a-blowing down the night.

We too can be scientific on occasion. A short while ago we lamented the absence of a good portmanteau word of spontaneous rather than deliberate generation. In accordance with Somebody's Law, which says that as soon as you say there is no such animal a perfect specimen trots around the corner, we came for the first time on the word "meld", embedded in a very distinguished matrix. Not the verb used in pinochle, which is of course German *melden*, to declare, but one meaning something like "amalgamate." Webster's International knew it not, and we were tempted to throw it out, but we have a weakness for monosyllables. To make a long story short, Webster's *New World Dictionary of the American Language* gives: "meld, v. t. and v. i. (merging of *melt* and *weld*) to blend, merge, unite." Sinking the classicist in the collector, we left it in the copy where we found it, and tiptoed away.

But this does not mean that we are prepared to accept "irregardless".

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THE NSA
TECHNICAL JOURNAL

VOL. IV APRIL 1959 NO. 2

Editorial Comment

"Whom are you?" said Cyril, for he had been to night-school.
—George Ade

One of the more charming frailties of actual speech goes by the rather stuffy name of hyper-urbanism, signifying that the speaker is trying too hard to sound like a "city feller." There are plenty of familiar instances. Tell a Cockney not to say " 'orse" for "horse" and he will presently call an outrage "a houtrage." Reprove his sister, who works in a Tea Shoppe, for calling a cake a "kike" and she will want to be "nace and refaned." Persuade a Brooklynite not to say "poil" for "pearl" and he will practice hard at saying "pernt" for "point"—or alternatively he will develop an extraordinary dipthong, something like that of French *feuille*, which makes it impossible to convict him of error, and equally impossible to tell whether he means "curl" or "coil."

Similarly in matters of syntax, if you train little Johnnie not to say he seen a Good Humor man, he will tell you that he wants to saw another; and apparently if you teach fifty million children not to say "him and me are going fishing," forty-nine million will grow up saying, "between you and I." We heard the other day of an unfortunate secretary, within the confines of this institution, who after one or two angry snubs no longer dares correct this idiom in her tyrant's correspondence. Our heart bleeds at the thought.

Secretaries themselves, however, have one form of hyper-urbanity to which they tend to succumb in large numbers. Ask a victim to do something for you, and she answers in tones of conscious rectitude "Yes, I shall."

It would be a brave man who would tackle the little matter of "shall" and "will"—representing, in the first person, futurity and volition respectively—within the limitations of two pages of print. Suf-

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fice it to say that a question uses the form of the expected, or rather the invited answer:

"Shall you (fut.) be in town tomorrow, and if so will you (vol.) send him a telegram."

"Of course I will (vol.) I shall (fut.) be glad to. Shall I (vol.) send it collect?"

"Yes. Will you (vol.)?"

"Shall I" seems to reverse the rule, but this is because it invites an answer in the *second* person, and for the second and third persons "will" stands for futurity and "shall" for volition (of the speaker). Thus "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" *invites* the answering command "Thou shalt . . ." although what is probably *expected* is an ecstatic "Oh, William, *would* you?" But this is a digression.

Colloquial usage, of course, is "I will" for everything, even an undesired futurity: "If I do that I will be fired." Only "shall I" survives, like a fragment of an ancient ruin protruding through the level turf. Thus, reverting to our original thesis, when a lady is asked to do a favor she should answer, whether colloquially or formally, "I will."—excluding, of course, the more frequent case where the proper answer is "No."

One wonders, by the way, whether when the secretary marries her boss, and "Wilt thou, Angelina . . ." is intoned amid orange blossoms, she answers crisply "Yes, I shall."

It may be said that we are not concerned, as an editor, with spoken language, but only with what is printed. In fact we said as much ourselves about six months ago when someone asked us to voice a protest about a growing tendency to say "I could care less." But last week, sure as death, we saw it in print. Unfortunately, ours is, we like to think, a mild and mannered pen, incapable of excoriating the perpetrators. However: the English sentence (gentle non-reader) which says in five neat syllables precisely what it means, is "I couldn't care less." It is hard to improve on it. Evidently it would be unfair to expect you to *understand* what you hear, but could you, perhaps, *listen* a little more closely?

Aw, gee, mom, what's the use?

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THE NSA
TECHNICAL JOURNAL

VOL. IV JULY 1959 NO. 3

Editorial Comment

The time has come, alas, to lay down the editorial pen.

As we pushed open the glass doors this morning, Big Brother saluted us with some remarks on "the end of a perfect day"; as we reached our desk he assured us that father would come to his babe in its nest (silver sails all out of the west), and to date he is still making noises like a noontide bee. This curious sample of the mores of a mechanised culture always used to affect us with sardonic glee, but coming as it does at a time of sweet sorrow, it merely irritates. We wish Big Brother would stop talking about twilights. (But as a matter of fact we have long since joined the little band of negative thinkers who wish Big Brother would stop; period.)

Human vanity is a depressing spectacle, especially one's own. To have had even a quasi-captive audience, of a mere six hundred souls, for about five minutes, at three-month intervals, should not be a very intoxicating experience, yet, as with other bad habits, one is amazed at the wrench involved in giving it up. We feel like the scientist at the end of "The First Men on the Moon," dragged relentlessly away from the home-made transmitter with which he was communicating with Earth, back into endless shadows. Actually, we hasten to add, no one is dragging us, natural as such a course might be. Mowgli drives Mowgli. The business of dashing, unsolicited, to the rescue of the language and discoursing on the meaninglessness of meaninglessness, has been a lot of fun (for us), but its presence on the editorial page imparts a certain kitchen quality to what is in other respects a serious scientific journal, and the time has come to stop.

Naturally we have hesitated over the best subject for a final fling. We had thought of describing the extraordinary things—reminiscent of a baby with a tube of library paste—that an amateur can do to a sentence with the word "such". But it seems more appropriate to

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end with a salute to a success of the enemy. We shall talk about one of the major triumphs of Dee-Effery.

Most things in this world are accomplished by having tools and knowing how to use them. "Tool" has long since been replaced by "implementation" with a net gain of four syllables, but "way", "means", and "methods" are all regrettably brief. Some genius, however, has risen to the occasion, and it now becomes possible to write "the finalization of the operation may be accomplished by the employment of the appropriate implementation and methodology", ending with a fine approximation to the Ciceronian *esse videatur*, and using thirty-eight syllables to say, the reader will note, absolutely nothing.

Obviously "implementation" and "methodology" go together like bacon and eggs, and a guy should know when he's licked. Nevertheless we raise a protest. "Methodology" is as inappropriate to mean nothing as "methodism" would be, because both have been pre-empted to mean something. We shall not enter into the horrors of religious controversy by defining "methodism", but "methodology" means, roughly, "the science of scientific method", and people give courses in it and write books about it. In such a crisis we have no wish to be merely destructive, yet it is hard to make a suggestion. "Methodry" perhaps, on the analogy of "toiletry" and "circuitry". "Insufficient normalcy of methodry" (meaning "this is too new a way of doing it") has surely some of the authentic Dee-Effian charm—and sentiment, for that matter. But the real devotee will demand a pentasyllable.

"Methodication" . . . ?

It is enough. As usual the agony of composition has assuaged our thirst for publicity. Never mind what we said above. We look forward with ineffable rapture to watching from the bank while others toil upstream, to hearing the contributors fill the sea and air, like little birds, with their sweet jargoning, and not having to do a thing about it. In this mellowing twilight it even seems, now that we don't have to do it any more, as if it might have been worth while; but we are not seduced. Your galley, gentlemen. You can keep my oar.

And thank you for listening so patiently.

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NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY
FORT GEORGE G. MEADE, MARYLAND

17 December 1959

Dr. Sydney Fairbanks
Editor, NSA Technical Journal
National Security Agency

Dear Dr. Fairbanks:

I would like to give you a medal for your outstanding performance as Editor of the NSA Technical Journal since 1954; however I have not yet seen an appropriate decoration for distinguished action in the war against pedantry.

All I can give you is my sincere thanks for making the NSA Technical Journal a publication which is regarded with pride and respect by all who know it. I wish you the greatest satisfaction and success in your new assignment.

Sincerely,

JOHN A. SAMFORD
Lieutenant General, USAF
Director

Copy furnished:
PERS-3 (for inclusion in official personnel file of Dr. Sydney Fairbanks)