The Newsletter of the Radio-Television Journalism Division of AEJMC

Vol. 40, No. 2

March 2001

'Texas Seven' Interview Provides Case Study in Media Ethics

by LEE HOOD

RTVJ Teaching Standards Committee Chair

Should a journalistic organization help law enforcement do its job? Should a journalist accede to the demands of criminals? In the abstract, the answers would certainly be no. In the reality of a given situation, the answers are not so easy.

Such was the case of a Colorado Springs, Colorado, TV station's involvement in the apprehension of two fugitives in late January. The two were the last of "The Texas Seven," who had escaped from a Texas prison in December and were suspected of killing a police officer near Dallas. After that, their whereabouts were unknown until someone in a small community near Colorado Springs recognized them from a report on "America's Most Wanted." Four were apprehended, one committed suicide, and two eluded police for several days, until they were cornered in a Colorado Springs motel room.

After hours of negotiations, the fugitives agreed to surrender but for one final request: a live interview on the local TV station they had been watching in their room. That station was the CBS affiliate, KKTV. News director Brian Rackham agreed to go talk to the officers involved in the negotiations. Once he was "thoroughly convinced" that the live interview was the only way to end the standoff, he gave the goahead. The interviewer would be Eric Singer, KKTV's main anchor, who was

given no ground rules about what specific questions, but was told to avoid "hot button questions" such as those involving the fugitives' escape or subsequent crimes.

Singer interviewed the fugitives via telephone, giving each five minutes of air time during which they gave rambling statements about the Texas prison system and answered Singer's questions

We are citizens in this town, too --KKTV news director Brian Rackham

about how they ended up in his community. The time was shortly after 3 a.m. After the interviews, the fugitives kept their word and surrendered peacefully. In their room afterward, police found a cache of loaded weapons.

Twelve hours later, a Denver TV reporter called to ask if I would agree to an interview about the ethics and propriety of what KKTV had done. The interviewer expressed surprise at my answers, apparently expecting an "ivory tower" response, an abstract answer that said journalists must never become an arm of law enforcement or a conduit for criminals. Instead, I said that being a journalist does not preclude one from being a citizen. I felt that the potential for a greater good outweighed the ethi-

cal concerns in this case.

The Poynter Institute, one of the most respected sources on journalistic ethics, criticized the station for violating the barriers between journalists and law enforcement. A Denver newspaper columnist criticized Singer as a "celebrity relay" for the fugitives, saying his role undermined his, and the media's, journalistic credibility.

Was the station helping law enforcement? Most certainly. Was the station allowing criminals a live, unedited forum for whatever they wanted to say? No question. Did the station become part of the news instead of just reporting it? No doubt, as evidenced by the number of national and local interviews Singer gave in the hours after the surrender.

But did the station also serve its community? For me this was the crucial question, and the answer was emphatically yes. TV stations are sometimes criticized for not doing enough to serve their communities, for caring more about profits than people. In this case, from my viewpoint, the people won. From the time we learned the fugitives were in Colorado, until the last two were captured, the entire state—and certainly the area around Colorado Springs—

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Head Notes

by JEANNE ROLLBERG RTVJ Division Head

As the officers in the RTVJ Division put the finishing touches on panels and plans for the August meeting, it looks as though AEJMC will have a convention befitting its excellent location—Washington, D.C. (Please see Suzanne Huffman's *Static* article on page 5 for preview highlights.)

Meanwhile, at the December Council of Divisions planning meeting in Atlanta, the pesky issue of on-line research paper distribution v. journal publications created more debate. That is, when is a publication a publication? If journal editors refuse to accept papers that have been published, even in rough form, on-line, then researchers will be very reluctant to allow on-line publication. However, such publication gets the materials to wide audiences quickly. There is likely to be a vote on this at the August convention, according to AEJMC officials. Please be ready to participate in the organizationwide debate.

Here are some ongoing RTVJ-related issues that will doubtless be incorporated into discussions/sessions at the AEJMC Convention and elsewhere:

"The 1999 Annual Survey of JMC Graduates" showed that, "As has traditionally been the case, television salaries were the lowest among all job types in 1999." The median starting salary for television news was \$19,968. The article noted that "salaries in broadcast television are the lowest among all communications specialties," and benefit levels remain consistently low. Sigh. Is there more that mass communication professors can do to address this critical issue with owners?

As Congressional hearings attest, the networks are working to overhaul the Voter News Service problems so evident on election night. Meanwhile, though it won't be popular among media practitioners, one honorable solution would be for networks to hold all results until the nation's polls are closed, especially if that could be tied in with universal polling times. Americans used to instant news won't like that, but it might be better for the democracy. The Florida fiasco was just one example of the need for the exercise of media restraint/the need to question long-hallowed exit polling strategy.

The KKTV-TV anchor in Colorado Springs who found himself in the midst of the unfolding Texas prisoner story, created a good case study for media ethics courses for years to come.

And speaking of ethics, the persistent melding of station promotion/journalism functions in TV newsrooms nationwide poses serious questions about what to teach our students regarding the changing nature of the news business.

AEJMC 2001: A Capital Odyssey

The annual AEJMC convention will be held at the Grand Hyatt in Washington, D.C. Sunday, Aug. 5 to Wednesday, Aug. 8. Hotel rates for the Grand Hyatt during our meeting are \$132 singles, \$162 doubles, \$192 triples and \$222 quads (rates do NOT include 14.5% sales and occupancy tax). Cut-off date for reserving a room at the Grand Hyatt is July 2, 2001 (received by deadline).

Attendees registering for the convention by July 9, 2001, (postmark deadline) will receive special rates.

Early bird rates are:

• Members: \$100

Non-members: \$200
Student Members: \$40
Non-member Students: \$80
Retired Members: \$40

Regular rates (after July 9 and onsite) are:

Members: \$140
Non-members: \$240
Student Members: \$55
Non-member Students: \$95
Retired Members: \$55

RTVJ Call for Papers/April 1 Deadline

The Radio-Television Journalism Division of AEJMC offers an open paper competition in which student papers compete with faculty papers. Student papers should be marked as such, however, for award consideration.

Monetary awards will be provided for the top faculty paper and the top student paper. Preferred maximum length for all RTVJ paper submissions is 25 pages, including tables and references. Papers using quantitative, qualitative, historical, or legal methodologies are encouraged. Send papers to:

C. A. Tuggle University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill CB #3365 Chapel Hill, NC 27599

Send three copies and an original. Each paper should include an abstract of approximately 150 words. Include author identification on a title page, to be attached to the original copy only. If you have any questions, e-mail Charlie Tuggle at catuggle@unc.edu.

RTNDA Reaching Out to Educators

by CHRIS ALLEN RTVJ RTNDA Liaison

Education seems to be taking a higher profile in Radio Television News Directors Association activities, and while it's not the main focus of the board or the association, the current chairman and the chairman-elect are both big friends of ours.

RTNDA Chairman Mark Millage appointed me to the Convention Planning Committee, which gives me not only a voice in educational sessions, but in the overall look of the Nashville convention. Chairman-elect Dave Busiek has decided to streamline this year's convention by paring the number of concurrent sessions.

One of the biggest complaints from last year's convention in Minneapolis was that there were too many concurrent sessions that people wanted to attend at the same time.

This year Busiek and the convention planning committee have been trying to focus each session. There will also be more time for attendees to browse the vendor area.

There will be a total of 12 student and/or educator sessions in Nashville. We will be bringing back last year's ethics session, "Video to Die For." Unfortunately, it will be one of the few sessions on ethics at the conference. But it generated an excellent discussion last year and was very well attended. The conference planning committee was eager to have the discussion extended.

Also on the schedule is another edition featuring journalism teachers who spend a month during the summer at local TV and radio stations getting their ears wet again.

"Teaching New Dogs Old Tricks" is being reworked from a few years ago. It was a hit among students then, and should be again. The session is designed to clue students in to ways to survive their first jobs.

Mike McKean of Missouri is putting together a session

he calls "The Best Job You've Never Heard Of." Make \$5-15,000 more than beginning reporters and producers by making the online connection. Hear from the people who're training and hiring the next generation of electronic journalists.

Other sessions will cover career options for journalists, student-produced newscasts, what *not* to do in a newsroom, and contracts, unions and agents.

If any of you have ideas or want to help with these, let me know and I'll pass your name on to the people organizing them.

RTNDA is interested in reviving its student chapter program. At the December board meeting President Barbara Cochran announced seven new student chapters. They are: University of Southern California, Loyola University of New Orleans, Elon University (North Carolina), Syracuse, Maryland, Southern Methodist and Iowa State.

There was discussion of the students chapters at the last Education Task Force meeting in Minneapolis. A number of people wondered if there were enough benefits for the students to join yet another professional organization, or whether there were enough professors to take on advising another organization on campus.

I've known Mark Millage and Dave Busiek for a number of years. Dave and I shared a cab to the airport after the December meeting, and he assured me RTNDA has had a change in attitude toward educators. In previous years there was a definite frosty atmosphere from the RTNDA office toward the education aspect. Millage and Busiek are both very interested in creating a warmer climate. I think the inclusion of the ETF chair on the convention planning committee is an indication of that. And I say that as a long-time critic of RTNDA's attitude toward teachers.

If you have any concerns or suggestions, please write.

Hey, Broadcast Journalism Educators! Nominate Your Mentor For DBJE

Have any of you electronic news teachers ever thought about who helped get you where you are? Nearly everyone during the course of a broadcast news or broadcast teaching career has had a mentor. Someone who guided you as your career began to take shape? Someone you would call when you needed help on an issue or job change or other problem?

Chances are your mentor qualifies for the RTVJ division's annual Distinguished Broadcast Journalism Educator award. The award is based on lifetime achievement as an electronic news teacher. A committee of veteran educators and professionals will choose the winner. But right now it's time for nominees.

Write the committee, describing your nominee's career and his or her impact on your life and accomplishments. Then get several others affected by this teacher to do the same. Letters from colleagues, former colleagues, students, former students all have an impact on the committee.

This year's award will be presented at the division's annual social and business meeting scheduled for 8 p.m. Monday, August 6 as part of the annual AEJMC convention.

Committee chair is former division head Bill Knowles of the University of Montana. You may nominate by email

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Election Night Debacle, Congressional Investigation Troubling

by GARY HANSON RTVJ PF&R Committee Chair

So what happened on election night? It's pretty clear that the TV networks made a colossal blunder, not once, but twice, when they called the state of Florida, first for Vice President Al Gore and then for Governor George W. Bush. The rush to provide analogies to what happened went into overdrive. NBC's Tom Brokaw admitted the networks had more than egg on their collective faces; they had "...the whole omelet." CNN's Jeff Greenfield asked an imaginary waiter to serve him and his colleagues at the anchor desk "...a full order of crow." Election 2000 provided us in the academy a first-hand example of the tricky balance that exists between journalism's professional freedom and its professional responsibility. Simply put, what happens when the freedom (the urge to pursue a story aggressively) collides with the responsibility (the need to get it right), and who cleans up after the inevitable collision?

Republican Congressman Billy Tauzin of Louisiana thought he had the

answer: congressional hearings. So, on Valentine's Day, the heads of the five television news networks and the Associated Press were hauled before Tauzin's committee to answer the question, "What happened?" It was quite a spectacle, part confessional, part political theater and part partisan politics. Tauzin and his fellow committee members may have scored some political points at television's expense by showing them a video "highlight reel" of the election night miscalls or using a white board as NBC's Tim Russert did on election night to give the news executives a lecture on journalistic values. These bits of theater took the spotlight away from a much larger problem. According to Barbara Cochran, President of RTNDA, the idea that television's election night reporting could be the subject of a congressional investigation at all should be troubling for all journalists. She points out that the networks themselves conducted their own post-election-night investigations, and most made their findings widely known to the public. She contends the congressional hearings crossed an important line. Cochran says, "having the government conduct the investigations and asking for data (from the networks) is very dangerous."

Television executives have appeared before Congress in adversarial situations before. The legendary Dr. Frank Stanton of CBS did so in the 1950s in the wake of the quiz show scandals. But the election night inquiry is the first time that network executives were called before Congress en masse to respond to editorial decisions about a specific story. You may remember that Stanton himself was cited for contempt of Congress for refusing to answer questions about the 1970s "The Selling of the Pentagon." Stanton stood his ground on principle with the full backing of the CBS chairman William Paley.

A lot has changed since then. Cochran sees the current hearings as a sign of how today's media conglomerates don't really understand the role of

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was on heightened alert. The remaining fugitives were known to be heavily armed, and their ringleader, by then in jail, had admitted the group killed the officer in Texas. The TV station was given an opportunity to effect a peaceful surrender, relieving a nervous community and potentially saving lives, by offering unabridged air time at 3 o'clock in the morning. For me, there was very little harm, and a great deal of community benefit, in the station cooperating.

Of the criticism he and the station received, news director Rackham told me, "I understand, in the world of theory, you don't want to be doing this." But he saw this case as a perfect example of why rules are made to be broken. And the community benefit obviously weighed into his decision.

"We are citizens in this town, too," Rackham said.

Dan Dennison, news director at rival KOAA-TV, was at first critical of police for what seemed at the time preferential treatment to one station. Once he understood the situation more fully, he admitted he probably would have made

the same decision Rackham did.

"One of our roles is to be public servants, too," Dennison said. "Journalists sometimes forget that we're people first."

Dennison, like others, worries about the potential this incident has for inspiring copycats to seek out the media. That, indeed, is one argument for not acquiescing to criminals or anyone else seeking an open forum. But this was not a precedent-setting case. There have been such cases in the past, perhaps most famously the publication of the Unabomber's manifesto several years ago. Shortly thereafter, Ted Kaczynski's brother recognized his writing and Kaczynski was arrested. Cases like this happen so infrequently that they become news when they do.

In my own research, my interviews with dozens of TV news viewers have made me realize many people feel a symbolic tie to local news. For me, this case was an opportunity to reflect on the different roles local news organizations fill in their communities, and perhaps to define them in a less restrictive way.

RTVJ Panels And Workshop Set For 2001 Convention

by SUZANNE HUFFMAN

RTVJ Vice Head & Program Chair

AEJMC'S 2001 Convention will run August 5—8 in Washington, D.C. "Bringing in The Outs: Toward Inclusivity and Democracy" is the theme. Washington, D.C. is a terrific convention location and we hope to see you all in the Capital in August. Following a successful "chip auction" in Atlanta in early December, we are organizing a number of exciting PF&R, research and teaching panels based on the ideas you submitted. In addition to the panels, we will have a pre-convention workshop and an offsite visit. Below is a "sneak preview" of this work-in-progress. Some of the panel titles are tentative, especially those for which we are not the lead sponsor.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 4

2:00 - 5:00 p.m. Teaching Panel RTVJ PRE-CONVENTION WORKSHOP "2001, A Teaching Workshop: Live Shots and Standups"

The history, pros and cons of the various types of live shots and stand-ups done today, and the tools for teaching today's broadcast news students how to do them well. Moderator: Bill Silcock, University of Missouri

SUNDAY, AUGUST 5

8:15 a.m. PF&R Panel

"Getting Published: How To Do It While Balancing Your Teaching Career and Your Life"

Let's see the specific criteria manuscript reviewers use. How do editors handle widely divergent reviews of a manuscript? How do grad students and beginning professors get started and stay energized? Tips and guidelines. Question-and-answer session with those who make the decisions. Co-sponsor: Visual Communication

Moderator: C. A. Tuggle, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

9:45 a.m. PF&R Panel

"Clustering Behavior in Media Ownership: How Has It Affected Advertising and Media Management"

The late 90s saw recognition of the term "clustering" to describe the media industry's acquisition patterns. Clustering ... a purposive attempt by chains to ... blanket a specific geographic area ... attempting to develop regional monopolies. This raises the specter of even more homogenized news....

Lead sponsor: Media Management & Economics

4:15 p.m. Teaching Panel

"Mid-career Interning: Faculty Going from Classroom to Newsroom"

A review of RTNDA's \$950,000 grant from the Knight Foundation to establish the Excellence in Journalism Education Project, a three-year program providing four-week placements in TV newsrooms for about 15 faculty members per year.

Lead sponsor: Internship and Careers Interest Group

6:00 p.m. Teaching Panel

"Convergence in the Curriculum"

Broadcast, print and new-media educators will discuss their collaboration in coming up with a common, converged curriculum that reflects the convergence in the industry. The educators will be joined by people from the industry who are dealing with the day-to-day reality of convergence.

Lead sponsor: Internship and Careers Interest Group

MONDAY, AUGUST 6

1:00 p.m. RTVJ Research/Paper Session I

4:30 p.m. Teaching Panel

"Contracts, Unions and Agents: Preparing Students for the Business End of the Industry"

This panel will discuss some of the ins and outs, do's and don'ts of signing contracts, dealing with agents and unions. Co-sponsor: Internship and Careers Interest Group Moderator: Jim Upshaw, University of Oregon

6:15 p.m. PF&R Panel

"Sports News: The Times They Are A Changin"

It seems no matter where you go, sports looks the same and every sports reporter is an ESPN wannabe. The on-air people of ESPN have coined terms which are copied and have become standard fare in local newscasts. Also ... Is daily local sports dying? Stations in markets in various parts of the country have started to drop regularly scheduled sports segments from their newscasts.

Co-sponsor: Media Management & Economics Moderator: Ed Freedman, Francis Marion University

8:00 p.m. RTVJ Business Meeting & Distinguished Broadcast Journalism Educator Award Presentation

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TUESDAY, AUGUST 7

7:00 a.m. RTVJ Research/Paper Session II

8:30 a.m. Teaching Panel

"Teaching Diversity and Sensitivity Issues in Journalism Skills Classes"

Guidelines for teaching students about diversity, sensitivity, inclusive language and unbiased writing, language and imaging. Includes alternative life styles. What do newsrooms need to know to sensitize their employees? What are examples from newsrooms that do it right? Includes hand-outs.

Co-sponsor: Media and Disability Interest Group Moderator: Don Heider, University of Texas

1:00 p.m. PF&R Panel

"When Advertising Masquerades as News"

In a world where media conglomerates own chains of radio and television stations in addition to other commercial enterprises, the term "cross-promotion" has taken on new meaning for the broadcast journalist. How far has American journalism slipped in its grab for commercial dollars, and what can educators and ethically-minded broadcast journalists do to solve the problem?

Co-sponsor: Media Ethics.

Moderator: Bill Davie, University of Southwestern Louisi-

ana

4:30 p.m. PF&R Panel

"The 2000 Election"

An analysis of the coverage and the vote.

Co-sponsor: Newspaper

Organizer and coordinator: Robert Wicks, University of

Arkansas at Fayetteville

6:15 p.m. RTVJ Executive Committee Meeting

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 8

8:45 a.m. RTVJ Research/Paper Session III

1:00 p.m. PF&R Panel, Mini Plenary

"Low-Powered Radio"

The goals and issues surrounding low-power radio. How does it cover (or not cover) the news? What are its strengths and weaknesses? What can we do to improve it (if it needs improving)?

Lead sponsor: Cultural Critical. Co-sponsors: Media Management & Economics, Media Ethics, RTVJ.

2:45 p.m. PF&R Panel

"Experimentation and Innovation in Creating Good Quality Content for TV News"

Both academics and professionals decry the relative lack of experimentation and innovation in creating content for television news. Certainly, civic journalism is an area where newspapers have done a fair amount and TV has done very little. It is time we start the discussion on how to encourage innovation in television news (and we are not talking about a new way to shoot from the helicopter). We are talking about ways to build audience and build good will with good journalism and by creating quality content.

Co-sponsor: Civic Journalism

Moderator: Dave Kurpius, Louisiana State University



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a free press. Network news departments are small elements in much larger companies with large agendas in other areas that may need congressional approval, so, as Cochran says, "to be uncooperative (with Congress) is not a good idea." She speaks for all journalists when she says it "...is very dangerous to have the government monkeying around in the editorial decisions of news organizations."

Having an omelet thrust in one's face in front of millions of people is a strong incentive to figure out what went wrong. The networks have all done that with their in-house investigations of their election night coverage, and in some cases, the findings were harsh. All have promised substantive changes in their policies for next time. There's a lesson here for all journalists. Election night 2000 reminded all of us that being accurate is more important than being first. It's a lesson that those of us in the academy must instill in our students. It's equally important that we give them the courage to stand up to the government when it starts to monkey around with the job of being a journalist.

The Static About **Static**

Recent postings to the RTVJ listserv about whether to take *Static* on-line only produced a variety of responses. This issue is likely to come up for a vote at our August business meeting, so we're including some excerpts from the on-line exchange for your consideration. First, here's this from Michel Dupagne of the University of Miami, who has been webmaster for the MME Division of AEJMC:

"I am in favor of the on-line version for the following reasons:

- 1. It is environmentally sound. I suspect that most members skim through the newsletter and then file it away. Piles of newsletters take space.
- 2. It is economically advantageous. You do not have to pay the shipping expenses with an on-line version. The saved money can be used for other things in the division.
- 3. It can be easily printed. Our on-line newsletters are formatted in PDF that can be easily printed if a member wants to keep hard copies.
- 4. It can be easily archived. After I became the MME Webmaster, I decided to archive all the newsletters (see http://www.miami.edu/com/mme/newsletter.htm). My hope is to create a long-standing database of newsletters.
 - 5. It can be announced and described on the listsery."

Conversely, Vernon Stone, Professor Emeritus from the University of Missouri, sees it differently:

"I'm for retaining *Static* in hard copy, along with online.

For one thing, some members may not use email. The AEJMC directory lists no email address for lots of members

For another, I hate to see it go. I have a file of STATIC back to December 1960 (Vol. 2, No. 1). It started not as an occasional newsletter, but as a monthly collection of "news and opinion on education for broadcast news" by the "AEJ Council on Radio-Television Journalism," later "division." For that 1960 issue, Mitch Charnley wrote an article on "The Challenge of Broadcast Journalism Education" and Dick Yoakum did one on "The Newsroom Manpower Problem." Also: short takes by Jim Bormann and Bill Small, and a review of Siller, White & Terkel's new textbook (Ted White's still at it).

Those early articles in STATIC (all caps back then) were often critical of the established order of the mass media and higher education. Thus the name STATIC (for that crackling noise heard on AM radio). STATIC was akin to the hard-hitting early versions of the RTNDA Code (see: www.missouri.edu/~jourvs/rtcodes). Low-budget mimeograph, but high quality content that generated static. Several years ago the division rejected a move to change to a more "now" name than STATIC.

But online-only may well befit the static-free Static which has evolved from our largely forgotten heritage. Heritage? Does anyone care? The archive of online Statics has even been dropped from the RTVJ web site."

If you have ideas to share about *Static* on-line vs. hard copy, please post them to the RTVJ listserv or send them to Division Head Jeanne Rollberg, jnrollberg@ualr.edu.

Minority Scholarship Offered

Applications are being accepted for the 2001 Lionel C. Barrows Minority Doctoral Student Scholarship, an award of \$1,200.

The scholarship is sponsored by the Communication Theory and Methodology Division of AEJMC. Minority students (U.S. citizens or permanent residents) enrolled in Ph.D. programs in journalism and mass communication are encouraged to apply. Applicants need not be members of AEJMC or of the CT&M Division.

The scholarship honors Professor Lionel C. Barrow of Howard University in recognition of his pioneering efforts in support of minority education in journalism and mass communication.

To be considered for this scholarship, please send a curriculum vitae, letter outlining research interests and career plans, and two letters of recommendation to:

Craig Trumbo
Department of Life Sciences Communication
University of Wisconsin
440 Henry Mall
Madison WI 53706
Fax: 608-265-3042
(no Email submissions please)

All materials should be received by June 1, 2001.

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or old-fashioned letter. Email goes to knowles@selway.umt.edu. Put DBJE in your subject line. Regular mail and all supporting material goes to:

DBJE Committee c/o Prof. Bill Knowles, Chair Radio-Television Department University of Montana 32 Campus Drive #6480 Missoula, MT 59812-6480

Deadline for nominations is May 1. All supporting materials must be received by the committee chair no later than May 21.

Last year's winner was Ken Keller, now professor emeritus from Southern Illinois University.

Questions? knowles@selway.umt.edu or (406) 243-4747.

The July issue of *Static* will preview the 2001 AEJMC convention. Copy deadline is June 22, 2001.

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