

FAX FROM :

07-OCT-1999 12:07

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07/10/99 11:27 PG: 2

P.02

CATCH:CHANGES VER:00 BY:SILCOCK;17/12,12:49 OPR:SILCOCK;17/12,13:19
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To Peter Roberts
 From Bryan Silcock

17.12.88

DEVON NEWS AGENCY COPY

Yesterday evening I was asked by Roy Greenslade to investigate the textual history of a story by Mazher Mahmood which appeared in The Sunday Times of 11.12.88. The story alleged that a chief inspector of police in Devon had been demoted to constable following a conviction for drunken driving. In fact he had been demoted only to inspector. This bit of the story was based on information filed by the Devon News Agency. The question was whether the mistake was the Agency's or Mazher's. There were suspicions that Mazher had attempted to doctor various versions of the story in the Atex to cover up a mistake, by making it appear that the Agency had filed an incorrect report.

With the help of an Atex systems operator Mazher had retrieved from the audit packs (records preserved on disc of the various versions a file goes through in the Atex) for late June to early July a file containing two reports from agencies of cases of drunken driving among the police, one of them from the Devon News Agency dated June 29. Mazher sent a copy of this file to Mike Williams. A printout - file name DEVON - is attached. It says that the demotion was to constable.

However I learned from the systems operator concerned, Roland Kenward, that Mazher had retrieved the file himself up in the computer room using Roland's logon, with help from the latter but without close supervision. Mazher therefore had the opportunity to make the crucial change of inspector to constable in the file before copying it and sending it to Mike Williams. (The audit pack version of the file as well as the DEVON copy says constable).

A further search through the audit pack brought to light two versions of the original report filed, by computer, by the Devon News Agency. The first dated June 29 was slightly garbled. Presumably a second version was requested and it was sent the following day. Both these say correctly that the demotion was to inspector. They are attached, filenames DRINK1 and DRINK2.

The file copied to Mike Williams includes exactly the same garble in the second line as DRINK1 and therefore almost certainly contains the text of DRINK1 rather than of some other, possibly incorrect, version of the story filed by the Devon News Agency. The information in the headers of DRINK1 and DRINK2 shows that they were preserved as audit vesions when sent from the NEWS-NWE queue, into which they were directed by the Agency, to Mazher by Rowena Webster. That is to say they predate the DEVON file copied to Mike Williams.

(MORE)

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I cannot see any explanation for the above except that the audit file of which DEVON is a copy was altered. There can be no doubt that the reports from the Devon News Agency were correct.

(END)

