

The Mystery & Adventure Series Review

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Hi, Richard:

Thanks for writing. I myself am satisfied that the documents were fake. There were in my opinion two indications and one proof.

Of course the strongest indication was that “th”. By taking some trouble, a person COULD produce a small th like that, on the IBM Composer (which is what I’m typing this letter to you on). But to do so, you’d have to go through a somewhat troublesome maneuver of taking off the larger-type ball, putting on a smaller-type ball, clicking up about three or four points to raise the baseline of the th, then typing the t, backspacing one or two increments, typing the h, then clicking back down to the baseline for your larger font ball, switching back to it, and resuming typing. In other words, using old equipment like this I definitely COULD simulate a word-processed or computer-typeset text, but for certain effects I would have to work at doing so. In 1972 no one would have been trying to fabricate such a counterfeit of technology that didn’t exist yet, so that’s pretty unlikely.

But, just to show that it could be done, I’ll do it here: Report to 111th F.L.S. —etc.

Still going by what I call indications, you COULD have done it on an IBM Executive typewriter, provided that you had a special “typit” key on one of the keylevers, holding a th superscript character. I mailed the NY Times a bunch of documents including a page from an old manual showing dozens of typit symbols that a person could substitute ad hoc onto IBM Executive type bars. However, a further “indication” that this was NOT an IBM Exec’s copy is the fact that in the Exec proportional-spacing system, the comma and period were made to occupy 3 units of space, rather than 2 as their width would actually indicate. This was so that typists could avoid one extra keystroke — a spacebar — following period or comma. In other words you were supposed to type right past a period or comma and leave no further space; the space was built into those characters. However, in practice, typists almost never did this, so a dead giveaway to IBM Exec copy is the presence of visible holes after period or comma— because the typist hit the spacebar and as a result stuck another 2 increments on top of the 3 already there, resulting in a period or comma with allotted space equal to that of the letter m.

But, as I say, that’s only an indication. The typist Could have backspaced an increment or two after the period to get that “F.L.S.” instead of “F. L. S.”

You could also have typed a document with a th like that on the Varsityper (Varsityper is the machine I use for most articles in the M&A Review) So, aside from these indications that the copy probably wasn’t done on any of these machines because to do so would have been somewhat troublesome and would have necessitated an effort to consciously counterfeit something only existing in a future time, there’s only one way to prove that the docu-

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ments never came off a Varityper, Exec typewriter, or Composer, and that's to type the samples on the actual machines and show that the differing proportional-spacing systems, as compared to computer-produced copy, result in lines' characters not falling under each other precisely as in the disputed sample.

To preface this proof: These machines operated by different proportionality systems, Varityper's being a 4-unit system, IBM Executive's a 5-unit system, and IBM Composer's a 9-unit system. Thus, in any given system there were many letters that were neither the values exactly of those in one of the other machines' system, nor multiples or exact halves of any of the others. Varityper and Exec shared the greatest number of similar-valued characters, but even there the "r" was 2 units in Varityper and 3 in Exec. Therefore, for illustrative purposes, you can see that r would be exactly half as wide as an m in Varityper (m was 4 units), but in Exec typewriter where the m was 5, an r was three-fifths, not half. In IBM Composer an r is 4 units and an m is 9.

What all this means is that over a bit of typing, any two lines of copy will tend to have particular letters vertically even with each other in any particular system, and this will not be the case when the same words are typed in any other system.

So let's say I type that line number 1 in the memo on the Composer:

1. You are ordered to report to commander, 111 F.L.S., Ellington AFB, not later than (NLT) 14 May, 1972 to conduct annual physical examination (flight)IAWAPM 35-13.

Okay, notice that the last character in the second line, a period, is exactly beneath the slight lateral space between the n and the o of "not". In the memo sample that period is considerably farther along with respect to the above line, falling about exactly under the letter l in "later".

Now, while there are a couple of points where variant amounts of space may be used, such as following the beginning numeral 1 (I hit the 3-unit spacebar twice after typing the period following that numeral), my having hit the spacebar only once instead would only have resulted in the two lines coming out even farther apart in synchronization of the last comparable characters. I typed several lines of the other memo as shown in Newsweek, and was instantly convinced that the memos never came off an IBM Composer.

What about the Varityper and IBM Exec? Well, you can exclude the Varityper pretty fast on the basis of that "W" in "George W. Bush". The Varityper's W is only 4 units wide and is the most defective character in that system, needing to be 5 or 6 at least. Right at this moment I have a long piece of copy for The Opera Glass that I'm working on in my office Varityper, or I'd move this sheet of paper over to it to give you a sample. But I think that you can well imagine that a W which is no wider than a lower-case w definitely looks cramped— and the one in the memo sample doesn't.

(Although I might add that in my own present-day typesetting on the Varityper, I never use the cap-W key, and instead hit V followed by two units of backspace, then another V. This gives me a quite handsome 6-unit W. Likewise, on the IBM Composer, where even with a nice 9-unit W I still sometimes feel a need for a wider one, I type V, then 4 units of increment backspace, then V again, yielding W, as opposed to W.)

In the 5-unit system used by IBM Exec and Justowriter, the memo still doesn't add up:

1. You are ordered to report to commander, 111 F.L.S., Ellington AFB, not later than (NLT) 14 May, 1972 to conduct annual physical examination (flight)IAWAFM 35-13.

Obviously this sample deviates even faster from the memo's version. This excludes all of the fine-grained proportional spacing (or as Varityper called it, Differential Spacing) systems extant in the seventies. There were others such as the Olivetti Lexikon and Underwood ~~Rafael~~

RAPHAEL

ment's glance. The Lexikon's only proportional-spacing ball element (to the best of my knowledge) was a medium to light-weight sans serif. I do have one of these machines but haven't operated it in some time; it's in storage. I've never been able to find any but sans-serif elements for its selectable proportional-spacing feature, although regular single-width balls are available in serif conventional-typewriter fonts of varying pitch.

The Underwood Raphael uses some kind of half- and whole-unit system, and that makes letters either too narrow or TOO WIDE, resulting in an oddly expanded look to lines. The disputed memo is if anything extremely condensed.

Reputedly there was a Hermes Ambassador, but even if it did have proportional spacing as I've seen reported now and then over the years, I've never been able to find one that did. I've seen two Hermes typewriters and neither had anything other than very nice single-width characters. . If there was a proportionally spacing variant of this typewriter, I have no information on its system.

Anyhow, the long and short is that the copy, to have been typed in 1972, pretty much had to be a 4, 5, or 9-unit system, and it provably was not.

There sure was a lot of misinformation on such matters during the course of this flap. "Typewriters couldn't give different widths to different letters." (Prop. spacing didn't exist; tell that to Coxhead, in fact to Sears back in 1896.) "Kerning wasn't possible, and characters in the memo seem to be kerned." Yeah, that NLT sort of looks kerned, but it does here too. If I really kern it, it's NLT or NLT. Typewriters supposedly couldn't deliver typographical quote marks, Yet: " " . And Varityper could do those, too. IBM Exec could not. All proportional machines could kern.

Too bad Rather didn't come to me first. He could have kept himself from being dumped down the credibility hole.

Thanks for the stamps. Glad you liked the M & A Review.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Tom Riddle".

P.S. If I had to speculate, I would say that the memos were a deliberately detectable counterfeit. They were intended to be exposed. That way, something that was actually composed of real words and meaning— i.e., genuine material — would wind up being discredited and exposed as fake. Surely anyone truly desirous of making up a phoney document from 1972 would switch his computer system into one of the single-width typewriter simulations, of which there appear to be many, prior to generating a copy and then photocopying it a few times to blur and distort it. The memos were more than just a heavy-handed fake, in my opinion. They were really very adroit "dirty trick" productions relying on the psychology of persons overly eager for them to be real. What a campaign! I have never seen anything like it.