

RFID Security

Selected Areas of LF and HF Applications

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Part ONE

RFID Physical Layer Recalled

Radio Classification of Transponders

Band	Sub-class	Typical sort	Typical deployment	Operation Distance (order)
LF (100 to 150 kHz)	-	Memory card	Access control, immobilizer, implant, loyalty card	cm to m(*)
HF (13.56 MHz)	Vicinity ISO 15693	Memory card	Access control, skipass, loyalty card	cm to m
	Proximity ISO 14443	Contact-less smartcard	Access control, payment card, e-passport	cm
UHF (430 - 2450 MHz)	-	Memory card	Stock control	cm to 10s m

(*) rare configurations with low consumption read-only cards and high power, high dimension readers

[Contact(less) Smartcard]

Application layer	ISO 7816-4 and higher		
Transport layer	ISO 7816-3	ISO 14443-4	
Data link layer		ISO 14443A-3	ISO 14443B-3
Physical layer		ISO 14443A-2	ISO 14443B-2
Electromechanical properties	ISO 7816-1, 2	ISO 14443-1	

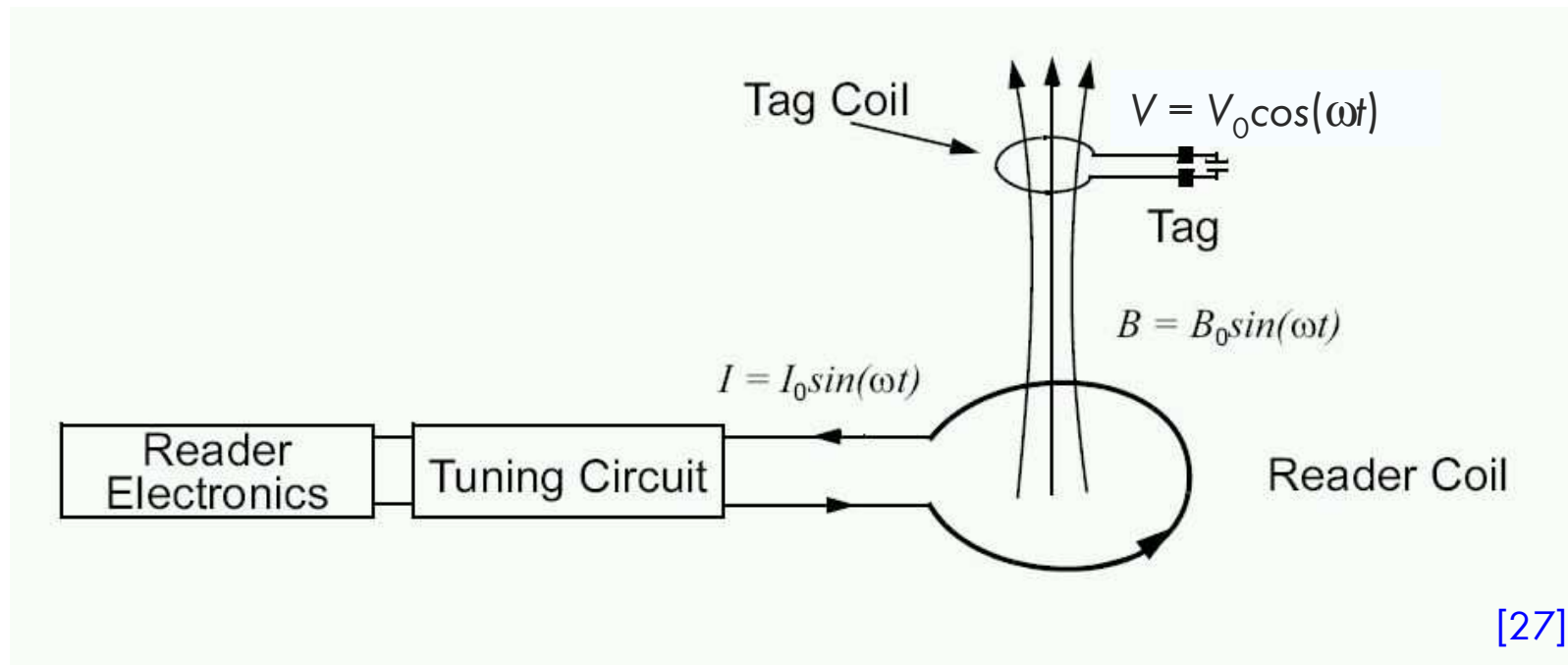
contact interface

contactless interface

[LF & HF Physical Layer]

- Employs inductive coupling in so-called near field of the transmitter at circa **125 kHz** (LF) or **13.56 MHz** (HF).
 - Field equations are reduced considerably, especially wave effects can be omitted [\[7\]](#), [\[11\]](#), [\[31\]](#), [\[41\]](#).
 - This is true for an ordinary operation. An attacker trying to expose limits of this communication may be facing a “different” physics.
 - Threshold is approx. $\lambda/2\pi$, $\lambda \cong 300/f$ [m, -, MHz]
 - Arrangement „transponder antenna – terminal antenna“ can be viewed as a high frequency transformer.
 - Comprehensive description is given in [\[11\]](#).
 - Such a setup differs from UHF RFID [\[7\]](#), [\[11\]](#) significantly, so care must be taken when interpreting distance ranges experiments, etc.

Terminal – Transponder In LF/HF Energizing



The tag itself is assumed to have no autonomous power source. It gets the energy for computation solely from the terminal's field.

[Field Induction Estimation]

...using even stationary field equations

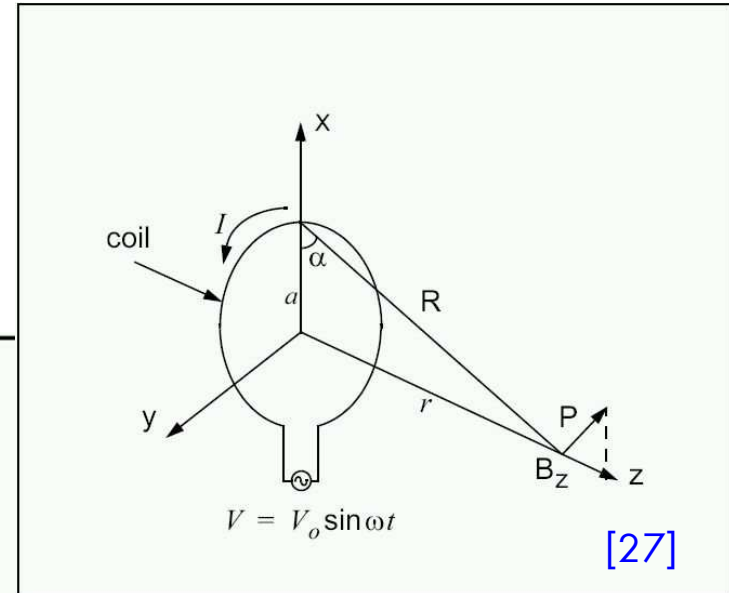
Biot-Savart: $d\mathbf{B} = \mu_0 N I (\mathbf{R} \times d\mathbf{c}) / (4\pi |\mathbf{R}|^3)$

↓ circular coil integration

$$B_z = \frac{\mu_0 I N a^2}{2(a^2 + r^2)^{3/2}}$$

$$= \frac{\mu_0 I N a^2}{2} \left(\frac{1}{r^3} \right) \text{ for } r^2 \gg a^2$$

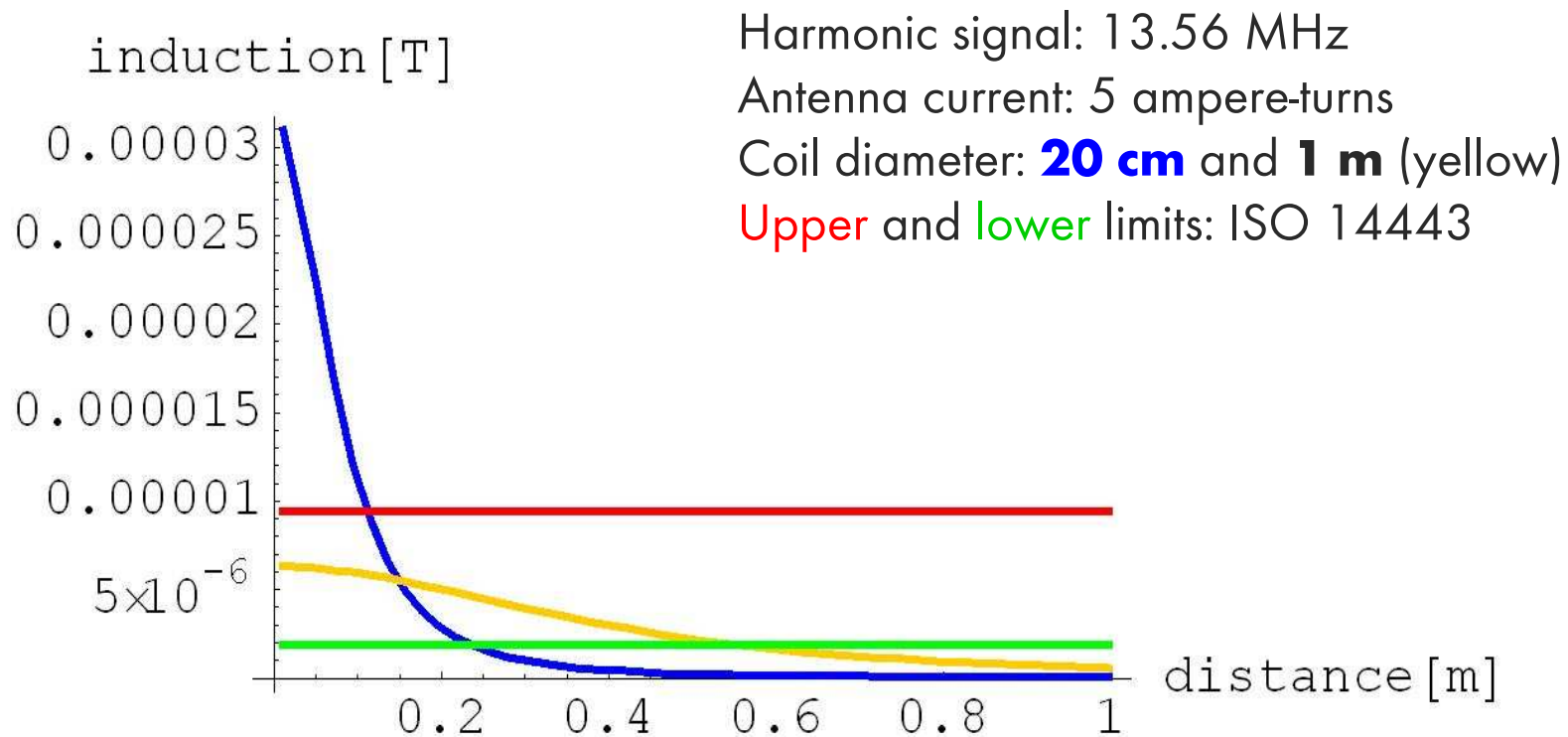
[27]



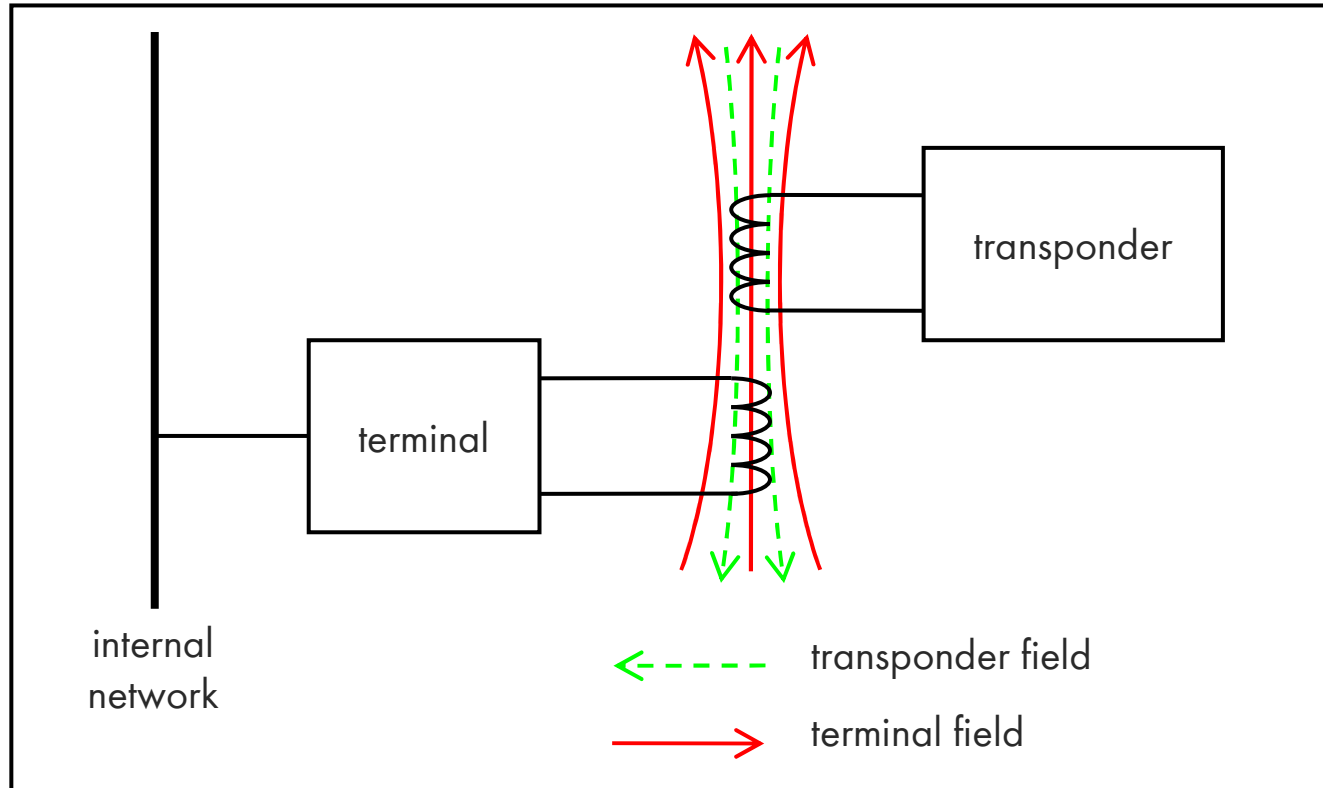
note $|d\mathbf{c}| = a * d\phi$

Optimum antenna diameter: $a = r^* \sqrt{2}$, where r is the communication distance.

B_z Induced by a Circular Coil



Terminal – Transponder In LF/HF Data Communication



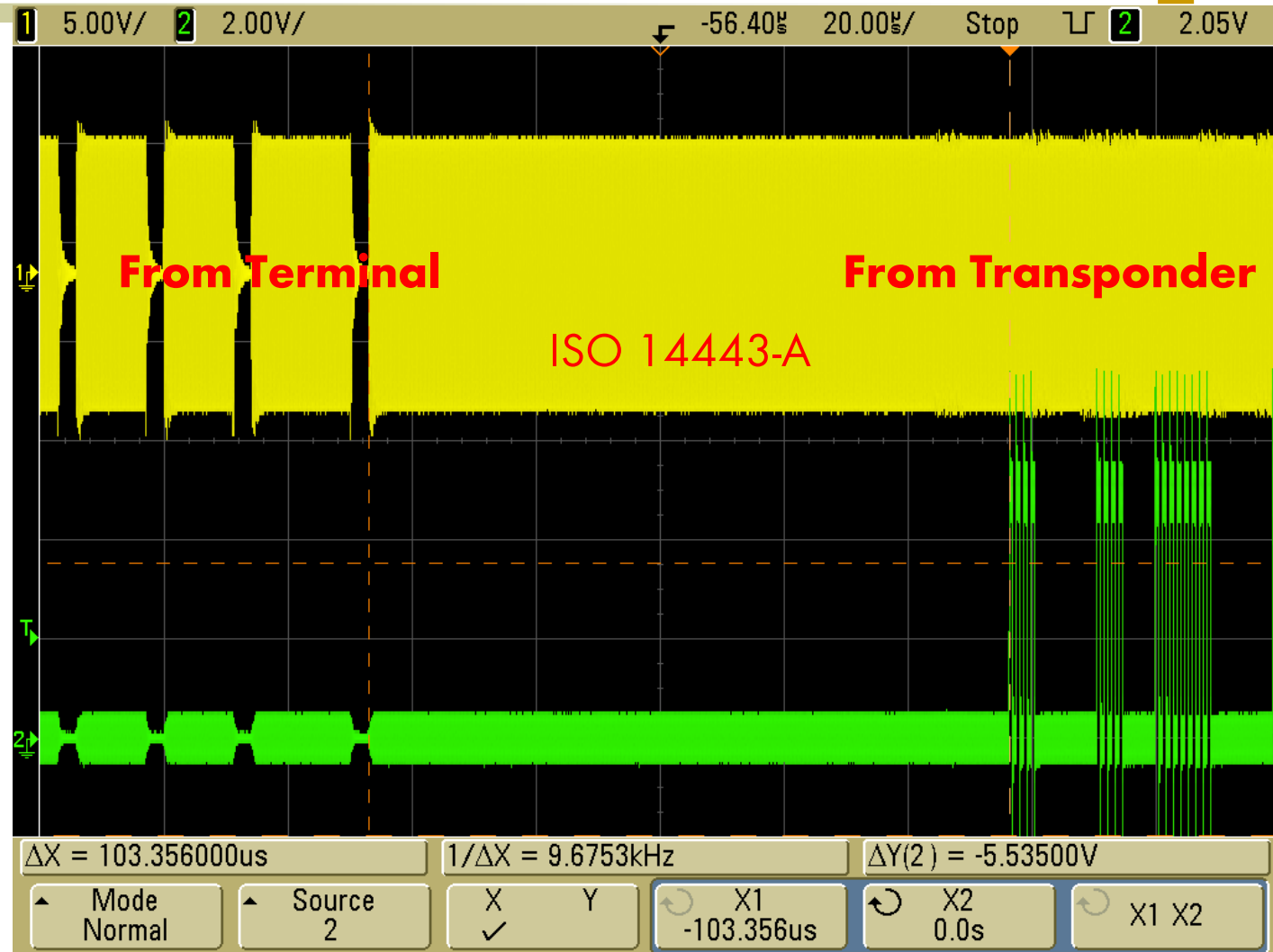
Terminal: direct amplitude modulation of the basic carrier

Transponder: load modulation resulting in indirect amplitude/phase modulation of the basic carrier

Communication Oscilloscope

- Yellow trace:
basic carrier

- Green trace:
AM detector
with 847.5
kHz filter



When the Distance Matters (LF/HF)

Method	Distance
Active communication with transponder	dozens of cm
Passive reception - both ways	units of m
Passive reception - terminal only	dozens of m
Active communication with terminal	dozens of m



Part TWO

Access Control Systems

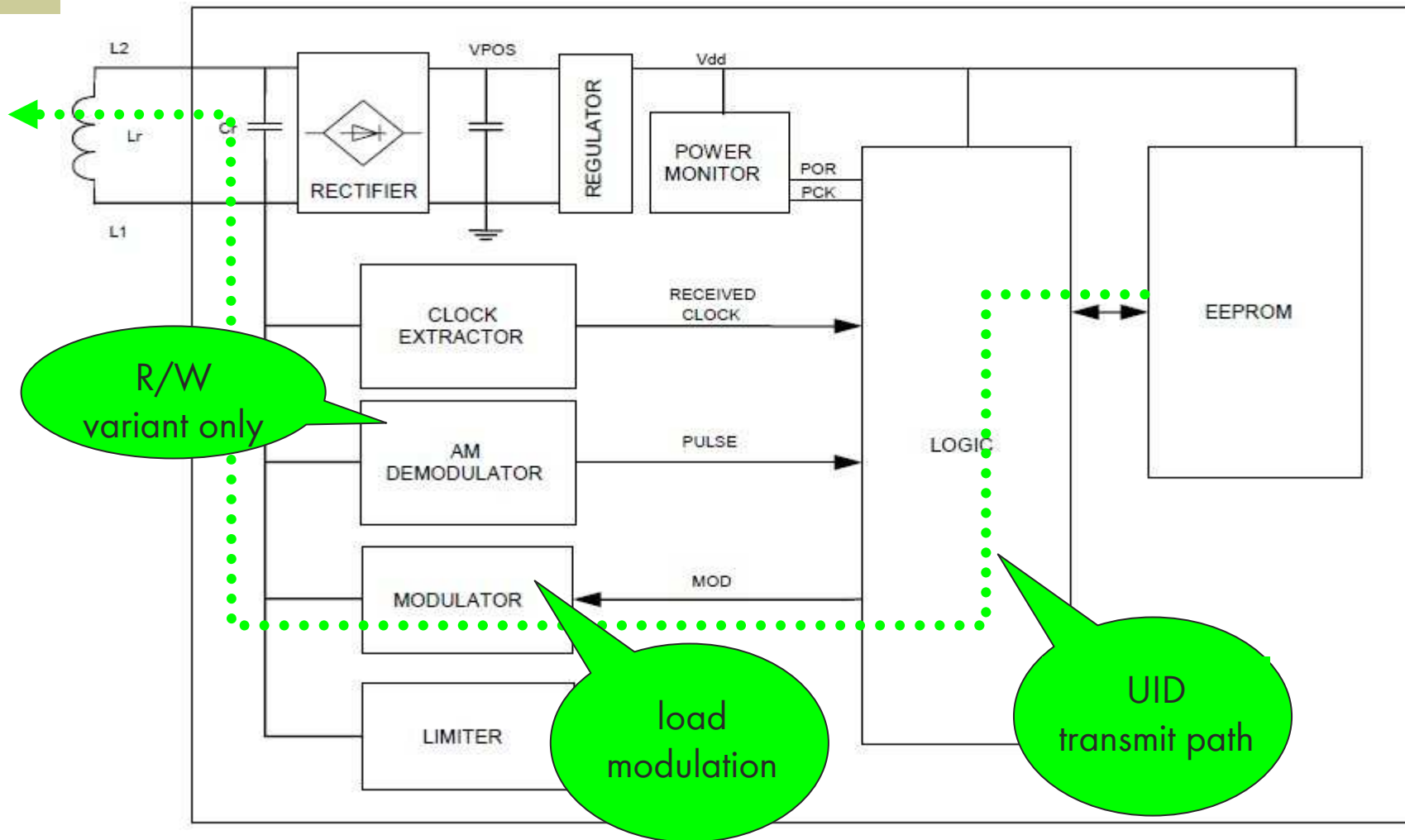
[Penetration Test Scope]

- The aim was to try to make a functionally equivalent duplicate of an existing access control card.
 - That is a theft of identity of some employee or temporary worker or an external supplier, etc.
 - See [\[49\]](#) for particular cases reported (CZ).

[Unique-ID LF Transponders]

- Serial memory programmed during the chip manufacturing or personalization phase
- When in the terminal (reader) field, they transmit the memory content automatically in a cycle
- There is no communication origin authentication
 - The transponder talks to anybody
 - The terminal listens to anybody
- Examples: EM Unique, HID Prox, INDALA

Unique-ID Transponder Overview



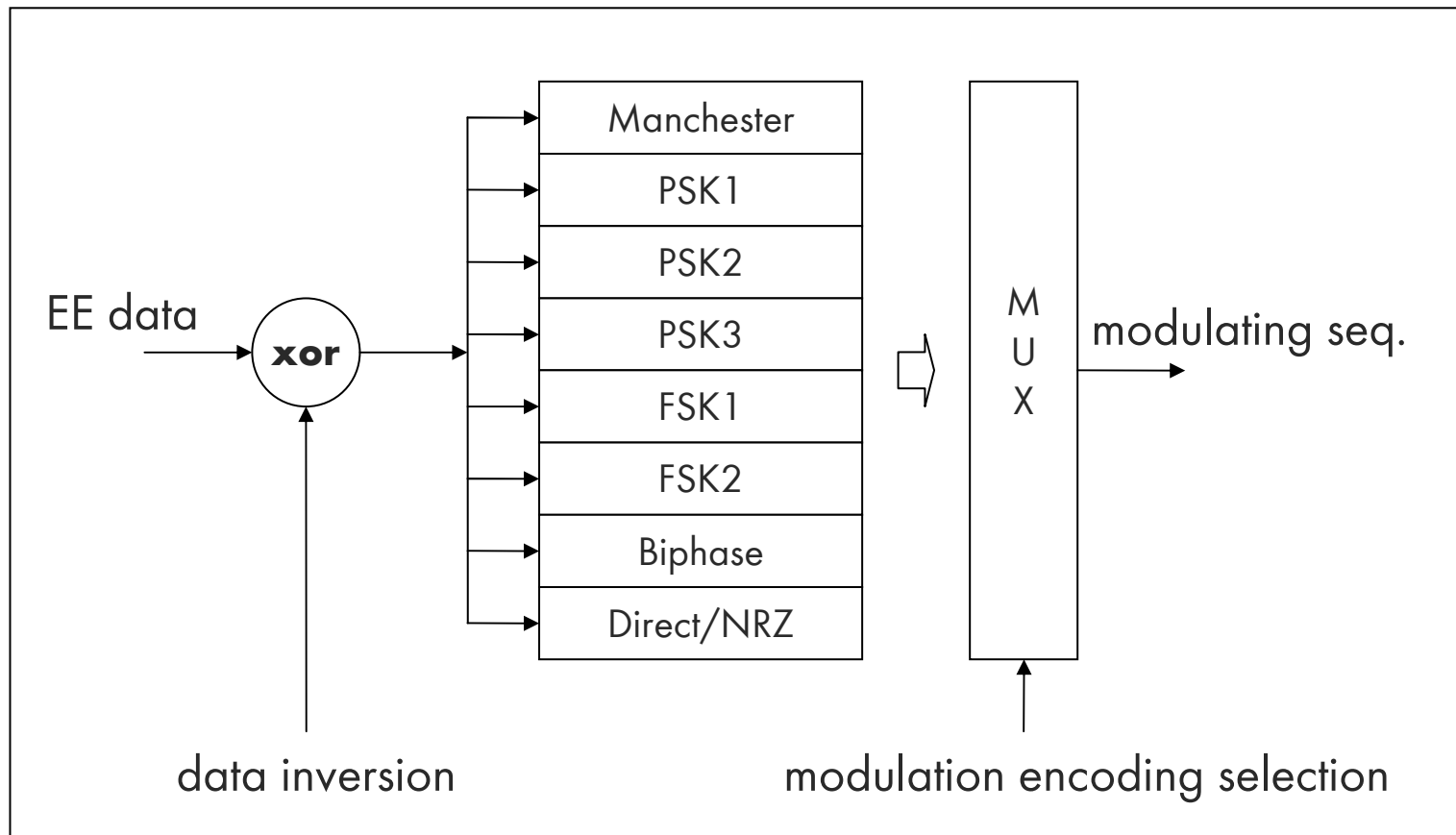
Where the Security Comes From

- It is important to note **what the attacker really does not have to do**:
 - To understand the meaning of the data stored in the transponder memory. The data can even be encrypted (and it still does not matter here).
- **Necessary and sufficient condition to make the duplicate of the transponder is**:
 - To effectively describe the control sequence driving the load modulator and to repeat this action in the terminal (reader) field later on.

[Q5 – Queen of the LF Band]

- Programmable LF transponder called “Q5”
 - 224 user defined EEPROM bits (330 b in total)
 - wide support of modulation and encoding schemes
- Variable chip packing – key fob, ISO card, etc.
- It was able to emulate all those LF “Unique-ID” transponders tested, so far
- Widely available on the market 😊
 - E.g.
http://www.therfidshop.com/product_info.php?products_id=373

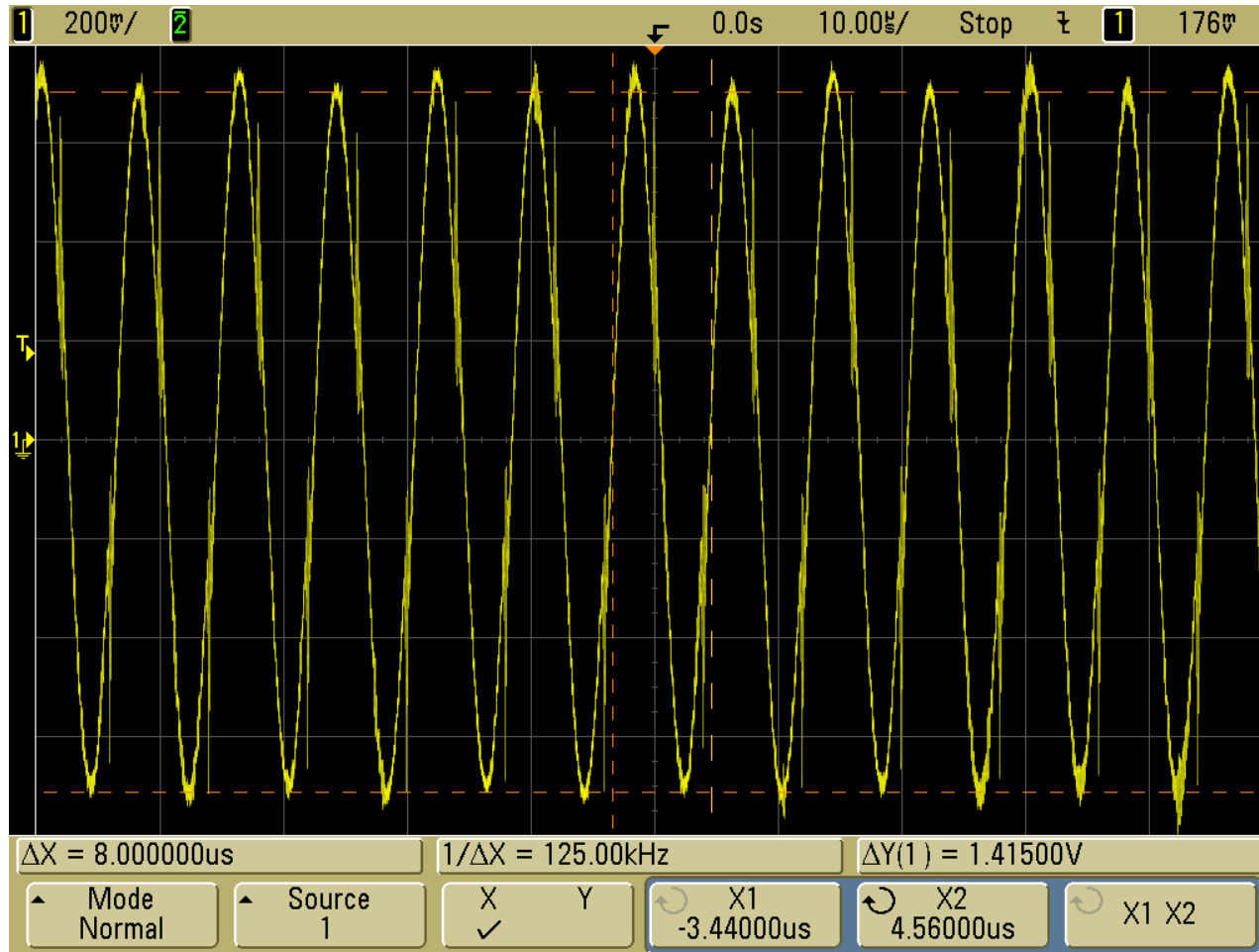
[Q5 – Output Encoder Part]



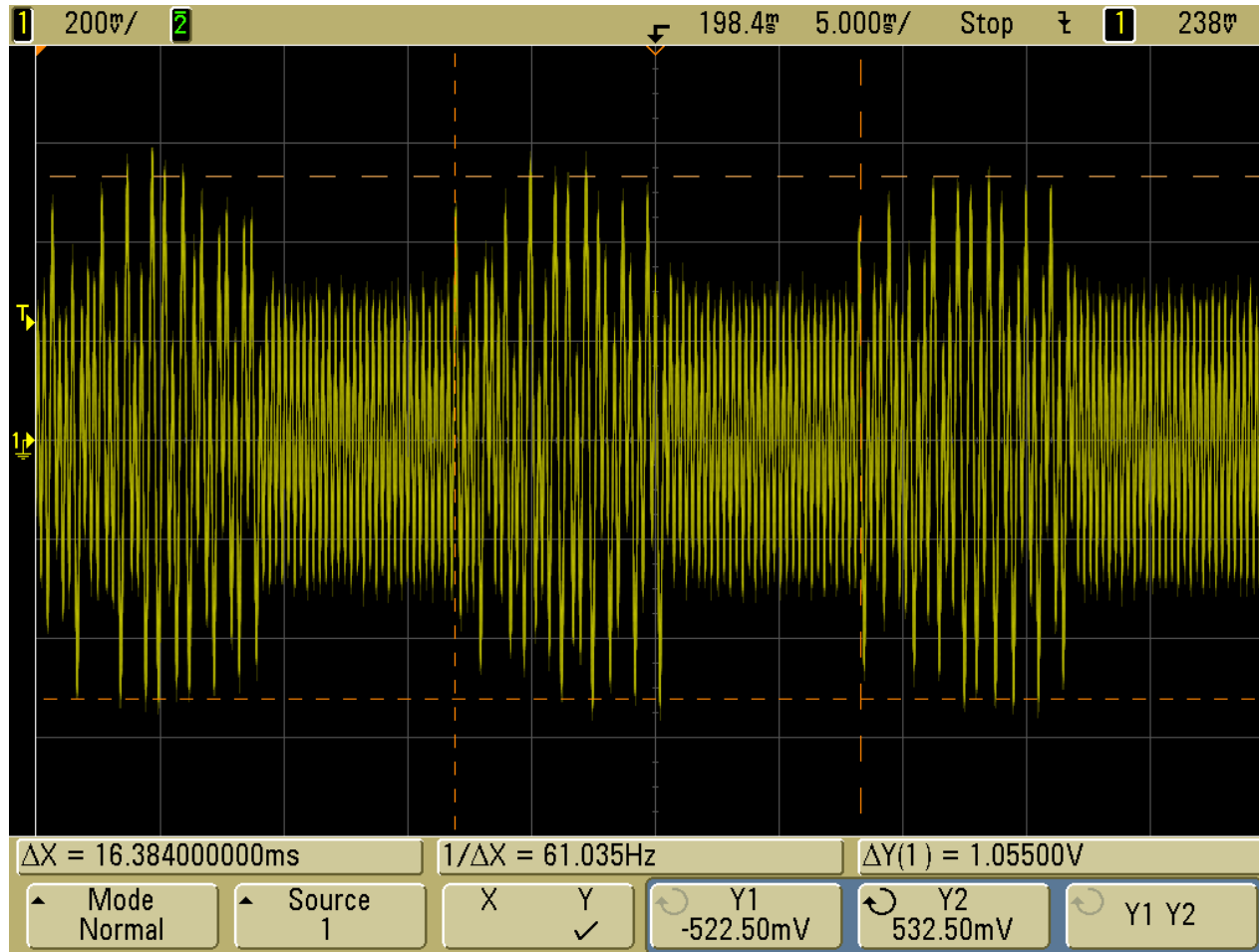
[Using Q5 for an Attack]

- Phase I – describing the modulating seq. of the original transponder
 - In theory, this can be a very hard problem, but...
 - ... in practice, we seldom meet something “unique”.
 - Let us be inspired by all those possible Q5 configurations!
- Phase II – making the duplicate
 - We store the modulating seq. into Q5 memory and program its output encoder/modulator...

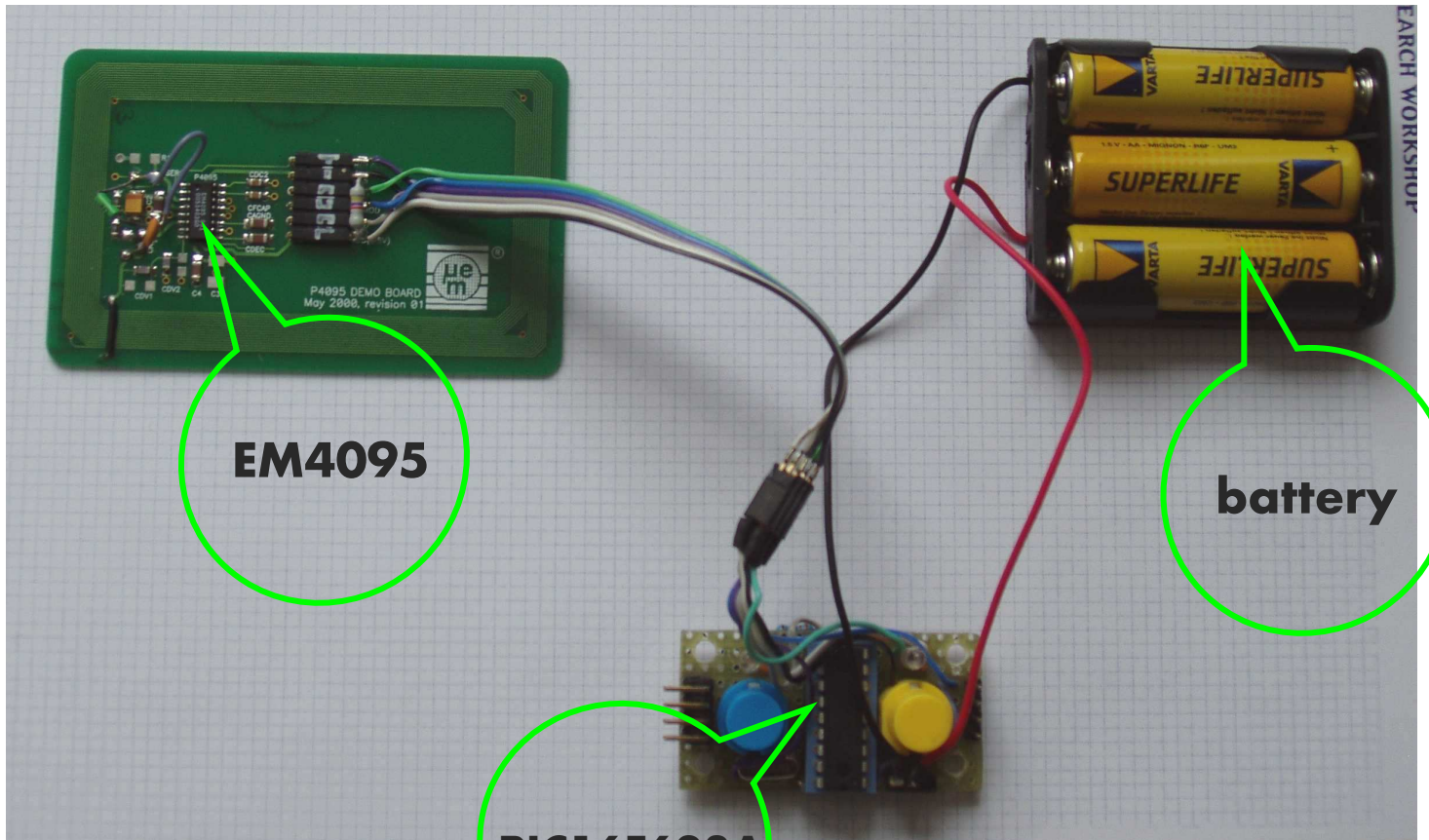
LAB: The Effect of Using a Subcarrier Frequency



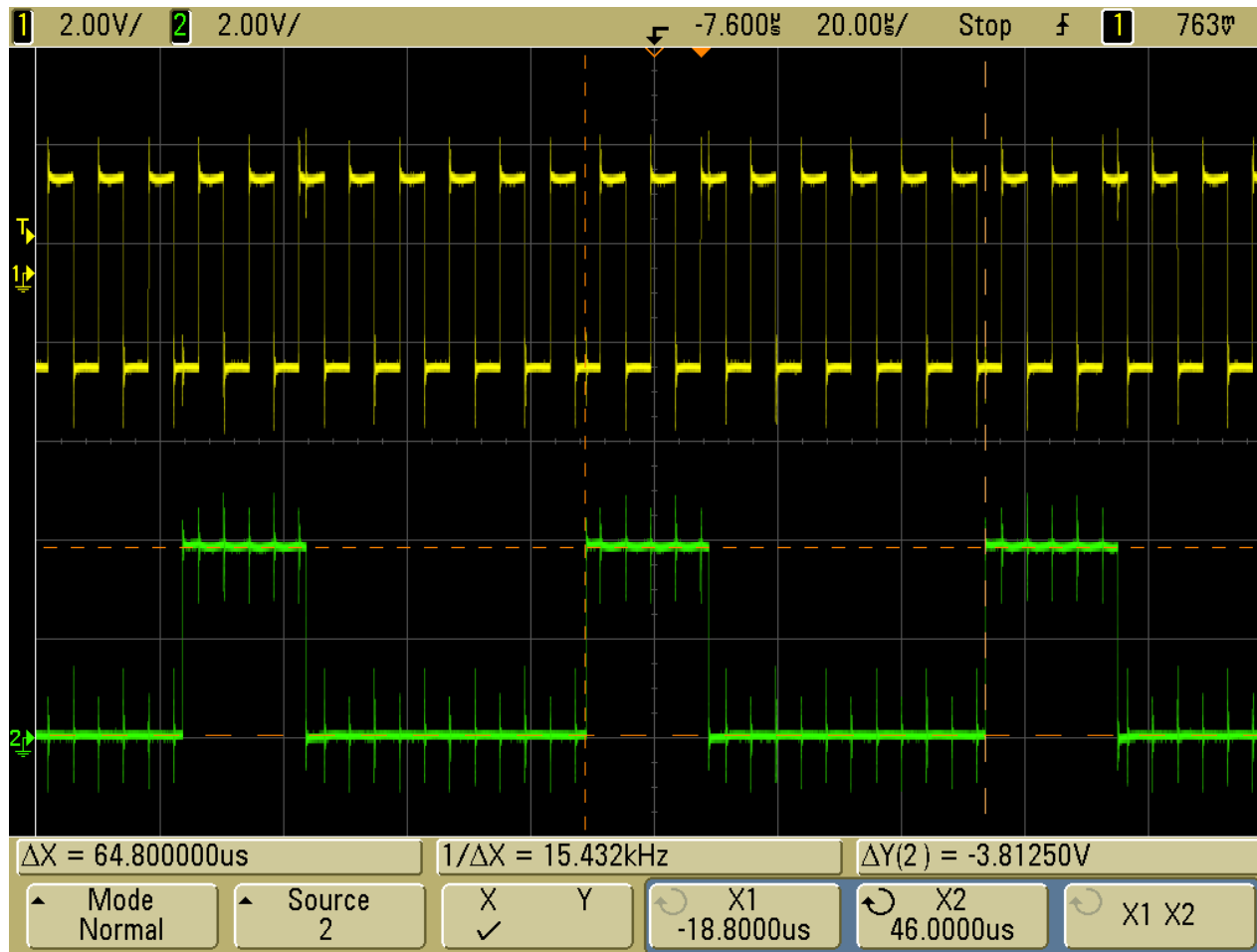
LAB: Subcarrier with Phase Modulation



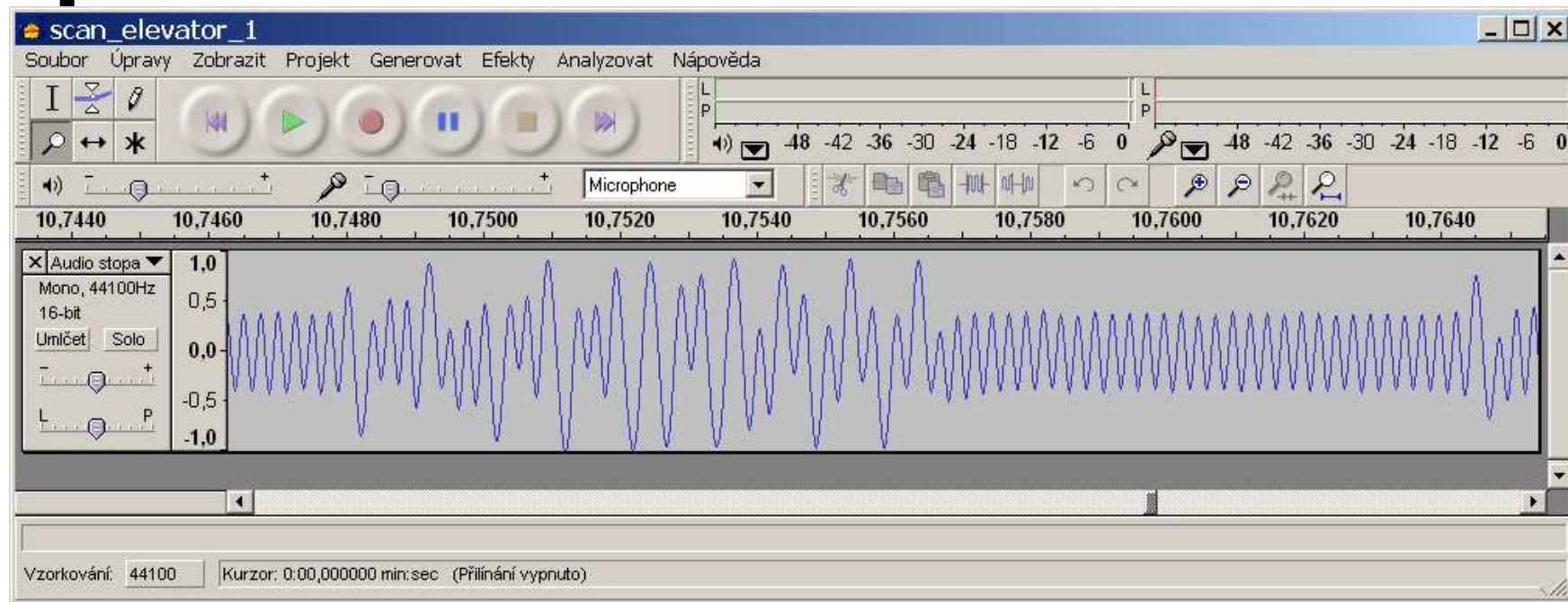
[LAB: Ad Hoc Spyware]



LAB: Frequency Modulation Disclosed by EM4095 (green)



Another Practical Scenario: Eavesdropping in Elevator



LF band transponder data intercepted while its holder was authenticating to the reader in an elevator.

Distance: cca 0,5 m.

Receiver: Sangean ATS 909W.

[Disclosing “The Secret” ...]

- EM Unique
 - direct manchester encoding, bitrate $f/64$, 64 bits in total
 - Q5 configuration word: 60 01 F0 04
- INDALA (1 particular setup)
 - subcarrier $f/2$ with phase shift keying, modulating sequence length of 64 bits
 - Q5 configuration word: 60 00 F0 A4
- HID Prox (1 particular setup)
 - 2 subcarriers $f/8$ and $f/10$ with frequency shift keying, modulating sequence length of 96 bits
 - Q5 configuration word: 60 01 80 56

[MIFARE Classic]

- Two basic ways of usage:
 - So-called „UID only“ mode which is functionally equivalent to the unique-ID transponders.
 - Easy to break using a transponder emulator.
 - So-called “cryptographic” mode that uses e.g. mutual authentication of transponder and terminal.
 - Broken totally in 2007-2009. At present, there are dozens of practically feasible devastating attacks.

[MF Classic Cryptanalysis]

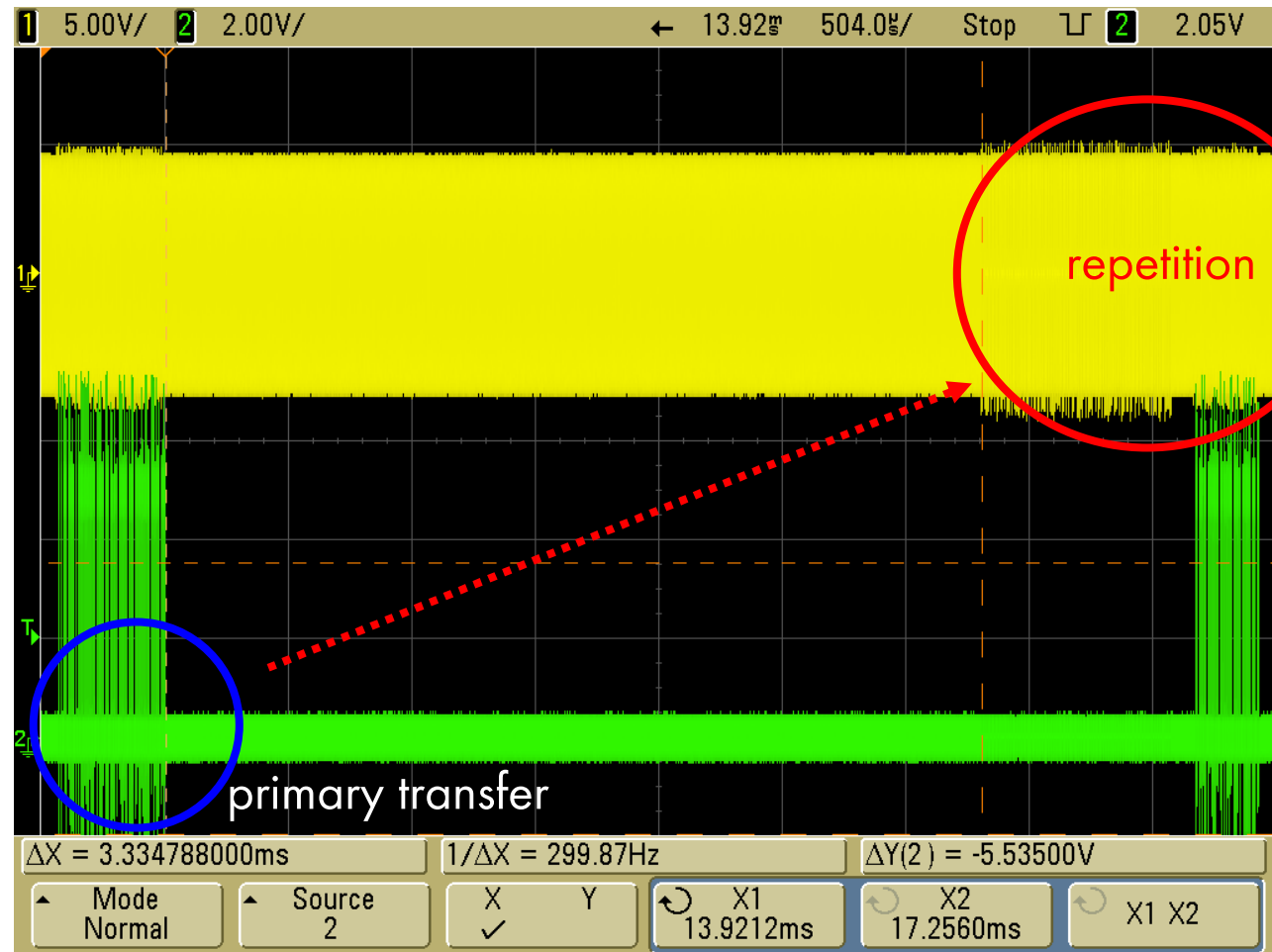
- Implications
 - **Secret key recovery** basing on an interaction with the terminal (reader) only
 - **Secret key recovery** from an intercepted terminal-transponder relation (it is enough to hear the terminal part only – feasible dozens of meters away)
 - **Secret key recovery** basing on an interaction with the transponder only
 - Totally devastating for a huge amount of micro-payment and public transportation applications.

[MIFARE „UID only“]

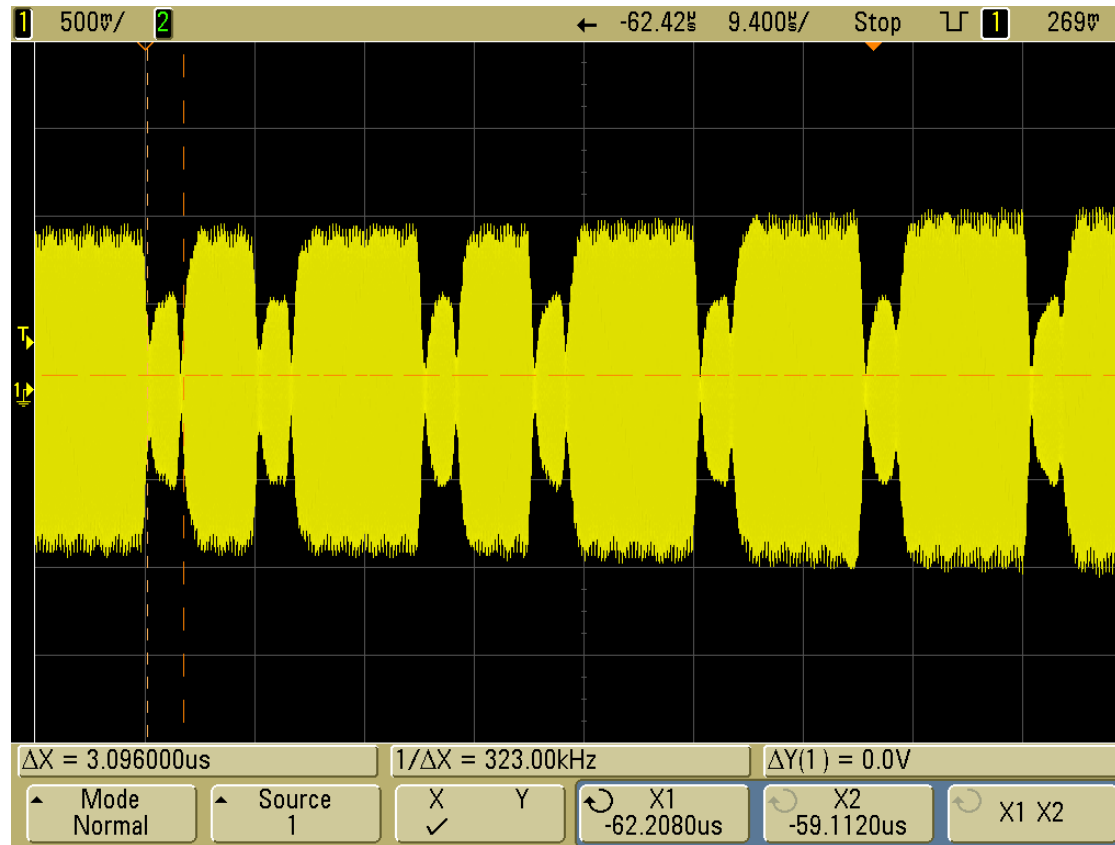
- In practice, huge amount of MF installations use this approach.
- In many aspects, the security of this approach is even worse than of the transponders in LF discussed before.
 - The communication protocol is standardized (ISO14443A).
 - UID interception is possible up to dozens of meters away.
 - Interestingly, similar security problem is already solved for UHF transponders [7].
- Only one obstacle here – there is no Q5 analogue for the HF band...
 - We need to build our own emulator – e.g. PicNic.

HF UID Interception

- Yellow trace:
basic carrier
- Green trace:
AM detector

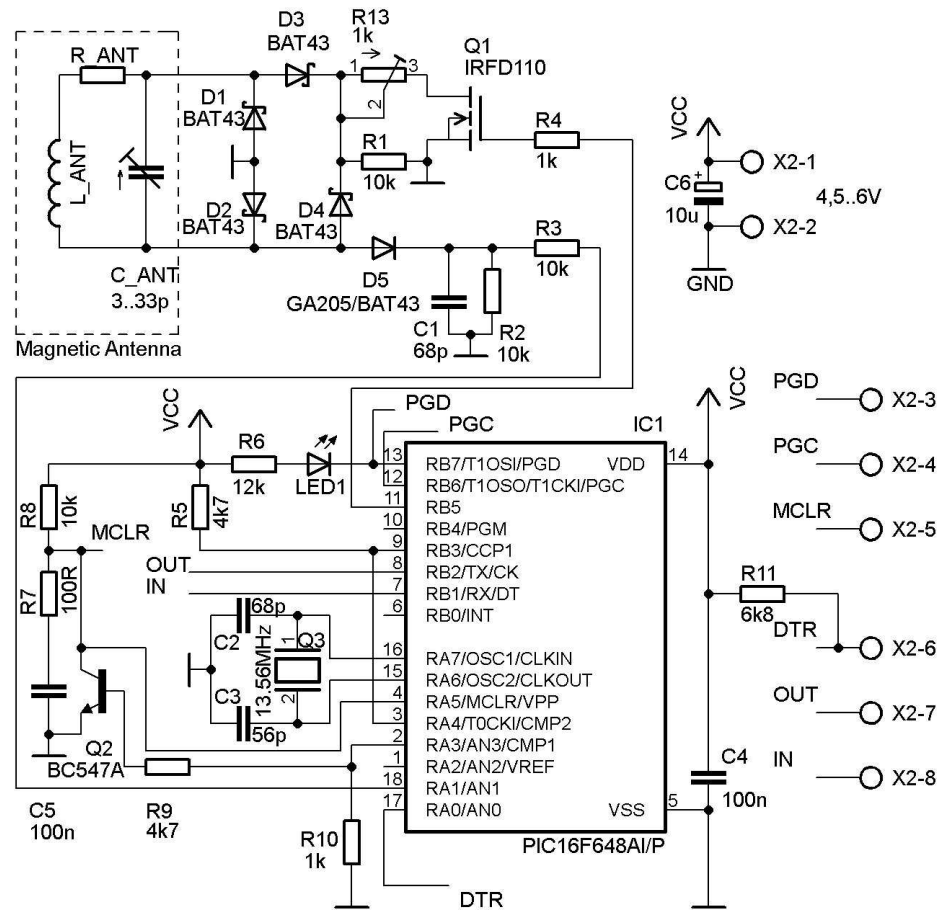


[Real Life Experiment]



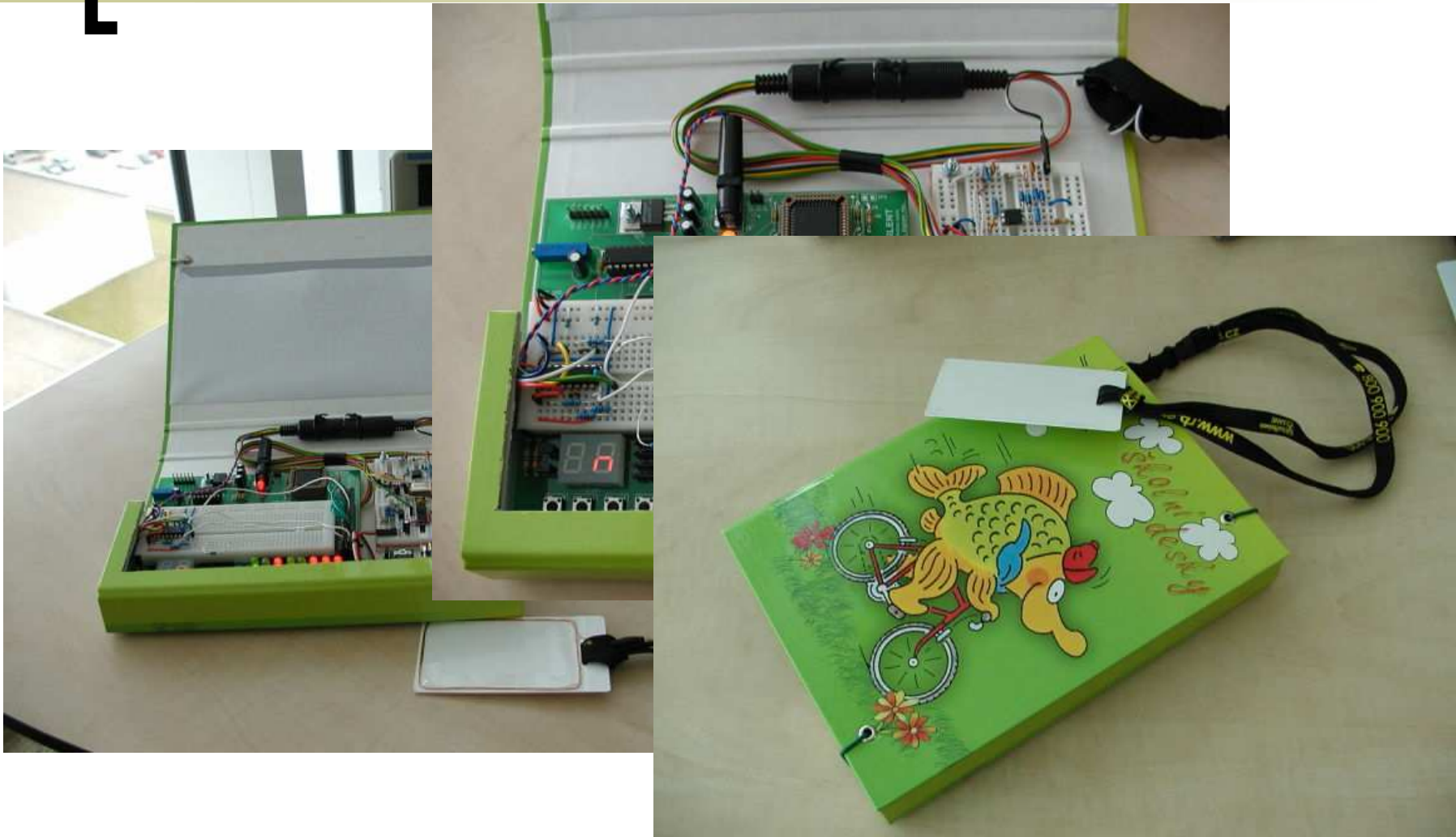
Receiver AOR AR8600MK2, HF output at i.f. 10,7 MHz.
Distance cca 2 m, at least two readers in the field.

PicNic HF Transponder Emulator



Details at <http://crypto.hyperlink.cz/picnic.htm>

PicNic & CPLD Coprocessor



Another Real Life Scenario

Danovy doklad c.: PD-08-002-5396
DUZP: 1.12.08
██████████, s.r.o.
PS-08-002-9080 ██████████ 1.12.08 11:07

1x Zampionova polevka	29,00	A
1x Cocka se sazеныm vejcem	69,00	A
1x Bonaqua neperлива 0,5l	20,00	A
Sleva 5%	-6,00	
CELKEM	112,00	

3cf2e2da9000 15 ROSA TOMAS

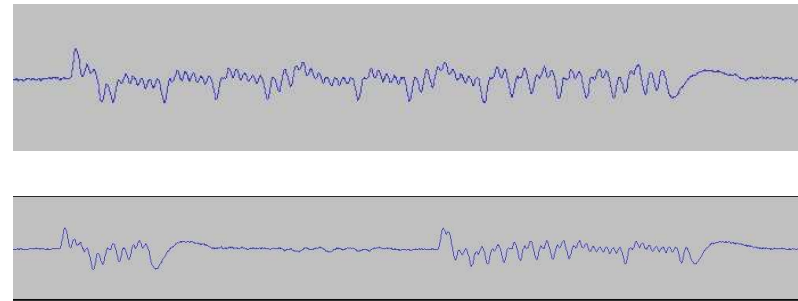
Zam. Karta			112,00
9% DPH/VAT	9,30	(102,70)	112,00 A

Puvodni zustatek: 395,00
Novy zustatek: 283,00

UID
here

Besides paying in the canteen, the same card opens the office door. Of course... So, lets feel the power of technology convergence - take a lunch and go for a walk around the office... ☺

Immobilizers – Next Target?



125 kHz/WFM
receiver AOR AR8200MK3
co-driver's seat position



It concerns almost any car of any manufacturer.



Part THREE

RFID Wormholes

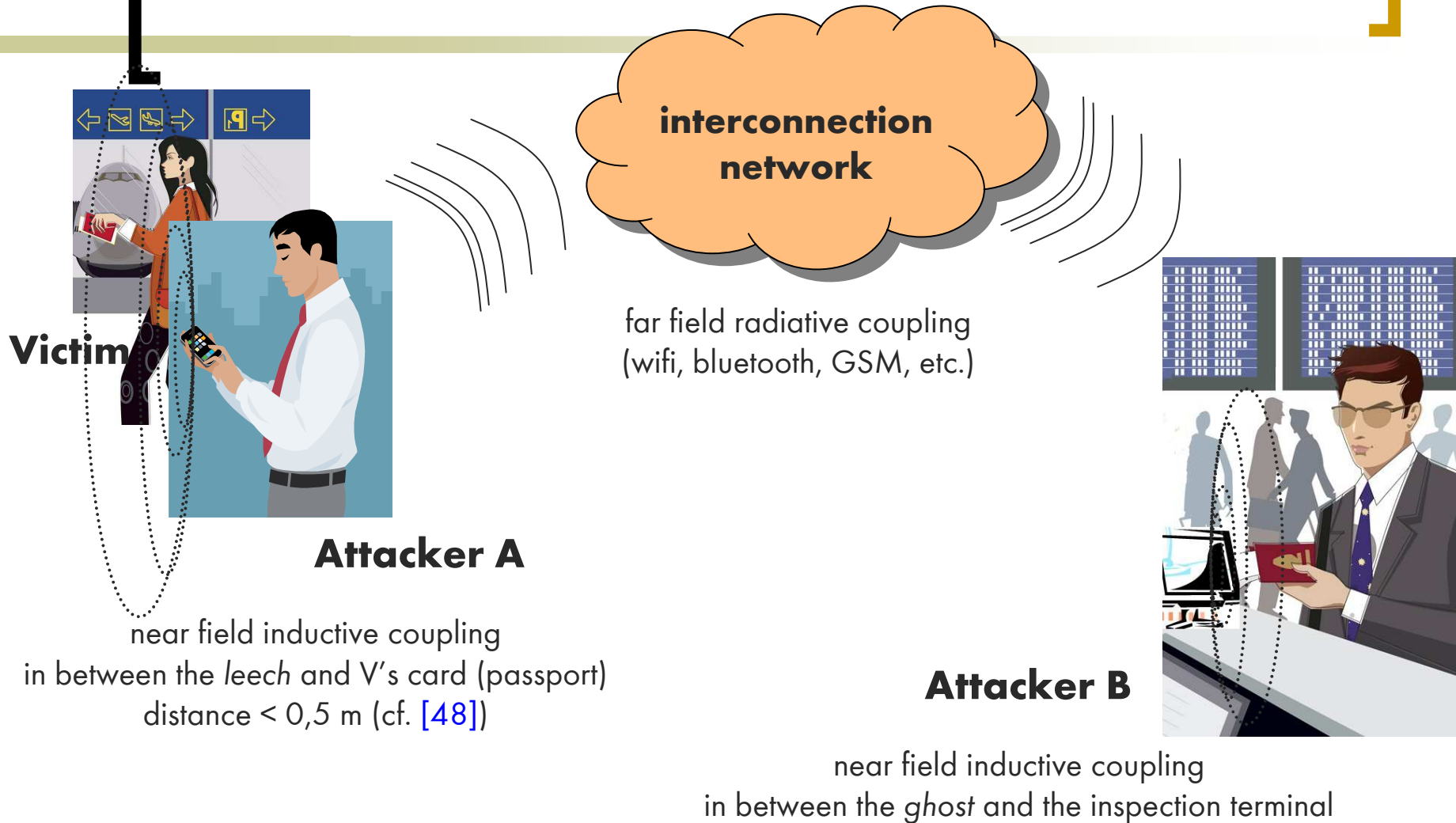
[Wormhole (Relay Channel)]

- *Let the RFID wormhole be any method enabling communication in between an out-of-range application transponder and the terminal.*
 - However, the sole presence of a transponder at the terminal is often directly linked to somebody's intention to e.g. open door, pay a bill, undergo electronic passport check, etc.

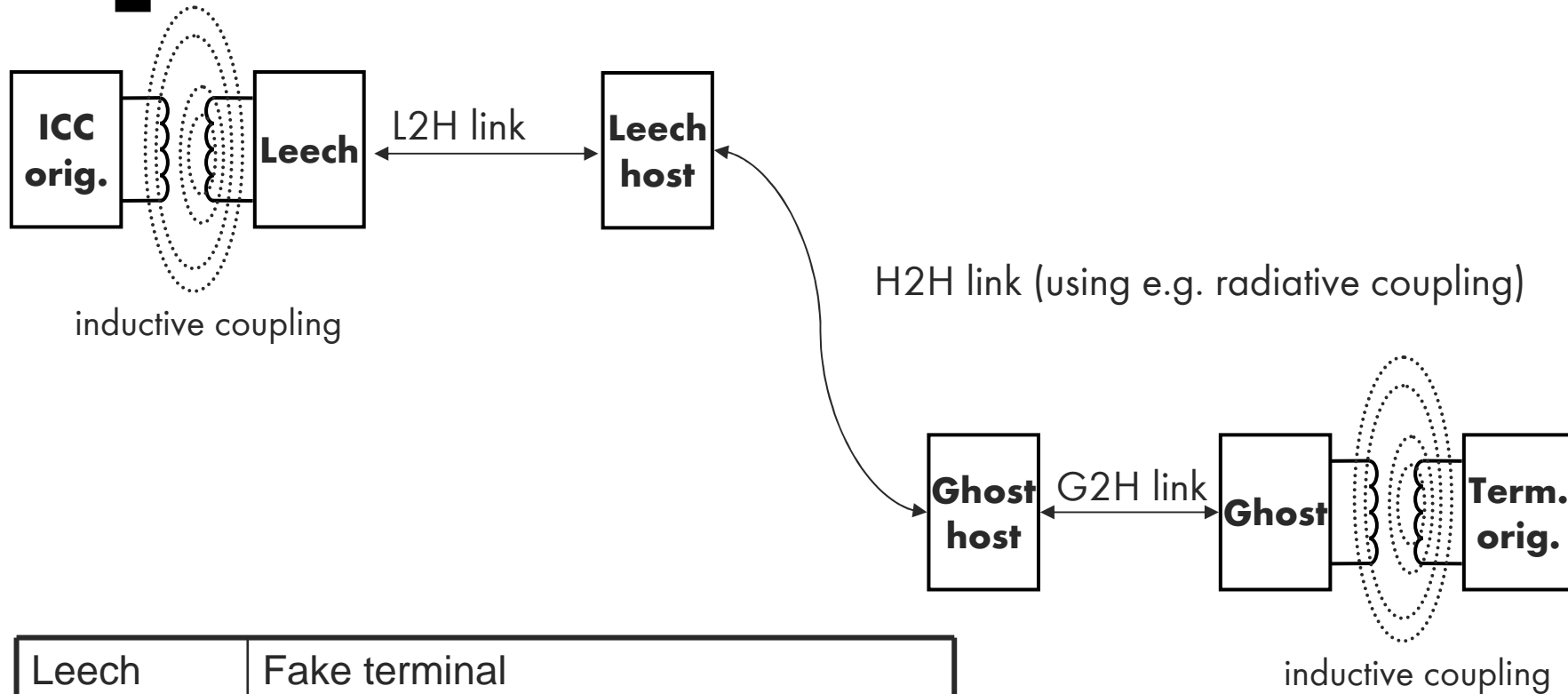
[Distance Bounding Protocols]

- These are special kind of cryptographic protocols, that can in theory protect against wormhole attacks [3].
 - They are, however, seldom known and even more rarely used in practice.
- Their cornerstone principle is really nicely illustrated by the excellent, two-sentence-long conclusion of Beth and Desmedt [2] (1990).
 - *“Because the speed of light is finite and constant we have provided a practical solution to the mafia and terrorist fraud. Its applications go beyond identification.”*

Wormhole Attack Illustrated



Wormhole Attack Scheme

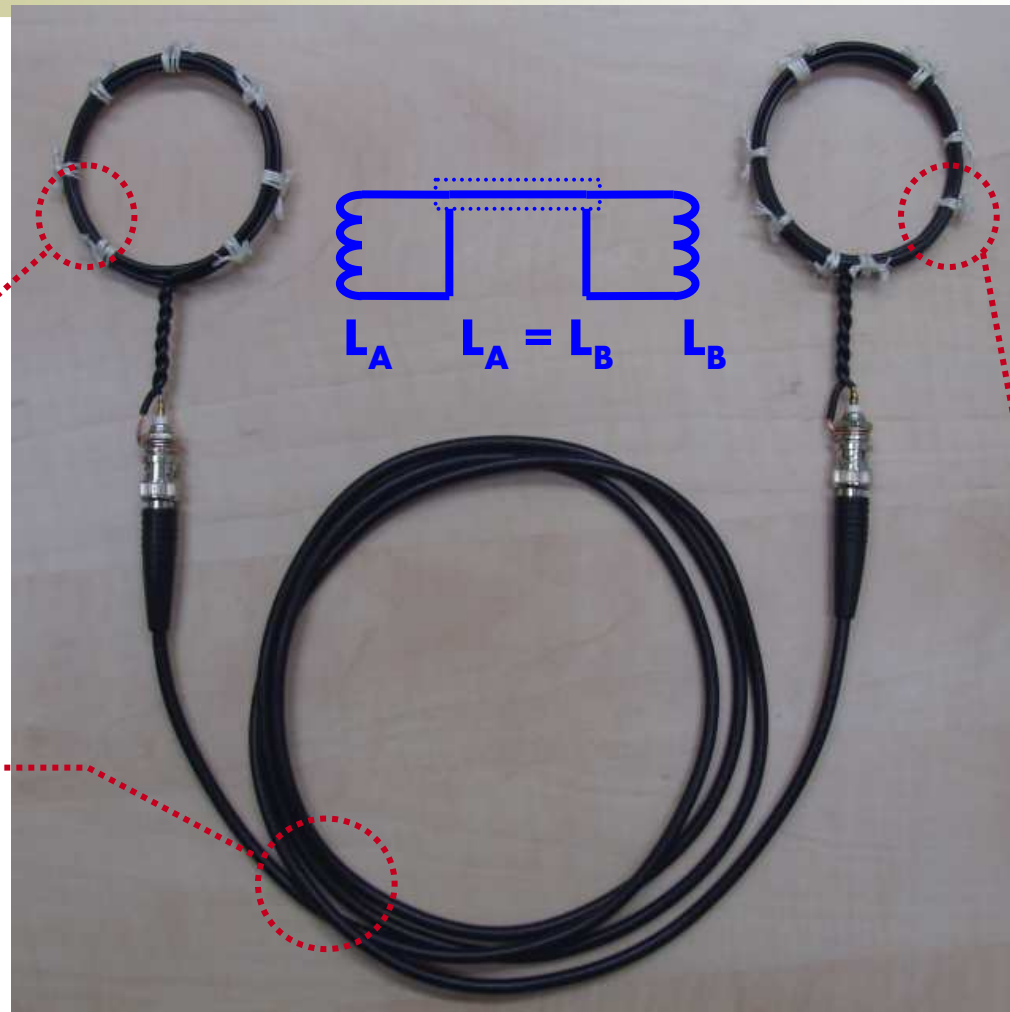


Leech	Fake terminal
Leech host	Computing device driving the leech
Ghost	Fake transponder
Ghost host	Computing device driving the ghost

[Do-It-Yourself HF Wormhole]

L_A : 4 turns of plain CUL wire, coil \varnothing 75 mm

coax. RG 58 length $< \lambda' / 2\pi$ (tested ≤ 2 m)



same as L_A

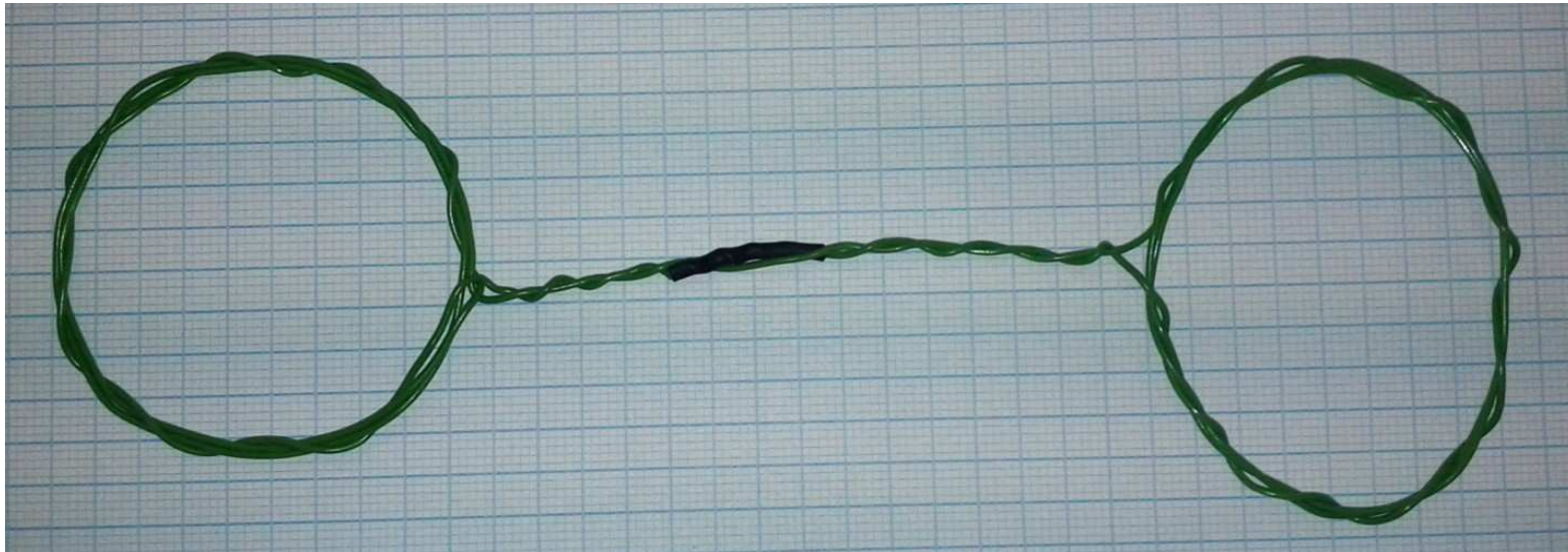
[Wormhole In Access Control]



Real successful experiment with the DIY wormhole in HF RFID access control.

Soom – Hacking & Security 2012, Prague

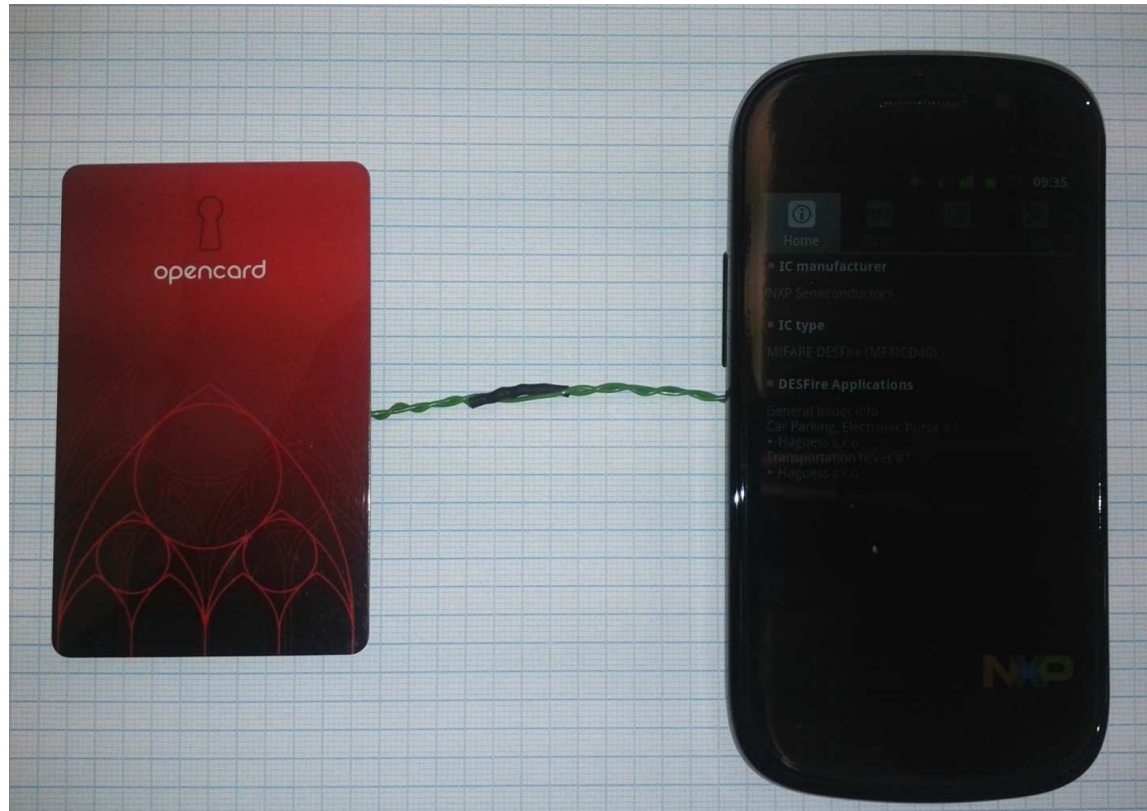
[Wormhole for NFC Debugging]



- Principal idea: Symmetric coils of 3 – 5 turns of CUL wire.
 - Later on, the coils can be deformed slightly on purpose to fit e.g. the NFC antenna geometry of a smart phone (cf. below).

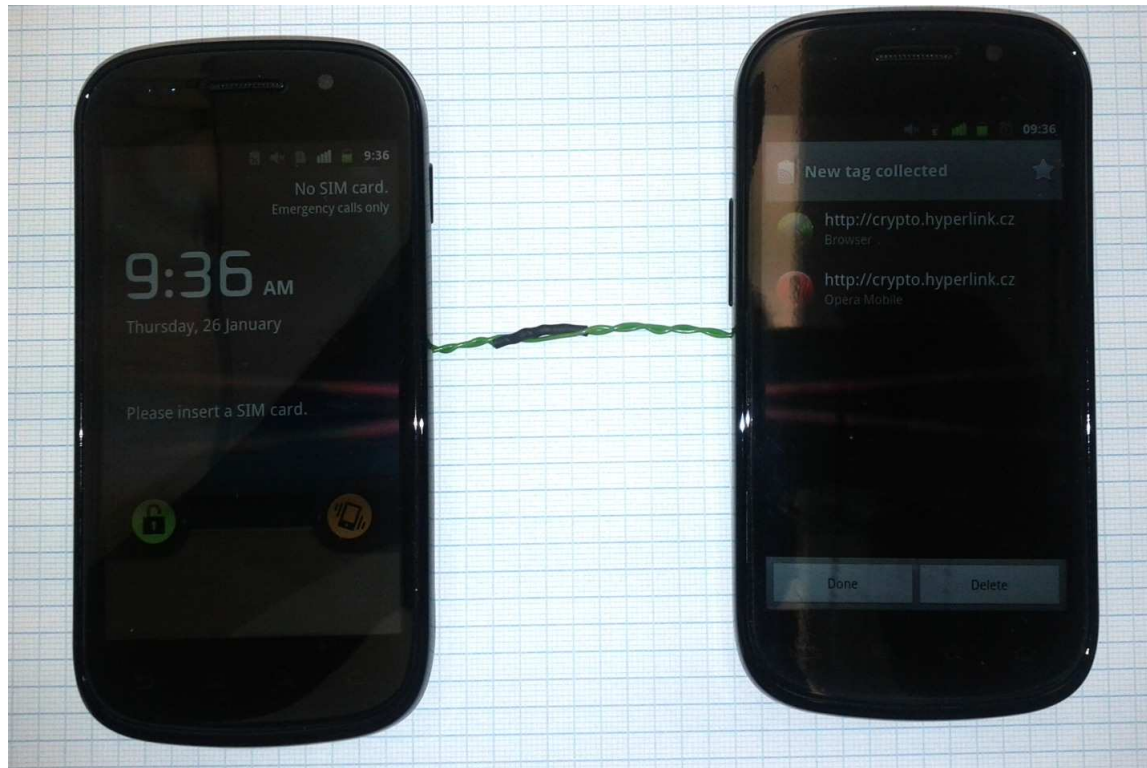
Simple Antenna Extender

Just Put the Stuff As-Is on Our Coils



- Google Nexus S (I9023) with Android 2.3.6 and TagInfo app working as passive-mode initiator with Prague's citizen card Opencard.

[No More “96” Positions!]



- Two Google Nexus S (I9023) with Android 2.3.6 working in reader-to-reader mode (user tag transfer).

[Wormhole In Car Entry]

- Interesting practical attack on keyless entry and start systems of modern cars was published in [12].
 - Focus on combined semi-passive LF/UHF transponder.
- By using LF wormhole, an attacker convinced the original transponder to send door opening request in UHF band.
 - The LF band circuit can be seen as a kind of implicit distance bounding protocol that should have ensured proximity distance between the key and the car.
 - Attack [12] shows, however, that this simple arrangement is weak.



Part FOUR

Hacking Into & With NFC

[NFC at Glance]

- NFC stands for *Near Field Communication*
- Device equipped with an NFC controller can work in the following modes:
 - Passive-mode initiator (or just a “reader”)
 - Passive-mode target (or just a “transponder”)
 - Active-mode initiator/target (or just “reader-to-reader”)

13.56 MHz

[NFC Standards]

- ISO 18092 specifies the **NFCIP-1** core protocol.
 - In fact, several parts duplicate the ISO 14443 A or FeliCa, but with a rather “innovative” wording.
 - Attention – the word “passive” does no longer equal to “without autonomous power source” here.
 - It is used to address those ISO 14443 A or FeliCa compatible modes in general (reader as well as tag).
- Furthermore, ISO 21481 addresses possible RF interference issues.
 - Handles coexistence of devices and operational modes following other standards occupying 13.56 MHz.
 - Those mainly are ISO 14443 and ISO 15693.
- Besides ISO, there is a lot of industry standards available at <http://www.nfc-forum.org/specs/>.

[NFC vs. RFID]

- **Correct** to say NFC is an inductively coupled communication interface that shares many technical features with HF RFID.
 - This goes such far that NFC devices can directly play the role of certain HF RFID transponders or terminals (readers).
 - Of course, NFC also shares the general security properties related to communication interception, wormhole phenomenon, etc.

[NFC vs. RFID

II

- **NOT correct** to say that NFC directly equals to HF RFID.
 - There is, for instance, the reader-to-reader communication mode and a huge amount of protocols of upper layers [57] that are far beyond the established HF RFID.
- **NEITHER correct**, on the other hand, to say that NFC has nothing in common with RFID.
 - This is something Google tries to pretend to perhaps make NFC more sexy and harmless marketing word [42].
 - Such a view would, besides the others, hide the applications of HF RFID physical security analyses whose generalizations do (of course!) apply to NFC as well.
 - Perhaps, Google also wanted to emphasize NFC differs from **UHF** RFID significantly, which is true (in the same way as for HF RFID).

[NFC and ISO 14443]

- NFC-equipped device can address contactless smartcards world in two ways:
 - As a terminal (“reader”)
 - ISO 14443 A – passive-mode initiator
 - As a transponder emulator
 - ISO 14443 A – passive-mode target

[NFC Controllers]

- Handle NFCIP-1 protocol implementation.
 - Gradually replace previous generation of “terminal-only” RFID controllers used in contactless smartcard readers.
 - Therefore, we are slowly approaching the situation where almost any “reader” will be able to serve the role of a smartcard emulator as well.
- Several manufacturers provide NFC controllers.
 - NXP’s chipset seems to be the most popular.
 - ST and Inside Contactless provide similar chips, too.
 - Unfortunately, their interfaces are not compatible.

[NXP's Controllers Overview]

Chip	Interface	PCD Mode	PICC Mode	Level 4 Framing
PN531	I2C, SPI, USB	ISO 14443-A	ISO 14443-A	PCD only
PN532	I2C, SPI	ISO 14443-A/B	ISO 14443-A	PCD & PICC
PN533	USB	ISO 14443-A/B	ISO 14443-A	PCD & PICC

- Table presents summary of NFC controllers of PN53x family made by NXP [32].
 - Simplified viewpoint based on wormhole attacks on ISO 14443 [48].
 - Further details can be also found in [28].
 - Although variant-A-only support in PICC mode seems to be a limiting condition, it is actually not the case (cf. elaboration given in [48]).

[NFC and Mobile Phones]

- At this moment, several incompatible architectures exist.
 - We can call them “generation zero” devices.
 - Interesting survey is given in [\[40\]](#).
- Approaching version of “generation one” devices shall:
 - Include special HW module called CLF (Contactless Front-end).
 - Interconnect CLF directly with SIM card, so the SIM will serve the role of a *secure element*.
 - Also provide certain monitor connection in between CLF and phone’s main processor.

[CLF]

- Provides SWP (Single Wire Protocol) interface:
 - ETSI TS 102 613 (physical and data link layer),
 - ETSI TS 102 622 (host controller interface - HCI).
- At present, CLF can be bought separately.
 - Cf. e.g. www.bladox.com
 - SWP<->USB interface converter is one of those wanted technical projects, since CLF seems to be a valuable tool for security analysts in itself.
 - On the other hand, it is still unclear what kind of benefit the stand-alone CLF could provide over NFC-equipped reader.
 - As far as we can say, most CLFs will be based on the next generation of NFC controllers - e.g. [PN544](#) that seems to be further encapsulation of widely accessible PN53x family cores.

[NFC In Smart Phone OS]

(as of January 2012)

- The most systematic treatment can be found in Google Android.
 - Especially since Ice Cream Sandwich (4.0), but it already started with Gingerbread 2.3.3 [\[43\]](#).
 - Clearly, Google strives to become the leader in this area.
- Also interesting support in some BlackBerry devices (e.g. BB 9900 with BB OS API v7.0.0 [\[47\]](#), [\[59\]](#)).
- Apple seems to wait with iOS on how Google will eventually do [\[44\]](#), [\[45\]](#).
 - External NFC modules can be attached as accessories to iPhone [\[46\]](#).
 - This should principally work for iPad as well.

[Android NFC]

- The good points
 - Easy to learn, simple to use API.
 - Encapsulates even the communication with ISO 15693 transponders (initiator mode only).
- What is not so good
 - There is no support for passive-mode target.
 - Neither does it seem Google is willing to release it in public.
 - Apparently, this mode is "reserved" for first class citizens like banks, etc.
 - RIM, on the other hand, managed to provide this interface even to "common naughty" programmers [\[47\]](#), [\[59\]](#).

[Mobile + NFC + Malware = RISK]

- Cf. Security and Privacy in Smartphones and Mobile Devices (SPSM) 2011 [58].
 - Malware running on a smart phone scans for RFID cards in its neighborhood.
 - Link occurs e.g. when a payment card and the mobile device are carried in the same pocket...
 - When it finds an interesting card, it interconnects that card with a remote controlling server.
 - Depending on the card type, the server decides on how to utilize the relayed connection – e.g. for making a contactless payment transaction.

[libnfc at Glance]

- According to the libnfc authors:
 - “...libnfc is the first free NFC SDK and Programmers API released under the GNU Lesser General Public License. It provides complete transparency and royalty-free use for everyone...” [28].
- As far, as we can confirm, the aforementioned statement is true.
 - It is quite easy to (even unintentionally) buy an NFC-equipped device, while, on the other hand, it is considerably harder to get full programmer’s documentation and support for it.
 - libnfc commendably dares to remove this barrier.

[Experimental Setup [48]



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[Wormholes in Practice]

- Because of the wide availability of NFC controllers and libraries, the following is true:
 - *Using generally available computing devices and program codes, it is practically easy to mount a wormhole attack in a typical system accepting ISO 14443 contactless smartcards.*

Conclusion

- RFID security still deserves great attention across all frequency bands.
 - Security mechanisms employed for UHF are roughly comparable with LF. Furthermore, there is considerably increased threat of remote attacks [7].
- Hopefully, the following initiatives might contribute:
 - Low power microcontrollers,
 - Lightweight cryptography,
 - Business behind NFC and contactless payments,
 - Worldwide privacy protection effort.

[Thank You For Attention]



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[References

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