# April 18th

## No News Today

### April 18, 1930

People who tuned in to hear the news bulletin at 8:45pm on BBC Radio were told, "Good evening. Today is Good Friday. There is no news." For the rest of the 15-minute time slot, the station played piano music.

Of course, there had been some newsworthy occurrences: a raid on an armory by Indian independence fighters, and a typhoon in the Philippines, but details didn't reach the UK until the following day.

## HES Inspired

### April 18-20, 1967

Andries van Dam [Dec 8] bumped into Ted Nelson [June 17] at the 1967 Spring Joint Computer Conference, and Nelson took the opportunity to tell van Dam about his hypertext concept. van Dam recalled, "Nelson's vision seduced me. I really loved his way of thinking about writing, editing, and annotating as a scholarly activity, and putting tools together to support that."

The result was the Hypertext Editing System (HES), built by van Dam, Nelson, and their students at Brown University. HES was the first system to utilize hypertext concepts, based around links and branching text. Arbitrary text areas could be labelled, and later selected by accessing those names in automatically created menus.

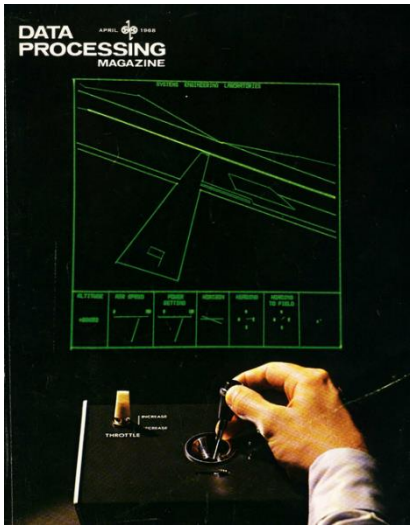
HES first ran on an IBM System/360 [April 7] Model 50 , and one significant user was NASA's Houston Manned Spacecraft Center, which employed it to manage documentation for the Apollo program.

The HES project ended in 1969, but was succeeded by FRESS (File Retrieval and Editing System). It utilized the capabilities of the IMLAC PDS-1 [March 00] (possibly the first graphical minicomputer) to allow users to create hyperlinks with a light pen, and support multi-window editing.

## First Flight Simulator

### April 18-20, 1967

The first flight simulator was demonstrated by Danny Cohen at the Spring Joint Computer Conference in Atlantic City. It offered a 'pilot' the chance to land a plane on a runway in a scene made up of about 50 lines, but no polygons, surfaces, hidden line elimination, or color. Nevertheless, Cohen later recalled, "It was a great attraction, no one had ever seen such a system. People waited in long lines for the opportunity to fly it for a few minutes."




Danny Cohen's Flight Simulator. Cover of *Data Processing* magazine, April 1968.

It occupied just 4K of memory on a System Engineering Lab SEL 810A. The company had asked Cohen to write a simulator to show off their machine and, incidentally, Cohen was a commercial pilot.

Interest in the math behind the demo – its perspective transformations and line clipping – led Frank S. Greatorex and Cohen to write, "Producing Dynamic Perspective Views for Vehicle Simulation," which became the cover story of the April 1968 issue of *Data Processing* magazine.

Cohen subsequently worked with Ivan Sutherland [May 16] on more sophisticated algorithms, and along the way adapted the simulator to run over the ARPANET [Aug 30], making it one of the first applications of packet switching [May 5].

Cohen is also known for coining the terms Big Endian and Little Endian [March 2] in his 1980 paper "On Holy Wars and a Plea for Peace."

The most famous flight simulator is probably Microsoft's Flight Simulator [Nov 00] developed by Bruce Artwick [Aug 8] and released in 1982.

## Intel 8080 Described

### April 18, 1974

*Electronics* magazine published an article describing the features of Intel's 8080, the company's second 8-bit chip (the first being the 8008 [April 00]). The 8080 offered more instructions, was faster, and only required six support chips to make a functional system instead of the 8008's twenty. Other improvements included the ability to address up to 64K of memory (vs. the 8008's 16K), and use of main memory to implement a stack of subroutine calls that permitted many more levels of nested procedures; the 8008's limit was seven.

The 8080 was designed by Federico Faggin [Dec 1] and Masatoshi Shima [Aug 22] who went on to design the Zilog Z80 [March 9] in 1976.

Initially the 8080 found rather unexciting use as a traffic-lights controller, but on [Dec 19] it became the processor inside the MITS Altair 8800. Although

there's a lot of debate about the "Altair" name, the more pressing question if why the machine wasn't called the Altair 8080?

## Andrew Yan-Tak Ng

### Born: April 18, 1976;

London, UK

Ng works primarily in machine learning, as typified by his Stanford Autonomous Helicopter project, and STAIR (STanford AI Robot) system which introduced ROS, popular middleware for open-source robotics.

In 2012, he co-founded Coursera [four entries forward] with Daphne Koller, and his courses on "Machine Learning" and "Neural Networks and Deep Learning" were the two most popular ones on the platform for many years.

Andrew Ng (2017). Photo by Steve Jurvetson. CC BY 2.0.

He co-founded the Google Brain project with Jeff Dean [July 23] and Greg Corrado, which employed the company's vast distributed computer infrastructure to develop very large neural networks. Among "Brain"s successes was a neural network that could recognize cats, for which it employed 16,000 CPUs and over 10 million images taken from YouTube videos [Feb 14].

## The Osborne Executive

### April 18, 1983

The Osborne Executive was the follow-up to the Osborne 1 [April 3], featuring a Z80 CPU [March 9] and 124K of RAM, a detachable keyboard, two 5.25-inch disk drives, two serial ports (for a printer and modem), and a parallel port.

It only had a small 7-inch amber screen, but that was still a distinct improvement over the Osborne 1's 5-inch display. In particular, it now meant that the screen was wide enough to show 80 columns of (very small) text.

The Executive was heavy, weighing around 28 lbs (3 lbs more than the Osborne 1), and looked not unlike a portable sewing machine.

The system came bundled with an impressive range of business software, including: Personal Pearl (a database), SuperCalc, MailMerge, and WordStar [Sept 00].

Sadly it's best remembered today for engendering the "Osborne Effect" – Adam Osborne [March 6] had announced the Executive back in Oct. 1982, triggering a drastic fall in sales for the Osborne 1 long before the Executive was ready to ship.

## Toshiba T1100 Released

### April 18, 1985

The T1100 has been described as "the world's first mass-market laptop computer". There were several earlier portable machines including ones from Osborne [April 3] and RadioShack [Feb 2], but the T1100 was the first to be both PC compatible and truly portable as opposed to 'luggable' – it measured 31.1 cm x 6.6 cm x 30.5 cm and weighed just 4.1 kg.

It used an Intel 80C88 (a variation of the 8088 [July 1]), had a 3.5-inch floppy disk drive, and a monochrome, high-contrast LCD capable of displaying 80x25 text or 640x200 graphics. It ran off rechargeable batteries that could last a decent eight hours between recharges.

## BDFL

### April 18, 1995

During the formation of the Python Software Association, Guido van Rossum [Jan 31], Python's inventor, was assigned the jocular title "Benevolent Dictator For Life" (BDFL), probably by Ken Manheimer or Barry Warsaw. More shockingly, the term did not originate from a Monty Python [Oct 5] sketch.

BDFL has become quite a common title for open-source leaders. Other BDFLs include Linus Torvalds [Dec 28] (Linux), Larry Wall [Sept 27] (Perl), Martin Odersky [Sept 5] (Scala), and Rich Hickey (Clojure [Oct 16]). However, Van Rossum stepped down from his BDFL role in July 2018.

## Cyberchondria

### April 18, 2001

Cyberchondria is a portmanteau word derived from cyber and hypochondria. It was first used in the UK's *The Independent* newspaper to describe "the excessive use of Internet health sites to fuel health anxiety."

In 2002 an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* noted that "a visit to an Internet clinic will probably diagnose drowsiness as chronic fatigue, anal itch as bowel cancer and a headache as a tumor."

The first academic study of the topic was carried out by Microsoft researchers Ryen White and Eric Horvitz in 2008.

## Coursera Expands

### April 18, 2012

Coursera (pronounced COR-sayr-uh) is an online learning platform founded by Andrew Ng [four entries back] and Daphne Koller based on their experiences of running online versions of their Stanford subjects.

The idea came to Ng after he had 100,000 students sign up for his online course on "Machine Learning". Ng was amazed, “I normally teach 400 students. To reach that many students before I would have had to teach my normal Stanford class for 250 years.”

On this day, Princeton, Stanford, the University of Michigan, and the University of Pennsylvania became official business partners in the Coursera venture, and many other academic institutions joined over the following months.

Coursera was one of three large MOOCs [Sept 15] created in 2012, the others being Udacity [Feb 20] and MIT edX [May 2].

As of Nov. 2020, Coursera had more than 77 million registered users and runs more than 4,000 courses.