August 27th

Kristen Nygaard

Born: Aug. 27, 1926;

Oslo, Norway
Died: Aug. 10, 2002

Nygaard and Ole-Johan Dahl [Oct 12] are considered the fathers of object-oriented programming (OOP) which grew out of their work at the Norwegian Computing Center in the 1960s on the SIMULA I simulation language. As their ideas developed, Nygaard and Dahl added the concepts of class, subclass, inheritance, dynamic object creation, and processes [Feb 10]. Simula would have a massive influence on many later languages, including Smalltalk [May 17], C++ [Oct 14], and Java [Feb 23].

Nygaard was very concerned about the social impact of computerization, especially its use to de-skill workers. In particular, he helped the Norwegian trade unions push for agreements that gave them a say in the introduction and use of computer technology.

Nygaard and Dahl are both *Commanders of the Order of Saint Olav*, awarded by the King of Norway.

A Van at Zotts'

Aug. 27, 1976

A van parked outside Zotts' beer garden (officially called "The Alpine Inn" at 3915 Alpine Road, Portola Valley) made Internet history – it sent the first packet data message across two networks using the new Internet TCP protocol [Sept 9]. The van was equipped with radio equipment that let it function as a mobile node in the packet-radio PRNET network. The SRI team, led by Don Nielson, then SRI's assistant director of telecommunications, placed a terminal on one of the wooden tables in the beer garden, connected it to the van, and sent a message from their PRNET node to a computer back at SRI (some seven miles south). It was then transferred to the ARPANET [Dec 5] and sent on to Boston.

The same van and team made history again, on [Nov 27] 1977, when three networks were linked. The van (but not the team) is now on display in the Computer History Museum [Sept 24].

The SRI team in Zott's Beer Garden (1976). (c) Photo Courtesy: Don Nielson.

Zott's has an illustrious history, dating back to at least 1909 when the president of Stanford described it as "unusually vile, even for a roadhouse, a great injury to the University and a disgrace to San Mateo County." This view was not generally shared by Stanford students.

Today, you can still visit the Alpine Inn and send an email, but from your phone rather than a radio van.

5.25-inch Floppy

Aug. 27, 1976

The Shugart SA-400 Minifloppy was the first 5.25 inch floppy disk drive. It was able to store 89,600 bytes of data on a disk, and cost a mere $390, although that didn't include the $45 for ten diskettes.

The SA-400 (and related models) quickly became Shugart Associates' [Sept 27] best sellers with shipments reaching 4000 drives per day at one point.

The drive's popularity meant that its 4-pin power connector and 34-pin signal interface became de facto industry standards. By 1978, more than ten manufacturers were producing similar devices.

The story goes that the drive was conceived in 1976 when Jim Adkisson and Don Massaro, two Shugart engineers, had lunch with An Wang [Feb 7] of Wang Labs, who complained that the commonplace 8-inch drive was too big. When Adkisson asked what the size should be, Wang pointed to a napkin and said, "About that size." Adkisson returned to the lab with the napkin and designed the 5.25-inch floppy drive to fit it.

In the early 1980s, to reduce development and start-up costs, Shugart had Matsushita Communications manufacture its drives. This started Matsushita on its way to becoming the largest floppy drive manufacturer in the world.

IE6

Aug. 27, 2001

Prev: [March 18]

Microsoft released Internet Explorer 6.0 (IE6), two months before Windows XP [Oct 25]. This version marked the start of IE's rise to domination of the browser market, with over 80% of the market share by mid-2004.

IE6 didn't fully (or correctly) support CSS version 2 [Oct 10], which made it difficult for developers to ensure that its Web pages were compatibility with other browsers without degrading their appearance and functionality. One very obvious problem was that IE 6 couldn't handle transparency in PNG images. The browser was also criticized for its security, with *PC World* labeling it "the least secure software on the planet."

Nevertheless, IE 6 conquered all, perhaps because it was the browser shipped with Windows

XP. But this also led to an air of complacency on Microsoft's part, and there was a five year gap between IE6 and IE 7 (released on Oct 18, 2006) which gave more nimble alternatives a chance to shine, most notably Firefox [Nov 9].

IE6's eventually demise was greatly encouraged by YouTube's [Feb 14] announcement on July 14, 2009 that it would be phasing out support for the browser 'soon'. Amazingly, this move was the initiative of disgruntled engineers at YouTube who had become heartily sick of hacking their code to deal with IE6's idiosyncrasies. There was an enormous groundswell of support for this, including a similar banner put out soon after by Google Docs.

Allen Sues

Aug. 27, 2010

Paul Allen [Jan 21], co-founder of Microsoft, but in this case acting as the founder of "Interval Licensing", sued AOL, Apple, eBay, Facebook, Netflix, Office Depot, OfficeMax, Staples, Yahoo, and YouTube.

He claimed that these companies had infringed up to four patents covering “fundamental web technologies” granted to Allen's defunct lab "Interval Research."

A Panzerkampfwagen IV with a long-barreled gun. Photo by Paul Hermans. CC BY-SA 3.0.

One of the more memorable lawsuits alleged that "Interval Research" was one of the four original investors of Sergey Brin [Aug 21] and Larry Page’s [March 26] research that eventually became Google [Sept 27]. The suit backed this up with a screenshot of a 1998 Google webpage, crediting Allen’s lab. However, this 'damning evidence' proved insufficient, and on Dec. 10 a federal judge dismissed the case.

Another remarkable Allen lawsuit was the Sept. 11, 2014 case against the *Collings Foundation* for failing to hand over a Panzer IV, a WWII-era German tank, that Allen had allegedly bought for $2.5 million. The tank was one of only 38 complete Panzer IVs in the world and one of five in the US.

It had previously been part of the vast collection of military hardware owned by the Hewlett-Packard [Jan 1] engineer, Jacques Littlefield (1949 - 2009). At one time, Littlefield owned more than 240 vehicles, housed in four football field-sized buildings.