

Dec. 27th

## Betty Jean Bartik

(née Jennings)

**Born: Dec. 27, 1924;**

Gentry County, Missouri

Died: March 23, 2011

Bartik and Betty Holberton [March 7] were the co-lead programmers of the ENIAC [May 00], and their projectile trajectory calculation program was the main demo when the machine was publicly unveiled on [Feb 15] 1946. Bartik later said, "The day ENIAC was introduced to the world was one of the most exciting days of my life. The demonstration was fabulous. ENIAC calculated the trajectory faster than it took the bullet to travel. We handed out copies of the calculations as they were run. ENIAC was 1,000 times faster than any machine that existed prior to that time."

In 1947, Bartik was asked to lead a group that converted the ENIAC into a stored program machine, working closely with John Von Neumann [Dec 28], Dick Clippinger, and Adele Goldstine [Dec 21].

Later she joined the Eckert-Mauchly Computer Corporation (EMCC), programmed the BINAC [April 4], and helped with the design of the UNIVAC I [March 31], including its cathode-ray tube-based memory.

Bartik and Holberton's SORT/MERGE routine from 1952 for data stored on UNIVAC tape drives was called "the first major 'software' routine ever developed for automatic programming" by Donald Knuth [Jan 10].

Bartik was originally hired as a "computer" by the Army in 1945 when it was still considered a job title. She started out by calculating firing table trajectories using a mechanical desktop calculator, but was later taught to program by Adele Goldstine at the Moore school [July 8].

## Joseph Leslie Armstrong

**Born: Dec. 27, 1950;**

Bournemouth, UK

Died: April 20, 2019

Armstrong worked on fault-tolerant distributed systems, and developed the Erlang language with Robert Virding and Mike Williams at Ericsson (the Swedish telecoms company).

Originally Erlang was aimed at telephony applications, but it soon became apparent that it was well suited to writing more general-purpose concurrent software.



Joe Armstrong (2009). Photo by Måns Sandström. CC BY 2.0.

The initial version was influenced by the PLEX language used in Ericsson telephone exchanges, and was implemented in Prolog [Jan 24]. The "Erlang" name was due to Bjarne Däcker, and refers to the Danish mathematician and engineer Agner Krarup Erlang, as well as being an abbreviation of "Ericsson Language".

Armstrong originally trained as a physicist, but was lured away by AI and robotics, worked with Donald Michie [Nov 11], and became a founding member of the British Robotics Association. When the funding for AI dried up as a result of the Lighthill Report [Aug 30], he returned to physics at the Swedish Space Corporation, and eventually joined Ericsson.

A quote by Armstrong: "The problem with object-oriented languages is they've got all this implicit environment that they carry around with them. You wanted a banana but what you got was a gorilla holding the banana and the entire jungle."

## Masayori "Masi" Oka

**Born: Dec. 27, 1974;**

Tokyo, Japan

Oka is an actor, probably best known for his roles as Hiro Nakamura on NBC's "Heroes" and as Doctor Max Bergman in CBS' "Hawaii Five-0". However, his first job after graduating from Brown with a degree in computer science and mathematics was at Industrial Light & Magic (ILM [Sept 12]), developing CGI tools, and working on the "Star Wars" [May 4] prequel trilogy. Fortunately, this didn't prevent him from being named the "Coolest Geek" at the Spike TV Guys' Choice Awards on June 13, 2007.

He was at one time a leader of the "Dawn of Valor" raiding guild in "World of Warcraft" [Nov 23], renowned across the land for its druids and warlocks.

## Town on eBay Dec. 27, 2002

Bridgeville is an 83-acre town 420 km north of San Francisco, that was once a thriving networking hub for the local stagecoach route and a stop on the Pony Express [April 3].

On this day, it became the first town to be sold on eBay. Its owners, the Lapple family, advertised it as "a private retreat, basking in the glory of the redwoods" and as a possible "economic powerhouse with the potential for generating a large cash flow."

Unfortunately, a potential buyer backed out of the \$1.77 million deal after discovering that the town had fallen into a sad state

of repair. Bruce Krall, an Orange County banker, stepped in and snapped it up for a mere \$700,000. He planned to turn it into a mind-body health resort, but eventually relisted it on eBay in 2006.

For more unusual eBay auctions, see [\[Sept 22\]](#).

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