Feb. 22nd

Edmund Callis Berkeley

Born: Feb. 22, 1909;

New York City
Died: March 7, 1988

Berkeley was a co-founder of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM [Sept 15]), author of the first popular book on computing, "Giant Brains, or Machines That Think" [June 30], the editor of the first computer magazine, *The Computing Machinery Field* [Sept 00], and the founder of a company, Berkeley Enterprises, that offered some of the first construction kits for hobbyist robots and computing devices.

In a series of thirteen articles in *Radio-Electronics* magazine, from Oct. 1950, Berkeley published plans for what is perhaps the world's first personal computer, Simon [May 18]. He followed that with "Squee, the Robot Squirrel" [Aug 25] in the Dec. 1951 issue.

Berkeley Enterprises, began as a consulting firm in 1948, and later moved into selling kits. Notable products were: Geniac (Genius Almost-Automatic Computer), Tyniac (Tiny Almost-Automatic Computer), Weeniac (Weeny Almost-Automatic Computer), and Brainiac (Brain-Imitating Almost-Automatic Computer).

The Geniac (1955) was essentially a collection of rotary switches which could be set up to perform different logical functions. The kit came with a good tutorial, was full of schematics for interesting projects, including a tic-tac-toe machine [Aug 25], Nim [Sept 24], I.Q. testing, and uranium prospecting.

The Brainiac and Geniac were almost identical products; Berkeley started selling the former in 1958 after he had a falling out with his business partner, Oliver Garfield.

As a naval officer during WWII, Berkeley had worked with Howard Aiken [March 8] on the Harvard Mark I [Aug 7], but the two didn't get on. At one point Berkeley suggested that Aiken should read Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence People" (1936).

Berkeley was well-known for his outspoken nature. In 1972, the ACM honored Berkeley at its 25th anniversary dinner, and he gave a speech that poured vitriol upon those working on military devices for the Vietnam War. Several prominent ACM members (and employees of the firms that Berkeley singled out) walked out.

For more educational computer kits, see [April 30], [July 00], [Sept 30].

Thomas Eugene Kurtz

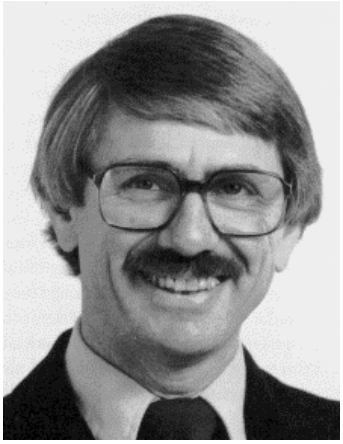
Born: Feb. 22, 1928;

Oak Park, Illinois

Kurtz was the co-developer with John Kemeny [May 31] of the Dartmouth Time-Sharing System (DTSS) and BASIC [May 1].

The seeds for BASIC were planted while Kurtz was struggling to code statistical calculations in assembly. After "one hour of valuable IBM 704 [May 7] time and untold hours of my less valuable time," he admitted defeat, and switched to FORTRAN [Dec 00], which was then considered too high-level to generate fast code. "The answers appeared," he recalled "and about five minutes of computer time was used. This lesson – that programming in higher-level languages could save computer time as well as person time – impressed me deeply."

In the meantime, John McCarthy [Sept 4] was earning a reputation as an enthusiastic advocate of time-sharing computing, and had published an influential memo [Jan 1] on the subject in 1959. While visiting MIT, Kurtz talked to McCarthy, who told him in no uncertain terms: "You guys ought to do time-sharing." Kurtz and Kemeny agreed.



Thomas Eugene Kurtz (c) CIS, Dartmouth College.

GPS Begins

Feb. 22, 1978

The Global Positioning System (GPS), more fully known as the "Navigation Satellite Timing and Ranging Global Positioning System" (NAVSTAR GPS), was conceived by Ivan A. Getting. Today, it's the property of the US government, and managed by the air force, which is required to keep at least 24 of its satellites available 95% of the time. The first satellite in the system, NAVSTAR 1, was launched on this day.

GPS was originally intended for military use only, but the shooting down of Korean Air Lines Flight 007 in 1983 after it strayed into the USSR's prohibited airspace changed all that.

The event convinced President Ronald Reagan to issue a directive making GPS freely available for civilian use. However, the quality was degraded under a program euphemistically called "Selective Availability."

This was scrapped in May 2000, causing location accuracy to improve from around 50 meters to five. Recent GPS receivers can offer much better accuracy,

pinpointing devices to within 30 cm.

The fact that GPS is controlled by the US government has persuaded several countries to develop their own satellite navigation systems (e.g. [Dec 28]).

KeyHole Images Declassified

Feb. 22 (or 23), 1995

President Bill Clinton signed Executive Order 12951 declassifying more than 860,000 images of the Earth's surface collected by various photo-reconnaissance satellites between 1960 and 1972. These included missions by the Corona (KH-1 [Feb 28] to KH-4), KH-5 Argon and KH-6 Lanyard.

A further review in Sept. 2002 led Clinton to declassify photos from the later KH-7 Gambit and KH-9 Hexagon missions, which included images taken up to 1980.

The KH- (KeyHole) satellites returned their film to earth in capsules (aka "buckets") that were recovered in the air during their parachute descent by specially equipped aircraft. The capsules could also float if they landed in the ocean.

The entire collection of photographs was handed over to the National Archives and Records Administration and the US Geological Survey (USGS), and proved immediately useful: scientists from the Australian National University used them to locate ancient archaeological remains in northern Syria, while scientists at Harvard identified prehistoric traveling routes in Mesopotamia.

Japan's i-mode

Feb. 22, 1999

Japanese mobile phone operator NTT DoCoMo unveiled i-mode, the first wireless Internet service integrated into mobile phones. Users had access to services such as e-mail, sports results, weather forecasts, games, financial services, and ticket booking.

This was possibly since NTT (the Japan Telegraph and Telephone Corporation) owned a packet-switched wireless network that it made available to DoCoMo. DoCoMo was able to offer consumers an always-on connection, leading to a killer competitive advantage.

i-mode was designed to work well with devices having small screens, limited numbers of buttons, and no keyboard. It used a cut-down form of HTML, c-HTML, which meant that simple sites could be rendered on an i-mode device, and existing sites could be repurposed.

The content planning team was led by Mari Matsunaga, Takeshi Natsuno was responsible for business development, and Keiichi Enoki oversaw the overall development.

By Aug. 1999, i-mode had signed up one million subscribers. By 2001, the company was adding a million new users every three weeks.

i-mode kicked off the "keitai" ("portable telephones") culture in Japan, which eventually spread around the world. Two factors contributing to its rapid success was the country's low PC usage and high mobile phone ownership.

i-mode usage in Japan peaked in 2008.

iMac Special Edition

Feb. 22, 2001

At the Macworld Expo in Tokyo, Apple introduced the iMac G3 [May 6] Special Edition, available in colors that were perhaps the company's high-water mark for wackiness: "Dalmatian Blue" and "Flower Power". "Blue Dalmatian" was a pattern of white blobs on a blue and green background, while "Flower Power" consisted of simple flower shapes, which looks suspiciously like the patterns that grow on moldy bread.

According to impresario Steve Jobs [Feb 24], these new cases took 18 months to develop, and they weren't colors, but rather patterns molded "right into the plastic."

All told, the iMac G3 came in thirteen colors: Bondi Blue [Aug 15], blueberry, grape, tangerine, lime, strawberry, graphite, ruby, sage, indigo, snow, and the two new ones. Records later showed that of the fruity iMacs, blueberry accounted for close to 50% of all sales

Beautiful iMac G3s. Photo by Clicsouris. CC BY-SA 3.0

"Flower Power" and "Blue Dalmatian" didn't hang around long. Apple discontinued them in July.

Shadow Man 2: Grave Concerns

Feb. 22, 2002

Game maker Acclaim Entertainment announced that it planned to advertise "Shadow Man : 2econd Coming" in the UK by paying families for the right to place small billboards on their relatives' gravestones. The amount would be proportional to the gravestone's position and visibility in the cemetery. The company suggested that its scheme might "particularly interest poorer families."

The Church of England said that there was no possibility it would allow any of its graveyards to be used in such a fashion. A spokesman recalled that: "There

was enough fuss with plastic flowers in churchyards."

In the game, the player is a NYC cop with a "living dead" alter ego who must seek a confrontation with the devil with only magic and voodoo to help him. The 'storyline' was based on the Shadowman comic book series published by Valiant Comics.

Another controversial UK marketing campaign proposed by Acclaim in Sept. 2002 was a £6000 award to any parents that named their baby "Turok", to promote the release of the game, "Turok: Evolution".

After poor financial returns in 2003, Acclaim filed for Chapter 7 bankruptcy. The company had been formed by Greg Fischbach, Robert Holmes and Jim Scoroposki in March 1987 after they left Activision [April 25].

The company's name was chosen so it was alphabetically before Activision and Accolade (another company formed by ex-Activision employees). The founders of Activision [April 25] had used this same naming trick when they'd left Atari [June 27].