Nov. 28th

László Kozma

Born: Nov. 28, 1902;

Budapest, Hungary
Died: Nov. 9, 1983

Kozma was the designer of the first Hungarian digital computer, a relay-based machine called the MESZ-1. It was built at the University of Technology in Budapest, went into service in 1957, and remained operational until 1969. It used around 2,000 relays, calculated using 8 digit decimals, and had a storage capacity of 12 decimals; the first version wasn't a stored-program machine.

Roberto Busa

Born: Nov. 28, 1913;

Vicenza, Italy
Died: Aug. 9, 2011

Busa, a Jesuit priest, was one of the pioneers in using computers for linguistic and literary analysis. He was the editor of the *Index Thomisticus*, a complete index of the works of Saint Thomas Aquinas and some related authors, that eventually encompassed ten million words of Medieval Latin.

He began planning the index in 1946, and met with Thomas J. Watson Sr. [Feb 17] in 1949 to persuade IBM to support the massive endeavor. Before the meeting, Busa had learned of an internal IBM report that essentially said that what he wanted to do was impossible. As he waited outside Watson's office, Busa noticed an IBM poster bearing the motto, "The difficult we do right away; the impossible takes a little longer," which he took into the conclave.

Busa later recounted, "Sitting down in front of him and sensing the tremendous power of his mind, I was inspired to say: 'It is not right to say 'no' before you have tried.' I took out the poster and showed him his own slogan."

This approach worked, with Watson agreeing to help, provided that IBM didn't turn into "International Busa Machines."

Between 1949 and 1951, Busa's team digitized the third canto of Dante's "Inferno" [Jan 1] on 136 punch cards, and a large collection of hymns by Aquinas. Poetry and hymns were ideal choses during this "proof of concept" stage because a card could only fit eighty characters at a time.

In the end, the project took nearly thirty years to complete, with the *Index Thomisticus* growing to 56 printed volumes.

The project's success encouraged IBM to index Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* [July 00], and for even more literary shenanigans with computers, see [Feb 1; Aug 1; Aug 22; Sept 9; Sept 11; Oct 26; Dec 25].

MUMPS

Nov. 28, 1971

The Massachusetts General Hospital registered "MUMPS" as a trademark; not the illness but the "Massachusetts General Hospital Utility Multi-Programming System". It's also known by the even shorter name "M".

MUMPS was essentially a specialized database system and language first designed by Neil Pappalardo, Robert Greenes, and Curt Marble in 1966. In particular, it addressed the problem of how to store and process the multitude of tests for a single ICU patient, coming from multiple sources and measuring many different factors, often in real time. This data had to be accessed by dozens of medical staff, and the system might have to support hundreds or thousands of patients.

Even now, MUMPS remains a very popular tool in healthcare. For example, it was used to implement the Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (aka VistA) in the early 2000's, by far the largest medical system in the US, consisting of a suite of over 80 different modules.

CBI

Nov. 28, 1977

Erwin and Adelle Tomash incorporated the International Charles Babbage Society [Dec 26], which later became the Charles Babbage Institute (CBI) and the Charles Babbage Foundation (CBF), the advisory board for the CBI

In Sept. 1980, the CBI became a research center at the University of Minnesota, specializing in the history of information technology, particularly the history of software and networking since 1935. Of particular interest is its wonderfully extensive collection of oral history interviews, more than 400 in total, and its "Reprints in the History of Computing" series.

Vaporware Popularized

Nov. 28, 1983

"Vaporware" generally means hardware or software that has been announced, but that the developer has no intention of releasing any time soon, if ever [July 1; June 17].

The term may date from 1982 when Ann Winblad, president of "Open Systems Accounting Software", asked two Microsoft engineers, John Ulett and Mark Ursino, whether the development of Xenix [Aug 25] had stopped. One of them said, "Basically, it's vaporware".

Winblad mentioned the word to Esther Dyson [Sept 18], who used it in an article entitled "Vaporware" in today's issue of the "RELease 1.0" newsletter.

InfoWorld magazine editor Stewart Alsop also helped popularize the phrase by

awarding Bill Gates a "Golden Vaporware" trophy for Microsoft's prompt release of Windows 1.0 on [Nov 20] 1985, a mere two years after its announcement. At the presentation ceremony, the song “The Impossible Dream” played in the background.

Vaporware? Photo by Lindsay Fox. CC BY 3.0.

Related terms include: dribbleware (software released in small increments); slideware (products that exist only in a vendor’s slide show); bloatware (software that eats your computer); and nagware (software that keeps asking you for things).

ExecPC BBS

Nov. 28, 1983

The ExecPC BBS was launched at 2:00am by Bob Mahoney in his basement in Milwaukee. He had hooked a 1200-baud Hayes modem [Jan 30] between his phone and a IBM PC with a 30MB hard drive, the largest then available.

By the mid-1990’s, ExecPC had become one of the most popular BBS's in North America, well known for its extensive shareware archives, and competing against the likes of CompuServe [Sept 24] and Prodigy [Feb 13]. It now supported 280 phone lines, a then-staggering 300 GB of storage, and had over 80,000 subscribers

For more BBSes, see [Feb 16], [May 11], [Dec 10].

TRS-80 2000

Nov. 28, 1983

At COMDEX, RadioShack [Feb 2] introduced the Tandy TRS-80 Model 2000 (aka the Tandy 2000 or T-2000). It used the Intel 80186 chip (the one that came out between the 8086/8088 [July 1] and the 80286 [Feb 1]), and was the first RadioShack machine to employ an Intel processor.

The T-2000's big problem was that while it was BIOS-compatible with the IBM XT [March 8], that really didn't count for much. The truth was that most popular MS-DOS software of the time bypassed the BIOS and directly accessed the hardware. This was necessary to achieve decent performance, but it meant that those programs couldn’t run on the computer.

Not surprisingly, the T-2000 failed to gain much support, although after Tandy dropped support for it, a gallant band of brothers formed the “Tandy 2000 Orphans” to look after the machine.

Grand Theft Auto

Nov. 28, 1997

The first "Grand Theft Auto" (GTA) game was released by Rockstar Games after three-and-and-a half years in development by British game designers David Jones and Mike Dailly.

The game allows players to roam a fictional city, rewarding them with points for completing missions, and causing general mayhem along the way, such as the running down of pedestrians. The game's name is the US term for motor vehicle theft.

The game was soon being criticized for its “extreme violence”, and Brazil banned it outright. Despite this notoriety (or because of it), the game was a huge success.

During its development at Dundee-based DMA Design, many people were far from confident about GTA's prospects. In an informal staff survey about which of the current projects were most likely to succeed, "Grand Theft Auto" came last.

The game originated as a tech experiment by Mike Dailly to show how buildings could look in 3D from top down. He added dinosaurs to destroy the buildings, and little cars roaming the streets. Eventually, the game's emphasis shifted from the dinosaurs to the driving of the cars, with this game called "Race 'n' Chase".

"Grand Theft Auto III" (2001) was the first 3D version, and became a landmark game for the PlayStation 2 [March 2]. "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" is remembered for its “Hot Coffee” mini game [June 9].

The 1977 comedy movie, “Grand Theft Auto”, was directed by and starred Ron Howard. It was produced by Roger Corman who later sued and settled a lawsuit brought against Rockstar.

Cyber Monday

Nov. 28, 2005

“Black Friday” is the Friday after Thanksgiving that's typically the busiest shopping day of the year, at least in the US. In a similar vein, “Cyber Monday” is the first Monday after Thanksgiving that's become the busiest *online* shopping day. Depending on the year, the date can range between Nov. 26 to Dec. 2.

In 2019, "Cyber Monday" online sales grew to a record $9.4 billion. Clearly, as millions return to work following the tiring holiday weekend, their first priority is to use their office computer to shop for Christmas.

The term was coined on this day in 2005 by Ellen Davis and Scott Silverman at Shop.org in a press release.

However, both "Black Friday" and "Cyber Monday" have been easily beaten out of top spot in recent years by the Chinese shopping holiday known as

"Singles Day," which occurs on Nov. 11.

In 2020, Alibaba [April 4] shoppers spent more than 498 billion yuan ($75 billion) during the event.

WikiLeaks Leaks

Nov. 28, 2010

WikiLeaks [Oct 4] began to release over 250,000 diplomatic cables acquired from an anonymous source thought to be US Army intelligence analyst Chelsea (Bradley) Manning, who had been arrested in May.

The cables, 15,000 of which were classified “secret,” included calls for an attack on Iran, criticism of world leaders, and discussions of the Guantánamo Bay prison camp.

Several newspapers, including *The New York Times*, published highlights.

The Imitation Game Released

Nov. 28, 2014

“The Imitation Game” was a historical movie directed by Morten Tyldum, quite loosely based on the biography “Alan Turing: The Enigma” by Andrew Hodges. It starred Benedict Cumberbatch as Turing [June 23].

The film was criticized for its many inaccuracies. For example, there was no mention of Gordon Welchman [March 18], or the Polish work on the bomba [July 15], or the involvement of the British Tabulating Machine Company (BTM) [Feb 18]. The bombe’s ‘siblings’, the Heath Robinson [June 1] and the Colossus [Jan 18] were also absent.

The bombe shown in the movie was fairly close to the real one, having been based on a replica in the museum at Bletchley Park [Aug 15]. However, production designer Maria Djurkovic admitted that it had been made “a little more cinematic” by being made larger and having more of its internal mechanisms exposed. It also wasn't able to do any calculations. The movie version was subsequently put on display at Bletchley.

An accurate bombe replica, built by the "Phoenix" team led by John Harper (2008). Photo by Antoine Taveneaux. CC BY-SA 3.0.

On the day before the movie's release, *The New York Times* reprinted the 1942 crossword puzzle from *The Daily Telegraph* that had been used to recruit code breakers. Entrants who solved the reprinted puzzle could mail in their results for a chance to win a trip for two to London and a tour of Bletchley.

Benedict Cumberbatch and Alan Turing are related in real life. According to the family history site Ancestry.com, the two are 17th cousins with family dating back to the 14th century. Both are related to John Beaufort, the first Earl of Somerset, through Cumberbatch’s and Turing’s paternal lines.

A previous, more faithful, adaption based on Hodges' biography is the play “Breaking the Code” [Oct 21].