

Sept. 7th

## David Packard

**Born: Sept. 7, 1912;**

Pueblo, Colorado

Died: March 26, 1996

Packard co-founded Hewlett-Packard (HP) [Jan 1] with William Hewlett [May 20] in 1939, initially in Packard's garage at 367 Addison Ave in Palo Alto [May 17]. Their first employee was Lucile Salter, who Packard had married the previous year.

Aside from being skilled engineer, Packard was an expert administrator, and devised the "HP Way" [Sept 6] management philosophy. For example, when HP's senior managers traveled to NYC in 1961 to celebrate the listing of the company on the stock exchange, Packard insisted they take the subway instead of taxis to reach Wall Street from their hotel. Although more cost-effective, the high-powered executives made the wrong connection at Times Square, and got lost.



David Packard. Photo by the Department of Defense Historical Office Public Affairs.

Packard served as US Deputy Secretary of Defense from 1969–1971 during the Nixon administration, which prompted him to put all of his HP stock into a trust to avoid any possible conflicts of interest. All dividends were also donated to charity.

He was an avid outdoorsman who enjoyed hunting and fishing, and a hands-on manager at the ranches he owned with Hewlett in California and Idaho. For instance, he'd often operate a bulldozer himself during construction or clearing operations.

The banker David Rockefeller called him "a brilliant scientist, an innovative businessman and an incredibly generous and tolerant human being".

In 1977, the oil tanker, *The David Packard*, was named in his honor.

## Christopher Null

**Born: Sept. 7, 1971;**

Houston, Texas

Null is a writer, film critic, and columnist, with a special interest in media, business, and technology.

In Nov. 2015, he wrote an opinion piece, "Hello, I'm Mr. Null" for *Wired* magazine [Jan 2] in which he pointed out some of the drawbacks of his lastname in the age of computing. They typically arise because null is a reserved value in many programming languages, and many applications also use null to denote that a data field is empty. For example, he's been trying to persuade Bank of America for years to accept his null@nullmedia.com as a mailbox name.

In response, he's developed a number of workarounds, including adding a full stop:

"Null." But Null also mentions that there's a certain caché associated with his name when you're a technology journalist, as perhaps John Dvorak might agree [Sept 17; Dec 26].

Tony Hoare [Jan 11] once stated that his invention of the null reference in ALGOL-W was his "billion-dollar mistake".

## ILLIAC IV

**Sept. 7, 1981**

Dan Slotnick's [Nov 12] ILLIAC IV was one of the first massively parallel computers (possessing up to 256 processors), based around a SIMD (Single Instruction, Multiple Data stream) array processor. Nevertheless, its benchmark speeds were less than inspiring, although the machine's architectural problems helped promote research into parallel computing.

Most other supercomputers of the era took a different approach to hardware, employing a single very high speed vector processor. The classic example of that design was the Cray-1 [March 4]. Indeed, the problems with the ILLIAC IV's massively parallel design led Seymour Cray [Sept 28] to joke, "If you were plowing a field, which would you rather use? Two strong oxen or 1024 chickens?"

The University of Illinois signed the contract to build the ILLIAC IV for DARPA [Feb 7] in 1964, and the first design was completed in 1966. After several delays, including a day of "Illiaction" [May 9], the computer was delivered to NASA's Ames Research Center in Sept. 1971.

The system proved rather buggy, and was only certified as reliable in 1975 when it could run continuously for 60 hours per week between faults. During that November, it was connected to the ARPANet [July 29], becoming the first network-available supercomputer, beating the Cray-1's linkup by 12 months.

The ILLIAC IV was shut down on this day in 1981 after a decade's worth of service.

## Google Incorporated Sept. 7, 1998

Although Larry Page [March 26] and Sergey Brin [Aug 21] filed incorporation papers for Google on Friday, Sept 4, the company marks this day as its official incorporation date. To further confuse matters, the eponymous search engine [Aug 29] was only renamed Google from BackRub on [Sept 15].

The incorporation had been prompted by the arrival of funding in August in the form of \$100,000 from Andy Bechtolsheim [Sept 30], co-founder of Sun Microsystems.

The company was initially based in Susan Wojcicki's [July 5] garage at 232 Santa Margarita Ave, Menlo Park. She charged Page and Brin a rent of \$1,700 a month, and also took a security deposit just in case. Google now owns the house, and there's a virtual tour of "Susan's Garage," available in Google Maps [Feb 8].

Google's big publicity coup came a few months later, in Dec. 1998, when *PC Magazine* included it as one of its "Top 100 Web Sites for 1998". It was listed in the search engines section, along with AltaVista [Dec 15], HotBot [Oct 27], MetaCrawler, and Northern Light, labeled as "academic research", with the URL [google.stanford.edu](http://google.stanford.edu)

In Feb. 2016, news leaked that Google was offering its employees free condoms in their campus health center in a range of blue, red, green, and yellow, with their trademark 'I'm Feeling Lucky!' printed on them. It appears that this service has been up and running for at least six years. Also, Sergey Brin apparently once suggested that the company use its massively enlarged marketing budget to give out free, branded condoms to high school students.

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## SegaNet Sept. 7, 2000

Sega launched the SegaNet gaming network to offer online play for Dreamcast consoles [Nov 27] through the device's built-in 56k modem. Unlike a standard ISP, the game servers were directly linked to SegaNet's internal network, providing faster access and gameplay.

Just over a month after launch, the network could boast of 1.55 million registered users, including 750,000 in Japan, 400,000 in North America, and 400,000 in Europe. By comparison, Xbox Live, which launched on [Nov 14] 2002, took nearly two years to reach 1 million.

However, due to pressure from the PlayStation 2 [March 4] and the announcements of the Xbox [Nov 15] and GameCube [Sept 14], sales of the Dreamcast dropped. After a change of management at Sega, the Dreamcast was discontinued on March 31, 2001, and in July Sega announced that SegaNet would be closed down. This marked Sega's withdrawal from the console business and its restructuring to become a third-party game publisher.

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## The Lindbergh Operation Sept. 7, 2001

The "Lindbergh Operation" was the first surgical procedure performed by a robot, a ZEUS Robotic Surgical System, designed by Computer Motion. The 45-minute operation was to remove a gallbladder, and took place in a hospital in Strasbourg, France.

However, the system was controlled by Doctor Jacques Marescaux and his team from IRCAD (Institute for Research into Cancer of the Digestive System), a french institution, but in this case they were based in New York.

The two locations, on either side of the Atlantic, was the reason for using Charles Lindbergh's name. (He was the first person to fly solo across the Atlantic on May 20-21, 1927.)

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## iPod Nano Sept. 7, 2005

At a press conference called to unveil the Motorola Rokr, Apple surprised the media by discontinuing the iPod [Oct 23] Mini line, and announcing the iPod Nano. With his usual pizzazz, Steve Jobs [Feb 24] did this by pointing to the small watch pocket in his jeans and asking, "Ever wonder what this pocket is for?"



iPod Nano in its Dock. Photo by Keeleysam. CC BY-SA 3.0.

The Nano combined the flash memory of the iPod Shuffle with the controls and interface of the original iPod. The use of flash instead of a hard drive allowed for a much smaller form factor (62% smaller), increased reliability, and improved battery life. The device could also display color photographs.

The Nano proved extremely popular, with 1 million units sold in its first 17 days.

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## Yahoo! in China Sept. 7, 2005

Prev: [Aug 11] Next: [May 3]

In June 2005, Shi Tao, a mainland Chinese journalist, was sentenced to ten years in jail for sending a Communist Party document about restrictions on news coverage of

the Tiananmen Square massacre anniversary to an overseas Chinese democracy group. Shi had taken precautions, using a Yahoo! [April 12] Mail account to post the document anonymously, but had still been tracked down.

On this day, it was reported that Yahoo! China had helped in Shi's arrest by providing government officials with his personal details. Yahoo! quickly released a statement explaining that they had only been following Chinese laws.

Incidentally, on [Aug 11], Yahoo! had been allowed to acquire a 30% share in Alibaba.com [April 4] for \$1 billion, and Alibaba had taken over the operation of Yahoo! China.

Two years later, in August 2007, Yahoo's co-founder, Jerry Yang [Nov 6], appeared before the House Foreign Affairs Committee in Washington because of the company's role in Shi's arrest, where he expressed sincere remorse for the company's actions. Chairman Tom Lantos (Democrat) noted that "Much of this testimony reveals that while technologically and financially you are giants, morally you are pygmies".

Yahoo! later settled a lawsuit by Shi's family out of court, and pledged to reform its practices. In August 2013, Yahoo! closed its email service in China and recommended users switch to a service run by Alibaba.

Shi Tao was released on Sept. 5, 2013, having spent 8 years and 6 months in prison.

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## Spore Released Sept. 7, 2008

The Spore simulation game, designed by Will Wright [Jan 20], allows players to guide the evolution of a virtual species from microscopic organisms to an intelligent society capable of space travel.

Evolutionary biologists, Thomas Near and Thomas Prum,

reported that Spore was fun to play, admired its mission to get people to think about evolution, but consider the game's evolutionary mechanisms to be "severely messed up."

However, the game drew ire because of its use of SecuROM copy protection, which required a user to authenticate the game at installation time, and then again every ten days. Access to the Internet returned further authentication steps.

Naturally, several file-sharing communities started spreading cracked versions of the game, and the title soon became the most pirated of 2008. In December, Electronic Arts [May 27] appeared to concede defeat by beginning to sell Spore minus SecuROM.

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