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Richard E. Sprague

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On Line—Real Time Computer Conference

by **Richard E. Sprague**

ALL THE LEADING COMPUTER MANUFACTURERS were contacted and invited to make presentations of their existing systems and their long- and short-range plans for entering the On Line—Real Time field at a seminar held October 3-7 by the firm's Computer Systems Department. The Department believes these systems are becoming more and more important and held the seminar to test this belief.

Five manufacturers—IBM, Remington Rand, RCA NCR and Tele-register—agreed to participate. The American Telephone & Telegraph Company was also invited, since communications facilities play a significant role in any On Line system. Presentations were made by the engineering or product planning departments of the companies, so our computer specialists learned what to expect directly from the men designing the equipment.

The meeting was chaired by Richard E. Sprague, Director of the Computer Systems Department, and was attended by Henry Sherwood, Manager—Retail Data Processing; Jess Lynch, Senior Consultant—Financial Institutions Data Processing; William Power and Robert Bozeman, Retail Data Processing; Robert McClendon, Associate Consultant—Manufacturing Data Processing; and Richmond Laux, Detroit area Junior Consultant, all representing the Computer Systems Department.

Also present were Dennis Mulvihill, Management Sciences Representative—Detroit area; Roger Crane, Principal in Charge—Management Sciences Department; Dennis Price, representing the Operations Research Department; Joseph Buchan, Senior Consultant—Technical Training and Communication; and Donald Wood (Detroit), Leo Feltz (San Francisco) and James Bresnahan (Dayton), all representing Management Services in their respective offices.

What does On Line — Real Time mean?

For the benefit of the layman, an On Line—Real Time system is one in which a central data processor is connected by cable or by communications lines to a large number of data-originating or display devices usually in widely dispersed geographic locations. The input devices generate information to be sent to the data processor, where an answer is created and sent back to the same input point, usually in a short space of time.

“Real Time” means that the responses received at the remote points are fast enough to match the real world time scale required. For instance, if people are waiting at a ticket window, the real time scale for the responses will be made in a few seconds, to produce answers fast enough to issue tickets.

Typical examples of such systems now in operation are automatic reservations systems, the input devices of which are seen in Sheraton Hotels and at various airline counters. Savings banks will soon have systems operating where the teller's window machine is connected directly to a computer.

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Kooperativa Forbundet—As a result of contacts made by Henry Sherwood and Roger Crane over the last eighteen months, culminating in Roger Crane's trip to Stockholm last September, a project with the Swedish Kooperativa Forbundet (KF) is scheduled to begin this February. KF is a very large cooperative of growers, manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers in Sweden. Dr. George O'Brien is supervising the project, which is expected to last at least a year and will necessitate David Fleisher's going to Sweden for six to eighteen months. Mr. Fleisher will help KF personnel install Selective Inventory Management in several departments of their retail stores and possibly in their food stores.

Operations Research Society of America—Dr. George O'Brien was general chairman of the 18th National Operations Research Society of America meeting held in Detroit from October 10-12. TRB&S people helping Dr. O'Brien were Albert Arcus, Financial Committee Chairman; Barbara Dow, Entertainment Committee Chairman; Richard Trueman, who chaired the session on Business Games and Simulation; and Roger R. Crane, Master of Ceremonies for the banquet.