YESTERDAYS NEWS

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YESTERDAYS FEST WESTS

FEST WEST 86 - March 1-2 1986, Los Angeles, CA.
Hosts: LA 99ERS

FEST WEST 87 - May 16-17 1987, Los Angeles, CA.
Hosts: LA 99ERS

FEST WEST 88 - February 27-28 1988, Las Vegas, NV.
Hosts: Southern Nevada User Group (SNUG)

FEST WEST 89 - February 18-19 1989, San Diego, CA.
Hosts: Southern California Computer Group (SCCG)

FEST WEST 90 - February 17-18 1990, Tucson, AZ.
Hosts: Southwest Ninety-Niners

FEST WEST 91 - February 16-17 1991, Anaheim, CA.
Hosts: User Group of Orange County (UGOC)

FEST WEST 92 - February 15-16 1992, Phoenix, AZ.
Hosts: Valley Of The Sun TI99/ERS (VAST)

FEST WEST 93 - February 13-14 1993, Salt Lake City, UT.
Co-Hosts: Ogden TI-99/4A User Group
The Salt Lake and Valley 99ER USER GROUP (TI SLAVES)

FEST WEST 94 - February 19-20 1994, Tucson, AZ.
Hosts: Southwest Ninety-Niners

FEST WEST 95 - February 18 1995, San Diego, CA.
Hosts: Southern California Computer Group(SCCG)

FEST WEST 96 - February 17 1996, Tucson, AZ.
Hosts: Southwest Ninety-Niners

FEST WEST 97 - April 5 1997, San Jose, CA.
Hosts: South Bay TI User Group (SBTIUG).

FEST WEST 98 - February 14 1998 Lubbock,TX
Hosts: Southwest Ninety-Niners of Tucson,AZ.

Editors Note - I was co-chairman for the FEST WEST that VAST hosted in February 1992. I also was able to attend the FEST WEST that the Southwest Ninety-Niners hosted in February of 1994. I wish there were more TI-99/4A users here in Arizona. I'd love to try and put together another Fest in Phoenix. I've always had a strong desire to attend the Chicago Faire as well.

I originally ran this news item in the Volume 12 Number 6 (June 1996) issue of the VAST News newsletter.

THE 99/**4** HOME COMPUTER
DESCRIPTION OF AN ANTIQUE
BY CHARLES GOOD
CONTINUED FROM YESTERDAYS NEWS VOL. 1, NO. 1

The 4A gets its "A" from the fact that it has a 9918A video processor, whereas the 99/4 has a 9918 video processor. The 9918A has bit map mode, which is not found on the 9918 processor. This means that any software that uses bit map mode will not run on the 99/4. Other differences between the 99/4 and 99/4A (such as the "4"s lack of an XOP assembly directive) are referenced in the index of the Editor/Assembler manual (p .456) under the heading "Computer differences".

In general, all software written for the "4" will run on the 4A. Some complicated routines on the 4A were required to achieve this compatibility. The "4" has 256 bytes more free memory in TI BASIC than the 4A, so some BASIC software written on a "4" may not work on an unexpanded 4A. Lots of assembly or GPL software written for the 4A will NOT work on the "4", and there is no easy way to upgrade a "4" to a 4A.

The Mini Memory module and its line by line assembler, and the E/A module and its editor and assembler work OK on the "4". A partial list of "won't work on the 99/4" software includes TI-Writer, Multiplan, Funnelweb v4.x, the LINES program that comes with the Mini Memory module, all the Milton Bradley game modules that were created to accompany the MBX system, Word Invasion, Parsec, Story Machine, Alpiner, Dragon Mix, and Word Radar.

Most of these modules and the LINES program are probably incompatible because they use bit map mode. There are probably other reasons for the incompatibility of Multiplan, TI-Writer, and Funnelweb. Even the non-editor parts of Funnelweb won't work in the "4". When you boot Funnelweb into the "4" using the extended basic module, the title screen shows blanks where there should be lower case letters. You can then go to Funnelweb's extended basic user list, but here the "4" locks up. You can't boot any software from the XB user list.

THE KLUDGY 99/4 KEYBOARD

After playing around with my "4" for a couple of months, I am forced to agree with the statement made in an accompanying FORTUNE magazine article. The 99/4 is a real dog, mainly because of its keyboard. There are 41 "chicklet" style keys, each slightly contoured and shaped like a narrow rectangle. The 4A keyboard has 48 keys. Although each 99/4 key depresses separately, the keys are not what experienced users would call "full travel". There is no tactile response, no click, before the keys suddenly bottom out at the end of their downward travel.

Non-alphanumeric keys include one (and only one) SHIFT, an ENTER, SPACE bar, and a SPACE key immediately to the left of the "A" key. Alpha keys always produce upper case letters, so the SHIFT key is not used as often as it is on the 99/4A. There is no ALPHA LOCK, FCTN, or CTRL keys on the "4". The "4"s SPACE key and bar do exactly the same thing, leave a blank space. I can see no reason at all for this space KEY, in addition to the normally positioned space bar. There are ASCII characters built into the 99/4 console that are not implemented on its limited keyboard, yet there is this stupid extra space key.

Touch typing on the 99/4 is difficult. The keys are spread apart the same distan ce as on the familiar 99/4A keyboard, so it is possible to get all your fingers at once onto the keys. But the small vertical size of the keys and their lack of tactile feel makes touch typing difficult. The small size and minimal contour of the "4"s keys makes it difficult for a touch typist to find by feel and seat his or her fingers in the center of the desired keys as the fingers move blindly around the keyboard. The fully contoured much larger keys of the 4A (larger because there is less space between keys) makes touch typing much easier. A special problem to experienced touch ypists is the lack of any key to the right of the "L". This means there is no "home" key for the little finger of the right hand to touch, and this will drive most touch typists crazy.

Frequently, when I try to type on my "4" I end up accidently moving my fingers over one key to the left on the home key row so that all ten fingers have something to touch. My left hand pinky finger is then on the useless SPACE key instead of on the "A" where it should be. Then I type rtow fevfw. TI recognized this problem. The only application software written for the 99/A that is likely to require touch typing, is the Terminal Emulator II, it has a keyboard overlay with a raised area creating a fake key for the right hand's little finger.

TI provided a series of overlays specifically for use with the 99/4 and not usable with the 4A. Some overlays were packaged with the "4" and others were available with specific command modules. Because of the narrow vertical size of each key there is enough room between rows of keys on the "4" to display a text prompt immediately above ANY key, not just above the numeric keys as is the case with the 4A. The overlays have text prompts for special keypresses, and cover the entire "4" keyboard , with the keys sticking up through holes in the overlay.

Special keypresses usually involve using the SHIFT key in combination with a letter key. One overlay packaged with the "4" shows the editing keys used in BASIC.

SHIFT/Q=QUIT.
SHIFT/W=BEGIN.
SHIFT/ESDX=ARROWS.
SHIFT/R=REDO.
SHIFT/T=ERASE.
SHIFT/A=AID.

SHIFT/F=DELETE.
SHIFT/G=INSERT.
SHIFT/Z=BACK.
SHIFT/C=CLEAR.
SHIFT/V=PROCEED.

There is nothing intuitive about some of these Keypresses (why not SHIFT/B instead of /Z for bacK), so the overlay is really needed. Another overlay pacKaged with the "4" shows the split Keyboard Keys that can be used with some games to simulate the 8 positions of joysticKs #1 and #2.

In addition to the overlays pacKaged with the computer, I have seen overlays designed for use with the following command modules: Terminal emulator I, Terminal emulator II, Video graphs (P HM3005), and Video Chess. There may be other overlays I havn't seen.

One of the reasons I give the 99/4 my "real dog" rating is the uncontrollable multiple repeat of the Keys on my "4"s Keyboard. This maKes it almost impossible to do any useful typing, touch or hunt and pecK, on my "4". Autorepeat of all Keys at rate of 12 characters per second after a 1 second delay is listed as a NEW feature of the 99/4A (99ER MAGAZINE, Vol 1 #2, July/August 1981, p.48). Autorepeat is NOT described in TI literature as a feature of the "4". On my "4" any of the Keys are liKely to repeat INSTANTLY. When you depress a "4" Key, the Keypress registers in the memory of the computer at a point about 1/2 way down the travel of the Key. There is no tactile response that this has occured. The only thing your finger feels during a Keypress is the sudden stop when the Key bottoms out. If the Key hovers in this "1/2 way down" region you get mmmultiiiplle displays of theee Keeey on the scrrreennn. Try as I might, I can't seem to avoid this. My "4"s Keyboard is very sensitive. Other experienced 4A users who have tried my "4" all have the same problem. Having to use bacKspace (SHIFT/S) and delete (SHIFT/F) after every 6-10 KeystroKes gets old really fast. It as been suggested to me that this problem may be related to the ageing of my "4" . The condition may not have existed when my "4" was built. One collector of TI computer products told me, "I had a 99/4 that did that. I got rid of it and replaced it with a 99/4 that still worKs fine."

ONLY UPPER CASE LETTERS

No Keypress on the "4" Keyboard will give ASCII codes 97-122, the lower case letters. Everything you type is in upper case, and this means you only use the SHIFT Key in routine typing to shift the numeric Keys and display !@@#$%^&&*(). The 99/4 uses a 5x6 pixel grid to display upper case letters. The 99/4A uses a 5x7 grid to display both upper case and lower case text. If you load into the "4" BASIC software written on a 4A that includes lower case text, the program seems to worK OK, but no lowercase letters are displayed on screen.

THE EQUATION CALCULATOR

When you PRESS ANY KEY TO CONTINUE from the color bar powerup screen of the "4", you get a menu with three choices.

PRESS
1 FOR TI BASIC,
2 FOR EQUATION CALCULATOR,
3 FOR TITLE OF COMMAND MODULE.

The EQUATION CALCULATOR is a way of using the "4" in mathematical calculations without having to write a BASIC program to do the calculations. You can do simple arithmetic, and you can also use exponential numbers, PI, SQR, exponents, SIN, COS, TAN, and ATN in your calculations. Everything that can be done using EQUIATION CALCULATOR can also be done using a TI BASIC program, or directly from BASIC command mode. The EQUATION CALCULATOR screen is divided into three sections. The bottom section is where you do your calculating. You can, for example, type in a simple calculation such as 1567+56.98-145+(12/98), press <enter>, and display the answer. To do the same thing in BASIC command mode, you would have to type PRINT before you typed the numbers of the calculation. A single calculation is limited to 28 characters (one line of text).

You can define variables such as LENGTH=60, press the up arrow, and have this variable stored in memory and permanently displayed in the upper third of the EQUATION CALCULATOR screen. You can display up to 6 variable names and their current values on screen in this way and not have to worry about the display scrolling off the top of the screen. You can do the same thing in BASIC command mode by pressing <enter> after typing LENGTH=60. The value of LENGTH would be stored in the computer's memory, but it would only remain on screen until it scrolled off the top due to subsequent entrys .

You can also define an equation such as PERIMETER=2*LENGTH+2*WIDTH and store this equation in the middle part of the EQUATION CALCULATOR screen. You can then define the values of the variables LENGTH and WIDTH, use the down arrow to bring he equation into the bottom worK area of the EQUATION CALCULATOR screen, press <enter> and display the current value of PERIMETER. You can then redefine LENGTH and/or WIDTH, and reuse the equation to calculate the new value of PERIMETER. You can also store equations for repeated use in a BASIC program, although you cannot store such an equation in memory in BASIC command mode. In command mode you would have to retype the equation each time.

REVIEWED

From Vol 1,No 1 issue of Home Computer Compendium
aKa MICROPENDIUM

B-1 Nuclear Bomber

This game's right on target by John Koloen

B-1 Nuclear Bomber is the first computer game translated into TI Basic by the Avalon Hill Game. Microcomputer Games is the company's computer games division .

The game is a text-only simulation programmed in Basic. I was fascinated by the challenge of trying to penetrate a web of Soviet defenses to drop a thermonuclear weapon on a major population center. All considerations aside – this is a game, after all – things seem to happen so fast I didn't notice that it wasn't written in Extended Basic. Incidentally, it runs perfectly well in Extended Basic.

Performance: There are no preliminaries in this game. The first thing you see is a message indicating war has begun and you are to fly your B-1 Bomber from Thule AFB to a target in the Soviet Union. You are told what your primary target is and then given a "fail-safe" code to arm your one megaton nuclear warhead.

You control your mission through four types of commands: flight control, navigation, combat and bombing. Flight commands allow you to change course or altitude as well as the distance you fly on any heading. Navigation commands allow you to determine what course to set to reach a particular target and lets you checK the status of your mission. You can also use radar and use the search command to locate Soviet defense complexes in your flight path. Combat commands allow you to fight off surface-to-air missiles and MIGs that are launched against you. You may use electronic countermeasures, taKe evasive action or fire Phoenix missiles. (Phoenix is spelled "Pheonix" in several places in the program and missile is spelled "missle" throughout.) You have six of them. Bombing commands are used only when you've reached a target, whether primary or secondary. I've not been able to bomb a primary target and return safely to the base. I reached the base once only to find out that the crew had died of radiation poisoning from a nuclear airburst. Such are the wages of war. There are 20 Soviet defense complexes from which SAMs and MIGs are launched to intercept you. Once they come within range of the Phoenix missile you may destroy them. There may be six or more SAMs and MIGs going after you at any one time after penetrating into the interior of the country so you must be constantly monitoring your situation.

Your computer Keeps tracK of enemy contacts by displaying the type of aircraft or missile launched against and the time, in seconds, before it will hit your plane.

This summary appears frequently and you may call it up by checKing your status. The status command lets you Know how much fuel you've got left, your altitude, your course and similar data. All of these displays are in text.

Regardless of whether you drop your bomb on a primary or secondary target, the soviet defenses will continue to fire on your plane until you've left Soviet airspace.

Ease of Use: Using only Keyboard input, the game relies on two-letter commands. "ST", for example, is the status command. "EC" represents the electronic countermeasures command. You may enter the entire word , but the first two letters is all the computer "reads." The game seems to be crash-proof. A 12-year-old who played it found no trouble in getting used to the command structure. An eight-year-old, however, was less than impressed. The absence of graphics, predictably, disturbed him.

REPORT CARD

PERFORMANCE A	DOCUMENTATION A	FINAL GRADE A-
EASE OF USE A	VALUE B	

TI99/4 CONTINUES

I don't thinK EQUATION CALCULATOR is very useful. Apparently TI didn't either, because they dropped it when the 4A was released. From BASIC (a program or from command mode) you can do all the same things, and more. The main limitation of EQUATION CALCULATOR is the 28 character size of a formula or chain calculation. The most common routine calculating I do on my 99/4A is to balance my checKbooK. I enter BASIC command mode and type PRINT, followed by my initial banK balance, followed by all my subsequent withdrawals (as minus numbers) and deposits (as positive numbers). Before I press <enter> to display my balance I can checK the screen to see that all the numbers in the calculation are typed correctly and use INSERT or DELETE to correct mistaKes. Such a long chain calculation requires several lines on the screen to display all the digits before pressing <enter>. TI BASIC command mode gives me 4 lines. EXTENDED ASIC command mode gives me 5 lines. EQUATION CALCULATOR allows me only one line of digits.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

When it was released in 1979 the 99/4 was the only consumer device that could really be called a "Home Computer". It was the first to utilize cartridge software . Its speech synthesis was, and still is, unequaled. It was easy to use, easy to program in BASIC, and it was powerful. Its high price was probably the major reason for its initially limited sales. Its rotten Keyboard didn't help either. I'm sure glad we now have the 99/4A. The 4A is much superior to the "4".

B1 CONTINUES

DOCUMENTATION: The game comes with an eight-page manual that includes a map of the Soviet Union showing the locations of all targets and defense complexes. The cassette includes versions of the game for the TI-99/4 & 4A, TRS-80 Model I/III and the Timex-Sinclair microcomputers. It comes in a large attractive box. Included in the box is a catalog of Avalon Hill games.

VALUE: I enjoyed playing this game, though I'm not sure it's worth $16.00. However, it may be that that's what you'll have to pay for games from major game companies. Distribution costs are high and the flashy (read expensive) packaging is necessary to attract the consumer's eye. Nonetheless, I hope Avalon Hill is successful with this game. This company has a raft of simulation games for other computers that I'd like to see on TI a screen, including NuKewar, Legionnaire,Computer Diplomacy, TanKtics and Telengard. I hope this is the start of something very good. -J.K.

From **MICRO**PENDIUM July 1991

THE ACCELERATOR

Accelerator priced at $250

The 99105 accelerator for the TI-99/4A manufactured by Bud Mills Services was scheduled to be available to end users in late July, according to Bud Mills. The device is also available from OPA.

The card, priced at $250, dramatically increases the power of the TI. The standard TI uses a 9900 chip with a clock speed of 3.3 MHz. The 99105 upgrade operates at a clock speed of 12 MHz. The upgrade is installed in the TI console and requires no soldering.

According to its designer, Don O'Neil, the 99105 accelerator increases the speed of the TI by a factor 5. This improvement increases to a 10-fold gain in speed when used with a 16-bit RAM card that fits in the Peripheral Expansion Box.

According to O'Neil, the accelerator is invisible to the TI system.

EDITORS NOTE - IT'S A SHAME THIS DEVICE NEVER MADE IT TO MARKET. I HAVE MODIFIED BOTH OF THE TI CONSOLES THAT I CURRENTLY USE (A BLACK/SILVER & A BEIGE) WITH THE "TURBO" CRYSTAL MODIFICATION. THIS MODIFICATION IS SAID TO SPEED A CONSOLE UP BY 20 PERCENT. I CAN ONLY IMAGINE A 5 TIMES SPEED INCREASE. I DO NOT THINK A CONSOLE EQUIPPED WITH AN ACCELERATOR COULD BE USED WITH GAMES HOWEVER. -RR

NATIONAL FUN & GAMES

GAME TITLE	SCORE	JOYSTICK JOCKEY	TI CLUB	DATE
BACKSTEINE	155900	STEVEN JAKABFY	OSHTI UG	09/95
BIGFOOT	290500	DAVID HANDLE	OZARK 99	01/95
BLASTO	44880	MIKE CENDROWSKI	W/PENN 99	11/94
BREAKTHROUGH	1850	RAY FRANTZ	VAST	11/93
BURGER BUILDR	1000000	ELEANOR ZIC	W/PENN 99	03/94
BURGERTIME	82600	MICKEY CENDROWSKI	W/PENN 99	09/85
CAR WARS	6050	JIM WAYNE	VAST	11/93
CENTIPEDE	301930	MICKEY CENDROWSKI	W/PENN 99	01/87
COLORS	1000000	HARRY HOFFMAN	CLEVELAND	03/95
DIG DUG	262460	FRANK ZIC	W/PENN 99	03/94
ENTRAPMENT	3668	FRANK ZIC	W/PENN 99	11/93
HOPPER	4031826	TOM BEERSMAN	OZARK 99	06/94
HUSTLE	WON 52	ELEANOR ZIC	W/PENN 99	03/94
JAWBREAKER	15025	JIM WAYNE	VAST	11/93
JUMPY	131900	ELEANOR ZIC	W/PENN 99	03/94
MICRO PINBALL	1776500	NORM ROKKE	W/PENN 99	05/87
MIDNITE MASON	27100	FRANK ZIC	W/PENN 99	11/93
MINEFIELD (A)	0:00:01	NORM ROKKE	W/PENN 99	08/94
MINEFIELD (B)	0:00:05	NORM ROKKE	W/PENN 99	08/94
MINEFIELD (C)	0:00:12	NORM ROKKE	W/PENN 99	08/94
MINEFIELD (D)	0:00:31	NORM ROKKE	W/PENN 99	08/94
MINEFIELD (E)	0:00:47	NORM ROKKE	W/PENN 99	08/94
MINEFIELD (F)	0:01:27	NORM ROKKE	W/PENN 99	08/94
MINEFIELD (G)	0:02:26	NORM ROKKE	W/PENN 99	08/94
MINEFIELD (H)	0:02:36	NORM ROKKE	W/PENN 99	08/94
MINEFIELD (I)	0:03:56	NORM ROKKE	W/PENN 99	08/94
MINEFIELD (J)	0:04:27	NORM ROKKE	W/PENN 99	08/94
MOON PATROL	73150	MIKE SEALY	W/PENN 99	03/94
MUNCHMAN	202170	PAUL BROCK SR.	W/PENN 99	09/87
PACMAN	153000	GARY TAYLOR	W/PENN 99	09/87
PARSEC	47300	MICKEY CENDROWSKI	W/PENN 99	09/87
PKR SOLITAIRE	3790	JACKIE REMENSKI	VAST	11/93
POLE POSITION	57700	MICKEY CENDROWSKI	W/PENN 99	12/94
SUPER YAHTZEE	615	JACKIE REES	VAST	11/93
THE ATTACK	31800	JIM WAYNE	VAST	11/93
TI INVADERS	15930	PAUL BROCK SR.	W/PENN 99	09/87
TI TRIS	2208	FRANK ZIC	W/PENN 99	11/93
TOMBSTNE CITY	154400	DANNY MCGUIRE	OZARK 99	11/94
TRN SOLITAIRE	351	CAROL HOFFMAN	CLEVELAND	03/95
TREASURE ISLE	37800	MIKE CENDROWSKI	W/PENN 99	10/94
TRIS (ASGARD)	8393	MICKEY CENDROWSKI	W/PENN 99	12/94

EDITORS NOTE - THIS WAS THE LAST GROUP OF SCORES THAT I HAD RAN IN THE DECEMBER 1996 (VOL 12, NO 12) ISSUE OF VAST NEWS. I FIGURED I'D PUBLISH IT A COUPLE MORES TIMES IN CASE ANY READER WANTS TO POST A BETTER SCORE OR HAS A GAME THEY PLAY THAT'S NOT ON THE ABOVE LIST. -RR