



ROBOT ACCOUNTANT

This alphabetical accounting machine prints in convenient tabulated form the information about Army supplies. Using such electrical robots as this, the U. S. Quartermaster Corps is speeding the paper work needed to equip an army of 1,500,000 men, which may triple in a few years.

ENGINEERING

Robots Speed U.S. Army's Count of Its Many Supplies

Each Quartermaster Supply Depot Keeps Punch Card Record Showing State of All Its Supplies on Hand

ROBOT soldiers with mechanical brains are now counting the Army's supplies.

They count at such untiring speed that the Quartermaster Corps now knows every week exactly how many items are on hand from boats to boots and parachutists' helmets to skis. What is more, the Corps also is aware of how many of everything each Army unit expects to need, sooner or later.

The robots are credited with a great victory over red tape, by tremendously speeding up the paper work involved in supplying over a million men with clothing, shelter and transportation.

Squads of electrical machines are the mechanical troops drafted for this new service. The robot squads are on duty at the War Department in Washington and at 15 supply depots.

Number and types of machines assigned to different depots vary, according to the job. A five-machine unit consisting of card punches, mechanical multipliers, and accounting devices can do in one day what 15 men with 15 pencils would require a week to turn out.

Acting as a sort of arithmetical sergeant major, a human attendant gives the machines orders by simply plugging in electric cords and arranging cards according to the type of punching, writing, or figuring desired.

By the new system, each of the 15 Quartermaster supply depots keep a punch card record showing the state of its supplies. An exact copy speeds every week to Washington, where all cards are called in. Washington then gets out a weekly report covering 60,000 items that the Army Quartermaster Corps sup-

plies. The machines are not being used to count food stores.

Operated by one girl, a card punching machine can produce 2,000 cards a day. A given card, for example, might show by variously spaced holes how many enlisted men's web-waisted belts are needed at a new Army cantonment.

Taking these punched cards, all of which carry information about supply requirements, a multiplying punch machine dashes off about 15,000 cards a day, and computes a month's requirements for any Army unit. Whether the unit is a section of 12 men or a field Army with 52,938 individuals, the multiplier carries on.

So "bright" are the Army's robot multipliers that they can multiply by a factor in four decimal places and get the answer in whole numbers, dropping all fractions of less than one-half and picking up all fractions of one-half or over, which gives the next number.

An alphabetical interpreter then takes the information from the punched holes and converts it into printed lines of words across the top of the cards. The machine interprets about 15,000 cards a day.

Thus far, the Army's robot accountants have worked only on quantities of items. Later they may take over a job now done by human brains—figuring the weight and cubic space that items occupy, which is information vital in the planning of transporting supplies.

Science News Letter, August 16, 1941

MEDICINE

Research Worker Contracts Infantile Paralysis

FOR the first time in 30 years, a laboratory worker has contracted infantile paralysis (poliomyelitis) under circumstances that make it highly probable that it was accidentally picked up during research work with the virus.

In order that other investigators may take unusual future precautions, this case of B. J., a woman of 35, is published (*Science*, Aug. 1) by her colleagues, Dr. Albert B. Sabin and Dr. Robert Ward of the Children's Hospital and the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine.

The duties of the victim included working with monkeys experimentally infected with human poliomyelitis virus strains. She went on vacation the middle of June and ten days later became ill with the disease.

Science News Letter, August 16, 1941