

Ancient Abacus Soon Will Aid Blind Persons

By JOSEPH VARILLA
United Press International
Frankfort, Ky. —(UPI)—The centuries-old abacus may soon be to blind mathematicians what Braille is to blind readers.

The ancient device, long used by Orientals for even the most complex arithmetical computations, has been fitted with a new part by a Kentucky state official with the result that the blind will be able to use it.

T. V. Cranmer, director of service to the blind in the Kentucky department of education, feels his brainchild will permit the blind to do arithmetic problems quickly and accurately.

He said most blind persons now either ask someone to work their problems or use mental arithmetic. For Cranmer, who is blind himself, neither of the methods was acceptable.

Cranmer first became interested in the abacus when he visited the Japanese section of Los Angeles and listened to the rapidly with which shop girls were running their fingers across the beads on the device and coming up with accurate answers.

A friend told him what it looked like: 13 wires with five beads on each wire.

When he got back here, Cranmer did some research on the abacus. He found the Japanese had tried at least twice to adapt the device for the blind. But neither attempt was successful because the beads slipped out of place easily and the blind didn't notice them.

To solve that problem, Cranmer fitted the back of the abacus with a piece of felt. And the beads stayed in place.

The only other method of computation for the blind used to any extent in this country utilized Braille and required five or 10 minutes to solve the simplest problem. As the problems got tougher, the task became all but impossible.

Cranmer is planning a pilot study with about 50 persons to determine if the blind can adapt to the device, which has been named "Cranmer's Computer."

The volunteers for the program will be tested on their present knowledge of arithmetic and permitted to use any method of calculation. Then they will be given a Cranmer computer and an instruction manual in Braille. After also receiving some personal instruction, they will be given the test over and will use the computer.

If the results are what Cranmer hopes they will be, he wants to put the computer in the hands of every blind Kentuckian. The devices are being manufactured by the American Printing House for the Blind of Louisville, a non-profit organization. The computers could be mass-produced within about a year.

He estimates that the cost of the pocket-sized calculator being used for the pilot tests will be between \$1.50 and \$3.

Balkan Peninsula Is Powder Keg of Wars

Washington —(UPI)—The Balkan Peninsula in southeastern Europe is notorious as a powder keg of wars. For centuries various armies have marched up and down its vast reaches, dividing and conquering.

The Balkan, including Yugoslavia and Albania, today is the focal point of ever-dividing opinion within the once-monolithic communist sphere. From the name Balkan comes the verb "balkanize," which means to break up into small weak and often conflicting units, the National Geographic society reports.

Short Pants Made In Gordonstoun School

London —(UPI)—Prince Charles is strictly a short pants boy at Gordonstoun school.

As a student at the school, known for its Spartan discipline, he will wear the official shorts, sweater over open-neck shirt, knee-length grey socks and black shoes.

Long trousers and neckties are taboo at Gordonstoun for the 13-year-old prince and other students.

HE'S UNPLATONIC

New York —(UPI)—French actor Yves Montand's definition of Platonic Affection: "I have heard of this thing between a man and a woman. Perhaps it exists. I think not."

NON-TALKATIVE TEXANS

Houston, Tex. —(UPI)—The average length of telephone calls in Texas is only three minutes, compared with the national average of six minutes, according to the Southwestern Bell Telephone Co.

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