



Seymour Roger Cray

September 28, 1925 - October 5, 1996

Colorado Springs, Colorado

Seymour Roger Cray, the reticent Wisconsin engineer whose machines defined the word supercomputer, died at Penrose Hospital in Colorado Springs, Colorado, early on October 5, 1996. He was seventy-one. Two weeks earlier, on September 22, his Jeep Cherokee had been struck and rolled on Interstate 25 after another driver tried to pass; he never recovered from his head injuries.

He was born on September 28, 1925, in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, the son of a civil engineer. As a boy he filled the basement with radio gear and wired a telegraph between rooms. In the Second World War he served as an Army radio operator in Europe and the Pacific, then studied electrical engineering and applied mathematics at the University of Minnesota.

In 1951 he joined Engineering Research Associates in St. Paul, one of the first computer companies in the country, and helped design machines for the Navy. In 1957 he was among the founders of Control Data Corporation in Minneapolis. There he built the CDC 1604, and then, in a quiet laboratory near his home in Chippewa Falls, the CDC 6600, which in 1964 became the fastest computer in the world.

He founded Cray Research in 1972. Its Cray-1, delivered to Los Alamos in 1976, was shaped like a C so that its wires could be kept short and was wrapped in a padded bench that hid its cooling system. Engineers joked that it was the most expensive loveseat on earth. Its successor, the Cray-2, was cooled by immersing its circuits in liquid. For years his machines forecast the weather, modeled weapons and designed aircraft and cars.

He shunned interviews and meetings, worked late, and was said to tunnel beneath his Wisconsin house when he

needed time to think. Weeks before his death he had started yet another company. Notice Nearby remembers the engineer who believed that speed came from simplicity.

Services

Died at Penrose Hospital, Colorado Springs, Colorado, October 5, 1996, of injuries from a September 22 highway crash. Electrical engineer; co-founder of Control Data Corporation; founder of Cray Research. Portrait: painted rendering of a public-domain National Security Agency photograph, hosted by Notice Nearby.

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