

SWORD cuts throughput time

Like SOLAR, the supply centre's batch computer system INTERPICS came into full operation in 1976. But while SOLAR continues to shine, the sun has set on INTERPICS — it has been replaced by an on-line system known as SWORD which the supply centre implemented on 25 April.

SWORD was conceived approximately two years ago.

The supply centres in the UK and Holland required a system which would help them drive down their throughput times and would also handle both spares and machines.

By reducing throughput times the supply centres could allow the operating companies to reduce their own stock-holding and also provide a much speedier service to the engineers who maintain machines in customers' premises.

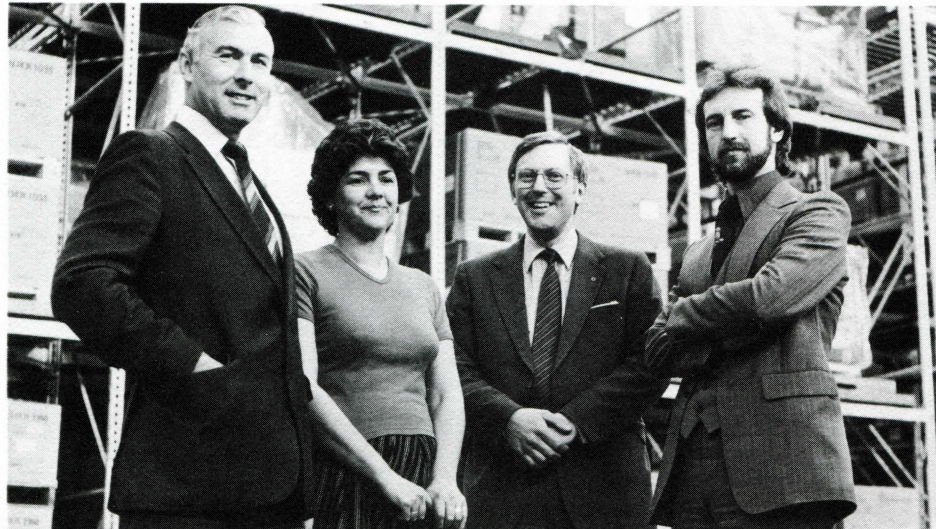
Because INTERPICS only handled spares business, machine stock and orders were processed manually. The introduction of SWORD, however, will now enable the supply centres to handle all the business through one system and to process orders without the delays inherent in a batch system.

Representatives from each of the three European supply centres designed the system together with divisional IS development staff.

In one way or another most people in the Mitcheldean supply centre have been involved with SWORD. The team members have switched as the system progressed, but the major representatives have been Sam Gooding and John Hodgson from PCL, Phil Davies and Tony Eveleigh from shipping, Geoff Gray from warehouse admin. and Ted Butcher from supply systems.

As a system, SWORD is very comprehensive. It handles all supply centre stock, processes orders, and includes a detailed financial package. However, inside

John Hodgson (PCL), Janet Newman (machine control), Trevor Knight (finance) and Gordon Gray (machine control), all of whom were involved with the implementation of SWORD.



Sam Gooding (PCL), Phil Davies and Tony Eveleigh (shipping) and project leader Ted Butcher (supply systems) with Cathy Ballinger of export.

Left: In warehouse administration Geoff Gray and Kevin Hill see how easily Joyce Strange extracts an order via the SWORD system.

that rather simple description are a lot of complexities that required very determined testing.

Until late August 1982 our involvement had been on a part-time basis, but from September to December that year a major base case test exercise took place at Aylesbury with representatives from Venray, Mitcheldean and Welwyn in full-time attendance.

As a system test, the base case was very thorough. Initially we discovered that there were several unplanned and adventurous things you could do to the stock file, but gradually the errors were found and corrected.

By Christmas the users were happy that the programs were performing to spec-

ification. In addition, after working weekends/long hours we had found out quite a lot about each other!

One area that was not proved at base case was the ability of the hardware to cope with peak loads.

As Venray were the first site to go live, they spent January setting up for implementation and carrying out a volume test. They were finally satisfied and went live on 21 February.

Geoff Gray and Ted Butcher spent three days assisting Venray with the implementation and also learning as much as they could from what proved to be a very smooth first week.

Even though Venray implemented first, there was a lot of preparatory work to do at Mitcheldean. Having completed our own user test to prove all the local system interfaces, our next milestone was to complete staff training. I believe everyone has been relieved to find how simple the system is to use and how easily the users have learned to operate the terminals.

However, in the two weeks before 25 April a great deal of effort was required from all supply centre staff.

Our major jobs were to carry out a volume test, clear the work in progress from INTERPICS and load files to SWORD.

In the event the implementation went very smoothly. We have had no major problems and maintained normal service to our customers throughout. Everyone has settled very well with the new system and SWORD has now become the normal way of working.