Computer hacks tap US secrets

By Richard Stern

Computer users across the country are feeling the effects of one of MIT's newest breeds, the "computer hacker." These many computer facilities have proved an easy target for many 6.47 (now 6.41, 6.45) graduates and others. For example, the PDP-1 computer system is readily available to qualified students. One ingenious Tech- man, it's believed, managed to tap the national government data line that used to be attached to Omaha, Nebraska. These operations also had the effect of jum- ming the government's own lines, causing them considerable annoyance.

Space War

The versatile PDP-1 system has also been used to store data. For example, a "space war" is an exciting and stimulating game for two people and a $29,000 computer. The PDP-1, when programed properly, will read out a display of two spaceships, each maneuvering in space, trying to torpedo the other ship. Space war addicts had been known to play for days on end until the Institute clamped down and con- fiscated the all-important control console.

MIT's Project MAC (Multiple Access Computer/Network Address Cognition) is a prime target for hacks. This system can be shared by users all over the world and user time is therefore at a premium. This also means that programs may be printed out at thousands of various locations all over the globe. Although the sys- tem code is highly confidential, it has been broken accidentally by students from time to time.

Pranks and more pranks

A team of math students wired a computer so that one night all the telephone lines in one large building rang simultaneously. The switchboard operator, seeing every line light up, called the fire depart- ment.

Pranks such as these have far reaching implications, and are a source of concern to many top executives. For example, it would be easy for a computer operator to embezzle money from a bank because there would be no written records, no duplicate slips, or other traces of the "transaction." The embezzler could program a withdrawal and then replace it, programming a correction. For example, the PDP-1 computer system is readily available to qualified students. One ingenious Tech- man, it's believed, managed to tap the national government data line that used to be attached to Omaha, Nebraska. These operations also had the effect of jum- ming the government's own lines, causing them considerable annoyance.

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