NAME OF SYSTEM:

Computer Output Data Retrieval

ORIGINATOR:

Division of Disbursement
Bureau of Accounts-Fiscal Service
Department of the Treasury
Washington, D.C. 20220

OBJECTIVE. To evaluate and operate a microform data storage and retrieval system that will result in significant tangible savings and operational improvements in the check inquiry activity.

BACKGROUND. The Division of Disbursement—one of five divisions in the Bureau of Accounts—functions as a service organization providing centralized disbursing facilities to about 1,600 civilian agency offices of the Executive Branch of the Government. Its primary mission is issuing Government checks and savings bonds. During the last fiscal year, the Division issued 425 million checks with a face value of about $100 billion. The centralized disbursement activity is carried out by 10 regional disbursement offices located throughout the United States.

A record is made of each Government check issued. This record is used as a basic source of reference in the processing of check nonreceipt claims and various types of inquiries. No other permanent record of checks is prepared or maintained. Prior to 1949, all of the disbursement check records were in the form of paper copies. These copies were costly both to produce as well as service. Storage of the records became an increasingly serious problem as did the deterioration of the paper.

To resolve this growing storage and maintenance problem, a microform system was adopted in 1950 that proved relatively effective until increasing workload again created problems in the late 1950's. After a three-year evaluation of improved methods and equipment, the Treasury Department settled on a combination magnetic tape and microfilm system. The analysis of the various system proposals was based primarily on quality, cost, and speed. One of the real breakthroughs came from the fact that magnetic tape systems were already integrated in the production of the checks. Thus, the adopted system permitted the disbursement offices to move from the high speed method of microfilming checks into an ultra-high-speed system of preparing microfilm directly from the already edited magnetic tape.

THE NEW METHOD. The computer-microfilming system, now commonly called the COM (computer output microfilm), accepts check issue data from the magnetic tape produced for the check writing function and converts the tape's binary-coded bits to human-readable characters on 16-mm. microfilm. This process is performed by a Digiprint COM recorder that displays the characters on a cathode ray tube in a frame format.

In addition to serving their own disbursement needs, the Chicago-based system duplicates microfilm records of recurring benefit payment checks for use by other administrative agencies for security backup purposes. The Chicago office also duplicates the microfilm record of benefit payment checks for 55 regional offices of the Veterans Administration (VA). This arrangement allows VA to deal personally with veterans and their dependents concerning the average of 8,000 monthly check payment problems.

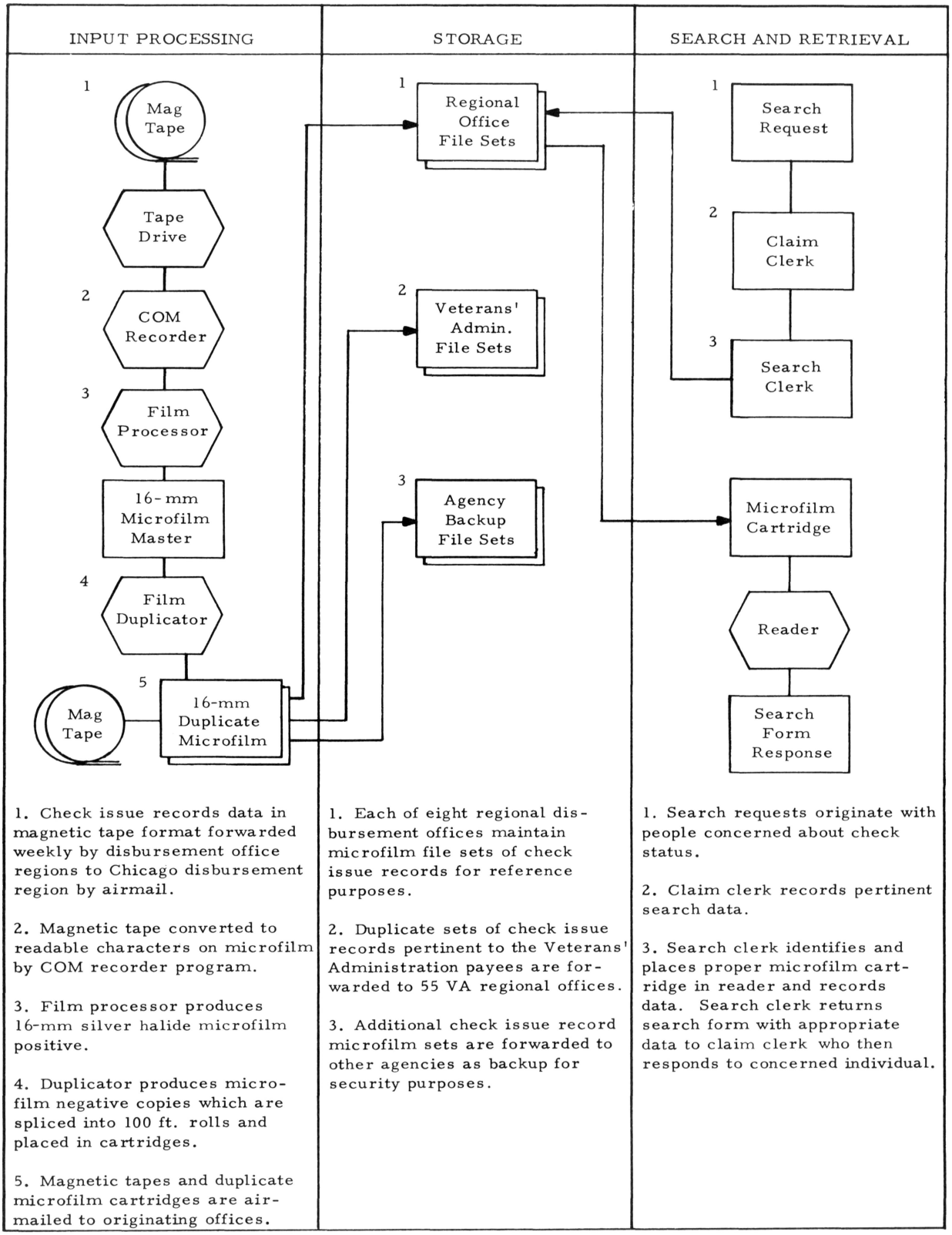
Search actions relative to check payment problems are usually generated through personal inquiry at any of the regional offices. Claims clerks receiving the query initially record all known information on a claim form that is passed to search clerks located in the microfilm file area. As check issue records are controlled by check serial number sequence, microfilm cartridges are positioned in the storage container to show their range of numbers. The searcher places the proper cartridge in the reader and, with knowledge of the cartridge's number range and the number being searched, is able to quickly bring the proper image within close proximity of the

viewing screen before making a detailed examination. Once the proper record is found, the search clerk completes the form and passes it to the claim clerk for final action.

REMARKS. The use of microfilm in the check handling function has had a profound effect on the Division of Disbursement's productivity. In 1949 one employee could, in effect, completely process about 61,000 checks per year. Currently each employee handles 299,000 checks, or five times as many. The elimination of paper check issue records in favor of microfilm and the consistent improvement in the microfilming techniques contribute substantially to this increase in productivity.

Film is now being produced at the rate of over 1½ million check record images per day. A single roll of microfilm holds 102,000 check records. From the standpoint of effectiveness, the current system enables check issue records to be produced 70 times faster than the old paper copy system permitted.

COMPUTER OUTPUT DATA RETRIEVAL



1. Check issue records data in magnetic tape format forwarded weekly by disbursement office regions to Chicago disbursement region by airmail.

2. Magnetic tape converted to readable characters on microfilm by COM recorder program.

3. Film processor produces 16-mm silver halide microfilm positive.

4. Duplicator produces microfilm negative copies which are spliced into 100 ft. rolls and placed in cartridges.

5. Magnetic tapes and duplicate microfilm cartridges are airmailed to originating offices.

1. Each of eight regional disbursement offices maintain microfilm file sets of check issue records for reference purposes.

2. Duplicate sets of check issue records pertinent to the Veterans' Administration payees are forwarded to 55 VA regional offices.

3. Additional check issue record microfilm sets are forwarded to other agencies as backup for security purposes.

1. Search requests originate with people concerned about check status.

2. Claim clerk records pertinent search data.

3. Search clerk identifies and places proper microfilm cartridge in reader and records data. Search clerk returns search form with appropriate data to claim clerk who then responds to concerned individual.