The 1960s were the days of the Cold War between the United States and the former USSR, but as cold as relations were between these two adversaries, there was one area where some friendly cooperation took place. The authors of two chess programs, one in the United States and the other on the other side of the Iron Curtain and both the cream of the thin crop of those days, agreed to hold a friendly four-game match in 1966 with moves communicated across the Atlantic by telegraph.

Alan Kotok developed his program at MIT as his bachelor's thesis. His supervisor was John McCarthy, a prominent computer scientist who left MIT for Stanford around the beginning of the match. In addition to his contributions to computer chess, McCarthy is widely known for developing the programming language Lisp. The KOTOK/MCCARTHY program was written in FORTRAN and assembly language, and was modeled on Shannon’s Type B strategy. It used the alpha-beta algorithm along with graduated forward pruning. During the match, the program ran on Stanford's IBM 7090 computer.

The ITEP (Institute of Theoretical and Experimental Physics) Program was developed by the Moscow-based group of George Adelson-Velsky, Vladimir Arlazarov, Alexander Uskov, Alexander Bitman, and Alexander Zhivotovsky. Arlazarov was the head of the group, Adelson-Velsky was its sage, and Bitman the chess whiz. The program ran on a Soviet M-20 computer and used Shannon’s Type A strategy.

On November 22, 1966, the two groups began their match. After about nine months the ITEP program emerged the winner with a 3-1 score.
Games were adjudicated as drawn when the fortieth move was reached. It is likely that the Soviet program would have won all four games if they had been played to completion. In its two victories—mating in nineteen moves in one game and in thirty-seven moves in the other—the ITEP program was searching to a depth of five plies. In its two draws, it was searching to a depth of three plies. The KOTOK/McCARTHY program was searching to a depth of four plies in all four games.

The results of this match showed very vividly for the first time that deeper search pays off. It was also one example of a Type A search being superior to a Type B search. Mikhail Botvinnik, when discussing the games, said that the heuristics for pruning moves in the KOTOK/McCARTHY program were inadequate and threw away the baby with the bath water too often. This match also marked the beginning of the dominance of Arlazarov's group in the world of computer chess. It reigned for a decade—until the second world championship in Toronto in 1977.