



## Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 31 December

Events in History over the next 15 day period that had U.S. military involvement or impacted in some way on U.S military operations or American interests

- **Dec 16 1773 – American Revolution:** *Sons of Liberty dump British tea* » In Boston Harbor, a group of Massachusetts colonists disguised as Mohawk Indians board three British tea ships and dump 342 chests of tea into the harbor.

The midnight raid, popularly known as the “Boston Tea Party,” was in protest of the British Parliament’s Tea Act of 1773, a bill designed to save the faltering East India Company by greatly lowering its tea tax and granting it a virtual monopoly on the American tea trade. The low tax allowed the East India Company to undercut even tea smuggled into America by Dutch traders, and many colonists viewed the act as another example of taxation tyranny.



When three tea ships, the Dartmouth, the Eleanor, and the Beaver, arrived in Boston Harbor, the colonists demanded that the tea be returned to England. After Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson refused, Patriot leader Samuel Adams organized the “tea party” with about 60 members of the Sons of Liberty, his underground resistance group. The British tea dumped in Boston Harbor on the night of December 16 was valued at some \$18,000.

Parliament, outraged by the blatant destruction of British property, enacted the Coercive Acts, also known as the Intolerable Acts, in 1774. The Coercive Acts closed Boston to merchant shipping, established formal British military rule in Massachusetts, made British officials immune to criminal prosecution in America, and required colonists to quarter British troops. The colonists subsequently called the first Continental Congress to consider a united American resistance to the British.

- **Dec 16 1826 – Old West:** *Edwards declares the Texas Republic of Fredonia* » In an act that foreshadowed the American rebellions to come, Benjamin Edwards rides into Mexican-controlled Nacogdoches, Texas, and proclaims himself the ruler of the Republic of Fredonia.

The brother of a corrupt backer of an American colony in Texas, Benjamin Edwards made the bold (and perhaps foolish) decision to rebel against the Mexican government while his brother was away in the United States raising money for his colony. Under the empresario system—which was created by the Mexican government in the 1820s to encourage colonization of its northern provinces—men like the Edwards were allowed to settle Anglo families in Texas. However, many of the Anglo settlers retained stronger ties to the United States than to Mexico, and Benjamin Edwards hoped that many former Americans would support his attempt to split from Mexico. Accompanied by a force of about 30 men, Edwards seized a stone fort in Nacogdoches and declared that the new “Republic of Fredonia” was now independent of Mexican control. Edwards claimed his new nation extended from the Sabine River to the Rio Grande River, and would be governed under the principles of “Independence, Liberty, and Justice.”

In a bid to build up a defense against the Mexican soldiers who were on their way to quell the rebellion, Edwards quickly negotiated an agreement with the Cherokee Indians offering to share Texas in exchange for military aid. Edwards was less successful in winning the support of the local Anglo and Mexican inhabitants of Nacogdoches, in whose name he was supposedly acting. When the Mexican militia approached Nacogdoches six weeks later, Edwards’ ill-planned revolution quickly disintegrated and he fled to the United States for sanctuary.

While short-lived and premature, Edwards’ Fredonian Rebellion nonetheless reflected the growing tensions between the American colonialists in Texas and their Mexican rulers. Less than a decade later, in 1835, other Texans followed in Edwards’ footsteps and staged the far more successful revolution that established the independent Republic of Texas.

- **Dec 16 1863 – Civil War:** *Johnston named commander of Army of Tennessee* » Confederate President Jefferson Davis names General Joseph Johnston commander of the Army of Tennessee. Johnston replaced Braxton Bragg, who managed to lose all of Tennessee to the Union during 1863.



Gen. Braxton Bragg



Gen. Joseph Johnston

A Virginia native, Johnston graduated from West Point in 1829 along with future Confederate leader Robert E. Lee. Johnston fought in the Black Hawk, Creek, and Seminole wars of the 1830s before

serving with distinction in the Mexican War (1846-48). When Virginia seceded from the Union shortly after the firing on Fort Sumter, South Carolina, in April 1861, Johnston accepted a commission in the Confederate army. He fought at the First Battle of Bull Run, Virginia, in July 1861, and commanded the Army of Northern Virginia during the early stages of the Peninsular Campaign in 1862. When Johnston was wounded at the Battle of Seven Pines, Virginia, on May 31, Lee replaced him.

After recovering from his wounds, Johnston was sent to coordinate the operations of the armies of the Tennessee and Mississippi regions. Since he did not have a command of his own, Johnston resented this duty. In 1863, he made a futile attempt to relieve John C. Pemberton's army at Vicksburg, Mississippi. He wanted Pemberton to fight his way out of Vicksburg, but Union General Ulysses S. Grant had Pemberton trapped. The surrender of Pemberton's army put additional stress on the already strained relationship between Johnston and President Davis.

After the campaigns of 1863, however, Davis felt he had little choice but to name Johnston commander of the Army of Tennessee. The Confederates were losing large sections of territory to the Union. Bragg was literally maneuvered right out of Tennessee during the summer, although he engineered a victory at Chickamauga before laying siege to Union troops at Chattanooga. When Grant broke the Confederate hold on Chattanooga in November, Bragg resigned his command.

Davis reluctantly appointed Johnston to save the situation in the West. Johnston took the field with his army in the spring of 1864, when Union General William T. Sherman began his drive toward Atlanta. Johnston employed a defensive strategy that avoided direct battle with Sherman but which also resulted in lost territory as Johnston slowly backed up to Atlanta. Johnston's command lasted until July 1864, when Davis replaced him after the Army of the Tennessee was backed into Atlanta.

- **Dec 16 1864 – Civil War:** In the 2 day Battle of Nashville, Union forces under George H. Thomas almost completely destroy the Army of Tennessee under John B. Hood. Casualties and losses: US 3,061 – CSA Approx. 6,000.
- **Dec 16 1907 – U.S. Navy:** The American Great White Fleet begins its circumnavigation of the world. It consisted of 16 battleships divided into two squadrons, along with various escorts.



- **Dec 16 1914 – WWI:** *Germans bombard English ports of Hartlepool and Scarborough* » At approximately 8 o'clock in the morning, German battle cruisers from Franz von Hipper's Scouting Squadron catch the British navy by surprise as they begin heavy bombardment of Hartlepool and Scarborough, English port cities on the North Sea.

The bombardment lasted for about one and a half hours, killing more than 130 civilians and wounding another 500. It would unleash a damning response from the British press, which pointed to the incident as yet another example of German brutality. The German navy, however, saw the two port cities as valid targets due to their fortified status.

Two defense batteries in Hartlepool responded to the attacks, damaging three of the German vessels, including the heavy cruiser Blucher. Hipper's squadron hoped to draw British forces to pursue them across waters freshly laced with mines. Another German fleet, commanded by Admiral Friedrich von Ingenohl, sat waiting offshore to provide support. A major confrontation did not take place, however, as the British decided to keep most of their fleet—depleted by the dispatch of their major cruisers to pursue the dangerous squadron of Admiral Maximilian von Spee—in the harbor.

An attempt by the Scouting Squadron one month later to repeat the tactics used to surprise the British at Scarborough and Hartlepool resulted in the Battle of Dogger Bank, where Hipper's squadron was defeated but managed to avoid capture.

- **Dec 16 1917 – WWI:** USS F-1 (SS-20) sunk after collision with USS F 3 (SS-22) off San Diego, California. 19 died.
- **Dec 16 1941 – WW2:** Japanese forces occupy Miri, Sarawak, Malaysia, on the island of Borneo.
- **Dec 16 1944 – WW2:** *Battle of the Bulge begins* » With the Anglo-Americans closing in on Germany from the west and the Soviets approaching from the east, Nazi leader Adolf Hitler orders a massive attack against the western Allies by three German armies. The German counterattack out of the densely wooded Ardennes region of Belgium took the Allies entirely by surprise, and the experienced German troops wrought havoc on the American line, creating a triangular “bulge” 60 miles deep and 50 miles wide along the Allied front. Conditions of fog and mist prevented the unleashing of Allied air superiority, and for several days Hitler's desperate gamble seemed to be paying off. However, unlike the French in 1940, the embattled Americans kept up a fierce resistance even after their lines of communication had been broken, buying time for a three-point counteroffensive led by British General Bernard Montgomery and American generals Omar Bradley and George Patton.



Fighting was particularly fierce at the town of Bastogne, where the 101st Airborne Division and part of the 10th Armored Division were encircled by German forces within the bulge. On December 22, the

German commander besieging the town demanded that the Americans surrender or face annihilation. U.S. Major General Anthony McAuliffe prepared a typed reply that read simply:

*To the German Commander:*

*Nuts!*

*From the American Commander*

The Americans who delivered the message explained to the perplexed Germans that the one-word reply was translatable as “Go to hell!” Heavy fighting continued at Bastogne, but the 101st held on. On 23 DEC, the skies finally cleared over the battle areas, and the Allied air forces inflicted heavy damage on German tanks and transport, which were jammed solidly along the main roads. On 26 DEC, Bastogne was relieved by elements of General Patton’s 3rd Army. A major Allied counteroffensive began at the end of December, and by 21 JAN the Germans had been pushed back to their original line.

Germany’s last major offensive of the war had cost them 120,000 men, 1,600 planes, and 700 tanks. The Allies suffered some 80,000 killed, wounded, or missing in action, with all but 5,000 of these casualties being American. It was the heaviest single battle toll in U.S. history.

- **Dec 16 1950 – Korea:** *Truman declares state of emergency* » In the wake of the massive Chinese intervention in the Korean War, President Harry S. Truman declares a state of emergency. Proclaiming that “Communist imperialism” threatened the world’s people, Truman called upon the American people to help construct an “arsenal of freedom.”

In November, the stakes in the Korean War dramatically escalated with the intervention of hundreds of thousands of communist Chinese troops. Prior to their arrival on the battlefield, the U.S. forces seemed on the verge of victory in Korea. Just days after General Douglas MacArthur declared an “end the war offensive,” however, massive elements of the Chinese army smashed into the American lines and drove the U.S. forces back. The “limited war” in Korea threatened to turn into a widespread conflict. Against this backdrop, Truman issued his state of emergency and the U.S. military-industrial complex went into full preparations for a possible third world war. The president’s proclamation vastly expanded his executive powers and gave Mobilization Director Charles E. Wilson nearly unlimited authority to coordinate the country’s defense program. Such an increase in government power had not been seen since World War II.

The Soviet Union, which Truman blamed for most of the current world problems in the course of his speech, blasted the United States for “warmongering.” Congress, most of America’s allies, and the American people appeared to be strongly supportive of the President’s tough talk and actions. Truman’s speech, and the events preceding it, indicated that the Cold War—so long a battle of words and threats—had become an actual military reality. The Korean War lasted from 1950 to 1953.

- **Dec 16 1965 – Vietnam War:** *Westmoreland asks for more troops* » Commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam, sends a request for more troops. With nearly 200,000 U.S. military personnel in South Vietnam already, Westmoreland sent Defense Secretary Robert McNamara a message stating that he would need an additional 243,000 men by the end of 1966. Citing a rapidly deteriorating military situation in which the South Vietnamese were losing the equivalent of an infantry battalion (500 soldiers) a week in battle, Westmoreland predicted that he would need a total of 600,000 men by the end of 1967 to defeat the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese. Although the high tide of U.S.

troop strength in South Vietnam never reached the 600,000, there were more than 540,000 U.S. troops in South Vietnam by 1969.

- **Dec 16 1972 – Vietnam War:** *Kissinger announces that North Vietnamese left negotiations* » Henry Kissinger announces at a news conference in Washington that the North Vietnamese have walked out of the ongoing private negotiations in Paris.

President Richard Nixon turned to private negotiations in August 1969 because of the all but total impasse in the official negotiations that had been in session since May 1968. The fact that these private talks were being conducted was not disclosed until January 25, 1972, when Nixon, in response to criticism that his administration had not made its best efforts to end the war, revealed that Kissinger had been conducting secret negotiations with North Vietnamese representatives in Paris. Although Kissinger had been able to make some progress in the private negotiations, the talks failed to achieve what President Nixon regarded as “just and fair agreement to end the war.”

The central disagreement between Kissinger and the North Vietnamese negotiators was over the question of who would rule South Vietnam after any negotiated cease-fire. The North Vietnamese negotiators, headed by Le Duc Tho, demanded that the government of Nguyen Van Thieu be dissolved, that the South Vietnamese army be disbanded, and that a coalition government be installed, which would then negotiate for a truce. At the same time, the South Vietnamese were making their own demands. Over 100,000 North Vietnamese troops had occupied territory in South Vietnam during the 1972 Easter Offensive. Nguyen Van Thieu demanded that the North Vietnamese recognize Saigon’s sovereignty over South Vietnam, which would make the continued presence of the North Vietnamese troops in the south illegal. The North Vietnamese refused Thieu’s demands, saying that they would not recognize Thieu’s government and walked out of the negotiations.

Kissinger charged that Hanoi was to blame for the failure to reach an agreement, and asserted that the U.S. would not be blackmailed or stampeded into an agreement. North Vietnam criticized the U.S. for breaking the agreement to maintain silence on the private negotiations. Nixon issued an ultimatum to Hanoi to send its representatives back to the conference table within 72 hours “or else.” The North Vietnamese rejected Nixon’s demand on December 18, and the president gave the order to launch Operation Linebacker II, an intensified bombing campaign of North Vietnam. Over the next 11 days—with the exception of Christmas Day—the “Christmas bombing” continued unabated. In all, roughly tons of bombs over North Vietnam, and Air Force and Navy fighter-bombers added another 5,000 tons. On December 28, the North Vietnamese agreed to Nixon’s conditions for re-opening the negotiations and the next day, the president called an end to Linebacker II.

- **Dec 16 1998 – U.S.\*Iraq:** *Clinton orders air attack on Iraq* » The president announces he has ordered air strikes against Iraq because it refused to cooperate with United Nations (U.N.) weapons inspectors. Clinton’s decision did not have the support of key members of Congress, who accused Clinton of using the air strikes to direct attention away from ongoing impeachment proceedings against him. Just the day before, the House of Representatives had issued a report accusing Clinton of committing “high crimes and misdemeanors” related to the Monica Lewinsky scandal, in which Clinton had—and then lied about—an illicit sexual liaison with an intern in the Oval Office.



At the time of the air strikes, Iraq was continuing its attempts to build weapons of mass destruction including nuclear, chemical and biological agents. Fearful of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's belligerence, and his penchant for using those weapons against his own people, the U.N. sent in weapons inspectors in 1997. After repeatedly refusing the inspectors access to certain sites, Clinton resorted to air strikes to compel Hussein to cooperate.

Many in Congress agreed with Republican majority leader Trent Lott that the timing of the air strikes was "suspect" and "cursory." In their opinion, the air strikes were simply a ploy to direct the public's attention away from the impeachment proceedings, and would ultimately prove futile in persuading Hussein to comply with the U.N.'s demands. Lott and his cohorts considered sustained bombardment of Iraq and the direct overthrow of Hussein the only way to end Iraq's weapons program. Clinton, in a televised public address that day brushed aside the criticism, saying that the Iraqi president was wrong if he thought "...the serious debate [on impeachment] would distract Americans or weaken our resolve to face him down." He emphasized that his decision to launch air strikes was critical to America's vital interests and to the security of the world.

Ultimately, the American public's attention, and that of the press, stayed fixated on Clinton and his battle to save his presidency. Both the air strikes and the impeachment threat proved anti-climactic. Clinton was acquitted by the Senate in February 1999 and the air strikes on Iraq failed to intimidate Hussein into allowing weapons inspectors full access to Iraq's weapons facilities.

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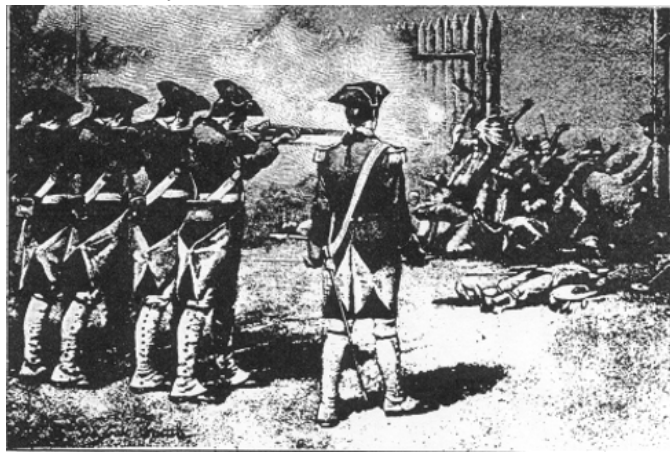
- **Dec 17 1777 – American Revolution:** *France formally recognizes the United States* » The French foreign minister, Charles Gravier, count of Vergennes, officially acknowledges the United States as an independent nation. News of the Continental Army's overwhelming victory against the British General John Burgoyne at Saratoga gave Benjamin Franklin new leverage in his efforts to rally French support for the American rebels. Although the victory occurred in October, news did not reach France until December 4th.

Franklin had quickly mustered French support upon his arrival in December 1776. France's humiliating loss of North America to the British in the Seven Years' War made the French eager to see an American victory. However, the French king was reluctant to back the rebels openly. Instead, in May 1776, Louis XVI sent unofficial aid to the Continental forces and the playwright Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais helped Franklin organize private assistance for the American cause.

Franklin, who often wore a fur cap, captured the imagination of Parisians as an American man of nature and his well-known social charms stirred French passions for all things American. He was the toast of Parisian society, enchanting salons with his wide-ranging knowledge, social graces and witty repartee. Nevertheless, he was not allowed to appear at court.

It took the impressive and long-awaited victory at Saratoga to convince Louis that the American rebels had some hope of defeating the British Empire. His enthusiasm for the victory paired with the foreign minister's concern that the loss of Philadelphia to the British would lead Congress to surrender, gave Franklin two influential allies with two powerful—if opposing—reasons for officially backing the American cause. A formal treaty of alliance followed on February 6, 1778.

- **Dec 17 1812 – War of 1812:** \_ » U.S. forces attack Lenape and Miami Indian villages which was considered the first American victory of the war. Casualties and losses: US 56 – Indians 80.



- **Dec 17 1862 – Civil War:** *Grant expels Jews from Tennessee, Kentucky and Mississippi* » U.S. Army General Ulysses S. Grant, the future 18th president of the United States, issues General Order No. 11, expelling Jews suspected of engaging in war profiteering from a region occupied by the Union Army.

Grant was commander of the military's administrative "department" of Tennessee (consisting of Tennessee, Kentucky and Mississippi) and was in charge of issuing trade licenses. Although President Abraham Lincoln permitted limited trade in southern cotton, Grant was tasked with shutting down the black-market trade in the cotton industry. Swayed by the commonly held prejudice that Jews were largely responsible for war profiteering, Grant blamed the district's Jewish community for organizing the illegal trade in black-market cotton.

Grant's order prohibited the issuing of trade licenses to Jews within the Tennessee district. Furthermore, it required them to leave the district within 24 hours of the order or risk imprisonment. Grant's zealous underlings immediately began to enforce the order: Entire families were marched out of town with only what they could carry.

According to the American Jewish Historical Society's research, Lincoln did not know about Grant's order and expressed surprise when a group of Jewish leaders met with him to protest Grant's decree. President Lincoln disapproved of the order and expressed his disbelief to Grant in a letter: "a paper purporting to be [issued by you] has been presented here. It expels all Jews from your



department. If such an order has been issued, it will be immediately revoked.” Three days later, Grant obeyed the commander in chief’s orders and revoked General Order No. 11. Lincoln later told Jewish representatives that “to condemn a class is, to say the least, to wrong the good with the bad” and promised to not only rid the country of slavery, but to protect Americans from religious discrimination.

Grant’s reputation was not tarnished by the General Order No. 11 episode. In fact, after the war, most Americans regarded Grant as a hero and he went on to win the majority of the Jewish vote in the presidential election of 1868. As president, he appointed Jews to top federal positions.

- **Dec 17 1939 – WW2:** Battle of the River Plate – The Admiral Graf Spee is scuttled by Captain Hans Langsdorff outside Montevideo.
- **Dec 17 1941 – WW2:** Japanese forces land in Northern Borneo.
- **Dec 17 1941 – WW2:** Rear Admiral Husband E. Kimmel was relieved of his command of the U.S. Pacific Fleet as part of a shake-up of officers in the wake of the Pearl Harbor disaster.
- **Dec 17 1943 – WW2:** U.S. forces invade Japanese held New Britain Island in New Guinea.
- **Dec 17 1944 – WW2:** The German Army renews the attack on the Belgian town of Losheimergraben against the defending Americans during the Battle of the Bulge. Within 5 days the 101st Airborne Division is surrounded at Bastogne Belgium.
- **Dec 17 1944 – WW2:** *U.S. approves end to internment of Japanese Americans* » U.S. Major General Henry C. Pratt issues Public Proclamation No. 21, declaring that, effective January 2, 1945, Japanese American “evacuees” from the West Coast could return to their homes.

On February 19, 1942, 10 weeks after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, authorizing the removal of any or all people from military areas “as deemed necessary or desirable.” The military in turn defined the entire West Coast, home to the majority of Americans of Japanese ancestry or citizenship, as a military area. By June, more than 110,000 Japanese Americans were relocated to remote internment camps built by the U.S. military in scattered locations around the country. For the next two and a half years, many of these Japanese Americans endured extremely difficult living conditions and poor treatment by their military guards.

During the course of World War II, 10 Americans were convicted of spying for Japan, but not one of them was of Japanese ancestry. In 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed a bill to recompense each surviving internee with a tax-free check for \$20,000 and an apology from the U.S. government.

- **Dec 17 1944 – WW2:** Battle of the Bulge - Malmedy massacre. Ninety American 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion POWs are shot by Waffen-SS Kampfgruppe Peiper.
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- **Dec 17 1947 – USAF:** First flight of the Boeing B-47 Stratojet strategic bomber.



- **Dec 17 1950 – Korea:** The F-86 Sabre's first mission over Korea.
- **Dec 17 1957 – Cold War:** The United States successfully launches the first Atlas intercontinental ballistic missile at Cape Canaveral, Florida.
- **Dec 17 1969 – USAF:** The U.S. Air Force ended its "Project Blue Book" and concluded that there was no evidence of extraterrestrial activity behind UFO sightings.
- **Dec 17 1971 – Vietnam War:** *Cambodian forces under heavy pressure* » Cambodian government positions in Prak Ham, 40 miles north of Phnom Penh, and the 4,000-man base at Taing Kauk are the targets of continuous heavy bombardment by communist forces. The communist Khmer Rouge and their North Vietnamese allies were trying to encircle the capital city.

Premier Lon Nol took over the government from Prince Norodom Sihanouk in March 1970, and Lon Nol’s troops were locked in a desperate battle with the communists. Despite U.S. air support, the Cambodian government troops were under heavy pressure from the communists. The Prak Ham siege was lifted four days later, but the communists continued to encircle Phnom Penh in the face of weakened Cambodian resistance. Meanwhile, antigovernment demonstrations against the Lon Nol regime broke out inside the capital. The government reacted by banning all such protests, as well as political meetings, and by authorizing police searches of private houses.

Despite the unrest in Phnom Penh and a series of major defeats, Lon Nol managed to retain control of the government. Lon Nol’s government troops managed to hold on largely because of U.S. support. However, with the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973, American forces were withdrawn from Southeast Asia, and Lon Nol’s forces soon found themselves fighting alone against the communists.

The last U.S. airstrikes flown in support of Cambodian forces were in August 1973. Lon Nol and his forces fought on, but with no external support, it was an overwhelming task. On April 17, 1975, Lon Nol’s greatly depleted forces surrendered to the Khmer Rouge. During the five years of war, approximately 10 percent of Cambodia’s 7 million people died. The victorious Khmer Rouge emptied

the cities and forced millions of Cambodians into forced labor camps, murdered hundreds of thousands of real or imagined opponents, and caused hundreds of thousands of deaths from exhaustion, hunger, and disease.

- **Dec 17 1991 – Cold War:** *Yeltsin supporters announce Soviet Union will cease to exist by New Year's Eve* » After a long meeting between Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and President of the Russian Federation Boris Yeltsin, a spokesman for the latter announces that the Soviet Union will officially cease to exist on or before New Year's Eve. Yeltsin declared that, "There will be no more red flag." It was a rather anti-climactic culmination of events leading toward the dismantling of the Soviet Union.



A woman reaches into her bag, which rests on a fallen Soviet hammer-and-sickle on a Moscow street in 1991.

Despite its dramatic implications, the announcement inspired mostly yawns and skeptical jokes from a Russian population weary from months of political intrigue and instability and a crumbling economy. For many people, the Soviet Union had already disintegrated. The various Russian republics had already declared their independence; in a few days they would meet and form the Commonwealth of Independent States. Gorbachev's power was steadily ebbing: a coup attempt the previous August had already nearly toppled him. Yeltsin, on the other hand, was busily planning the takeover of Soviet facilities and the symbolic lowering of the Soviet hammer-and-sickle to be replaced by the flag of Russia. Even Gorbachev seemed to accept the inevitable, taking time off from his less and less meaningful job to have a photo op with the rock group Scorpion.

It was all a rather unexciting end to the nation President Ronald Reagan once called "the evil empire."

- **Dec 17 2011 – North Korea:** *Kim Jong Il, leader of North Korea, dies* » North Korea's enigmatic, reclusive dictator, dies of a heart attack while reportedly traveling on a train in his country. Kim, who assumed leadership of North Korea upon the death of his father in 1994, ruled the Communist nation with an iron fist, and his isolated, repressive regime was accused of numerous human rights violations.

Little is known about Kim's early life, although it is believed he was born in 1941 at a Soviet military base near Khabarovsk, Russia, where his father was stationed. However, when Kim became leader of North Korea, the government propaganda machine, which presented numerous myths about him as fact, claimed he was born on February 16, 1942, atop Korea's sacred Mount Paektu, as a new star and double rainbow appeared overhead. (Among the many other questionable claims reported by the state media about the man known as the "Dear Leader" and "Supreme Leader" to his followers was that he made

11 holes-in-one in a single round of golf, composed numerous operas, invented an invisible cell phone and could control the weather.)



Kim Jong-il in 2011

In 1948, Kim's father, Kim Il Sung (1912-1994), became head of the newly established Communist nation of North Korea (officially named the Democratic People's Republic of Korea). The younger Kim graduated from the country's Kim Il Sung University in 1964, and went on to rise through the Korean Workers' Party, the ruling political party, while also developing a reputation as a playboy who enjoyed fine food and expensive liquor. Additionally, Kim, a film fanatic, amassed a vast collection of foreign movies, and in 1978 ordered the kidnapping of a famous South Korean actress and her director husband in order to boost North Korea's movie industry.

Soon after Kim succeeded his father, North Korea experienced a series of severe famines that killed an estimated 2 million people by the late 1990s. As ordinary citizens suffered economic hardships, Kim directed a substantial portion of the nation's budget to maintaining a large military and to the development of nuclear weapons (which North Korea tested in 2006 and 2009). Additionally, under Kim's totalitarian regime, the media was controlled by the state, and average North Koreans had minimal personal liberties and couldn't leave the country (the few foreigners who were allowed in were closely monitored). Those who opposed the government were sent to harsh prison camps. As with his father (now referred to by North Koreans as the "eternal president"), a cult of personality built up around Kim. The two men were portrayed as deities and images of them appeared on all public buildings.

The relationship between North Korea and the United States, along with much of the West, was strained due to Kim's secretive nuclear weapons program. In 2002, President George Bush called out North Korea as part of an "axis of evil," along with Iran and Iraq. However, in 2008, the Bush administration took North Korea off the U.S. list of terrorism-supporting nations after it agreed to allow some inspections of its nuclear sites.

After Kim died on December 17, 2011, his embalmed body was put on permanent public display in Kumsusan Memorial Palace in the nation's capital, Pyongyang. (The body of Kim Il Sung has been on display there since he died.) Kim was succeeded as leader of North Korea by the youngest of his three sons, Kim Jong Un, then in his 20s and largely unknown to the world.

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- **Dec 18 1777 – American Revolution:** *States give thanks* » The new United States celebrates its first national day of thanksgiving on Thursday, December 18, 1777, commemorating the American

victory at the Battle of Saratoga after the surrender of General John Burgoyne and 5,000 British troops in October 1777.

In proclaiming the first national day of thanksgiving, Congress wrote, “It is therefore recommended to the Legislative or executive Powers of these UNITED STATES, to set apart THURSDAY, the eighteenth Day of December next, for solemn THANKSGIVING and PRAISE; That at one Time and with one Voice the good People may express the grateful Feelings of their Hearts, and consecrate themselves to the Service of their Divine Benefactor”

Neither when the Congress proclaimed the day of Thanksgiving on 1 NOV, nor when the population celebrated in December, were they aware that on 17 DEC, the French would finally formalize a military and trade alliance with the rebelling states. These were not disconnected events. The victory at Saratoga convinced the French king that the Americans might be worthy allies and the ensuing alliance made an American victory possible.

Merely having a national day of thanksgiving was a tremendous step forward in creating an American identity. Previously, the colonies had celebrated individually or as part of the British Empire. Now they had experienced an event that had affected them all and formalized a celebration that involved them all. With the French alliance, they had an ally who supported them all. Americans had just taken a major step on the tortured trail from colonies to states and from states to nation.

- **Dec 18 1813 – War of 1812:** *British capture American Fort Niagara* » In response to the American burning of the Canadian city of Newark, the British attacked Ft Niagara. The Americans were unprepared for the attack. 550 British regulars and militia crossed the river on December 18th and found the fort's main drawbridge down. The British quickly captured the fort and killed 67 of its defenders and taking 350 prisoners. The British then turned their attention towards Buffalo. The Americans tried to make a stand at Black Rock but they were swiftly defeated. The British burned the town of Buffalo and Black Rock to the ground.
- **Dec 18 1862 – Civil War:** *Battle of Lexington, Tennessee* » Confederate cavalry leader General Nathan Bedford Forrest routs a Union force under the command of Colonel Robert Ingersoll on a raid into western Tennessee, an area held by the Union.

With the main Union army in the region occupying northern Mississippi, Confederate General Braxton Bragg ordered Forrest to cut the Federal supply lines in Tennessee. Forrest left Columbia, Tennessee, on December 11 and began crossing the Tennessee River on 13 DEC. On 16 DEC, Union General Jeremiah Sullivan dispatched Ingersoll and 200 men from Jackson to Lexington, where Ingersoll picked up 470 reinforcements. Most of the troops were raw recruits with no combat experience.

On 17 DEC, Ingersoll's scouts detected more than half of Forrest's 2,500 men approaching Lexington from the south. Ingersoll guessed that Forrest would attack along one of two main roads, Old Stage Road and Lower Road. To impede the Confederate advance, Ingersoll ordered the destruction of a bridge across Beech Creek along Lower Road. He then concentrated the bulk of his force along Old Stage Road. Forrest pulled his force up to Lexington, but did not attack until 18 DEC.

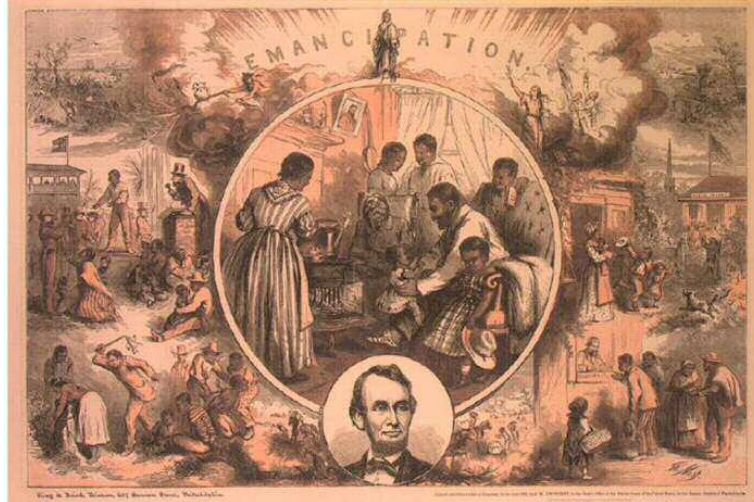
In the morning, Forrest advanced along Lower Road. Ingersoll's scouts had failed to eliminate the bridge the day before, leaving the Confederates a clear path towards the smaller part of Ingersoll's command. The Yankees swung around to stop the attack, but it was too late. Forrest's troops overwhelmed the panicked Federals and captured more than 140 men, including Ingersoll. The rest of the Union force scattered into the countryside. Forrest also captured artillery pieces, horses, rifles, and supplies. Forrest headed to Jackson, but found the city well defended. He continued his raid into Kentucky, destroying bridges and hampering supplies to the Union armies in Mississippi.

- **Dec 18 1862 – Civil War:** Union General Ulysses S. Grant announces the organization of his army in the West. Sherman, Hurlbut, McPherson, and McClellan are to be corps commanders.
- **Dec 18 1865 – Civil War:** *Slavery abolished in America* » Following its ratification by the requisite three-quarters of the states earlier in the month, the 13th Amendment is formally adopted into the U.S. Constitution, ensuring that “neither slavery nor involuntary servitude... shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”

Before the American Civil War, Abraham Lincoln and other leaders of the anti-slavery Republican Party sought not to abolish slavery but merely to stop its extension into new territories and states in the American West. This policy was unacceptable to most Southern politicians, who believed that the growth of free states would turn the U.S. power structure irrevocably against them. In November 1860, Lincoln's election as president signaled the secession of seven Southern states and the formation of the Confederate States of America. Shortly after his inauguration in 1861, the Civil War began. Four more Southern states joined the Confederacy, while four border slave states in the upper South remained in the Union.

Lincoln, though he privately detested slavery, responded cautiously to the call by abolitionists for emancipation of all American slaves after the outbreak of the Civil War. As the war dragged on, however, the Republican-dominated federal government began to realize the strategic advantages of emancipation: The liberation of slaves would weaken the Confederacy by depriving it of a major portion of its labor force, which would in turn strengthen the Union by producing an influx of manpower. With 11 Southern states seceded from the Union, there were few pro-slavery congressmen to stand in the way of such an action.

In 1862, Congress annulled the fugitive slave laws, prohibited slavery in the U.S. territories, and authorized Lincoln to employ freed slaves in the army. Following the major Union victory at the Battle of Antietam in September, Lincoln issued a warning of his intent to issue an emancipation proclamation for all states still in rebellion on New Year's Day. That day—January 1, 1863—President Lincoln formally issued the Emancipation Proclamation, calling on the Union army to liberate all slaves in states still in rebellion as “an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity.” These three million slaves were declared to be “then, thenceforward, and forever free.” The proclamation exempted the border slave states that remained in the Union and all or parts of three Confederate states controlled by the Union army.



The Emancipation Proclamation transformed the Civil War from a war against secession into a war for “a new birth of freedom,” as Lincoln stated in his Gettysburg Address in 1863. This ideological change discouraged the intervention of France or England on the Confederacy’s behalf and enabled the Union to enlist the 180,000 African American soldiers and sailors who volunteered to fight between January 1, 1863, and the conclusion of the war.

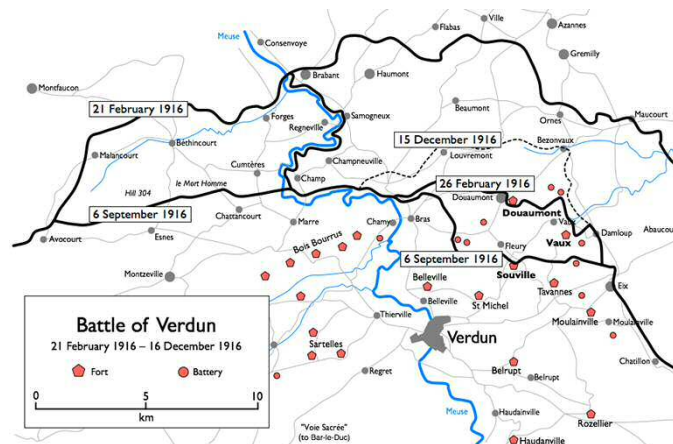
As the Confederacy staggered toward defeat, Lincoln realized that the Emancipation Proclamation, a war measure, might have little constitutional authority once the war was over. The Republican Party subsequently introduced the 13th Amendment into Congress, and in April 1864 the necessary two-thirds of the overwhelmingly Republican Senate passed the amendment. However, the House of Representatives, featuring a higher proportion of Democrats, did not pass the amendment by a two-thirds majority until January 1865, three months before Confederate General Robert E. Lee’s surrender at Appomattox.

On December 2, 1865, Alabama became the 27th state to ratify the 13th Amendment, thus giving it the requisite three-fourths majority of states’ approval necessary to make it the law of the land. Alabama, a former Confederate state, was forced to ratify the amendment as a condition for re-admission into the Union. On 18 DEC, the 13th Amendment was officially adopted into the Constitution—246 years after the first shipload of captive Africans landed at Jamestown, Virginia, and were bought as slaves. Slavery’s legacy and efforts to overcome it remained a central issue in U.S. politics for more than a century, particularly during the post-Civil War Reconstruction era and the African American civil rights movement of the 1950s and ’60s.

- **Dec 18 1915 – WWI:** In a single night, about 20,000 Australian and New Zealand troops withdraw from Gallipoli, Turkey, undetected by the Turks defending the peninsula.
- **Dec 18 1916 – WWI:** *Battle of Verdun ends* » The longest engagement of World War I, ends on this day after ten months and close to a million total casualties suffered by German and French troops.

The battle had begun on 21 FEB, after the Germans—led by Chief of Staff Erich von Falkenhayn—developed a plan to attack the fortress city of Verdun, on the Meuse River in France. Falkenhayn believed that the French army was more vulnerable than the British, and that a major defeat on the

Western Front would push the Allies to open peace negotiations. From the beginning, casualties mounted quickly on both sides of the conflict, and after some early gains of territory by the Germans, the battle settled into a bloody stalemate. Among the weapons in the German arsenal was the newly-invented flammenwerfer, or flamethrower; that year also saw the first use by the Germans of phosgene gas, ten times more lethal than the chlorine gas they previously used.



As fighting at Verdun stretched on and on, German resources were stretched thinner by having to confront both a British-led offensive on the Somme River and Russia’s Brusilov Offensive on the Eastern Front. In July, the Kaiser, frustrated by the state of things at Verdun, removed Falkenhayn and sent him to command the 9th Army in Transylvania; Paul von Hindenburg took his place. By early December, under Robert Nivelle, who had been appointed to replace Philippe Pétain in April, the French had managed to recapture much of their lost territory, and in the last three days of battle took 11,000 German prisoners before Hindenburg finally called a stop to the German attacks.

The massive loss of life at Verdun—143,000 German dead out of 337,000 casualties, to France’s 162,440 out of 377,231—would come to symbolize, more than that of any other battle, the bloody nature of trench warfare on the Western Front.

- **Dec 18 1940 – WW2:** Adolf Hitler issues his secret plans for the invasion of the Soviet Union—Operation Barbarossa.
- **Dec 18 1941 – WW2:** Defended by 610 fighting men, the American held island of Guam falls to more than 5,000 Japanese invaders in a 3 hour battle. Casualties and losses: US 458 – Japan 7.
- **Dec 18 1941 – WW2:** *Japan invades Hong Kong* » Japanese troops land in Hong Kong and a slaughter ensues. A week of air raids over Hong Kong, a British crown colony, was followed up on 17 DEC with a visit paid by Japanese envoys to Sir Mark Young, the British governor of Hong Kong. The envoys’ message was simple: The British garrison there should simply surrender to the Japanese—resistance was futile. The envoys were sent home with the following retort: “The governor and commander in chief of Hong Kong declines absolutely to enter into negotiations for the surrender of Hong Kong...”





Japanese troops enter Hong Kong via the Shenzhen River, in December 1941

The first wave of Japanese troops landed in Hong Kong with artillery fire for cover and the following order from their commander: “Take no prisoners.” Upon overrunning a volunteer anti-aircraft battery, the Japanese invaders roped together the captured soldiers and proceeded to bayonet them to death. Even those who offered no resistance, such as the Royal Medical Corps, were led up a hill and killed. The Japanese quickly took control of key reservoirs, threatening the British and Chinese inhabitants with a slow death by thirst. The Brits finally surrendered control of Hong Kong on Christmas Day.

- **Dec 18 1941 – WW2:** *War Powers Act* » The Act was passed by Congress on the same day as Japan invaded Hong Kong. It authorized the president to initiate and terminate defense contracts, reconfigure government agencies for wartime priorities, and regulate the freezing of foreign assets. It also permitted him to censor all communications coming in and leaving the country. FDR appointed the executive news director of the Associated Press, Byron Price, as director of censorship. Although invested with the awesome power to restrict and withhold news, Price took no extreme measures, allowing news outlets and radio stations to self-censor, which they did. Most top secret information, including the construction of the atom bomb, remained just that.

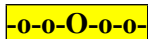
The most extreme use of the censorship law seems to have been the restriction of the free flow of “girlie” magazines to servicemen—including *Esquire*, which the Post Office considered obscene for its occasional saucy cartoons and pinups. *Esquire* took the Post Office to court, and after three years the Supreme Court ultimately sided with the magazine.

- **Dec 18 1942 – WW2:** Adolf Hitler meets with Benito Mussolini and Pierre Laval.
- **Dec 18 1944 – WW2:** B-29's (77) and 200 other aircraft of U.S. 14th Air Force bomb Hankow, China, a Japanese supply base.
- **Dec 18 1944 – WW2:** The Supreme Court upheld the wartime internment of Japanese-Americans.
- **Dec 18 1944 – WW2:** Japanese forces are repelled from northern Burma by British troops.
- **Dec 18 1951 – Korean War:** North Koreans give the United Nations a list of 3,100 POWs.
- **Dec 18 1960 – Vietnam War:** A rightist government is installed under Prince Boun Oum in Laos as the United States resumes arms shipments.

- **Dec 18 1965 – Vietnam War:** U.S. Marines attack VC units in the Que Son Valley during Operation Harvest Moon.
- **Dec 18 1970 – Cold War:** An atomic leak in Nevada forces hundreds of citizens to flee the test site.
- **Dec 18 1972 – Vietnam War:** *Nixon announces start of “Christmas Bombing” of North Vietnam* » Following the breakdown of peace talks with North Vietnam just a few days earlier, President Richard Nixon announces the beginning of a massive bombing campaign to break the stalemate. For nearly two weeks, American bombers pounded North Vietnam.

On 13 DEC, peace talks between the United States and North Vietnam collapsed. The North Vietnamese and American negotiators traded charges and countercharges as to who was to blame. Infuriated, President Nixon ordered plans drawn up for retaliatory bombings of North Vietnam. Linebacker II was the result. Beginning on 18 DEC, American B-52s and fighter-bombers dropped over 20,000 tons of bombs on the cities of Hanoi and Haiphong. The United States lost 15 of its giant B-52s and 11 other aircraft during the attacks. North Vietnam claimed that over 1,600 civilians were killed.

The bombings continued until 29 DEC, at which time the North Vietnamese agreed to resume the talks. A few weeks later, the final Paris Peace Treaty was signed and the Vietnam War came to a close, ending the U.S. role in a conflict that seriously damaged the domestic Cold War consensus among the American public. The impact of the so-called “Christmas Bombings” on the final agreement was difficult to assess. Some historians have argued that the bombings forced the North Vietnamese back to the negotiating table. Others have suggested that the attacks had little impact, beyond the additional death and destruction they caused. Even the chief U.S. negotiator, Henry Kissinger, was reported to have said, “We bombed the North Vietnamese into accepting our concessions.” The chief impact may have been in convincing America’s South Vietnamese allies, who were highly suspicious of the draft treaty worked out in October 1972, that the United States would not desert them. In any event, the final treaty did not include any important changes from the October draft.



- **Dec 19 1776 – American Revolution:** *Thomas Paine publishes American Crisis* » These are the times that try men’s souls; the summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.

When these phrases appeared in the pages of the Pennsylvania Journal for the first time, General George Washington’s troops were encamped at McKonkey’s Ferry on the Delaware River opposite Trenton, New Jersey. In August, they had suffered humiliating defeats and lost New York City to British troops. Between September and December, 11,000 American volunteers gave up the fight and returned to their families. General Washington could foresee the destiny of a rebellion without an army if the rest of his men returned home when their service contracts expired on December 31. He knew that without an upswing in morale and a significant victory, the American Revolution would come to a swift and humiliating end.

Thomas Paine was similarly astute. His *Common Sense* was the clarion call that began the revolution. As Washington's troops retreated from New York through New Jersey, Paine again rose to the challenge of literary warfare. With *American Crisis*, he delivered the words that would salvage the revolution.

Washington commanded that the freshly printed pamphlet be read aloud to his dispirited men; the rousing prose had its intended effect. Reciting Paine's impassioned words, the beleaguered troops mustered their remaining hopes for victory and crossed the icy Delaware River to defeat hung-over Hessians on Christmas night and on 2 JAN, the British army's best general, Earl Cornwallis, at the Battle of Princeton. With victory in New Jersey, Washington won not only two battles, but also the love and thanks of man and woman.

- **Dec 19 1777 – American Revolution:** *Continental Army enters winter camp at Valley Forge* » With the onset of the bitter winter cold, the Continental Army under General George Washington, still in the field, enters its winter camp at Valley Forge, 22 miles from British-occupied Philadelphia. Washington chose a site on the west bank of the Schuylkill River that could be effectively defended in the event of a British attack.



During 1777, Patriot forces under General Washington suffered major defeats against the British at the battles of Brandywine and Germantown; Philadelphia, the capital of the United States, fell into British hands. The particularly severe winter of 1777-1778 proved to be a great trial for the American army, and of the 11,000 soldiers stationed at Valley Forge, hundreds died from disease. However, the suffering troops were held together by loyalty to the Patriot cause and to General Washington, who stayed with his men. As the winter stretched on, Prussian military adviser Frederick von Steuben kept the soldiers busy with drills and training in modern military strategy.

When Washington's army marched out of Valley Forge on June 19, 1778, the men were better disciplined and stronger in spirit than when they had entered. Nine days later, they won a victory against the British under Lord Cornwallis at the Battle of Monmouth in New Jersey.

- **Dec 19 1862 – Civil War:** Confederate General Nathan B. Forrest begins tearing up the railroads in Union generals Grant and Rosecrans rear, causing considerable delays in the movement of Union supplies.
- **Dec 19 1941 – WW2:** The Japanese land on Hong Kong and clash with British troops.

- **Dec 19 1941 – WW2:** In a major shake-up of the military high command, Adolf Hitler assumes the position of commander in chief of the German army. The German offensive against Moscow was proving to be a disaster. A perimeter had been established by the Soviets 200 miles from the city—and the Germans couldn't break through.
- **Dec 19 1942 – WW2:** The British advance 40 miles into Burma in a drive to oust the Japanese from the colony.
- **Dec 19 1944 – WW2:** During the Battle of the Bulge, American troops begin pulling back from the twin Belgian cities of Krinkelt and Rocherath in front of the advancing German Army.
- **Dec 19 1946 – Vietnam:** Start of the First Indochina War.
- **Dec 19 1950 – Cold War:** The North Atlantic Council names General Dwight D. Eisenhower as supreme commander of Western European defense forces.
- **Dec 19 1959 – Post Civil War:** Reputed to be the last civil war veteran, Walter Williams, dies at 117 in Houston.
- **Dec 19 1964 – Vietnam War:** *Another bloodless coup topples the government in Saigon* » Maj. Gen. Nguyen Khanh and a group of generals led by Air Commodore Nguyen Cao Ky and Army Gen. Nguyen Van Thieu arrest three dozen high officers and civilian officials. The coup was part of the continuing political instability that erupted after the November 1963 coup that resulted in the murder of President Ngo Dinh Diem. The period following the overthrow of Diem was marked by a series of coups and “revolving door” governments. The coup on this day was engineered by a faction of younger military officers known as the “Young Turks,” who were fed up with what they believed was the ineffective government headed by a group of older generals known as the Military Revolutionary Council. Khanh and the newly formed Armed Forces Council, made up of the generals who had participated in the coup, restored civilian control on January 7, 1965, under Tran Van Huong. Hunon proved unable to put together a viable government and the Armed Forces Council ousted him on January 27 and installed Gen. Khanh in power. Khanh was ousted by yet another coup on February 18 led by Ky and Thieu. Khanh then went to the United States and settled in Palm Beach, Florida. A short-lived civilian government under Dr. Phan Huy Quat was installed, but it lasted only until June 12, 1965. At that time, Thieu and Ky formed a new government with Thieu as the chief of state and Ky as the prime minister. Thieu and Ky were elected as president and vice-president in general elections held in 1967.
- **Dec 19 1972 – Vietnam War:** *North Vietnam condemns Linebacker raids* » Hanoi's foreign ministry, calling the new B-52 raids against Hanoi and Haiphong “extremely barbaric,” accuses the United States of premeditated intensification of the war and labels the actions “insane.”

On 13 DEC, North Vietnamese negotiators walked out of secret talks in Paris with National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger. President Nixon issued an ultimatum to Hanoi to send its representatives back to the conference table within 72 hours “or else.” The North Vietnamese rejected Nixon's demand

and the president ordered Operation Linebacker II, a full-scale air campaign against the Hanoi area. During the 11 days of Linebacker II, 700 B-52 sorties and more than 1,000 fighter-bomber sorties were flown. These planes dropped roughly 20,000 tons of bombs, mostly over the densely populated area between Hanoi and Haiphong.



B-52 bombing crews at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam being briefed on the operation.

Nixon was severely criticized both by American antiwar activists and in the international community for ordering what became known as the “Christmas bombing.” Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, China and the Soviet Union officially condemned the resumption of American bombing above the 20th parallel. The French newspaper *Le Monde* compared the attacks to the bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War, when German planes from the Condor Legion attacked the Spanish city and caused great devastation and loss of life. In England, the *Manchester Guardian* called the bombing “the action of a man blinded by fury or incapable of seeing the consequences of what he is doing.” Pope Paul VI and United Nations Secretary General Kurt Waldheim expressed concern for world peace.

American antiwar activists charged that Linebacker II involved “carpet bombing”—deliberately targeting civilian areas with intensive bombing designed to “carpet” a city with bombs. Though the bombing was focused on specific military targets, it did result in the deaths of 1,318 civilians in Hanoi. The “Christmas bombing” was deemed a success by the U.S., since it caused the North Vietnamese to return to the negotiating table, where the Paris Peace Accords were signed less than a month later.

- **Dec 19 1972 – Aviation:** *Last lunar-landing mission ends* » The Apollo lunar-landing program ends on December 19, 1972, when the last three astronauts to travel to the moon splash down safely in the Pacific Ocean. Apollo 17 had lifted off from Cape Canaveral, Florida, 10 days before. In July 1969, after three years of preparation, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) accomplished President John F. Kennedy’s goal of putting a man on the moon and safely returning him to Earth with Apollo 11. From 1969 to 1972, there were six successful lunar landing missions, and one aborted mission, Apollo 13. During the Apollo 17 mission, astronauts Eugene A. Cernan and Harrison H. Schmitt stayed for a record 75 hours on the surface of the moon, conducting three separate surface excursions in the Lunar Rover vehicle and collecting 243 pounds of rock and soil samples.

Although Apollo 17 was the last lunar landing, the last official Apollo mission was conducted in July 1975, when an Apollo spacecraft successfully rendezvoused and docked with the Soviet Soyuz 19 spacecraft in orbit around the Earth. It was fitting that the Apollo program, which first visited the moon

under the banner of “We came in peace for all mankind,” should end on a note of peace and international cooperation.

- **Dec 19 1984 – Cold War:** British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang sign an agreement that commits Britain to return Hong Kong to China in 1997 in return for terms guaranteeing a 50-year extension of its capitalist system. Hong Kong was leased by China to Great Britain in 1898 for 99 years.

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- **Dec 20 1783 – Post American Revolution :** *Virginia cedes western land to federal government* » The Ohio Valley territory, which covered the area north of the Ohio River, east of the Mississippi River, and south of the Great Lakes and Canada, had been contested by Pennsylvania, New York, Massachusetts and Connecticut. A young George Washington began the Seven Years’ War with a failed attempt to secure Virginia’s Ohio Valley outposts in 1754.

For some, the British Proclamation line of 1763, banning further European settlement west of Appalachia had been a major incentive for rebellion. To complicate matters, Congress and the states had promised their soldiers land in payment for their service during the War for Independence. The states without western claims worried that they would forever be poor relations without western land to sell and fill their coffers. The new and fragile union remained at risk of dissolution until the land-claims issue found resolution.

Pennsylvanian John Dickinson first suggested that the states cede their lands to the Continental Congress in 1776. Virginia argued that their western claims superseded those of any of the other states because they were made in the first colonial charter, but the desire of leading Virginians for a stable confederated government outstripped their desire for land. They were the first state to cede significant holdings to the national government. Other states soon followed suit, solidifying the strength and wealth of the union and making western expansion a federal project, which culminated in Jefferson’s brilliantly conceived Northwest Ordinance.

- **Dec 20 1803 – Old West:** *The French surrender Orleans to the U.S* » Without a shot fired, the French hand over New Orleans and Lower Louisiana to the United States.

In April 1803, the United States purchased from France the 828,000 square miles that had formerly been French Louisiana. The area was divided into two territories: the northern half was Louisiana Territory, the largely unsettled (though home to many Indians) frontier section that was later explored by Lewis and Clark; and the southern Orleans Territory, which was populated by Europeans.

Unlike the sprawling and largely unexplored northern territory (which eventually encompassed a dozen large states), Orleans Territory was a small, densely populated region that was like a little slice of France in the New World. With borders that roughly corresponded to the modern state of Louisiana, Orleans Territory was home to about 50,000 people, a primarily French population that had been living under the direction of a Spanish administration.

These former citizens of France knew almost nothing about American laws and institutions, and the challenging task of bringing them into the American fold fell to the newly appointed governor of the

region, twenty-eight-year-old William Claiborne. Historians have found no real evidence that the French of Orleans Territory resented their transfer to American control, though one witness claimed that when the French tri-color was replaced by the Stars and Stripes in New Orleans, the citizens wept. The French did resent that their new governor was appointed rather than elected, and they bridled when the American government tried to make English the official language and discouraged the use of French.

It didn't help matters that young Claiborne knew neither French nor Spanish. Claiborne soon found himself immersed in a complex sea of ethnic tensions and political unrest that he little understood, and in January he wrote to Thomas Jefferson that the population was "uninformed, indolent, luxurious-in a word, ill-fitted to be useful citizens for a Republic." To his dismay, Claiborne found that most of his time was spent not governing, but dealing with an unrelenting procession of crises like riots, robberies, and runaway slaves.

Despite his concerns, Claiborne knew that somehow these people had to be made into American citizens, and over time he gradually made progress in bringing the citizenry into the Union. In December 1804 he was happy to report to Jefferson that "they begin to view their connection with the United States as permanent and to experience the benefits thereof." Proof of this came eight years later, when the people of Orleans Territory drafted a constitution and successfully petitioned to become the eighteenth state in the Union. Despite Claiborne's doubts about whether the French would ever truly fit into their new nation, the approval of that petition meant that the people of Louisiana were officially Americans.

- **Dec 20 1860 – Old West:** *Jackson submits Indian treaty to Congress* » President Andrew Jackson presents Congress with a treaty he negotiated with the Ioway, Sacs, Sioux, Fox, Otoe and Omaha tribes of the Missouri territory. The treaty, which removed those tribes from their ancestral homelands to make way for white settlement, epitomized racist 19th century presidential policies toward Native Americans. The agreement was just one of nearly 400 treaties—nearly always unequal—that were concluded between various tribes and the U.S. government between 1788 and 1883.

American population growth and exploration of the west in the early to mid-1800s amplified conflicts over territory inhabited by Native American tribes who held different views of land and property ownership than white settlers. During this time, Andrew Jackson played a major part in shaping U.S. policy toward Native Americans. A hero of the War of 1812, he earned equal recognition as an Indian fighter and treaty negotiator. In fact, he brokered nine treaties before becoming president in 1829. In 1830, as part of his zealous quest to acquire new territory for the nation, President Jackson pushed for the passing of the Indian Removal Act. It was this act that allowed for the 1838 forced removal by the U.S. military of Cherokee from their Georgia homeland to barren land in the Oklahoma territory. The march at gunpoint—during which 4,000 Cherokee died from starvation, disease and the cold—became known as the Trail of Tears. Jackson's policies toward Indians reflected the general view among whites of the time that Indians were an inferior race who stood in the way of American economic progress.

A few presidents have made small attempts to bridge the gap of mistrust and maltreatment between the U.S. government and Native Americans. In 1886, Grover Cleveland protected Indian land rights when a railroad company petitioned the government to run tracks through a reservation. In 1924, Calvin Coolidge passed the Indian Citizen Act of 1924, which granted automatic U.S. citizenship to all

American tribes, along with all the rights pertaining to citizenship. On personal moral grounds, Coolidge sincerely regretted the state of poverty to which many Indian tribes had sunk after decades of legal persecution and forced assimilation. Throughout his two terms in office, Coolidge presented at least a public image as a strong proponent of tribal rights. In recognition of his advocacy for Native Americans, a North Dakota tribe of Sioux “adopted” Coolidge as an honorary tribal member in 1927. However, U.S. government policies of forced assimilation, which worked to separate families and tribes and destroy native cultures, remained in full swing during his administration.

Largely relegated to reservations by the late 1800s, Native American tribes across the country were obliterated by disease and plunged into poverty, a state many remain in today.

- **Dec 20 1860 – Pre Civil War:** South Carolina secedes from the Union.
- **Dec 20 1861 – Civil War:** *Trent Affair Crisis* » English transports loaded with 8,000 troops set sail for Canada so that troops are available if the “Trent Affair” is not settled without war. The Trent Affair was a diplomatic crisis that took place between the United States and Great Britain from November to December 1861, during the U.S. Civil War (1861-65). The crisis erupted after the captain of the USS San Jacinto ordered the arrest of two Confederate envoys sailing to Europe aboard a British mail ship, the Trent, in order to seek support for the South in the Civil War. The British, who had not taken sides in the war, were outraged and claimed the seizure of a neutral ship by the U.S. Navy was a violation of international law. In the end, President Abraham Lincoln’s administration released the envoys and averted an armed conflict with Britain.
- **Dec 20 1862 – Civil War:** *Raid on Holly Springs, Mississippi* » Confederate General Earl Van Dorn thwarts Union General Ulysses S. Grant’s first attempt to capture Vicksburg, Mississippi, when Van Dorn attacks Grant’s supplies at Holly Springs, Mississippi.

Grant planned a two-pronged attack on the last Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi River. He would take a force from western Tennessee to approach Vicksburg from the interior of Mississippi. Meanwhile, Union General William T. Sherman would lead an army down the Mississippi River for an attack from the north. Grant said, “We can go as far as supplies can go.”

The plan started on a good note for the Yankees when Grant’s army pushed aside Confederates in northern Mississippi. In response, Confederate cavalry colonel John Griffith suggested attacking Grant’s supply line at Holly Springs, and recommended Van Dorn for the mission. Up to that point, Van Dorn had done little to build his reputation. He lost the Battle of Pea Ridge in Arkansas and the Battle of Corinth, Mississippi, earlier in 1862, and was known for his drunkenness and tendency to cavort with prostitutes.

Van Dorn gathered three cavalry brigades and left Grenada, Mississippi, on December 17. On December 20, his forces fell on the Union supply depot at Holly Springs, driving the Yankee defenders away and capturing materials. What could not be carried was destroyed. Van Dorn remained in the area a few more days, cutting rail and telegraph lines, before fleeing in the face of pursuing Union cavalry. The Confederates rode 500 miles in two weeks, returning on December 28 after successfully disrupting Grant’s campaign. The raid was the highlight of Van Dorn’s military career. He was murdered five months later by the husband of a woman with whom he was having an affair.



- **Dec 20 1914 – WWI:** *First Battle of Champagne begins* » After minor skirmishes, the First Battle of Champagne begins in earnest, marking the first major Allied attack against the Germans since the initiation of trench warfare on the Western Front.

Still determined to win a quick victory, and despite early defeats in the trenches against German positions, French commander Joseph Joffre planned a major offensive stretching throughout the Artois and Champagne regions of France from Nieuport in the north to Verdun in the south. After minor attacks on December 10 near Perthes in eastern Champagne, heavy fighting occurred simultaneously at Givenchy, Perthes, and Noyon, where the numerical advantage enjoyed by the French resulted in few gains in territory. The Germans were well-entrenched and their defense proved superior. From the outset of the war, machine gun battalions were used along with the regular infantry, which proved lethally effective in Champagne.

Winter weather made for dismal conditions on the battlefield: guns became clogged with mud and refused to fire, and heavy rainfall often made the trenches practically unusable. Fighting continued in the region from mid-December until mid-February, when the French paused briefly to reorganize, and then again until March 17, 1915. On that day, due to their continuing lack of gains and the strength of German counter-attacks since the beginning of the year, the French called off the attack. Joffre did not give up hope of eventual success in Champagne, however, and would begin another offensive there in the fall of 1915.

- **Dec 20 1924 – Germany:** Adolf Hitler is released from prison after serving less than one year of a five year sentence for treason.
- **Dec 20 1933 – Germany:** The German government announces 400,000 citizens are to be sterilized because of hereditary defects.
- **Dec 20 1941 – WW2:** The Flying Tigers – American pilots in China enter combat for the first time against the Japanese over Kunming China.



**1st American Volunteer Group**

- **Dec 20 1941 – WW2:** In one of his first acts as the new commander in chief of the German army, Adolf Hitler informs General Franz Halder that there will be no retreating from the Russian front near Moscow. “The will to hold out must be brought home to every unit!”
- **Dec 20 1943 – WW2:** Soviet forces halt a German army trying to relieve the besieged city of Stalingrad.

- **Dec 20 1943 – WW2: *Battle of Ortona (20 - 28 DEC)*** » By late 1943, the entire Italian campaign was not intended to win the war but to remove Italian troops from other areas of Europe, divert German forces from France and reduce the strength of the German army. This part of the Italian Campaign was fought between two battalions of elite German Fallschirmjäger (paratroops) from the German 1st Parachute Division under Generalleutnant Richard Heidrich, and assaulting Canadian troops from the Canadian 1st Infantry Division under Major General Chris Vokes. Most of the Canadians were fresh recruits whose baptism of fire was during the Invasion of Sicily. It was the culmination of the fighting on the Adriatic front in Italy during "Bloody December".

The battle was known to those who fought it as the "Italian Stalingrad," for the brutality of its close-quarters combat, which was only worsened by the chaotic rubble of the town and the many booby traps used by both sides. The battle took place in the small Adriatic Sea town of Ortona, with a peacetime population of 10,000. On 28 December, after eight days of fighting, the depleted German troops finally withdrew from the town. The Canadians suffered 1,375 dead during the Moro River battles of which Ortona was one part. This represented almost a quarter of all Canadians killed during the entire Italian Campaign. Ortona was successfully liberated but the month would be considered as "Bloody December" by Canadian forces because of the numerous casualties in and around the town. As well, over 5,000 Canadians were evacuated due to battle exhaustion and illness. In addition to the Canadian losses, the German 1st Parachute Division and the 90th Light Infantry Division (Wehrmacht) also suffered numerous casualties

- **Dec 20 1946 – France\*Vietnam: *French crack down on Vietnamese rebels*** » The morning after Viet Minh forces under Ho Chi Minh launched a night revolt in the Vietnamese capital of Hanoi, French colonial troops crack down on the communist rebels. Ho and his soldiers immediately fled the city to regroup in the countryside. That evening, the communist leader issued a proclamation that read: "All the Vietnamese must stand up to fight the French colonials to save the fatherland. Those who have rifles will use their rifles; those who have swords will use their swords; those who have no swords will use spades, hoes, or sticks. Everyone must endeavor to oppose the colonialists and save his country. Even if we have to endure hardship in the resistance war, with the determination to make sacrifices, victory will surely be ours." The First Indochina War had begun.

Born in Hoang Tru, Vietnam, in 1890, Ho Chi Minh left his homeland in 1911 as a cook on a French steamer. After several years as a seaman, he lived in London and then moved to France, where he became a founding member of the French Communist Party in 1920. He later traveled to the Soviet Union, where he studied revolutionary tactics and took an active role in the Communist International. In 1924, he went to China, where he set about organizing exiled Vietnamese communists. Expelled by China in 1927, he traveled extensively before returning to Vietnam in 1941.



There, he organized a Vietnamese guerrilla organization—the Viet Minh—to fight for Vietnamese independence. Japan occupied French Indochina in 1940 and collaborated with French officials loyal to France’s Vichy regime. Ho, meanwhile, made contact with the Allies and aided operations against the Japanese in South China. In early 1945, Japan ousted the French administration in Vietnam and executed numerous French officials.

When Japan surrendered to the Allies on September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh felt emboldened enough to declare the independence of Vietnam from France. French forces seized southern Vietnam and opened talks with the Vietnamese communists in the north. Negotiations collapsed in November 1946, and French warships bombarded the northern Vietnamese city of Haiphong, killing thousands. In response, the Viet Minh launched an attack against the French in Hanoi in December 1946. The French quickly struck back, and Ho and his followers found refuge in a remote area of northern Vietnam. The Viet Minh, undefeated and widely supported by the Vietnamese people, waged an increasingly effective guerrilla war against the French.

The conflict stretched on for eight years, with Mao Zedong’s Chinese communists supporting the Viet Minh, and the United States aiding the French and anti-communist Vietnamese forces. In 1954, the French suffered a major defeat at Dien Bien Phu, in northwest Vietnam, prompting peace negotiations and the division of Vietnam along the 17th parallel at a conference in Geneva. Vietnam was divided into northern and southern regions, with Ho in command of North Vietnam and Emperor Bao Dai in control of South Vietnam.

In the late 1950s, Ho Chi Minh organized a communist guerrilla movement in the South, called the Viet Cong. North Vietnam and the Viet Cong successfully opposed a series of ineffectual U.S.-backed South Vietnam regimes and beginning in 1964 withstood a decade-long military intervention by the United States, known as the Vietnam War in America but also called the Second Indochina War. Ho Chi Minh died on September 2, 1969, 25 years after declaring Vietnam’s independence from France and nearly six years before his forces succeeded in reuniting North and South Vietnam under communist rule. Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, was renamed Ho Chi Minh City after it came under the control of the communists in 1975.

- **Dec 20 1948 – WW2:** The U.S. Supreme Court announces that it has no jurisdiction to hear the appeals of Japanese war criminals sentenced by the International Military Tribunal.

- **Dec 20 1957 – U.S. Army:** While spending the Christmas holidays at Graceland in his newly purchased Tennessee mansion, rock-and-roll star Elvis Presley receives his draft notice for the United States Army.
- **Dec 20 1960 – Vietnam War:** *National Liberation Front formed* » North Vietnam announces the formation of the National Front for the Liberation of the South at a conference held “somewhere in the South.” This organization, more commonly known as the National Liberation Front (NLF), was designed to replicate the success of the Viet Minh, the umbrella nationalist organization that successfully liberated Vietnam from French colonial rule.



The NLF reached out to those parts of South Vietnamese society who were displeased with the government and policies of President Ngo Dinh Diem. One hundred delegates representing more than a dozen political parties and religious groups—both communists and non-communists—were in attendance at the conference. However, from the beginning, the NLF was dominated by the Lao Dong Party Central Committee (North Vietnamese Communist Party) and served as the North’s shadow government in South Vietnam. The Saigon regime dubbed the NLF the “Viet Cong,” a pejorative contraction of Viet Nam Cong San (Vietnamese Communists).

The NLF’s military arm was the People’s Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF). In February 1965, the PLAF attacked U.S. Army installations at Pleiku and Qui Nhon, which convinced President Lyndon B. Johnson to send the first U.S. ground troops to South Vietnam a month later. Ultimately, more than 500,000 U.S. troops were sent to Vietnam to fight the PLAF and the People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN, or North Vietnamese Army).

The NLF reached the height of its power during the 1968 Tet Offensive, when the communists launched a massive coordinated attack against key urban centers throughout South Vietnam. Although the Viet Cong forces were soundly defeated during the course of the offensive, they achieved a great psychological victory because the attack prompted many longtime supporters of the war to question the Johnson administration’s optimistic predictions.

- **Dec 20 1963 – Cold War:** *Berlin Wall opened for first time* » More than two years after the Berlin Wall was constructed by East Germany to prevent its citizens from fleeing its communist regime, nearly 4,000 West Berliners are allowed to cross into East Berlin to visit relatives. Under an agreement reached between East and West Berlin, over 170,000 passes were eventually issued to West Berlin citizens, each pass allowing a one-day visit to communist East Berlin.



The day was marked by moments of poignancy and propaganda. The construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 separated families and friends. Tears, laughter, and other outpourings of emotions characterized the reunions that took place as mothers and fathers, sons and daughters met again, if only for a short time. Cold War tensions were never far removed from the scene, however. Loudspeakers in East Berlin greeted visitors with the news that they were now in “the capital of the German Democratic Republic,” a political division that most West Germans refused to accept. Each visitor was also given a brochure that explained that the wall was built to “protect our borders against the hostile attacks of the imperialists.” Decadent western culture, including “Western movies” and “gangster stories,” were flooding into East Germany before the wall sealed off such dangerous trends. On the West Berlin side, many newspapers berated the visitors, charging that they were pawns of East German propaganda. Editorials argued that the communists would use this shameless ploy to gain West German acceptance of a permanent division of Germany.

The visits, and the high-powered rhetoric that surrounded them, were stark reminders that the Cold War involved very human, often quite heated, emotions.

- **Dec 20 1967 – Vietnam War:** *President Johnson visits Australia, Thailand, and Vietna* » The President attends a memorial service for Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt in Melbourne and then visits Vietnam, Thailand, and the Vatican. Arriving in Thailand on December 23, Johnson visited the U.S. air base at Korat, where he told the U.S. pilots there that the United States and its allies were “defeating this aggression.” The president then visited U.S. combat troops in Cam Ranh, South Vietnam, and told them that the enemy “knows that he has met his master in the field.” Next, Johnson flew to Rome and met with Pope Paul VI for over an hour with only interpreters present. A Vatican statement said the Pope advanced proposals toward attaining peace in Vietnam during the meeting.
- **Dec 20 1989 – U.S.\*Panama:** *The U.S. invades Panama* » The invasion was an attempt to overthrow military dictator Manuel Noriega, who had been indicted in the United States on drug trafficking charges and was accused of suppressing democracy in Panama and endangering U.S. nationals. Noriega’s Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF) were promptly crushed, forcing the dictator to seek asylum with the Vatican anuncio in Panama City, where he surrendered on January 3, 1990.

In 1970, Noriega, a rising figure in the Panamanian military, was recruited by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to assist in the U.S. struggle against the spread of communism in Central America. Noriega became involved in drug trafficking and in 1977 was removed from the CIA payroll. After the Marxist Sandinista government came to power in 1979, Noriega was brought back into the CIA fold. In 1983, he became military dictator of Panama.



Noriega supported U.S. initiatives in Central America and in turn was praised by the White House, even though a Senate committee concluded in 1983 that Panama was a major center for drug trafficking. In 1984, Noriega committed fraud in Panama's presidential election in favor of Nicolás Ardito Barletta, who became a puppet president. Still, Noriega enjoyed the continued support of the Reagan administration, which valued his aid in its efforts to overthrow Nicaragua's Sandinista government.

In 1986, just months before the outbreak of the Iran-Contra affair, allegations arose concerning Noriega's history as a drug trafficker, money launderer, and CIA employee. Most shocking, however, were reports that Noriega had acted as a double agent for Cuba's intelligence agency and the Sandinistas. The U.S. government disowned Noriega, and in 1988 he was indicted by federal grand juries in Tampa and Miami on drug-smuggling and money-laundering charges.

Tensions between Americans in the Panama Canal Zone and Noriega's Panamanian Defense Forces grew, and in 1989 the dictator annulled a presidential election that would have made Guillermo Endara president. President George H. Bush ordered additional U.S. troops to the Panama Canal Zone, and on December 16 an off-duty U.S. Marine was shot to death at a PDF roadblock. The next day, President Bush authorized "Operation Just Cause"—the U.S. invasion of Panama to overthrow Noriega.

On December 20, 9,000 U.S. troops joined the 12,000 U.S. military personnel already in Panama and were met with scattered resistance from the PDF. By December 24, the PDF was crushed, and the United States held most of the country. Endara was made president by U.S. forces, and he ordered the PDF dissolved. On January 3, Noriega was arrested by U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency agents.

The U.S. invasion of Panama cost the lives of only 23 U.S. soldiers and three U.S. civilians. Some 150 PDF soldiers were killed along with an estimated 500 Panamanian civilians. The Organization of American States and the European Parliament both formally protested the invasion, which they condemned as a flagrant violation of international law.

In 1992, Noriega was found guilty on eight counts of drug trafficking, racketeering, and money laundering, marking the first time in history that a U.S. jury convicted a foreign leader of criminal charges. He was sentenced to 40 years in federal prison, but after extradition to and incarceration in Panama, died in a Panama City hospital on May 29, 2017.

- **Dec 20 1995 – NATO\*Bosnia:** *NATO assumes peacekeeping duties in Bosnia* » During a brief military ceremony in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, French General Bernard Janvier, head of the United Nations peacekeeping force, formally transfers military authority in Bosnia to U.S. Admiral Leighton Smith, commander of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces in Southern Europe.

The solemn ceremony cleared the path for the deployment of 60,000 NATO troops to enforce the Dayton Peace Accords, signed in Paris by the leaders of the former Yugoslavia on December 14. The

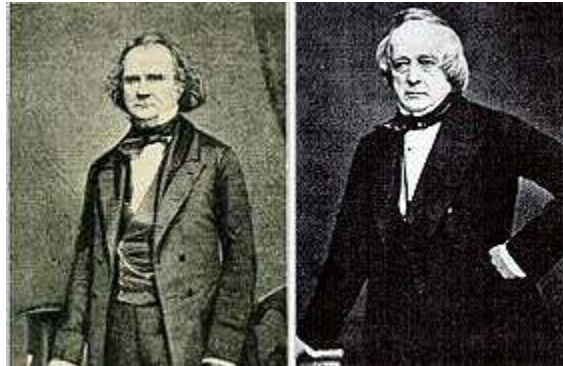
U.S.-backed peace plan was proposed during talks in Dayton, Ohio, earlier in the year and was reluctantly accepted by the last of the belligerent parties in November, ending four years of bloody conflict in the former Yugoslavia, which cost more than 200,000 lives.

The United Nations peacekeeping mission to Bosnia began in early 1992, shortly after the war erupted over efforts by the Bosnian Serbs to achieve independence from Bosnia-Herzegovina and unite with Serbia. Although the U.N. force was crucial in distributing humanitarian aid to the impoverished population of Bosnia, it was unable to stop the fighting. Approximately 25,000 U.N. peacekeepers served in Bosnia over three and a half years, and during that time 110 of those were killed, 831 wounded, and hundreds taken hostage.

The NATO force, with its strong U.S. support and focused aim of enforcing the Dayton agreement, was more successful in bringing stability to the war-torn region.

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- **Dec 21 1861 – Civil War: *Trent crisis escalates*** » Lord Lyons, the British minister to the United States, meets with Secretary of State William Seward concerning the fate of James Mason and John Slidell, Confederate envoys arrested by the U.S. Navy aboard the Trent, a British mail steamer. During the meeting, Lyons took a hard line against Seward and forced President Abraham Lincoln’s administration to release the Confederates a few days later.



James Mason & William Seward

The arrest of Mason and Slidell on November 8, 1861, near the Bahamas triggered a major diplomatic crisis between Britain and the United States. The British had not taken sides in the American Civil War and they accepted any paying customers wishing to travel on their ships. When Mason and Slidell were arrested, the British were furious that their ship had been detained and their guests taken into custody. The British government demanded their release. The Lincoln administration refused, and the Americans waited for the British reaction. The British stood firm by their demand and prepared for war with the United States.

After Lyons met with Seward, he wrote to Lord Russell, the British foreign minister: “I am so concerned that unless we give our friends here a good lesson this time, we shall have the same trouble with them again very soon. Surrender or war will have a very good effect on them.” The Lincoln administration got the message, and Mason and Slidell were released within a week. “One war at a

time,” Lincoln said. The Trent affair was the most serious diplomatic crisis between the two nations during the Civil War.

- **Dec 21 1862 – Medal of Honor:** The U.S. Congress authorizes the Medal of Honor to be awarded to Navy personnel who have distinguished themselves by their gallantry in action. Public Resolution 82, containing a provision for a Navy Medal of Valor, is signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln.
- **Dec 21 1866 – Old West:** *Indians massacre Fetterman and eighty soldiers* » Determined to challenge the growing American military presence in their territory, Indians in northern Wyoming lure Lieutenant Colonel William Fetterman and his soldiers into a deadly ambush on this day in 1866.

Tensions in the region started rising in 1863, when John Bozeman blazed the Bozeman Trail, a new route for emigrants traveling to the Montana gold fields. Bozeman’s trail was of questionable legality since it passed directly through hunting grounds that the government had promised to the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851. Thus when Colorado militiamen murdered more than two hundred peaceful Cheyenne during the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864, the Indians began to take revenge by attacking whites all across the Plains, including the emigrants traveling the Bozeman Trail. The U.S. government responded by building a series of protective forts along the trail; the largest and most important of these was Fort Phil Kearney, erected in 1866 in north-central Wyoming.

Indians under the leadership of Red Cloud and Crazy Horse began to focus their attacks on Fort Phil Kearney, constantly harassing the soldiers and raiding their wood and supply parties. On December 6, 1866, Crazy Horse discovered to his surprise that he could lead a small detachment of soldiers into a fatal ambush by dismounting from his horse and fleeing as if he were defenseless. Struck by the foolish impulsiveness of the soldiers, Crazy Horse and Red Cloud reasoned that perhaps a much larger force could be lured into a similar deadly trap.



On the bitterly cold morning of December 21, about 2,000 Indians concealed themselves along the road just north of Fort Phil Kearney. A small band made a diversionary attack on a party of woodcutters from the fort, and Commandant Colonel Henry Carrington quickly ordered Colonel Fetterman to go to their aid with a company of 80 troopers. Crazy Horse and 10 decoy warriors then rode into view of the fort. When Carrington fired an artillery round at them, the decoys ran away as if frightened. The party of woodcutters made it safely back to the fort, but Colonel Fetterman and his men chased after the fleeing Crazy Horse and his decoys, just as planned. The soldiers rode straight into the ambush and



were wiped out in a massive attack during which some 40,000 arrows rained down on the hapless troopers. None of them survived.

With 81 fatalities, the Fetterman Massacre was the army's worst defeat in the West until the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876. Further Indian attacks eventually forced the army to reconsider its commitment to protecting the Bozeman Trail, and in 1868 the military abandoned the forts and pulled out. It was one of only a handful of clear Indian victories in the Plains Indian Wars.

- **Dec 21 1914 – WWI:** The first bombing raids on England were nuisance raids carried out against Channel ports. German press reports mention a raid carried out on 27 October, but there is no British record of any incident on this date. The first confirmed raid occurred on 21 DEC, when a Friedrichshafen FF.29 dropped two bombs into the sea near the Admiralty Pier in Dover. These raids, usually carried out by one or two aircraft during daytime, continued throughout the war, with little effect.
- **Dec 21 1915 – WWI:** *Sir William Robertson is appointed chief of the Imperial General Staff* » Shortly after Sir Douglas Haig is installed as the new commander-in-chief of the British forces, his steadfast supporter, Sir William Robertson, is appointed the new chief of the Imperial General Staff, with King George's backing and over the head of the embattled British war secretary, Sir Horatio Kitchener.

Robertson, who first enlisted as a private soldier in 1877, became the only man in the British army to rise from such humble beginnings to the rank of field marshal by the end of the Great War. His impressive ascent included stints as an officer in India and South Africa; positions in British Intelligence in both the Russian and colonial areas; head of the Foreign Section of the War Office in London; chief of the general staff under Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien; commandant of the Staff College from 1910 to 1913; and finally director of military training at the War Office, where he was serving when war broke out in August 1914.

With the start of war, Robertson was plucked from his duties in London and sailed to Boulogne, France, as quartermaster-general of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), then led by Sir John French. When Haig replaced French on December 19, 1915, the new commander-in-chief saw his chance to appoint his ally to replace Sir Archibald Murray as chief of an Imperial General Staff that had been allowed to weaken under Kitchener's watch since before the war.

The strong-willed Robertson had already concluded by the time of his appointment that the war could only be won on the Western Front. He wrote to Kitchener on December 27 that "we can only end the war in our favor by attrition or by breaking through the German line." In this view, Robertson coincided with Haig, but the force of his personality ensured that he would be more than just Haig's puppet. In his new role, he effectively served as a liaison between the army and the government. He supported the ousting of Prime Minister Herbert Asquith in December 1916 in favor of David Lloyd George, then clashed bitterly with Lloyd George over the latter's attempts to subordinate Haig and Robertson himself through the formation of a Superior War Council that would direct the war's policy. In early 1918, when the new council created a strategic reserve corps of its own, against Haig's wishes and out of Robertson's command, Robertson resigned his position. He was replaced by Sir Henry Wilson.

Robertson subsequently returned to London. After the war, he served as commander in chief of the British Army on the Rhine. In March 1920, he was made a field marshal. He published two memoirs about his military career: *From Private to Field Marshal* and *Soldiers and Statesmen*. Sir William Robertson died in 1933.

- **Dec 21 1944 – WW2:** German troops surround the 101st Airborne Division at Bastogne in Belgium.
- **Dec 21 1945 – WW2:** *“Old Blood and Guts” dies* » General George S. Patton, commander of the U.S. 3rd Army, dies from injuries suffered not in battle but in a freak car accident. He was 60 years old.

Descended from a long line of military men, Patton graduated from the West Point Military Academy in 1909. He represented the United States in the 1912 Olympics—as the first American participant in the pentathlon. He did not win a medal. He went on to serve in the Tank Corps during World War I, an experience that made Patton a dedicated proponent of tank warfare.

During World War II, as commander of the U.S. 7th Army, he captured Palermo, Sicily, in 1943 by just such means. Patton’s audacity became evident in 1944, when, during the Battle of the Bulge, he employed an unorthodox strategy that involved a 90-degree pivoting move of his 3rd Army forces, enabling him to speedily relieve the besieged Allied defenders of Bastogne, Belgium.

Along the way, Patton’s mouth proved as dangerous to his career as the Germans. When he berated and slapped a hospitalized soldier diagnosed with “shell shock,” but whom Patton accused of “malingering,” the press turned on him, and pressure was applied to cut him down to size. He might have found himself enjoying early retirement had not General Dwight Eisenhower and General George Marshall intervened on his behalf. After several months of inactivity, he was put back to work.

And work he did—at the Battle of the Bulge, during which Patton once again succeeded in employing a complex and quick-witted strategy, turning the German thrust into Bastogne into an Allied counterthrust, driving the Germans east across the Rhine. In March 1945, Patton’s army swept through southern Germany into Czechoslovakia—which he was stopped from capturing by the Allies, out of respect for the Soviets’ postwar political plans for Eastern Europe.

Patton had many gifts, but diplomacy was not one of them. After the war, while stationed in Germany, he criticized the process of denazification, the removal of former Nazi Party members from positions of political, administrative, and governmental power. His impolitic press statements questioning the policy caused Eisenhower to remove him as U.S. commander in Bavaria. He was transferred to the 15th Army Group, but in December of 1945 he suffered a broken neck in a car accident and died less than two weeks later.

- **Dec 21 1968 – Aviation:** Apollo 8, the first manned mission to orbit the moon, is successfully launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida, with astronauts Frank Borman, James Lovell, Jr., and William Anders aboard.



- **Dec 21 1969 – Vietnam War:** *Thailand plans to withdraw troops* » Thailand announces its intention to withdraw its 12,000-man contingent from South Vietnam. Thai forces went to Vietnam as part of the Free World Military Forces, an effort by President Lyndon B. Johnson to enlist allies for the United States and South Vietnam. By securing support from other nations, Johnson hoped to build an international consensus behind his policies in Vietnam.

The first Thai contribution to the South Vietnamese war effort came in September 1964, when a 16-man Royal Thai Air Force group arrived in Saigon to assist in flying and maintaining some of the cargo aircraft operated by the South Vietnamese Air Force. In 1966, in response to further urging from President Johnson, the Thais agreed to increase their support to South Vietnam. The Royal Thai Military Assistance Group was formed in Saigon in February 1966. Later that year, the Thai government, once again at Johnson's insistence, agreed to send combat troops to aid the South Vietnamese government. In September 1967, the first elements of the Royal Thai Volunteer Regiment, the "Queen's Cobras," arrived in Vietnam and were stationed in Bear Cat (near Bien Hoa, north of Saigon). The Thai regiment began combat operations in October 1967.

In July 1968, the Queen's Cobras were replaced by the Royal Thai Army Expeditionary Division (the "Black Panthers"), which included two brigades of infantry, three battalions of 105-mm field artillery, and an armored cavalry unit. In August 1970, the Black Panther Division was renamed the Royal Thai Army Volunteer Force, a title it retained throughout the rest of its time in South Vietnam.

The decision by the Thai government to begin withdrawing its troops was in line with President Nixon's plan to withdraw U.S. troops from South Vietnam as the war was turned over to the South Vietnamese. The first Thai troops departed South Vietnam in 1971 and all were gone by early 1972.

- **Dec 21 1972 – Vietnam War:** *Defense Department reports eight B-52s lost during Linebacker II* » The Defense Department announces that eight B-52 bombers and several fighter-bombers were lost since the commencement of Operation Linebacker II on December 18. These losses included at least 43 flyers captured or killed. President Richard Nixon ordered the operation after the North Vietnamese negotiators walked out of the peace talks in Paris. In response, President Nixon immediately issued an ultimatum that North Vietnam send its representatives back to the conference table within 72 hours "or else." When they rejected Nixon's demand, he ordered a full-scale air campaign against Hanoi and Haiphong to force them back to the negotiating table. On December 28, after 11 days of intensive bombing, the North Vietnamese agreed to return to the talks.

- **Dec 21 1988 – War On Terrorism: *Pan Am Flight 103 bombing*** » This was a regularly scheduled transatlantic flight from Frankfurt to Detroit via London and New York. On 21 DEC the aircraft (N739PA) operating the transatlantic leg of the route was destroyed by a bomb, killing all 243 passengers and 16 crew – a disaster known as the Lockerbie bombing. Large sections of the aircraft crashed onto residential areas of Lockerbie, Scotland, killing 11 people on the ground. With a total of 270 people killed, it is the deadliest terror attack in the history of the United Kingdom.

Following a three-year joint investigation by Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary and the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), arrest warrants were issued for two Libyan nationals in November 1991. In 1999, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi handed over the two men for trial at Camp Zeist, Netherlands, after protracted negotiations and UN sanctions. In 2001, Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, a Libyan intelligence officer, was jailed for life after being found guilty of 270 counts of murder in connection with the bombing. In August 2009, he was released by the Scottish Government on compassionate grounds after being diagnosed with prostate cancer. He died in May 2012 as the only person to be convicted for the attack.

In 2003, Gaddafi accepted responsibility for the Lockerbie bombing and paid compensation to the families of the victims, although he maintained that he had never given the order for the attack. Acceptance of responsibility was part of a series of requirements laid out by a UN resolution in order for sanctions against Libya to be lifted. Libya said it had to accept responsibility due to Megrahi's status as a government employee. During the Libyan Civil War in 2011, former Minister of Justice Mustafa Abdul Jalil claimed that the Libyan leader had personally ordered the bombing, though this was later denied, while investigators have long believed that Megrahi did not act alone, and have been reported as questioning retired Stasi agents about a possible role in the attack.

Some relatives of the dead, including the Lockerbie campaigner Dr Jim Swire, believe the bomb was planted at Heathrow airport and not sent via feeder flights from Malta, as the US and UK claim. A cell belonging to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (General Command) had been operating in West Germany in the months before the Pan Am bombing.

- **Dec 21 2004 – Iraq War:** A suicide bomber kills 22 at the forward operating base next to the main U.S. military airfield at Mosul, the single deadliest suicide attack on American soldiers to date.

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- **Dec 22 1775 – American Revolution: *Continental Congress creates a Continental Navy*** » Congress names Esek Hopkins, Esq., as commander in chief of the Continental Navy they created.

Congress also named four captains to the new service: Dudley Saltonstall, Abraham Whipple, Nicholas Biddle and John Burrows Hopkins. Their respective vessels, the Alfred, Columbus, Andrew Doria and Cabot, became the first ships of the Navy's fleet. Five first lieutenants, including future American hero John Paul Jones, five second lieutenants, and three third lieutenants also received their commissions.



USS Alfred



USS Columbus



USS Andrew Doria



USS Cabot

The new Admiral Hopkins, as he was dubbed by George Washington, was a Rhode Islander of some standing. His brother was Stephen Hopkins, the state's governor. Esek Hopkins had married well and used his wife's fortune to buy a ship. It proved a wise investment. He added to his wealth working as a privateer during the Seven Years' War. In his new position, Congress promised to pay him 125 dollars per calendar month; they also informed that he could look forward to some share of the prizes allotted to the captors. Christopher Gadsden of South Carolina designed Hopkins' personal standard, which flew from the first navy fleet. The yellow flag bore the image of a coiled snake and the Patriot motto, Don't Tread on Me.

Hopkins' first assignment was to assess the feasibility of an attack on British naval forces in the Chesapeake Bay. After sailing south with his meager force of eight ships, Hopkins decided that victory in such an encounter was impossible. He sailed to the Bahamas instead, where he attacked the British port of Nassau, a decision for which he was relieved of his command upon returning to the continent.

- **Dec 22 1807 – Napoleonic Wars:** In an effort to avoid engaging in the Napoleonic Wars, the United States Congress passed the Embargo Act, forbidding American ships from engaging in trade with foreign nations.
- **Dec 22 1864 – Civil War:** *Sherman presents Lincoln with a Christmas gift* » Union General William T. Sherman presents the city of Savannah, Georgia, to President Abraham Lincoln. Sherman captured the city after his famous March to the Sea from Atlanta. Savannah had been one of the last major ports that remained open to the Confederates.

After Sherman captured Atlanta in September 1864, he did not plan to stay for long. There was still the Confederate army of General John Bell Hood in the area, and cavalry leaders like Nathan Bedford Forrest and Joe Wheeler, who could threaten Sherman's supply lines. In November, Sherman dispatched part of his force back to Nashville, Tennessee, to deal with Hood while Sherman cut free from his supply lines and headed south and east across Georgia. Along the way, his troops destroyed nearly everything in their path. Sherman's intent was to wreck the morale of the South and bring the war to a swift end.

For nearly six weeks, nothing was heard from Sherman's army. Finally, just before Christmas, word arrived that Sherman's army was outside Savannah. A Union officer reached the coast and found a Union warship that carried him to Washington, D.C., to personally deliver news of the success. Sherman wired Lincoln with the message, "I beg to present you, as a Christmas gift, the city of Savannah, with 150 heavy guns and plenty of ammunition, and also about 25,000 bales of cotton."

- **Dec 22 1917 – WWI:** *Russian-German peace talks begin at Brest-Litovsk* » A week after the armistice was signed between Russia and Germany and nearly three weeks after a ceasefire was declared on the Eastern Front, representatives of the two countries begin peace negotiations at Brest-Litovsk, near the Polish border in what is now the city of Brest, in Belarus.

The leader of the Russian delegation was Leon Trotsky, the Bolshevik People’s Commissar for Foreign Relations. Max Hoffmann, the commander of German forces on the Eastern Front, served as one of the chief negotiators on the German side. The main difference of opinion in Brest-Litovsk was over cessation of Russian land to the Germans—the Russians demanded a peace without annexations or indemnities and the Germans were unwilling to concede on this point. In February 1918, Trotsky announced he was withdrawing the Russians from the peace talks, and the war was on again.



Leon Trotsky    Max Hoffmann

Unfortunately for Russia, with the renewal of fighting the Central Powers quickly took the upper hand, seizing control of most of Ukraine and Belarus. The Bolshevik hope that the workers of Germany and Austria, offended by their governments’ naked territorial ambition, would rise up in rebellion in the name of the international proletariat soon vanished. On March 3, 1918, Russia accepted peace terms even harsher than those originally suggested, losing Poland, Lithuania, and the Baltic states of Estonia, Livonia, and Courland to Germany. Meanwhile, Finland and the Ukraine saw Russia’s weakness as an opportunity to declare their independence. In all, Brest-Litovsk deprived Lenin’s new state of one million square miles of territory and one-third of its population, or 55 million people.

- **Dec 22 1939 – WW2:** *Express trains collide in Germany* » Two express trains collide in Magdeburg, Germany, killing more than 100 people on this day in 1939. Occurring at the outset of World War II, the accident was probably a result of the fact that the country’s best rail engineers had all been conscripted into the military.

Between the end of World War I in 1918 and 1939, German trains became well-known for their efficiency. However, as the Second World War began, a large part of the rail system and many of its employees were put to work for the military. In order to keep some civilian trains going, other people, including retired employees, were brought in to run the system. For these new employees, training was often minimal and rushed.

On the morning of December 22, an express train to Cologne filled with Christmas travelers made an unscheduled stop at the Genthin station near Magdeburg. The express train to Berlin came down the same tracks and ignored a stop signal. It was going full speed when it crashed straight into the rear car of the Cologne train.

The Cologne train’s three rear coaches were demolished by the impact. In addition, the locomotive of the Berlin express derailed and took five of its coach cars with it. The official death toll was 132

people, with 109 serious injuries. However, the numbers may have been kept artificially low by the Nazi government, which had initially attempted to keep the story from being reported by the press.

- **Dec 22 1941 – WW2:** *Churchill and Roosevelt discuss war and peace* » British Prime Minister Winston Churchill arrives in Washington, D.C. for a series of meetings with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt on a unified Anglo-American war strategy and a future peace.

Now that the United States was directly involved in both the Pacific and European wars, it was incumbent upon both Great Britain and America to create and project a unified front. Toward that end, Churchill and Roosevelt created a combined general staff to coordinate military strategy against both Germany and Japan and to draft a future joint invasion of the Continent. Roosevelt also agreed to a radical increase in the U.S. arms production program: the 12,750 operational aircraft to be ready for service by the end of 1943 became 45,000; the proposed 15,450 tanks also became 45,000; and the number of machine guns to be manufactured almost doubled, to 500,000.

Among the momentous results of these U.S.-Anglo meetings was a declaration issued by Churchill and Roosevelt that enjoined 26 signatory nations to use all resources at their disposal to defeat the Axis powers and not sue for a separate peace. This confederation called itself the “United Nations.” Led by the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union, all 26 nations declared a unified goal to “ensure life, liberty, independence and religious freedom, and to preserve the rights of man and justice.” The blueprint for the destruction of fascism and a future international peacekeeping organization was born.

- **Dec 22 1944 – WW2:** *Battle of the Bulge* » German troops demand the surrender of United States troops at Bastogne, Belgium, prompting the famous one word reply by General Anthony McAuliffe: "Nuts!"
- **Dec 22 1944 – WW2:** The People's Army of Vietnam is formed to resist Japanese occupation of Indo-China, now Vietnam.
- **Dec 22 1971 – Vietnam War:** *Soviet Union attacks Chinese policy toward Vietnam* » The Soviet Union accuses China of backing U.S. policies in Vietnam, an accusation that illustrates the growing rift between the two communist superpowers. China, which had previously taken a hard line toward negotiations between Hanoi and Washington, softened its position by endorsing a North Vietnamese peace plan for ending the war. Although the peace proposal was unacceptable to the United States, the fact that China advocated negotiations between Hanoi and Washington was significant. The Soviet Union, whose relations with China were already deteriorating, was highly suspicious of what they rightfully perceived as a “warming” in Sino-American relations. This suspicion only grew stronger in February 1972, when President Richard Nixon visited China.
- **Dec 22 1972 – Vietnam War:** *Washington announces Linebacker II raids will continue* » Bombing of North Vietnam will continue until Hanoi agrees to negotiate “in a spirit of good will and in a constructive attitude.”

North Vietnamese negotiators walked out of secret talks in Paris on December 13. President Nixon issued an ultimatum to North Vietnam to send its representatives back to the conference table within

72 hours “or else.” They rejected Nixon’s demand, and in response the president ordered Operation Linebacker II, a full-scale air campaign against the Hanoi area.

During the 11 days of the operation, 700 B-52 sorties and more than 1,000 fighter-bomber sorties dropped an estimated 20,000 tons of bombs, mostly over the densely populated area between Hanoi and Haiphong. In the course of the bombing, the Cuban, Egyptian, and Indian embassies were hit in Hanoi, as were Russian and Chinese freighters in Haiphong. Bach Mai, Hanoi’s largest hospital, was also damaged by the attacks. In the United States, 41 American religious leaders issued a letter condemning the bombing.

- **Dec 22 1989 – Cold War:** Berlin's Brandenburg Gate re-opens after nearly 30 years, effectively ending the division of East and West Germany.
- **Dec 22 1990 – Cold War:** *Lech Walesa sworn in as president of Poland* » Lech Walesa, well-known Polish labor leader and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, is sworn in as the first noncommunist president of Poland since the end of World War II. His victory was another sign of the Soviet Union’s lessening power and communism’s waning influence in Eastern Europe.

Walesa first came into prominence in Poland in 1980 when he took over the leadership of a strike of shipyard workers. The action was a success, with Poland’s communist government agreeing to the union’s right to exist. This was the birth of the so-called “Solidarity” movement in Poland, a broad-based movement designed to remove communist control over labor organizations. Though forced to give in during the strike, the government plotted to eliminate this new threat to its power. Martial law was imposed in 1981 and shortly thereafter Walesa was arrested and put into solitary confinement for nearly a year. In 1983, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in organizing Polish labor and protesting communist oppression in his nation.

Upon his release from prison, Walesa resumed his union efforts. The Solidarity movement rapidly gained in strength and popularity. In 1989, the Polish government allowed semi-free elections and Solidarity candidates won seats in the national parliament. In 1990, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, the communist leader of Poland, agreed to step down and allow free elections. Walesa, though he initially shunned political office, ran for president as the Solidarity candidate and won. His election was another blow to Soviet power in East Europe and marked another defection from the communist Iron Curtain nations of Europe.

Walesa’s five years in office were marked by Poland’s rapid transformation to a growing free-market economy, though Walesa himself was often criticized for his leadership style, which included replacing government staffers almost yearly. He lost the presidential election in 1995 and ostensibly retired from public life. He ran for president again in 2000, but received less than one percent of the vote.

- **Dec 22 2010 – DOD:** The repeal of the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, the 17 year old policy ban on homosexuals serving openly in the United States military, is signed into law by President Barack Obama.

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- **Dec 23 1783 – American Revolution:** Following the signing of the Treaty of Paris, General George Washington resigns as commander in chief of the Continental Army and retires to his home at Mount Vernon, Virginia.



**Dec 23 1862 – Civil War:** *Davis declares Butler a felon* » Confederate President Jefferson Davis declares Union General Benjamin Butler a felon and insists that he be executed if captured. Butler had earned few friends in New Orleans; indeed, his treatment of the city’s residents outraged most Southerners.

The Union captured New Orleans in early 1862 and Butler became the military commander of the city. His actions there soon made him the most hated Yankee in the Confederacy. Butler worked to root out all signs of the Confederacy from the city. He hanged a gambler who tore down an American flag and he ordered civil officers, attorneys, and clergy to take an oath of allegiance to the United States. Additionally, he offended Southern women with General Order No. 28, which stated that any woman who insulted Union troops would “be treated as a woman of the town plying her avocation.” Butler confiscated the property of Confederates and was accused of stealing silver spoons from the locals, earning him the nickname Spoons. Butler’s brother, Andrew, gained permits to trade in the area and made a fortune from the sale of contraband items.



Despite the Confederate president’s declaration that Butler was a felon, the Union general was never captured by the Rebels. After the Civil War ended, Butler went on to serve as a U.S. congressman and the governor of Massachusetts. He died in 1893 at age 74.

- **Dec 23 1941 – WW2:** *Wake Island taken* » Despite throwing back an earlier Japanese amphibious assault, the U.S. Marines and Navy defenders on Wake Island after 15 days of fighting capitulate to a second Japanese invasion. The second Japanese invasion force was composed mostly of the ships from the first attempt plus 1,500 Japanese marines. The landings began at 02:35; after a preliminary bombardment, the ex-destroyers Patrol Boat No. 32 and Patrol Boat No. 33 were beached and burned in their attempts to land the invasion force. After a full night and morning of fighting, the Wake garrison surrendered to the Japanese by mid-afternoon.

The US Marines lost 49 killed, two missing, and 49 wounded during the 15-day siege, while three US Navy personnel and at least 70 US civilians were killed, including 10 Chamorros (Mariana Islanders), and 12 civilians wounded. 433 US personnel were captured. Japanese losses were 144 casualties, 140 SNLF and Army casualties with another 4 aboard ships. At least 28 land-based and carrier aircraft were also either shot down or damaged. The Japanese captured all men remaining on the island, the majority of whom were civilian contractors employed by the Morrison-Knudsen Company.

On 5 October 1943, American naval aircraft from Lexington raided Wake. Two days later, fearing an imminent invasion, Japanese Rear Admiral Shigematsu Sakaibara ordered the execution of the 98 captive American civilian workers who had initially been kept to perform forced labor. They were taken to the northern end of the island, blindfolded and executed with a machine gun. One of the prisoners (whose name has never been discovered) escaped, apparently returning to the site to carve the message "98 US PW 5-10-43" on a large coral rock near where the victims had been hastily buried in a mass grave. The unknown American was recaptured, and Sakaibara personally beheaded him with a katana. The inscription on the rock can still be seen and is a Wake Island landmark.

On 4 September 1945, the remaining Japanese garrison surrendered to a detachment of United States Marines under the command of Brigadier General Lawson H. M. Sanderson, with the handover being officially conducted in a brief ceremony aboard the destroyer escort Levy

- **Dec 23 1944 – WW2:** *The execution of Eddie Slovik is authorized* » Gen. Dwight Eisenhower endorses the finding of a court-martial in the case of Eddie Slovik, who was tried for desertion, and authorizes his execution, the first such sentence against a U.S. Army soldier since the Civil War, and the only man so punished during World War II.

Private Eddie Slovik was a draftee. Originally classified 4-F because of a prison record (grand theft auto), he was bumped up to a 1-A classification when draft standards were lowered to meet growing personnel needs. In January 1944, he was trained to be a rifleman, which was not to his liking, as he hated guns.

In August of the same year, Slovik was shipped to France to fight with the 28th Infantry Division, which had already suffered massive casualties in the fighting there and in Germany. Slovik was a replacement, a class of soldier not particularly respected by officers. As he and a companion were on the way to the front lines, they became lost in the chaos of battle, only to stumble upon a Canadian unit that took them in.

Slovik stayed on with the Canadians until October 5, when they turned him and his buddy over to the American military police, who reunited them with the 28th Division, now in Elsenborn, Belgium. No charges were brought; replacements getting lost early on in their tours of duty were not unusual. But exactly one day after Slovik returned to his unit, he claimed he was "too scared and too nervous" to be a rifleman and threatened to run away if forced into combat. His admission was ignored-and Slovik took off. One day after that he returned, and Slovik signed a confession of desertion, claiming he would run away again if forced to fight, and submitted it to an officer of the 28th. The officer advised Slovik to take the confession back, as the consequences would be serious. Slovik refused, and he was confined to the stockade.

The 28th Division had seen many cases of soldiers wounding themselves or deserting in the hopes of a prison sentence that would at least protect them from the perils of combat. So a legal officer of the 28th offered Slovik a deal: Dive into combat immediately and avoid the court-martial. Slovik refused. He was tried on November 11 for desertion and was convicted in less than two hours. The nine-officer court-martial panel passed a unanimous sentence: execution-“to be shot to death with musketry.”

Slovik’s appeal failed. It was held that he “directly challenged the authority” of the United States and that “future discipline depends upon a resolute reply to this challenge.” Slovik was to pay for his recalcitrant attitude-and he was to be made an example. One last appeal was made-to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander. The timing was bad for mercy. The Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes forest was issuing in literally thousands of American casualties, not to mention the second largest surrender of an American Army unit during the war. Eisenhower upheld the sentence.



Slovik would be shot to death by a 12-man firing squad in eastern France in January of 1945. None of the rifleman so much as flinched, believing Slovik had gotten what he deserved.

- **Dec 23 1946 – Post WWII:** *Truman considers amnesty for draft dodgers* » President Harry S. Truman appoints an amnesty board to review cases of conscientious objectors (CO’s) who were imprisoned after refusing to serve during World War II.

Truman’s predecessor, Franklin Roosevelt, had pardoned select World War I “draft dodgers” in 1933. In preparation for the Second World War, Roosevelt tried to avoid jailing CO’s by offering them the opportunity to participate in a domestic civil-service program instead that included work on farms and in hospitals. Although approximately 25,000 men did take FDR up on his offer or joined the military and served in non-combat roles, 15,000 more chose not to support the war effort at all—some of these were charged with violating federal conscription law and imprisoned. Truman, in the spirit of forgiveness, appointed the board to review individual cases of those who were jailed, with the idea that anyone who had been unjustly punished would be pardoned.

A year later, the board reported back to Truman. Of the 15,000 violators of the World War II Selective Service Act, only 1,500 were considered entitled to full amnesty. Most were members of historically “pacifist” religious sects such as the Quakers and Mennonites. On December 23, 1947, Truman granted pardons to those 1,500 and restored their political and civil rights. (Those who had originally been jailed as convicted “felons” lost voting rights, and even after their release were prevented from obtaining certain jobs or holding public office.) As the board was given the power to define what constituted a legitimate “religious organization,” hundreds of Jehovah’s Witnesses were

not considered, nor were those who protested the war for personal reasons other than religion, including the belief that the draft violated the U.S. Constitution.

In 1948, former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, then a human rights activist, was approached by several religious and civil rights organizations, including the American Friends Service Committee, the Federal Council of Churches and the American Civil Liberties Union to advocate on their behalf for broader amnesty. Eleanor wrote to Truman and asked for a review of the thousands who had yet to be considered for pardons. Truman wrote back, admitting that he had little sympathy for the majority of conscientious objectors; in fact, he viewed them with contempt, believing them to be “just plain cowards or shirkers.” Truman believed that many CO’s used religion as an excuse to avoid service and told Eleanor that he thought all the “honest” conscientious objectors had been identified by his Amnesty Board. Truman was not the only president to grant clemency to draft dodgers: Gerald R. Ford and Jimmy Carter offered pardons in 1974 and 1977 respectively.

- **Dec 23 1948 – Post WWII:** *Japanese war criminals hanged in Tokyo* » In Tokyo, Japan, Hideki Tojo, former Japanese premier and chief of the Kwantung Army, is executed along with six other top Japanese leaders for their war crimes during World War II. Seven of the defendants were also found guilty of committing crimes against humanity, especially in regard to their systematic genocide of the Chinese people.



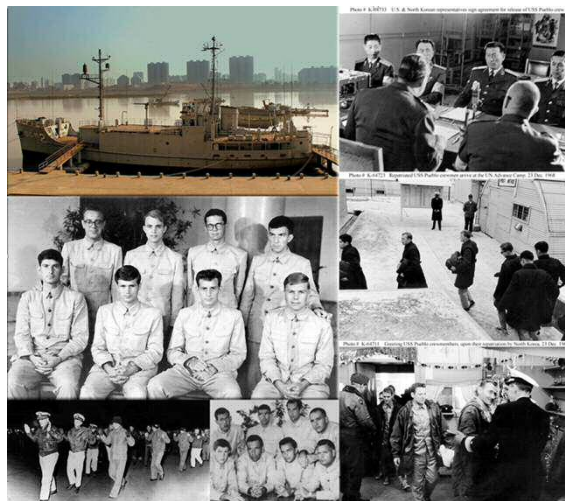
Hideki Tojo (left) before the International Military Tribunal (right) for the Far East

On 12 NOV, death sentences were imposed on Tojo and the six other principals, such as Iwane Matsui, who organized the Rape of Nanking, and Heitaro Kimura, who brutalized Allied prisoners of war. Sixteen others were sentenced to life imprisonment, and the remaining two of the original 25 defendants were sentenced to lesser terms in prison.

Unlike the Nuremberg trial of German war criminals, where there were four chief prosecutors representing Great Britain, France, the United States, and the USSR, the Tokyo trial featured only one chief prosecutor—American Joseph B. Keenan, a former assistant to the U.S. attorney general. However, other nations, especially China, contributed to the proceedings, and Australian judge William Flood Webb presided. In addition to the central Tokyo trial, various tribunals sitting outside Japan judged some 5,000 Japanese guilty of war crimes, of whom more than 900 were executed.

- **Dec 23 1961 – Cold War:** Fidel Castro announces Cuba will release 1,113 prisoners from failed 1961 Bay of Pigs Invasion for \$62M worth of food and medical supplies.

- Dec 23 1961 – Vietnam:** President John F. Kennedy ordered the Pentagon to provide U.S. military helicopters and crews to South Vietnam. As part of a wider strategy known as containment, he sought to avert a communist takeover of that country. At the time, the cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy in Southeast Asia was the so-called Domino Theory. It held that if South Vietnam fell to the communists, the entire region would follow suit. As a Democratic senator from Massachusetts during Dwight Eisenhower’s presidency, Kennedy argued that the security of all of Southeast Asia “would be threatened if the red tide of communism overflowed into Vietnam.”
- Dec 23 1966 – Vietnam War:** *Francis Cardinal Spellman visits South Vietnam* » The Roman Catholic Archbishop of New York and military vicar of the U.S. armed forces for Roman Catholics, visits U.S. servicemen in South Vietnam. In an address at mass in Saigon, Spellman said that the Vietnamese conflict was “a war for civilization—certainly it is not a war of our seeking. It is a war thrust upon us—we cannot yield to tyranny.” Anything “less than victory is inconceivable.” On 26 DEC, Spellman told U.S. soldiers that they were in Vietnam for the “defense, protection, and salvation not only of our country, but... of civilization itself.” The next day, Vatican sources expressed displeasure with Spellman’s statements in Vietnam. One source said, “The Cardinal did not speak for the Pope or the Church.” The Pope had previously called for negotiations and an end to the war in Vietnam.
- Dec 23 1968 – Cold War:** *Crew of USS Pueblo released by North Korea* » The crew and captain of the U.S. intelligence gathering ship Pueblo are released after 11 months imprisonment by the government of North Korea. The ship, and its 83-man crew, was seized by North Korean warships on January 23 and charged with intruding into North Korean waters.



The seizure infuriated U.S. President Lyndon Johnson. Later, he claimed that he strongly suspected (although it could not be proven) that the incident with the Pueblo, coming just a few days before the communist Tet Offensive in South Vietnam, was a coordinated diversion. At the time, however, Johnson did little. The Tet Offensive, which began just a week after the ship was taken by North Korea, exploded on the front pages and televisions of America and seemed to paralyze the Johnson administration. To deal with the Pueblo incident, the United States urged the U.N.’s Security Council

to condemn the action and pressured the Soviet Union to negotiate with the North Koreans for the ship's release.

It was 11 long months before the Pueblo's men were freed. Both captain and crew were horribly treated and later recounted their torture at the hands of the North Koreans. With no help in sight, Captain Lloyd Bucher reluctantly signed a document confessing that the ship was spying on North Korea. With this propaganda victory in hand, the North Koreans released the prisoners and also returned the body of one crewman who died in captivity. Some Americans criticized Johnson for not taking decisive retaliatory action against North Korea; others argued that he should have used every diplomatic means at his disposal to secure a quick release for the crew. In any case, the event was another blow to Johnson and America's Cold War foreign policy.

- **Dec 23 1972 – Vietnam War: *Operation Linebacker II continues*** » The East German Embassy and the Hungarian commercial mission in Hanoi are hit in the eighth day of Operation Linebacker II. Although there were reports that a prisoner of war camp holding American soldiers was hit, the rumor was untrue.

President Nixon initiated the full-scale bombing campaign against North Vietnam on 18 DEC, when the North Vietnamese—who walked out of the peace talks in Paris—refused an ultimatum from Nixon to return to the negotiating table. During the 11 days of the operation, 700 B-52 sorties and more than 1,000 fighter-bomber sorties dropped an estimated 20,000 tons of bombs, mostly over the densely populated area between Hanoi and Haiphong. President Nixon was vilified at home and abroad for ordering the “Christmas bombing,” but on 28 DEC, the North Vietnamese did agree to return to the talks in Paris. When the negotiators met again in early January, they quickly arrived at a settlement. The Paris Peace Accords were signed on 23 JAN and a cease-fire went into effect five days later.

- **Dec 23 1986 – Aviation: *Voyager completes global flight*** » After nine days and four minutes in the sky, the experimental aircraft Voyager lands at Edwards Air Force Base in California, completing the first nonstop flight around the globe on one load of fuel. Piloted by Americans Dick Rutan and Jeana Yeager, Voyager was made mostly of plastic and stiffened paper and carried more than three times its weight in fuel when it took off from Edwards Air Force Base on 14 DEC. By the time it returned, after flying 25,012 miles around the planet, it had just five gallons of fuel left in its remaining operational fuel tank.



Voyager was built by Burt Rutan of the Rutan Aircraft Company without government support and with minimal corporate sponsorship. Dick Rutan, Burt's brother and a decorated Vietnam War pilot, joined the project early on, as did Dick's friend Jeanna Yeager (no relation to aviator Chuck Yeager).

Voyager's extremely light yet strong body was made of layers of carbon-fiber tape and paper impregnated with epoxy resin. Its wingspan was 111 feet, and it had its horizontal stabilizer wing on the plane's nose rather than its rear—a trademark of many of Rutan's aircraft designs. Essentially a flying fuel tank, every possible area was used for fuel storage and much modern aircraft technology was foregone in the effort to reduce weight.

When Voyager took off from Edwards Air Force at 8:02 a.m. PST on 14 DEC, its wings were so heavy with fuel that their tips scraped along the ground and caused minor damage. The plane made it into the air, however, and headed west. On the second day, Voyager ran into severe turbulence caused by two tropical storms in the Pacific. Dick Rutan had been concerned about flying the aircraft at more than a 15-degree angle, but he soon found the plane could fly on its side at 90 degrees, which occurred when the wind tossed it back and forth.

Rutan and Yeager shared the controls, but Rutan, a more experienced pilot, did most of the flying owing to the long periods of turbulence encountered at various points in the journey. With weak stomachs, they ate only a fraction of the food brought along, and each lost about 10 pounds. On 23 DEC, when Voyager was flying north along the Baja California coast and just 450 miles short of its goal, the engine it was using went out, and the aircraft plunged from 8,500 to 5,000 feet before an alternate engine was started up.

Almost nine days to the minute after it lifted off, Voyager appeared over Edwards Air Force Base and circled as Yeager turned a primitive crank that lowered the landing gear. Then, to the cheers of 23,000 spectators, the plane landed safely with a few gallons of fuel to spare, completing the first nonstop circumnavigation of the earth by an aircraft that was not refueled in the air. Voyager is on permanent display at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C.

- **Dec 23 2002 – Iraq War:** A MQ-1 Predator is shot down by an Iraqi MiG-25, making it the first time in history that an aircraft and an unmanned drone had engaged in combat.



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- **Dec 24 1814 – War of 1812:** *War of 1812 ends* » The Treaty of Peace and Amity between His Britannic Majesty and the United States of America is signed by British and American representatives at Ghent, Belgium, ending the War of 1812. By terms of the treaty, all conquered territory was to be returned, and commissions were planned to settle the boundary of the United States and Canada.

In June 1812, the United States declared war against Great Britain in reaction to three issues: the British economic blockade of France, the induction of thousands of neutral American seamen into the British Royal Navy against their will, and the British support of hostile Indian tribes along the Great Lakes frontier. A faction of Congress, made up mostly of western and southern congressmen, had been

advocating the declaration of war for several years. These “War Hawks,” as they were known, hoped that war with Britain, which was preoccupied with its struggle against Napoleonic France, would result in U.S. territorial gains in Canada and British-protected Florida.

In the months following the U.S. declaration of war, American forces launched a three-point invasion of Canada, all of which were repulsed. At sea, however, the United States was more successful, and the USS Constitution and other American frigates won a series of victories over British warships. In 1813, American forces won several key victories in the Great Lakes region, but Britain regained control of the sea and blockaded the eastern seaboard.

In 1814, with the downfall of Napoleon, the British were able to allocate more military resources to the American war, and Washington, D.C., fell to the British in August. In Washington, British troops burned the White House, the Capitol, and other buildings in retaliation for the earlier burning of government buildings in Canada by U.S. soldiers. The British soon retreated, however, and Fort McHenry in Baltimore harbor withstood a massive British bombardment and inspired Francis Scott Key to pen the “Star-Spangled Banner.”

On September 11, 1814, the tide of the war turned when Thomas Macdonough’s American naval force won a decisive victory at the Battle of Plattsburg Bay on Lake Champlain. A large British army under Sir George Prevost was thus forced to abandon its invasion of the U.S. northeast and retreat to Canada. The American victory on Lake Champlain led to the conclusion of U.S.-British peace negotiations in Belgium, and on December 24, 1814, the Treaty of Ghent was signed, ending the war. Although the treaty said nothing about two of the key issues that started the war—the rights of neutral U.S. vessels and the impressment of U.S. sailors—it did open up the Great Lakes region to American expansion and was hailed as a diplomatic victory in the United States.

News of the treaty took almost two months to cross the Atlantic, and British forces were not informed of the end of hostilities in time to end their drive against the mouth of the Mississippi River. On January 8, 1815, a large British army attacked New Orleans and was decimated by an inferior American force under General Andrew Jackson in the most spectacular U.S. victory of the war. The American public heard of the Battle of New Orleans and the Treaty of Ghent at approximately the same time, fostering a greater sentiment of self-confidence and shared identity throughout the young republic.

Under terms of an agreement that was signed at Six O’clock on December 24th any land taken by either side during the war would be returned immediately. Commissions were to appoint to deal with any disputed territorial issues. All prisoners were to be exchanged, and any Indian lands seized were to be returned. The latter provision was ignored. After two years of warfare the two sides ended where they began.

- **Dec 24 1861 – Civil War:** The USS Gem of the Sea destroys the British blockade runner Prince of Wales off the coast at Georgetown, S.C.
- **Dec 24 1862 – Civil War:** A Christmas present arrives a day early for the Federal troops at Columbus, Kentucky, in the way of artillery on board the USS New Era.
- **Dec 24 1864 – Civil War:** *Bombardment of Fort Fisher begins* » A Union fleet under Admiral David Dixon Porter begins a bombardment of Fort Fisher, North Carolina. Although an impressive



display of firepower, the attack failed to destroy the fort; a ground attack the next day did not succeed either.

Fort Fisher guarded the mouth of the Cape Fear River, the approach to Wilmington, North Carolina. Throughout the war, Wilmington was one of the most important ports as the Confederates tried to break the Union blockade of its coasts. By late 1864, Wilmington was one of the last ports open in the South. Even though Wilmington was an important city, Union leaders initially directed more attention to other targets, such as the capture of the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia. Not until late 1864 did the Union turn attention to the massive wood-and-sand Fort Fisher, which was constructed in 1862 to withstand attacks by the most powerful Federal cannon.

Sixty ships attacked the fort on Christmas Eve. Inside the stronghold, some 500 Confederates hunkered down and withstood the siege. Although buildings in the fort caught fire, there were few casualties. The next day, a small Yankee force attacked on the ground, but reinforcing Confederates from Wilmington drove them away. The Union fleet sailed back to Hampton Roads, Virginia, with nothing to show for their efforts. The Union tried again to take Fort Fisher in January 1865. After two days, a Union force overwhelmed the fort and the last major Confederate port was closed.

- **Dec 24 1865 – Post Civil War: *KKK founded*** » In Pulaski, Tennessee, a group of Confederate veterans convenes to form a secret society that they christen the “Ku Klux Klan.” The KKK rapidly grew from a secret social fraternity to a paramilitary force bent on reversing the federal government’s progressive Reconstruction Era-activities in the South, especially policies that elevated the rights of the local African American population.

The name of the Ku Klux Klan was derived from the Greek word *kyklos*, meaning “circle,” and the Scottish-Gaelic word “clan,” which was probably chosen for the sake of alliteration. Under a platform of philosophized white racial superiority, the group employed violence as a means of pushing back Reconstruction and its enfranchisement of African Americans. Former Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest was the KKK’s first grand wizard; in 1869, he unsuccessfully tried to disband it after he grew critical of the Klan’s excessive violence.

Most prominent in counties where the races were relatively balanced, the KKK engaged in terrorist raids against African Americans and white Republicans at night, employing intimidation, destruction of property, assault, and murder to achieve its aims and influence upcoming elections. In a few Southern states, Republicans organized militia units to break up the Klan. In 1871, the Ku Klux Act passed Congress, authorizing President Ulysses S. Grant to use military force to suppress the KKK. The Ku Klux Act resulted in nine South Carolina counties being placed under martial law and thousands of arrests. In 1882, the U.S. Supreme Court declared the Ku Klux Act unconstitutional, but by that time Reconstruction had ended and the KKK had faded away.

The 20th century witnessed two revivals of the KKK: one in response to immigration in the 1910s and ’20s, and another in response to the African American civil rights movement of the 1950s and ’60s.

- **Dec 24 1914 – WWI:** The 'Christmas truce' begins. It lasts through Xmas Day and as long as New Year’s Day in some areas of the front. Over 577,000 Allied soldiers are to spend Christmas as prisoners in Germany.

- **Dec 24 1917 – WWI:** The Kaiser warns Russia that he will use an “iron fist” and a “shining sword” if peace is spurned.
- **Dec 24 1942 – WWII:** *French Admiral Jean Darlan is assassinated* » A pro-Free French assassin in Algeria kills Jean Francois Darlan, French admiral and collaborator in the Vichy government. He was 61.

Born on August 7, 1881, in Nerac, France, Darlan graduated from the French naval academy in 1902, and advanced quickly through the ranks, reaching the position of admiral of the fleet in June 1939. He was made commander in chief of the French navy two months later. Upon the surrender of France to the German invaders in June of 1940, Darlan let it be known that he was inclined to sail the fleet to Great Britain, to keep it out of German hands. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill conceded, “...I would cheerfully crawl on my hands and knees for a mile if by doing so I could get him to bring that fleet of his into the circle of Allied forces.”

But it was not to happen. Darlan was quickly “bought off” by a power position: He was made navy minister and then supreme commander of all Vichy French military forces under Philippe Petain’s government. He became a collaborator with the German puppeteers (even passing on to the Germans sensitive U.S. military information that had landed in the French embassy in Washington, D.C.), and, to add insult to injury, ordering most of the French fleet to North Africa to avoid Allied capture. (The Royal Navy at Oran would nevertheless attack it shortly thereafter.)



In November 1942, when Anglo-American forces launched its North African campaign, Operation Torch, Darlan was in Algiers, Algeria, visiting his seriously ill son. General Dwight Eisenhower took advantage of Darlan’s proximity by ordering American diplomat Robert Murphy and Major General Mark Clark to convince Darlan to aid the Allies in their invasion (Darlan had hinted that he might switch his allegiance again in exchange for heavy financial aid for France from the United States). Darlan vacillated, in part because he still distrusted and disliked the British because of the attack on his fleet at Oran, but in light of the German invasion of France, which the Vichy government’s concessions were supposed to prevent, he eventually acquiesced. He ordered a Vichy-force ceasefire to permit the Allied landings in North Africa to move forward unopposed. Darlan finally signed an armistice with the Allies, folding his Vichy forces into the Free French military.

Nevertheless, Darlan was never fully trusted by the Free French; he was deemed too much of an opportunist. On Christmas Eve, 1942, he was shot dead by Bonnier de la Chapelle, a Charles de Gaulle follower who was training to be a British agent. Despite the help Darlan ultimately provided, the Allies rejoiced. “Darlan’s murder, however criminal, relieved the Allies of their embarrassment at working with him,” admitted Churchill.

- **Dec 24 1943 – WWII:** General Dwight D. Eisenhower is appointed the Allied Supreme Commander, even though almost everyone believed the position would go to American Chief of Staff George C. Marshall.
- **Dec 24 1952 – Greece:** An estimated 20,000 communists, led by guerrilla General Markos Vafiadis proclaim the Free Greek Government in northern Greece. They issue a call to arms to establish the regime throughout the nation.
- **Dec 24 1952 – Cold War:** *McCarran-Walter Act goes into effect* » The McCarran-Walter Act takes effect and revises U.S. immigration laws. The law was hailed by supporters as a necessary step in preventing communist subversion in the United States, while opponents decried the legislation as being xenophobic and discriminatory. The act, named after Senator Pat McCarran (Democrat-Nevada) and Representative Francis Walter (Democratic-Pennsylvania), did relatively little to alter the quota system for immigration into the United States that had been established in the Immigration Act of 1924. The skewed nature of the quotas was readily apparent.

Immigrants from Great Britain, Ireland, and Germany were allotted two-thirds of the 154,657 spots available each year. However, the act did specifically remove previously established racial barriers that had acted to exclude immigrants from nations such as Japan and China. These countries were now assigned very small quotas. The changes that were of more concern for many critics centered on the act's provision of much more strenuous screening of potential immigrants. It banned admission to anyone declared a subversive by the attorney general and indicated that members of communist and "communist-front" organizations were subject to deportation.

In defending the act, Senator McCarran declared, "If this oasis of the world should be overrun, perverted, contaminated, or destroyed, then the last flickering light of humanity will be extinguished." President Harry S. Truman took a very different view, calling the legislation "un-American" and inhumane. When the bill was passed in June 1952, Truman vetoed the bill. Congress overrode his veto, and the act took effect in December. The McCarran-Walter Act set America's immigration standards until new legislation was passed in 1965.

- **Dec 24 1955 – Xmas:** NORAD Tracks Santa for the first time in what will become an annual Christmas Eve tradition.
- **Dec 24 1964 – Vietnam War:** *Viet Cong Bomb Brinks Hotel* » Two Viet Cong agents disguised as South Vietnamese soldiers leave a car filled with explosives parked at the Brinks Hotel in Saigon. The hotel was housing the Saigon U.S. Headquarters with U.S. officers. Two Americans were killed in the blast and 65 Americans and Vietnamese were injured. Ambassador Maxwell Taylor, Gen. William Westmoreland, and other senior U.S. officials tried to persuade President Lyndon B. Johnson to respond with retaliatory raids on North Vietnam, but Johnson refused. In his cable to Taylor explaining his decision, he indicated for the first time that he was considering a commitment of U.S. combat troops.
- **Dec 24 1964 – Vietnam War:** President Nixon suspends Operation Linebacker II for 36 hours to mark the Christmas holiday. The bombing campaign against North Vietnam had been operating since December 18, when Nixon initiated the campaign to force the North Vietnamese back to the Paris peace

negotiations. On 28 DEC, the North Vietnamese announced that they would return to Paris if Nixon ended the bombing. The bombing campaign was halted and the negotiators met during the first week of January. They quickly arrived at a settlement—the Paris Peace Accords were signed on 23 JAN, and a cease-fire went into effect five days later

- **Dec 24 1966 – Aviation:** A Soviet research vehicle soft-lands on the moon.
- **Dec 24 1968 – Aviation:** The first pictures of an Earth-rise over the moon are seen as the crew of Apollo 8 orbits the moon.
- **Dec 24 1970 – Vietnam War:** Nine GIs are killed and nine are wounded by friendly fire in Vietnam.
- **Dec 24 1972 – Vietnam War:** Hanoi bars all peace talks with the United States until U.S. air raids over North Vietnam stop.
- **Dec 24 1972 – Vietnam War:** *Bob Hope gives his last show in Vietnam* » Comedian Bob Hope gives what he says is his last Christmas show to U.S. servicemen in Saigon. Hope was a comedian and star of stage, radio, television, and over 50 feature films. Hope was one of many Hollywood stars who followed the tradition of travelling overseas to entertain American troops stationed abroad. The 1972 show marked Hope's ninth consecutive Christmas appearance in Vietnam. Hope endorsed President Nixon's bombing of North Vietnam to force it to accept U.S. peace terms, and received South Vietnam's highest civilian medal for his "anti-communist zeal." Although some antiwar protesters criticized Hope for supporting government policies in Vietnam, the comedian said he believed it was his responsibility to lift spirits by entertaining the troops.



- **Dec 24 1979 – Russia\*Afghanistan:** *Soviet tanks roll into Afghanistan* » The Soviet Union invades Afghanistan, under the pretext of upholding the Soviet-Afghan Friendship Treaty of 1978. As midnight approached, the Soviets organized a massive military airlift into Kabul, involving an estimated 280 transport aircraft and three divisions of almost 8,500 men each. Within a few days, the Soviets had secured Kabul, deploying a special assault unit against Tajberg Palace. Elements of the Afghan army loyal to Hafizullah Amin put up a fierce, but brief resistance.



On December 27, Babrak Karmal, exiled leader of the Parcham faction of the Marxist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), was installed as Afghanistan's new head of government. And Soviet ground forces entered Afghanistan from the north. The Soviets, however, were met with fierce resistance when they ventured out of their strongholds into the countryside. Resistance fighters, called mujahidin, saw the Christian or atheist Soviets controlling Afghanistan as a defilement of Islam as well as of their traditional culture. Proclaiming a "jihad" (holy war), they gained the support of the Islamic world. The mujahidin employed guerrilla tactics against the Soviets. They would attack or raid quickly, then disappear into the mountains, causing great destruction without pitched battles. The fighters used whatever weapons they could grab from the Soviets or were given by the United States.

The tide of the war turned with the 1987 introduction of U.S. shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missiles. The Stingers allowed the mujahidin to shoot down Soviet planes and helicopters on a regular basis. New Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev decided it was time to get out. Demoralized and with no victory in sight, Soviet forces started withdrawing in 1988. The last Soviet soldier crossed back across the border on February 15, 1989. It was the first Soviet military expedition beyond the Eastern bloc since World War II and marked the end of a period of improving relations (known as *détente*) in the Cold War. Subsequently, the SALT II arms treaty was shelved and the U.S. began to re-arm. Fifteen thousand Soviet soldiers were killed.

The long-term impact of the invasion and subsequent war was profound. First, the Soviets never recovered from the public relations and financial losses, which significantly contributed to the fall of the Soviet empire in 1991. Secondly, the war created a breeding ground for terrorism and the rise of Osama bin Laden.

**Dec 24 2005 – Chad\*Sudan:** Chad declares a state of war against Sudan in the wake of the 18 DEC attack on the town of Adre, in which approximately 100 people were killed.

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- **Dec 25 1776 – American Revolution:** *Washington leads troops on raid at Trenton, New Jersey* » Future president General George Washington leads his small and bedraggled army in a daring raid on British and Hessian troops at Trenton, New Jersey, during the American Revolution.

Just prior to launching boats from McKonkey's Ferry across the Delaware River, Washington had an excerpt from Thomas Paine's inspirational pamphlet *The Crisis*—published two days earlier—read aloud to the army. The pamphlet began: "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier

and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.”

Although Americans often think of President George Washington as stately and composed, in actuality the revolutionary hero could be quite down-to-earth, even coarse, a trait that endeared him to his troops. One historian’s account, supported by the memoirs of troops in attendance at the famous crossing of the Delaware, suggests that as Washington was stepping into a boat in which the portly General Henry Knox was already seated, he poked Knox with his boot and said “shift that fat [a.], Harry...but slowly, or you’ll swamp the damned boat.” The freezing, wet and frightened soldiers broke into hysterical laughter as word of Washington’s wisecrack drifted down the line of boats poised to cross the icy river.

Early on the morning of December 26, 2,500 American soldiers led by Washington surprised the mainly Hessian soldiers at Trenton (allegedly hung-over after a night of Christmas cheer) and after a short battle took control of the town. The scrappy Washington ordered his soldiers to take whatever ammunition and supplies they could carry and scurried back across the Delaware. Washington’s daring attack, after a string of demoralizing retreats, gave a desperately needed boost to the flagging spirits of the Continental Army.

- **Dec 25 1837 – Seminole Wars:** Battle of Lake Okeechobee. Casualties and losses: US 138 – Seminoles 25
- **Dec 25 1862 – Civil War:** *Christmas for Union soldier Elisha Hunt Rhodes* » Lieutenant Elisha Hunt Rhodes of the Second Rhode Island spends Christmas Day in camp, singing with other officers and writing in his diary: “I should like to be home this Christmas night.”

Rhodes is one of the most famous diarists of the Civil War. He was born in 1842 in Cranston, Rhode Island, the son of a sea captain. He joined the Union army when hostilities erupted in 1861, and fought at the First Battle of Bull Run, Virginia, on July 21, 1861. Rhodes served with the Second Rhode Island Infantry for the duration of the war, and fought in nearly every major battle in which the Army of the Potomac was engaged. Rhodes became an officer at age 20 and eventually rose from private to colonel. His vivid account of the war was edited and published by his great-grandson, Robert Hunt Rhodes, in 1985 as “All for the Union: The Civil War Diary and Letters of Elisha Hunt Rhodes.” Filmmaker Ken Burns featured Rhodes’ war experiences in his 1990 documentary “The Civil War.”

Christmas 1862 was the second of Rhodes’ four Christmases spent in the Army of the Potomac, and his location for each charts the progress of the army. The first two were spent in camps around Washington, D.C., the third near Brandy Station in northern Virginia, and the fourth in the trenches around Petersburg, Virginia. When in camp, Christmas was a welcome but short respite from the monotony of an army winter. Rhodes does not record an entry for 1861, and he comments in 1862 that it was a quiet day in which the soldiers were excused from drill and he was visited by his brother-in-law from Washington. In 1863, he rode his newly acquired army horse, Kate, on Christmas Day, and gave a dinner party for other officers in the regiment, during which they tried to celebrate the holiday “in a becoming manner.”



He spent his last army Christmas in a small hut outside Petersburg. The Union army was laying siege to the city, but there was little activity during the cold weather. On Christmas Eve, Rhodes entertained officers from the 49th Pennsylvania, and after their departure officers from the 37th Massachusetts serenaded him. On Christmas morning, he took a ride and watched Union soldiers hauling logs to build warmer quarters. Rhodes commented, “This is the birth of the Saviour, but we have paid very little attention to it in a religious way.” He closed his entry by writing, “This is my fourth Christmas in the Army. I wonder if it will be my last.”

It was. Rhodes was discharged shortly after the end of the war in April 1865, and returned to Rhode Island. He worked as a cotton and wool trader for the rest of his life and, like many soldiers, remained active in veteran affairs. In 1912, he brought his grandson, Frederick Miller Rhodes Jr. to Virginia to show him the fields on which he had struggled a half-century before. Elisha Hunt Rhodes died on January 14, 1917.

- **Dec 25 1868 – Post Civil War:** U.S. President Andrew Johnson grants unconditional pardon to all Civil War Confederate soldiers.
- **Dec 25 1914 – WWI:** *The Christmas Truce* » Just after midnight on Christmas morning, the majority of German troops engaged in World War I cease firing their guns and artillery and commence to sing Christmas carols. At certain points along the eastern and western fronts, the soldiers of Russia, France, and Britain even heard brass bands joining the Germans in their joyous singing.

At the first light of dawn, many of the German soldiers emerged from their trenches and approached the Allied lines across no-man’s-land, calling out “Merry Christmas” in their enemies’ native tongues. At first, the Allied soldiers feared it was a trick, but seeing the Germans unarmed they climbed out of their trenches and shook hands with the enemy soldiers. The men exchanged presents of cigarettes and plum puddings and sang carols and songs. There was even a documented case of soldiers from opposing sides playing a good-natured game of soccer.



The so-called Christmas Truce of 1914 came only five months after the outbreak of war in Europe and was one of the last examples of the outdated notion of chivalry between enemies in warfare. In 1915, the bloody conflict of World War I erupted in all its technological fury, and the concept of another Christmas Truce became unthinkable.

- **Dec 25 1941 – WW2:** *British surrender Hong Kong* » The British garrison in Hong Kong surrenders to the Japanese. Hong Kong was a British Crown colony whose population was overwhelmingly ethnic Chinese. It was protected by a garrison force composed of British, Canadian, and Indian soldiers. The British government, anticipating a Japanese attack, had begun evacuating women and children on June 30, sending them to Manila, capital of the Philippines. The Japanese had responded to the evacuation by posting troops across the Kowloon peninsula, blocking escape from Hong Kong by land.

One day after Pearl Harbor, the Japanese began their raid on Hong Kong as part of their broad imperial designs on China and the South Pacific. The British governor, Sir Mark Young, mobilized his forces, which were slim, and his weaponry, which was antiquated. Within two weeks, Japanese envoys issued an ultimatum-surrender or perish. The governor sent the envoys back with a definite refusal. Consequently, the Japanese followed up with a land invasion on the 18th of December. Ordered to take no prisoners, the Japanese rounded up captured soldiers and bayoneted them to death.

Continued bombing raids severed water mains, and Japanese infantry took control of remaining reservoirs, as well as the power station, leaving the British with the threat of death by thirst. Despite cries from the governor to “hold fast for King and Empire,” no further resistance was possible by the dwindling garrison forces. On 3:30 p.m. Christmas Day, white flags of surrender were flown.

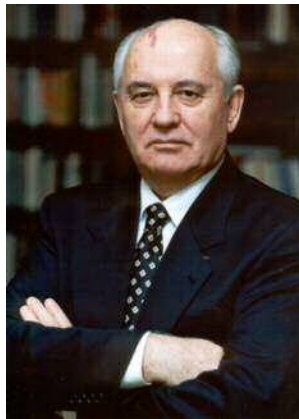
- **Dec 25 1966– Vietnam:** *Harrison Salisbury reports on damage caused by U.S. bombing* » Harrison Salisbury, assistant managing editor of the New York Times, files a report from Hanoi chronicling the damage to civilian areas in North Vietnam by the U.S. bombing campaign. Salisbury stated that Nam Dinh, a city about 50 miles southeast of Hanoi, was bombed repeatedly by U.S. planes starting on June 28, 1965. Salisbury’s press report caused a stir in Washington where, it was reported, Pentagon officials expressed irritation and contended that he was exaggerating the damage to civilian areas. On December 26, the U.S. Defense Department conceded that American pilots bombed North Vietnamese civilians accidentally during missions against military targets. The spokesman restated administration policy that air raids were confined to military targets but added, “It is sometimes impossible to avoid all damage to civilian areas.”
- **Dec 25 1972 – Vietnam:** *Linebacker II resumes after Christmas pause* » After a 36-hour respite for Christmas, the U.S. resumes Operation Linebacker II. The extensive bombing campaign was resumed because, according to U.S. officials, Hanoi sent no word that it would return to the peace talks.

On 13 DEC, North Vietnamese negotiators walked out of secret talks in Paris with National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger. President Nixon issued an ultimatum that North Vietnam send its representatives back to the conference table within 72 hours “or else.” The North Vietnamese rejected Nixon’s demand and the president ordered Operation Linebacker II, a full-scale air campaign against the Hanoi area that began on December 18. During the 11 days of Linebacker II, 700 B-52 sorties and



more than 1,000 fighter-bomber sorties dropped an estimated 20,000 tons of bombs on North Vietnam—half the total tonnage of bombs dropped on England during World War II.

- **Dec 25 1972 – Vietnam:** U.S. headquarters in Saigon announces that American military strength in South Vietnam was reduced by 700 men during the previous week. The reduction brought the total U.S. forces in South Vietnam to 24,000, the lowest in almost eight years.
- **Dec 25 1991 – Cold War:** *Gorbachev resigns as president of the USSR* » Mikhail Gorbachev announces that he is resigning as president of the Soviet Union. In truth, there was not much of a Soviet Union from which to resign—just four days earlier, 11 of the former Soviet republics had established the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), effectively dismembering the USSR. The Soviet Union, for all intents and purposes, had already ceased to exist.



In his farewell speech to the nation, Gorbachev indicated that the recent establishment of the CIS was the primary motive for his resignation, claiming he was “concerned about the fact that the people in this country are ceasing to become citizens of a great power and the consequences may be very difficult for all of us to deal with.” In words that were sometimes prideful, sometimes resentful, Gorbachev stated that he stood on his record of achievement. He had, he claimed, overseen the Soviet Union’s trip down the “road of democracy.” His reforms “steered” the communist economy “toward the market economy.” He declared that the Russian people were “living in a new world” in which an “end has been put to the Cold War and to the arms race.” Admitting “there were mistakes made,” Gorbachev remained adamant that he “never had any regrets” about the policies he pursued.

In reality, Gorbachev had lost much of his power and prestige in the Soviet Union even before the establishment of the CIS. The economy was unstable. No one seemed pleased by Gorbachev—some opponents demanded even more political freedom while hard-liners in his government opposed any movement toward reform. In August 1991, he survived a coup attempt only through the assistance of Russian Federation president Boris Yeltsin. Following the failed attempt, Yeltsin became a vocal critic of the slow pace of economic and political reforms in the country. As Gorbachev’s power slipped away, Yeltsin took over the Kremlin and other Soviet government facilities and replaced the Soviet flag with the flag of Russia. After over 70 years of existence, the Soviet Union—America’s archenemy in the Cold War—was gone.

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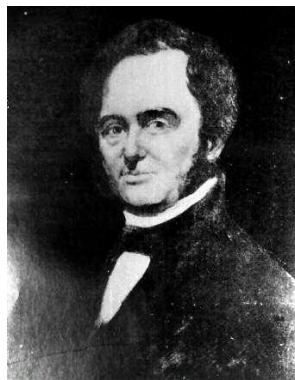
- **Dec 26 1776 – American Revolution:** *Washington wins first major U.S. victory at Trenton* » At approximately 8 a.m. on the morning of December 26, 1776, General George Washington's Continental Army reaches the outskirts of Trenton, New Jersey, and descends upon the unsuspecting Hessian force guarding the city. Trenton's 1,400 Hessian defenders were still groggy from the previous evening's Christmas festivities and had underestimated the Patriot threat after months of decisive British victories throughout New York. The troops of the Continental Army quickly overwhelmed the German defenses, and by 9:30 a.m. Trenton was completely surrounded.

Although several hundred Hessians escaped, nearly 1,000 were captured at the cost of only four American lives. However, because most of Washington's army had failed to cross the Delaware the previous day, he was without adequate artillery or men and was forced to withdraw from the town.

Although the victory was minor from a strategic perspective, it bore tremendous significance for the future of the Continental Army. Washington needed a success before his soldiers' enlistments expired on December 31—without a dramatic upswing in morale, he was likely to lose the soldiers under his command and be unable to recruit new men to replace them. The victories at Trenton and a few days later at Princeton proved to the American public that their army was indeed capable of victory and worthy of support.

The image of ragged farm-boy Patriots defeating drunken foreign mercenaries has become ingrained in the American imagination. Then as now, Washington's crossing and the Battle of Trenton were emblematic of the American Patriots' surprising ability to overcome the tremendous odds they faced in challenging the wealthy and powerful British Empire.

- **Dec 26 1861 – Old West:** *Moses Austin asks Spanish for Texas colony* » Hoping to recover from bankruptcy with a bold scheme of colonization, Moses Austin meets with Spanish authorities in San Antonio to ask permission for 300 Anglo-American families to settle in Texas.



A native of Durham, Connecticut, Austin had been a successful merchant in Philadelphia and Virginia. After hearing reports of rich lead mines in the Spanish-controlled regions to the west, Austin obtained permission in 1798 from the Spanish to mine land in an area that lies in what is now the state of Missouri. Austin quickly built a lead mine, smelter, and town on his property, and his mine turned a steady profit for more than a decade. Unfortunately, the economic collapse following the War of 1812 destroyed the lead market and left him bankrupt.

Determined to rebuild his fortune, Austin decided to draw on his experience with the Spanish and try to establish an American colony in Texas. In 1820, he traveled to San Antonio to request a land grant from the Spanish governor, who initially turned him down. Austin persisted and was finally granted permission to settle 300 Anglo families on 200,000 acres of Texas land.

Overjoyed, Austin immediately set out for the United States to begin recruiting colonists, but he became ill and died on the long journey back. The task of completing the arrangements for Austin's Texas colony fell to his son, Stephen Fuller Austin. The younger Austin selected the lower reaches of Colorado River and Brazos River as the site for the colony, and the first colonists began arriving in December 1821. Over the next decade, Stephen Austin and other colonizers brought nearly 25,000 people into Texas, most of them Anglo-Americans. Always more loyal to the United States than to Mexico, the settlers eventually broke from Mexico to form the independent Republic of Texas in 1836. Nine years later, they led the successful movement to make Texas an American state.

- **Dec 26 1861 – Civil War:** *Mason and Slidell freed* » Confederate diplomatic envoys James Mason and John Slidell are freed by President Abraham Lincoln's administration, heading off a possible war between the United States and Great Britain.

The two men were aboard the Trent, a British mail steamer, on November 8, 1861 when they were pulled over by the U.S.S. San Jacinto. They were headed to London to lobby for recognition of the Confederacy. The Union ship intercepted the English ship near the Bahamas, arrested the Southerners, and took them back to Boston. The British were outraged when word of the interception reached London in late November. They had not taken sides in the American Civil War and their policy was to accept any paying customer who wished to travel aboard their ships. The British government dispatched a message to the American government demanding the release of Mason and Slidell, along with an apology for the transgression of British rights on the high seas.

The British cabinet sent a message on 1 DEC insisting that the U.S. respond within a week. The British also began preparing for war, banning exports of war materials to the U.S. and sending 11,000 troops to Canada. Plans were made to attack the American fleet that was blockading the South. The British also planned a blockade of Northern ports.

Lincoln decided not to push the issue. On 26 DEC, he ordered the envoys released and averted a war with England in the process. The incident gave the Confederates hope that there was support for their cause in Britain, but it also demonstrated how hard the Union would work to avoid conflict with Britain.

- **Dec 26 1862 – Civil War:** The Battle of Chickasaw Bayou begins. It ends on 29 DEC with a Confederate victory. Casualties and losses: US 1,777 – CSA 217
- **Dec 26 1862 – Indian Wars:** The largest mass-hanging in U.S. history took place in Mankato, Minnesota, 38 Native Americans (Dakota) die for their part in the Sioux Uprising. Their leader Little Crow had fled the state.
- **Dec 26 1866 – Indian Wars:** Brig. Gen. Philip St. George Cooke, head of the Department of the Platte, receives word of the Fetterman Fight in Powder River County in the Dakota Territory. It was

the worst military blunder of the Western Indian wars prior to the Battle of the Little Bighorn in June 1876. On DEC 21 around 12 noon. Captain William Fetterman and the remnants of his 81 man patrol were ambushed and fight to the last man on Infantry Hill against over 1,000 Lakota warriors led by Crazy Horse. The entire battle lasted about 30 minutes.

- **Dec 26 1866 – WWI:** As a wartime measure, President Woodrow Wilson places railroads under government control, with Secretary of War William McAdoo as director general.
- **Dec 26 1915 – U.S.\*China:** Six U.S. destroyers are ordered from Manila to China to protect interests in the civil war that is being waged there.
- **Dec 26 1941 – WW2:** *Churchill addresses Congress* » Less than three weeks after the American entrance into World War II, Winston Churchill becomes the first British prime minister to address Congress. Churchill, a gifted orator, urged Congress to back President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s proposal that America become the “great arsenal of democracy” and warned that the Axis powers would “stop at nothing” in pursuit of their war aims.

Born at Blenheim Palace in 1874, Churchill joined the British Fourth Hussars upon his father’s death in 1895. During the next five years, he enjoyed an illustrious military career, serving in India, the Sudan, and South Africa, and distinguishing himself several times in battle. In 1899, he resigned his commission to concentrate on his literary and political career and in 1900 was elected to Parliament as a Conservative MP from Oldham. In 1904, he joined the Liberals, serving a number of important posts before being appointed Britain’s First Lord of the Admiralty in 1911, where he worked to bring the British navy to a readiness for the war he foresaw.

In 1915, in the second year of World War I, Churchill was held responsible for the disastrous Dardanelles and Gallipoli campaigns and was thus excluded from the war coalition government. However, in 1917 he returned to politics as a cabinet member in the Liberal government of Lloyd George. From 1919 to 1921, he was secretary of state for war and in 1924 returned to the Conservative Party, where two years later he played a leading role in the defeat of the General Strike of 1926. Out of office from 1929 to 1939, Churchill issued unheeded warnings of the threat of Nazi and Japanese aggression.



After the outbreak of World War II in Europe, Churchill returned to his post as First Lord of the Admiralty and eight months later replaced Neville Chamberlain as prime minister of a new coalition government. In the first year of his administration, Britain stood alone against Nazi Germany, but Churchill promised his country and the world that Britain would “never surrender.” He rallied the

British people to a resolute resistance and expertly orchestrated Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin into an alliance that eventually crushed the Axis.

After a postwar Labor Party victory in 1945, he became leader of the opposition and in 1951 was again elected prime minister. In 1953, he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II and awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. After his retirement as prime minister, he remained in Parliament until 1964, the year before his death.

- **Dec 26 1941 – WW2:** General Douglas MacArthur declares Manila an open city in the face of the onrushing Japanese Army.
- **Dec 26 1943 – WW2:** The German battle cruiser Scharnhorst is sunk by British warships in the Arctic after decoded German naval signals reveal that the Scharnhorst is on a mission to attack an Anglo-American convoy to Russia.
- **Dec 26 1944 – WW2:** *Patton relieves Bastogne* » General George S. Patton employs an audacious strategy to relieve the besieged Allied defenders of Bastogne, Belgium, during the brutal Battle of the Bulge.



The capture of Bastogne was the ultimate goal of the Battle of the Bulge, the German offensive through the Ardennes forest. Bastogne provided a road junction in rough terrain where few roads existed; it would open up a valuable pathway further north for German expansion. The Belgian town was defended by the U.S. 101st Airborne Division, which had to be reinforced by troops who straggled in from other battlefields. Food, medical supplies, and other resources eroded as bad weather and relentless German assaults threatened the Americans' ability to hold out. Nevertheless, Brigadier General Anthony C. MacAuliffe met a German surrender demand with a typewritten response of a single word: "Nuts."

Enter "Old Blood and Guts," General Patton. Employing a complex and quick-witted strategy wherein he literally wheeled his 3rd Army a sharp 90 degrees in a counterthrust movement, Patton broke through the German lines and entered Bastogne, relieving the valiant defenders and ultimately pushing the Germans east across the Rhine.

- **Dec 26 1944 – WW2:** Advancing Soviet troops complete their encirclement of Budapest in Hungary.
- **Dec 26 1945 – WW2:** The United States, the Soviet Union and Great Britain end a 10-day meeting, seeking an atomic rule by the UN Council.

- **Dec 26 1953 – Korean War:** The United States announces the withdrawal of two divisions from Korea.
- **Dec 26 1955 – Cold War:** *Porgy and Bess opens in Leningrad* » In one of the most publicized cultural exchanges of the Cold War, Porgy and Bess, an opera featuring an African-American cast, opens in Leningrad. Performances were also staged in Moscow in January of the next year.

The opera was only one part of a significant U.S. effort during the 1950s to use American culture as a force in the nation’s Cold War propaganda. The effort was based on the conclusion that while much of the world certainly appreciated (or, at least, respected) America’s military and economic might, this was not enough. Too many people overseas viewed the United States as a military behemoth lacking the culture and refinement that were so highly prized in many nations. Porgy and Bess, not only illustrated that Americans did not lack culture, it was also a response to critics, particularly the Soviets, who maintained that America was a racist nation.

As a Cold War public relations tool, Porgy and Bess performed admirably. While American reporters traveling with the show indicated that the average Russian seemed somewhat taken aback by the “unorthodox form” of the opera, the overall response was very favorable. As a New York Times critic declared, “the pervasive Gershwin melodies that distinguish this opera have recreated here at least temporarily an emotional bond between Russians and Americans.” The opening night audience in Leningrad gave the cast a 10-minute standing ovation. Even the Soviet press acknowledged that, “Our American guests have shown that original art is understandable for people of all countries.”

- **Dec 26 1967 – Vietnam War:** *Laos says communists launched an offensive* » Laotian Premier Souvanna Phouma reports that North Vietnamese troops have started a general offensive against government forces in southern Laos. Phouma reported that at least one battle was being waged near Pha Lane, but said Laotian troops appeared to be in control of the situation. On 29 DEC, North Vietnam denied that its forces began a drive in Laos, but it was supporting the communist Pathet Lao in their long-time campaign against the Royal Lao government.



- **Dec 26 1971 – Vietnam War:** *U.S. jets strike North Vietnam* » In the sharpest escalation of the war since Operation Rolling Thunder ended in November 1968, U.S. fighter-bombers begin striking at North Vietnamese airfields, missile sites, antiaircraft emplacements, and supply facilities.

These raids continued for five days. They were begun in response to intelligence that predicted a North Vietnamese buildup of forces and equipment for a new offensive. At a press conference on December 27, U.S. Defense Secretary Melvin Laird said the increase in bombing was in retaliation for

the communist failure to honor agreements made prior to the 1968 bombing halt. As evidence, Laird cited the shelling of Saigon the week before, DMZ violations—including an infiltration route being built through the buffer zone, and attacks on unarmed U.S. reconnaissance planes. Pentagon figures showed that U.S. planes—with as many as 250 aircraft participating in some missions—attacked communist targets over 100 times in 1971, a figure comparable to U.S. air activity in the previous 26 months.

The intensified bombing spurred new antiwar protests in American. In New York, 15 antiwar veterans barricaded themselves inside the Statue of Liberty and flew the U.S. flag upside down from its crown. They ended their occupation of the monument on 28 DEC, obeying a federal court order. At the same time in Washington, over 80 antiwar veterans were arrested after clashing with police on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

- **Dec 26 1972 – Vietnam War:** As part of Operation Linebacker II, 120 American B-52 Stratofortress bombers attacked Hanoi, including 78 launched from Andersen Air Force Base in Guam, the largest single combat launch in Strategic Air Command
- **Dec 26 1979 – Russia\*Afghanistan:** The Soviet Union flies 5,000 troops to intervene in the Afghanistan conflict.
- **Dec 26 1991 – Cold War:** The Supreme Soviet formally dissolves the Soviet Union.
- **Dec 26 1998 – Iraq:** Iraq announces its intention to fire upon U.S. and British warplanes that patrol the northern and southern no-fly zones.

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- **Dec 27 1780 – American Revolution:** *Americans raid Hammonds Store* » American Brigadier General Daniel Morgan detaches a force of approximately 275 troops commanded by Colonel William Washington to destroy a force of 250 British Loyalists under the command of Colonel Thomas Waters, who had been terrorizing Patriots in the vicinity of Fairforest Creek, on Bush River, South Carolina.

Hammonds Store was a blacksmith's shop and trading post in what became Laurens County, northeast of Mountville, in the district of Fort Ninety-Six. Colonel Washington, a cousin of General George Washington, surprised the Loyalists and Redcoats camping at the store. American forces killed or wounded 150 British Loyalists and captured 40 prisoners during the four-day siege without incurring any losses of their own. The Patriots consisted of 75 dragoons (cavalry on horseback) under Washington's direct command and 200 members of the South Carolina militia under Lieutenant Colonels Joseph Hayes and James McCall.

The area around Hammonds Store had seen its first European settler less than 30 years before. The ensuing Cherokee War of 1760-1761 had rendered the western Carolinas an area of ungovernable violence throughout the 1760s, with factional allegiances continuing to color settlers' politics during the revolution. In an area where murder, rape and plunder had been par for the course for 20 years, the violence at Hammonds Store seemed comparatively mild. After their resounding victory, the Patriots burned the store. The exact location of the store has since been lost to time.

- **Dec 27 1814 – War of 1812:** The American schooner USS Carolina is destroyed. It was the last of Commodore Daniel Patterson's makeshift fleet that fought a series of delaying actions that contributed to Andrew Jackson's victory at the Battle of New Orleans.
- **Dec 27 1846 – Old West:** *Doniphan's Thousand takes El Paso* » The rag-tag army of volunteers known as Doniphan's Thousand, led by Colonel Alexander W. Doniphan, wins a major victory in the war with Mexico with the occupation of El Paso.



Born in Kentucky in 1808, Doniphan moved to Missouri in 1830 to practice law. But the tall redheaded man was not satisfied with fighting only courtroom battles, and he volunteered as a brigadier general in the Missouri militia. When war between Mexico and the U.S. erupted in 1846, the men of the 1st Missouri Mounted Volunteers elected Doniphan their colonel, and marched south to join General Stephen Kearny's army in New Mexico.

Since they were not professional military men, Doniphan's troops cared little for the traditional spit-and-polish of the regular troops, and reportedly looked more like tramps than soldiers. Likewise, Doniphan was a casual officer who led more by example than by strict discipline. Nonetheless, Doniphan's Thousand proved to be a surprisingly effective force in the war with Mexico.

In December, Doniphan led 500 of his men and a large wagon train of supplies south to join General John E. Wool in his planned invasion of the Mexican state of Chihuahua. Before he had a chance to meet up with Wool's larger force near the city of Chihuahua, Doniphan encountered an army of 1,200 Mexican soldiers about 30 miles north of El Paso, Texas. Although his opponents had twice the number of soldiers, Doniphan led his men to victory, and with the path to El Paso now largely undefended was able to occupy the city two days later.

When nearing the Mexican border, Doniphan learned that General Wool's forces had broken off their invasion of Chihuahua because the army's wheeled vehicles had proved unworkable in the desert landscape. But rather than turn back, Doniphan reassembled his army to its full force of about 1,000 men and was allowed to proceed with the invasion unassisted. Once again grossly outnumbered-the Mexican army was four times the size of Doniphan's-the Missouri troops were still able to quickly break through the defensive lines and occupy Chihuahua City. By mid-summer 1847, Doniphan's victorious army reached the Gulf Coast, where they were picked up by ships and taken to New Orleans for discharge. By then, the focus of the battle had shifted to General Winfield Scott's campaign to take Mexico City. In September of that year, Scott's troops ended the war by successfully occupying Mexico City, and for the first time in U.S. history an American flag flew over a foreign capital. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed early in 1848, gave the U.S. the vast western territory stretching from Texas to the Pacific and north to Oregon.



- **Dec 27 1862 – Civil War:** Union General William Rosecrans' army begins moving slowly toward Murfreesboro, Tennessee, from Nashville.
- **Dec 27 1864 – Civil War:** *Hood's army crosses the Tennessee River* » The broken and defeated Confederate Army of Tennessee finishes crossing the Tennessee River as General John Bell Hood's force retreats into Mississippi.

The last half of 1864 was a disaster for the army. In May, Union General William T. Sherman began his drive on Atlanta from Chattanooga, Tennessee. The Confederate army was commanded then by Joseph Johnston, who responded to Sherman's flanking maneuvers by retreating slightly each time. From May to July, Johnston slowly backed into Atlanta, exchanging territory for time. When the troops reached Atlanta, Confederate President Jefferson Davis replaced Johnston with the offensive-minded Hood.

Hood immediately attacked Sherman three times in late July, losing each time. His offensive capabilities spent, Hood endured a month-long siege of Atlanta. In early September, he was finally forced to relinquish the city to Sherman. Hood hung around to try cutting into Sherman's supply lines but then retreated into Alabama. In November, Hood tried to draw Sherman from the deep South by moving towards Nashville, Tennessee. In response, Sherman dispatched part of his army back to Tennessee while taking the rest on his devastating march across Georgia, during which the Yankees destroyed nearly everything in their path.

Hood moved north and fought two battles that were disastrous for the Confederates. At Franklin, Tennessee, on 30 NOV, Confederate attacks on entrenched Union soldiers resulted in insignificant casualties and the loss of six of the army's finest generals. On December 15 and 16, the Confederates were crushed by the Yankees in front of Nashville. The dwindling numbers of participating soldiers tell the story of the Rebel army. In May, some 65,000 Confederates faced Sherman in northern Georgia. On 20 SEP, after Atlanta fell, Hood's force numbered around 40,400. After crossing the Tennessee River in December, Hood reported some 18,700 officers and enlisted men, a figure that another Confederate general, Pierre Beauregard, thought was significantly inflated. The Confederate Army of Tennessee was no longer a viable fighting force.

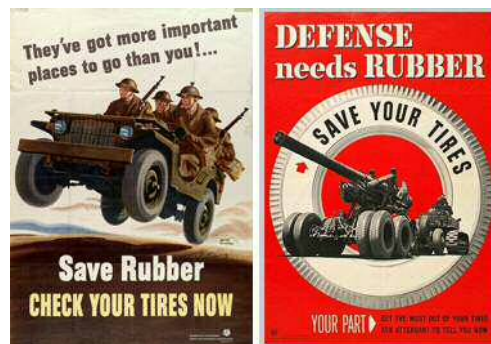
- **Dec 27 1922 – Japan:** Aircraft carrier Hosho becomes the first purpose built aircraft carrier to be commissioned in the world.



- **Dec 27 1933 – PreWW2:** Josef Stalin calls tensions with Japan a grave danger.
- **Dec 27 1941 – WW2:** Operation Anthropoid, the plot to assassinate high-ranking Nazi officer Reinhard Heydrich, commences.

- **Dec 27 1941 – WW2:** *Office of Price Administration begins to ration automobile tires* » On this day in 1941, the federal Office of Price Administration initiates its first rationing program in support of the American effort in World War II: It mandates that from that day on, no driver will be permitted to own more than five automobile tires.

President Roosevelt established the Office of Price Administration and Civilian Supply in April 1941 to “stabilize prices and rents and prevent unwarranted increases in them; to prevent profiteering, hoarding and speculation; to assure that defense appropriations were not dissipated by excessive prices; to protect those with fixed incomes from undue impairment of their living standards; to assist in securing adequate production; and to prevent a post-emergency collapse of values.” The OPA (its name was streamlined in August 1941) was responsible for two types of rationing programs. The first limited the purchase of certain commodities (tires, cars, metal typewriters, bicycles, stoves and rubber shoes) to people who had demonstrated an especial need for them. The second limited the quantity of things—like butter, coffee, sugar, cooking fat, gasoline and non-rubber shoes—which every citizen was allowed to buy. (As a result, of course, the black market flourished—studies estimated that 25 percent of all purchases during the war were illegal.)



Japanese occupations in the Far East had made it impossible to get rubber from plantations in the Dutch East Indies, and what little rubber was available went straight to airplane and munitions factories. Because no one had yet figured out how to make really high-quality artificial rubber, the OPA especially wanted to encourage people to care for the automobile tires they already had. Ads urged people to put less wear on their tires by driving in carpools. (“When You Ride Alone You Ride With Hitler!” said one poster; another announced, “To win this war...more people have got to enjoy riding in fewer cars.”) To conserve rubber (and gasoline), the national “Victory Speed Limit” was 35 miles per hour. Meanwhile, scrap-rubber drives collected old raincoats, garden hoses and bathing caps.

Rationing and recycling—collecting items like tin cans and used cooking fat for reuse—was a way to make ordinary citizens feel like they were part of what one ad called a “fighting unit on the home front.” During the war, the OPA rationed almost every commodity it could think of, but by the end of 1945 only two rationing programs—for sugar and for rubber tires—remained in place. Tire rationing finally ended on December 31, 1945.

- **Dec 27 1941 – WW2:** On the federal Office of Price Administration initiates its first rationing program in support of the American effort in World War II: It mandates that from that day on, no driver will be permitted to own more than five automobile tires.

- **Dec 27 1941 – WW2:** Japanese bombers attack Manila, despite its claim as an open city.
- **Dec 27 1942 – WW2:** The German military begins enlisting Soviet POWs in the battle against Russia. General Andrei Vlasov, a captured Soviet war hero turned anticommunist, was made commander of the renegade Soviet troops.
- **Dec 27 1944 – WW2:** *FDR seizes control of Montgomery Ward* » As World War II dragged on, President Franklin D. Roosevelt orders his secretary of war to seize properties belonging to the Montgomery Ward company because the company refused to comply with a labor agreement.

In an effort to avert strikes in critical war-support industries, Roosevelt created the National War Labor Board in 1942. The board negotiated settlements between management and workers to avoid shut-downs in production that might cripple the war effort. During the war, the well-known retailer and manufacturer Montgomery Ward had supplied the Allies with everything from tractors to auto parts to workmen’s clothing—items deemed as important to the war effort as bullets and ships. However, Montgomery Ward Chairman Sewell Avery refused to comply with the terms of three different collective bargaining agreements with the United Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union hammered out between 1943 and 1944.

In April 1944, after Sewell refused a second board order, Roosevelt called out the Army National Guard to seize the company’s main plant in Chicago. Sewell himself had to be carried out of his office by National Guard troops. By December of that year, Roosevelt was fed up with Sewell’s obstinacy and disrespect for the government’s authority. (The uber-capitalist Sewell’s favorite insult was to call someone a “New Dealer”—a direct reference to Roosevelt’s Depression-era policies.) On 27 DEC, Roosevelt ordered the secretary of war to seize Montgomery Ward’s plants and facilities in New York, Michigan, California, Illinois, Colorado and Oregon.

In his announcement that day, Roosevelt emphasized that the government would “not tolerate any interference with war production in this critical hour.” He issued a stern warning to labor unions and industry management alike: “strikes in wartime cannot be condoned, whether they are strikes by workers against their employers or strikes by employers against their Government.” Sewell took the fight to federal court, but lost.

For much of the 20th century, Montgomery Ward, founded in 1872, reigned as one of the country’s largest department store and mail-order retail chains. Heavy competition from Wal-Mart, Target and similar discount stores forced the company to close all of its stores in 2000, though it retains a catalog and internet presence.

- **Dec 27 1944 – WW2:** General George S. Patton’s Third Army, spearheaded by the 4th Armored Division, relieves the surrounded city of Bastogne in Belgium.
- **Dec 27 1950 – Cold War:** The United States and Spain resume relations for the first time since the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s.

- **Dec 27 1966 – Vietnam War:** *U.S. and South Vietnamese troops attack Viet Cong stronghold* » A United States and South Vietnamese joint-service operation takes place against one of the best-fortified Viet Cong strongholds, located in the U Minh Forest in the Mekong Delta, 125 miles southwest of Saigon.

U.S. warplanes dropped bombs and napalm on the forest in preparation for the assault. Then, 6,000 South Vietnamese troops attacked Viet Cong positions in the forest. The U.S. Navy also participated in the operation—on 29 DEC, the U.S. destroyer Herbert J. Thomas shelled suspected Viet Cong positions in the same area for seven hours. The operation ended on 31 DEC, with 104 Viet Cong reported killed and 18 captured. The operation was considered a success in weakening the communist strength in the U Minh Forest.

- **Dec 27 1968 – Aviation:** *Apollo 8 returns to Earth* » The first manned mission to the moon, returns safely to Earth after an historic six-day journey.



On 21 DEC, Apollo 8 was launched by a three-stage Saturn 5 rocket from Cape Canaveral, Florida, with astronauts Frank Borman, James Lovell, Jr., and William Anders aboard. On Christmas Eve, the astronauts entered into orbit around the moon, the first manned spacecraft ever to do so. During Apollo 8's 10 lunar orbits, television images were sent back home and spectacular photos were taken of the Earth and the moon from the spacecraft. In addition to being the first human beings to view firsthand their home world in its entirety, the three astronauts were also the first to see the dark side of the moon. On Christmas morning, Apollo 8 left its lunar orbit and began its journey back to Earth, landing safely in the Pacific Ocean on 27 DEC.

On 20 JUL of the following year, Neil A. Armstrong and Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin, astronauts of the Apollo 11 mission, became the first men to walk on the moon.

- **Dec 27 1968 –Cold War:** The United States agrees to sell F-4 Phantom jets to Israel.
- **Dec 27 1969 – Vietnam War:** *U.S. and North Vietnamese forces battle near Loc Ninh* » In the fiercest battle in six weeks, U.S. and North Vietnamese forces clash near Loc Ninh, about 80 miles north of Saigon. Elements of the 1st Infantry Division reported killing 72 of 250 North Vietnamese soldiers in a daylong battle. Loc Ninh, a village of fewer than 10,000 people, was located at the northern limit of national Route 13, only a few miles from the Cambodian border. It was the site of several major battles between U.S. and Communist forces. On April 5, 1972, as part of their Easter Offensive, North Vietnamese forces overtook Loc Ninh during their attempt to capture the An Loc provincial capital to the south.

- **Dec 27 1979 – Cold War: *Soviets take over in Afghanistan*** » In an attempt to stabilize the turbulent political situation in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union sends 75,000 troops to enforce the installation of Babrak Karmal as the new leader of the nation. The new government and the imposing Soviet presence, however, had little success in putting down antigovernment rebels. Thus began nearly 10 years of an agonizing, destructive, and ultimately fruitless Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan.



Ironically, Karmal overthrew and murdered another Afghan communist, Hafizullah Amin, to take power. Amin’s government became unpopular and unstable after it attempted to install a harsh communist regime, declared one-party rule and abolished the Afghan constitution. Muslims in the nation rejected his rule and formed a rebel force, the Mujahideen. When it became apparent that Amin could not control the rebellion, Soviet troops intervened and put a puppet ruler, Karmal, into power. For the Soviets, political turbulence in this bordering nation, which was viewed by some officials as a potentially useful ally pursuing its interests in the Middle East, was unacceptable.

The Soviet intervention cost Russia dearly. The seemingly endless civil war in Afghanistan resulted in thousands of Soviet dead and untold monetary costs. It also brought an abrupt end to the era of détente between the United States and the Soviet Union that began during the Nixon years. In response to the Soviet intervention, President Jimmy Carter withdrew the SALT II agreement from consideration by Congress. The treaty, which had been signed in June 1979, was designed to establish parity in nuclear delivery vehicles between the United States and the Soviet Union. Carter also halted grain shipments to the Soviet Union and ordered a U.S. boycott of the 1980 Olympics that were to be held in Moscow.

- **Dec 27 1983 – Beirut Lebanon:** President Reagan takes all responsibility for the lack of security in Beirut that allowed a terrorist on a suicide mission to kill 241 Marines on 23 OCT.
- **Dec 27 1996 – Afghanistan:** Taliban forces retake the strategic Bagram Airfield which solidifies their buffer zone around Kabul, Afghanistan. The new government and the imposing Soviet presence, however, had little success in putting down antigovernment rebels.

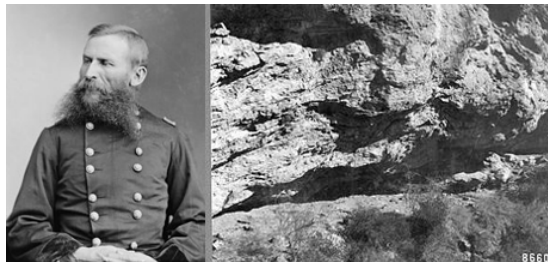


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- **Dec 28 1781 – American Revolution:** *British post troops on John's Island* » British troops commanded by Major James Henry Craig are posted at John's Island, just outside of Charleston, South Carolina. Craig had evacuated his troops from Wilmington, North Carolina, a little over a month earlier on 14 NOV. The Patriots planned to remove Craig and his men from the island with troops led by Lieutenant Colonel Henry Light Horse Harry Lee and his famed cavalry from Fort Ninety-Six in the South Carolina backcountry. Lee aborted the attack when a column led by Major James Hamilton arrived too late and was unable to cross the Wapoo River, which was only fordable once or twice a month.

The same logistical difficulties that kept American forces from reaching the island helped to keep its African population among the purest bearers of Gullah culture and language in North America. The islands of the South Carolina coast could only be reached by water until the 1950s. Thus Gullah, a Creole of Elizabethan English and languages of the African Slave Coast, survived there comparatively undisturbed.

- **Dec 28 1835 – Seminole Wars:** Osceola leads his Seminole warriors in Florida into the Second Seminole War against the United States Army. It lasts for 10 years.
- **Dec 28 1835 – Indian Wars:** *Battle of Salt River Canyon* » Lieutenant Colonel George Crook's men encountered the Yavapai tribe stronghold at Skeleton Cave located in Salt River Canyon. Crook's force was composed of 130 troopers from the 5th Cavalry Regiment led by Captain William H. Brown and another thirty Apache Scouts. The army took up a position around the mouth of Skeleton Cave and surprised the natives when they tried to leave. Surrounded, the warriors refused to surrender and the soldiers opened fire.



Lieutenant Colonel George Crook & Skelton Cave

Some of Brown's men aimed for the roof of the cave, causing the deaths of women and children within the cave. Others, who were personally accompanied by Crook, rolled rocks and boulders down from the cliffs above. Seventy-six dead were found in the cave afterward. A few who were captured were taken to Camp Grant. Among the dead within the cave was Chief Nanni-chaddi, who had claimed that no soldier would ever find his stronghold there. Crook followed up this victory with another at Turret Peak several weeks later. The Apaches soon made peace at Camp Verde in 1873 though some skirmishing continued into 1875.

- **Dec 28 1920 – Post WWI:** The United States resumes the deportation of communists and suspected communists.

- **Dec 28 1920 – U.S Policy:** President Franklin D. Roosevelt states, “The definite policy of the United States, from now on, is one opposed to armed intervention.”
- **Dec 28 1936 – Italy\*Spanish Civil War:** Benito Mussolini sends planes to Spain to support Francisco Franco’s forces.

In September 1936 a Non-Intervention Agreement was drawn-up and signed by 27 countries including Germany, Britain, France, the Soviet Union and Italy. However, Benito Mussolini continued to give aid to General Francisco Franco and his Nationalist forces and during the first three months of the Nonintervention Agreement sent 90 Italian aircraft and refitted the cruiser Canaris, the largest ship owned by the Nationalists. On 28 NOV the Italian government signed a secret treaty with the Spanish Nationalists. In return for military aid, the Nationalist agreed to allow Italy to establish bases in Spain if there was a war with France. Over the next three months Mussolini sent to Spain 130 aircraft, 2,500 tons of bombs, 500 cannons, 700 mortars, 12,000 machine-guns, 50 whippet tanks and 3,800 motor vehicles.

In December Mussolini began sending large numbers of Black Shirts to Spain. By the end of 1936 there were 3,000 members of the Black Shirts in Spain. They took part in the fighting around Madrid and participated in the fall of Málaga in February 1937. By this time their numbers had increased to 30,000. There were also 20,000 members of the Italian Army fighting in Spain. In August 1937 Italian submarines began torpedoing ships heading for Republican ports. The governments of Britain and France both made protests at this action and the following month Benito Mussolini brought an end to these attacks on shipping.

During the Spanish Civil War Italy sent 80,000 men, of whom almost 6,000 belonged to the Italian Air Force, 45,000 to the army and 29,000 to the fascist militia. Italy also supplied 1,800 cannon, 1,400 mortars, 3,400 machine-guns, 6,800 motor vehicles, 157 tanks, 213 bombers, 44 assault planes and 414 fighters.

- **Dec 28 1938– PreWW2:** France orders the doubling of forces in Somaliland to face any threats from Italy's East African empire; two warships are sent.
- **Dec 28 1941– WW2:** Rear Admiral Ben Moreell requests authority from the Bureau of Navigation to create a contingent of construction units able to build everything from airfields to roads under battlefield conditions. These units would be known as the “Seabees”—for the first letters of Construction Battalion.



- **Dec 28 1946 – France\*Vietnam:** The French declare martial law in Vietnam as a full-scale war appears inevitable.
- **Dec 28 1951 – U.S.\*Hungary:** The United States pays \$120,000 to free four fliers convicted of espionage in Hungary. Hungary had staged a farcical and painfully humiliating “court-martial” of four U.S. airmen who accidentally landed in Hungary, and demanded the \$120,000 ransom for their freedom. At the same time the Hungarian Government engaged the United States Government in an exchange of formal correspondence in vitriolic language unprecedented in the annals of peace-time diplomatic usage.
- **Dec 28 1964 – Vietnam War:** *South Vietnamese win costly battle at Binh Gia* » South Vietnamese troops retake Binh Gia in a costly battle. The Viet Cong launched a major offensive on 4 DEC and took the village of Binh Gia, 40 miles southeast of Saigon. The South Vietnamese forces recaptured the village, but only after an eight-hour battle and three battalions of reinforcements were brought in on helicopters. The operation continued into the first week of January. Losses included an estimated 200 South Vietnamese and five U.S. advisors killed, plus 300 more South Vietnamese wounded or missing. Battles such as this, in which the South Vietnamese suffered such heavy losses at the hands of the Viet Cong, convinced President Lyndon B. Johnson that the South Vietnamese could not defeat the communist without the commitment of U.S. ground troops to the war.
- **Dec 28 1972 – Vietnam War:** *Hanoi announces return to the Paris peace talks* » After 11 days of round-the-clock bombing (with the exception of a 36-hour break for Christmas), North Vietnamese officials agree to return to the peace negotiations in Paris.

The Linebacker II bombing was initiated on 18 DEC by President Richard Nixon when the North Vietnamese, who walked out of the peace negotiations in Paris, refused his ultimatum to return to the talks. During the course of the bombing, 700 B-52 sorties and more than 1,000 fighter-bomber sorties dropped an estimated 20,000 tons of bombs, mostly over the densely populated area between Hanoi and Haiphong.

During the ensuing battle, the North Vietnamese launched their entire stock of more than 1,200 surface-to-air missiles against the U.S. planes. Fifteen B-52s and 11 other U.S. aircraft were lost, along with 93 flyers downed, killed, missing or captured. Hanoi claimed heavy damage and destruction of densely populated civilian areas in Hanoi, Haiphong, and their suburbs. The bombing resulted in the deaths of 1,318 in Hanoi. While some news reporters alleged that the U.S. was guilty of “carpet bombing” the area (deliberately targeting civilian areas with intensive bombing to “carpet” a city with bombs), the bombing was intended to focus on specific military targets.

The Linebacker II bombing was effective in bringing the North Vietnamese back to the negotiating table. When they returned to Paris, the peace talks moved along quickly. On January 23, 1973, the United States, North Vietnam, the Republic of Vietnam, and the Viet Cong signed a cease-fire agreement that took effect five days later.

- **Dec 28 1973 – Cold War:** *Solzhenitsyn’s The Gulag Archipelago published* » Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s “literary investigation” of the police-state system in the Soviet Union, The Gulag



Archipelago, 1918-1956, is published in the original Russian in Paris. The book was the first of the three-volume work. The brutal and uncompromising description of political repression and terror was quickly translated into many languages and was published in the United States just a few months later.



Solzhenitsyn's massive work detailed the machinations of the Soviet police state from the time of the Bolshevik Revolution to 1956. In the preface to the book, however, he warned that reading the work would be "very dangerous" for Russians in 1973. The book was important in that it maintained that police terror had always been essential to the existence of the Soviet state. This deviated from the standard Soviet line that such terror had only come about during the time of Stalin and evaporated upon his death in 1956. Solzhenitsyn admitted that political repression eased during the ensuing Khrushchev years—the author himself was freed from political prison during that time. However, he believed that since Khrushchev's ouster in 1964, the Soviet state again resorted to intimidation and terror. His disappointment at the reversion of his country to these scare tactics influenced his decision to allow the publication of his book.

The book was an instant success in the West, but Soviet officials were livid. TASS, the official Soviet news agency, declared that the work was an "unfounded slander" against the Russian people. On February 12, 1974, Solzhenitsyn was arrested, stripped of his citizenship, and deported. He eventually settled in the United States. In the 1980s, he refused Mikhail Gorbachev's offer to reinstate his Soviet citizenship, but did return to Russia to live in 1994. Solzhenitsyn died of heart failure in Moscow on August 3, 2008. He was 89.

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- **Dec 29 1778 – American Revolution:** *British capture Savannah, Georgia* » British Lieutenant Colonel Archibald Campbell and his force of between 2500 and 3600 troops, which included the 71st Highland regiment, New York Loyalists, and Hessian mercenaries, launch a surprise attack on American forces defending Savannah, Georgia.

American Major General Robert Howe and his paltry force of between 650 and 900 men were severely outnumbered. Campbell also outflanked the Continental forces by locating a path through the swamp to the right of the American position. Howe ordered the city to be evacuated and the army to withdraw from combat. During the process, the Georgia Brigade took heavy losses when it was cut off from Howe's other forces. The Patriots lost 83 men and another 483 were captured, while the British lost only 3 men and another 10 were wounded. Savannah remained in British control until the Redcoats left of their own accord on July 11, 1782. French and American forces held Savannah under siege from September 23 to October 18, 1779, but failed to reclaim the city.

The French troops included 500 free Haitians of African descent, calling themselves the Chasseurs-Volontaires de Saint-Dominigue. Soldiers of African descent fighting for the Patriots was an anomaly during the southern campaign—most American slaves attempted to flee and join British forces, as they had no desire to defend their Patriot masters' right to enslave them. Many of the Volontaires themselves later went on to rebel against French control of Haiti. In fact, the Volontaires' twelve year old drummer, Henri Christoph, commanded Haiti's revolutionary army and later became king of Haiti.

- **Dec 29 1812 – War of 1812:** *Constitution vs. Java* » The USS Constitution under the command of Captain Bainbridge was off the coast of San Salvadore when he spotted a British ship closer to shore. The ship was the 38 gun HMS Java commanded by Captain Henry Labert. The Java was quicker than the Constitution while the 44 gun Constitution out gunned the Java. The Java was towing an American Merchant ship that it had captured. When it spotted the Constitution it sent its captured ship into San Salvador Harbor and raced to face the Constitution.



At 2PM the two ships were within cannon range. The two sides faced each other with broadsides. While the Java initially out maneuvered the Constitution, the latter's larger number of guns and the greater accuracy of its gunnery took a steady toll on the Java. By 3PM Captain Lambert had concluded that his only hope was to board the Constitution. That attempt failed when an accurate broadside struck his ship by the constitution that brought down his Top Mast and foremast. By 4:20 the Java's main mask fell. An hour later, when the Constitution was nearing for another run on the stricken ship, the Java struck her colors and surrendered.

The Java's captain was mortally wounded by rifle fire from the Constitution's masts, and she had suffered over 100 casualties before she struck her flag after a two hour fight. The Java was too badly damaged to take as a prize, and so on the day after the battle she was sunk.

- **Dec 29 1813 – War of 1812:** The two day Battle of Buffalo (a.k.a. Battle of Black Rock) begins with an ensuing rout of American forces and a British victory. Casualties and losses: US 169 – Brit. 112.
- **Dec 29 1835 – Indian Wars:** The Treaty of New Echota is signed, ceding all the lands of the Cherokee east of the Mississippi River to the United States.
- **Dec 29 1862 – Civil War:** *Battle of Chickasaw Bluffs* » At the battle Union General William T. Sherman is thwarted in his attempt to capture Vicksburg, Mississippi, when he orders a frontal assault on entrenched Rebels.

Chickasaw Bluffs was part of Union General Ulysses S. Grant's attempt to capture Vicksburg, the last Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi River. Grant planned a two-pronged assault. He would take a force from northern Mississippi while Sherman moved down the west side of the great river. In December, things began to go awry for the Yankees. Devastating Confederate cavalry raids by Nathan Bedford Forrest and Earl Van Dorn on Union supply lines in western Tennessee forced Grant to cancel his part of the campaign, but he was not able to get word to Sherman.

Sherman moved into position just a few miles north of Vicksburg by 27 DEC. He had 37,000 men while the Confederates had only 6,000 troops defending Vicksburg. However, as Sherman moved into position, another 6,000 troops arrived to reinforce the Confederates. The Rebels occupied strong positions on top of a river bluff with open ground in front of them. After two days of skirmishing, Sherman ordered a major attack on 20 DEC. The attack never had a chance of success. When one Union brigade captured Confederate rifle pits at the foot of the bluff, they came under fire from above. No other Federal force got close to the bluff.

Union losses totaled some 1,770 men while the Confederates lost around 200. The attack was a mistake by Sherman, who should have never tried to go up against fortified Rebels across open ground. Two years later, Sherman demonstrated that he had learned his lesson at Chickasaw Bluffs. During his campaign for Atlanta, he made few frontal assaults and inflicted more casualties than he sustained, which was rare for an offensive campaign.

- **Dec 29 1890 – Indian Wars:** *U.S. Army massacres Indians at Wounded Knee* » In the final chapter of America's long Indian wars, the U.S. Cavalry kills 146 Sioux at Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota.



Throughout 1890, the U.S. government worried about the increasing influence at Pine Ridge of the Ghost Dance spiritual movement, which taught that Indians had been defeated and confined to reservations because they had angered the gods by abandoning their traditional customs. Many Sioux believed that if they practiced the Ghost Dance and rejected the ways of the white man, the gods would create the world anew and destroy all non-believers, including non-Indians. On December 15, 1890, reservation police tried to arrest Sitting Bull, the famous Sioux chief, who they mistakenly believed was a Ghost Dancer, and killed him in the process, increasing the tensions at Pine Ridge.

On 29 DEC, the U.S. Army's 7th cavalry surrounded a band of Ghost Dancers under the Sioux Chief Big Foot near Wounded Knee Creek and demanded they surrender their weapons. As that was happening, a fight broke out between an Indian and a U.S. soldier and a shot was fired, although it's unclear from which side. A brutal massacre followed, in which it's estimated almost 150 Indians were

killed (some historians put this number at twice as high), nearly half of them women and children. The cavalry lost 25 men.

The conflict at Wounded Knee was originally referred to as a battle, but in reality it was a tragic and avoidable massacre. Surrounded by heavily armed troops, it's unlikely that Big Foot's band would have intentionally started a fight. Some historians speculate that the soldiers of the 7th Cavalry were deliberately taking revenge for the regiment's defeat at Little Bighorn in 1876. Whatever the motives, the massacre ended the Ghost Dance movement and was the last major confrontation in America's deadly war against the Plains Indians.

Conflict came to Wounded Knee again in February 1973 when it was the site of a 71-day occupation by the activist group AIM (American Indian Movement) and its supporters, who were protesting the U.S. government's mistreatment of Native Americans. During the standoff, two Indians were killed, one federal marshal was seriously wounded and numerous people were arrested.

- **Dec 29 1934 – Japan:** Japan renounces the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922 and the London Naval Treaty of 1930.
- **Dec 29 1940 – WW2:** *Worst air raid on London* » On the evening of December 29, 1940, London suffers its most devastating air raid when Germans firebomb the city. Hundreds of fires caused by the exploding bombs engulfed areas of London, but firefighters showed a valiant indifference to the bombs falling around them and saved much of the city from destruction. The next day, a newspaper photo of St. Paul's Cathedral standing undamaged amid the smoke and flames seemed to symbolize the capital's unconquerable spirit during the Battle of Britain.

In May and June 1940, Holland, Belgium, Norway, and France fell one by one to the German Wehrmacht, leaving Great Britain alone in its resistance against Nazi leader Adolf Hitler's plans for world domination. The British Expeditionary Force escaped the continent with an impromptu evacuation from Dunkirk, but they left behind the tanks and artillery needed to defend their homeland against invasion. With British air and land forces outnumbered by their German counterparts, and U.S. aid not yet begun, it seemed certain that Britain would soon follow the fate of France. However, Winston Churchill, the new British prime minister, promised his nation and the world that Britain would "never surrender," and the British people mobilized behind their defiant leader.

On 5 JUN, the Luftwaffe began attacks on English Channel ports and convoys, and on 30 JUN Germany seized control of the undefended Channel Islands. On 10 JUL, the first day of the Battle of Britain according to the RAF, the Luftwaffe intensified its bombing of British ports. Six days later, Hitler ordered the German army and navy to prepare for Operation Sea Lion. On 19 JUL, the German leader made a speech in Berlin in which he offered a conditional peace to the British government: Britain would keep its empire and be spared from invasion if its leaders accepted the German domination of the European continent. A simple radio message from Lord Halifax swept the proposal away.

Germany needed to master the skies over Britain if it was to transport safely its superior land forces across the 21-mile English Channel. On 8 AUG, the Luftwaffe intensified its raids against the ports in an attempt to draw the British air fleet out into the open. Simultaneously, the Germans began bombing Britain's sophisticated radar defense system and RAF-fighter airfields. During August, as many as

1,500 German aircraft crossed the Channel daily, often blotting out the sun as they flew against their British targets. Despite the odds against them, the outnumbered RAF fliers successfully resisted the massive German air invasion, relying on radar technology, more maneuverable aircraft, and exceptional bravery. For every British plane shot down, two Luftwaffe warplanes were destroyed.

At the end of August, the RAF launched a retaliatory air raid against Berlin. Hitler was enraged and ordered the Luftwaffe to shift its attacks from RAF installations to London and other British cities. On 7 SEP, the Blitz against London began, and after a week of almost ceaseless attacks several areas of London were in flames and the royal palace, churches, and hospitals had all been hit. However, the concentration on London allowed the RAF to recuperate elsewhere, and on 15 SEP the RAF launched a vigorous counterattack, downing 56 German aircraft in two dogfights that lasted less than an hour. The costly raid convinced the German high command that the Luftwaffe could not achieve air supremacy over Britain, and the next day daylight attacks were replaced with nighttime sorties as a concession of defeat. On 19 SEP, Nazi leader Adolf Hitler postponed indefinitely “Operation Sea Lion”, the amphibious invasion of Britain. The Battle of Britain, however, continued.

In October, Hitler ordered a massive bombing campaign against London and other cities to crush British morale and force an armistice. Despite significant loss of life and tremendous material damage to Britain’s cities, the country’s resolve remained unbroken. The ability of Londoners to maintain their composure had much to do with Britain’s survival during this trying period. As American journalist Edward R. Murrow reported, “Not once have I heard a man, woman, or child suggest that Britain should throw her hand.” In May 1941, the air raids essentially ceased as German forces massed near the border of the USSR.

By denying the Germans a quick victory, depriving them of forces to be used in their invasion of the USSR, and proving to America that increased arms support for Britain was not in vain, the outcome of the Battle of Britain greatly changed the course of World War II. As Churchill said of the RAF fliers during the Battle of Britain, “Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.”

- **Dec 29 1956 – Cold War:** *United States prepares new strategic plan for Middle East* » Just days before an official announcement is to be issued by the Eisenhower administration, the New York Times leaks the news that the United States is preparing a major policy statement on the Middle East. In the wake of heightened tensions in the area caused by the French-British-Israeli invasion of Egypt in November, the announcement was greeted with caution both at home and abroad.

According to the newspaper, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles was set to appear before Congress and ask for two things. First, Congressional support of a declaration by the Eisenhower administration that the United States would oppose any Soviet military intervention in the Middle East. Since the outbreak of hostilities between Egypt and the alliance of France, Britain, and Israel in November, the Soviets had been threatening the use of military force in support of Egypt.

Second, Dulles would ask Congress to establish a major economic assistance plan for the Middle East. This was largely in response to reports that the Soviets were making tremendous economic inroads into the area. The newspaper editorialized that the United States wanted “the Middle Eastern powers to know that they have not been abandoned by the West and that they can count on economic help and, if they want it, military help in opposing any Soviet aggression.”

Congressional reaction to the story was somewhat cool. Some congressmen feared that the United States was heading toward armed confrontation with the Soviets in the Middle East. The British and French were glad to hear that the United States would oppose communist expansion in the region, but were also wary of expanding problems in the Middle East into an arena for a military East-West collision. The response from Egypt was decidedly negative, with the Egyptian government declaring that it wanted no outside interference in the region's problems. Despite these less than enthusiastic responses to the proposed policy, it was evident that the United States was determined to take a much expanded and more active role in the Middle East. The NYT story was validated when the actual policy statement came in January 1957—it was almost exactly as the story predicted, though President Eisenhower, rather than Dulles, asked Congress for the resolutions supporting a greater U.S. economic and military presence in the Middle East.

- **Dec 29 1962 – Vietnam War:** *Saigon announces success of strategic hamlet program* » Saigon announces that 4,077 strategic hamlets have been completed out of a projected total of 11,182. The figures also stated that 39 percent of the South Vietnamese population was housed in the hamlets. U.S. officials considered these figures questionable.

The strategic hamlet program was started in 1962 and was modeled on a successful British counterinsurgency program used in Malaya from 1948 to 1960. The program aimed to bring the South Vietnamese peasants together in fortified strategic hamlets to provide security from Viet Cong attacks. Although much time and money was put into the program, it had several basic weaknesses. There was much animosity toward the program on the part of the South Vietnamese peasants, who were forcibly displaced from their ancestral lands. Also, the security afforded by the hamlets was inadequate and actually provided lucrative targets for the Viet Cong. Finally, the entire project was poorly managed. After the assassination of the program's sponsor, President Ngo Dinh Diem, in November 1963, the program fell into disfavor and was abandoned.

- **Dec 29 1966 – Vietnam War:** *Johnson Administration responds to Harrison Salisbury's charges* » Assistant Secretary of Defense Arthur Sylvester admits that the North Vietnamese city of Nam Dinh has been hit by U.S. planes 64 times since mid-1965, and that the air strikes were directed only against military targets: railroad yards, a warehouse, petroleum storage depots, and a thermal power plant. He denounced New York Times correspondent Harrison Salisbury's reports on the results of the air raids in North Vietnam as "misstatements of fact."

Salisbury, an assistant managing editor of the Times, filed a report on 25 DEC from Hanoi describing U.S. bombing destruction in several North Vietnamese cities. Salisbury stated that Nam Dinh, about 50 miles southeast of Hanoi, had been bombed repeatedly by U.S. planes since June 28, 1965. Salisbury's report caused a stir in Washington where, it was reported, Pentagon officials expressed irritation and contended that he was exaggerating the damage to civilian areas.

- **Dec 29 1966 – Vietnam War:** Student-body presidents from 100 U.S. colleges and universities sign an open letter to President Lyndon B. Johnson expressing anxiety and doubt over U.S. involvement in Vietnam. They warned in the letter that many youths might prefer prison to participation in the war. Johnson did not respond to the letter.

- **Dec 30 1813 – War of 1812:** British soldiers and Indians sack Buffalo NY and burn down all but 4 of its buildings. They also destroy the navy yard, three armed schooners, and one sloop. They then move on to the independent municipality of Black Rock and burn all but one of its buildings.
- **Dec 30 1862 – Civil War:** *U.S.S. Monitor sinks* » The ship sinks in a storm off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. Just nine months earlier she had been part of a revolution in naval warfare when the ironclad dueled to a standstill with the C.S.S. Virginia (Merrimack) off Hampton Roads, Virginia, in one of the most famous naval battles in American history—the first time two ironclads faced each other in a naval engagement.

After the famous duel, the Monitor provided gun support on the James River for George B. McClellan's Peninsular Campaign. By December 1862, it was clear the Monitor was no longer needed in Virginia, so she was sent to Beaufort, North Carolina, to join a fleet being assembled for an attack on Charleston, South Carolina. The Monitor served well in the sheltered waters of Chesapeake Bay, but the heavy, low-slung ship was a poor craft for the open sea. The U.S.S. Rhode Island towed the ironclad around the rough waters of Cape Hatteras. Since December is a treacherous time for any ship off North Carolina, the decision to move the Monitor could be considered questionable. As the Monitor pitched and swayed in the rough seas, the caulking around the gun turret loosened and water began to leak into the hull. More leaks developed as the journey continued. High seas tossed the craft, causing the ship's flat armor bottom to slap the water. Each roll opened more seams, and by nightfall on December 30, the Monitor was in dire straits.

The Monitor's commander, J.P. Bankhead, signaled the Rhode Island that he wished to abandon ship. The wooden side-wheeler pulled as close as safety allowed to the stricken ironclad, and two lifeboats were lowered to retrieve the crew. Many of the sailors were rescued, but some men were terrified to venture onto the deck in such rough seas. The ironclad's pumps stopped working and the ship sank before 16 crew members could be rescued.

Although the Monitor's service was brief, it signaled a new era in naval combat. The Virginia's arrival off Hampton Roads terrified the U.S. Navy, but the Monitor leveled the playing field. Both sides had ironclads, and the advantage would go to the side that could build more of them. Northern industry would win that battle for the Union.

- **Dec 30 1922 – Russia:** *USSR established* » In post-revolutionary Russia, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) is established, comprising a confederation of Russia, Belorussia, Ukraine, and the Transcaucasian Federation (divided in 1936 into the Georgian, Azerbaijan, and Armenian republics). Also known as the Soviet Union, the new communist state was the successor to the Russian Empire and the first country in the world to be based on Marxist socialism.

During the Russian Revolution of 1917 and subsequent three-year Russian Civil War, the Bolshevik Party under Vladimir Lenin dominated the soviet forces, a coalition of workers' and soldiers' committees that called for the establishment of a socialist state in the former Russian Empire. In the USSR, all levels of government were controlled by the Communist Party, and the party's politburo,

with its increasingly powerful general secretary, effectively ruled the country. Soviet industry was owned and managed by the state, and agricultural land was divided into state-run collective farms.

In the decades after it was established, the Russian-dominated Soviet Union grew into one of the world's most powerful and influential states and eventually encompassed 15 republics—Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Belorussia, Uzbekistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. In 1991, the Soviet Union was dissolved following the collapse of its communist government.

- **Dec 30 1950 – Cold War:** *Acheson calls for renewed effort to meet communist threat* » In a fiery statement, Secretary of State Dean Acheson declares that the United States will increase its efforts to contain communist aggression and calls upon the American people for support and sacrifice.

The statement was issued just weeks after hundreds of thousands of communist Chinese troops entered the Korean War, threatening to expand the conflict into a third world war. Acheson noted that 1950 had been a “dark year,” but also argued that the United States had made great advances in thwarting communist machinations around the world. Nevertheless, he continued, the United States faced a situation of “extreme gravity.” “Our freedom, our way of life, is menaced,” Acheson declared. In some of the harshest language in the statement, the secretary argued, “The present difficulties arise from the lawless and cynical conduct of the communists who would destroy peace and freedom.” Despite talk of peace from the Soviet Union, said Acheson, its recent actions revealed its talk to be “nothing but camouflage to cloak the naked imperialism of its aims.” The United States and the American people needed to support all efforts to defeat the communist threat. “No sacrifices are too great when the future of this nation is at stake.”

Acheson's heated rhetoric might have been an attempt to make up for his handling of foreign policy during the previous two years, when the secretary fell under near-constant criticism for not taking a tough stand against communism. Attacks by Senator Joseph McCarthy had been particularly loud and damaging. As 1950 drew to a close Acheson took a hard-line, declaring that the United States was willing and able to meet any challenge posed by the communists and that American commitment to Korea would not falter.

- **Dec 30 1965 – Philippines:** *Marcos inaugurated* » Former Philippines Senate president Ferdinand Marcos is inaugurated president of the Southeast Asian archipelago nation. Marcos' regime would span 20 years and become increasingly authoritarian and corrupt.

Ferdinand Marcos was a law student in the late 1930s, when he was tried for the assassination of a political opponent of his politician father. Convicted in 1939, he personally appealed the case before the Philippine Supreme Court and won an acquittal. During the Japanese occupation in World War II, he allegedly served as leader of the Filipino resistance movement, but U.S. government records indicate he played little role in anti-Japanese activities. In 1949, he was elected to the Philippines House of Representatives, thanks in large part to his fabricated wartime record. In 1959, he moved up to the Senate and from 1963 to 1965 served as Senate president. In 1965, he broke with the Liberal Party after failing to win his party's presidential nomination and ran as the candidate of the Nationalist Party. After a bitter and decisive campaign, he was elected president. In 1969, he was reelected.



Marcos' second term was marked by increasing civil strife and violence by leftist insurgents. In 1972, following a series of bombings in Manila, he warned of an imminent communist takeover and declared martial law. In 1973, he assumed dictatorship powers under a new constitution. Marcos used the military to suppress subversive elements but also arrested and jailed his mainstream political opponents. His anti-communist activities won him enthusiastic support from the U.S. government, but his regime was marked by misuse of foreign aid, repression, and political murders. His beauty-queen wife, Imelda Marcos, was appointed to important political posts and lived a famously extravagant lifestyle that included a massive wardrobe featuring thousands of pairs of shoes.

In 1981, Marcos was dubiously reelected president. In rural areas, insurgency by communists and Muslim separatists grew. In 1983, Marcos' old political opponent Benigno Aquino, Jr., returned from exile and was assassinated by military agents of Marcos as soon as he stepped off the plane. The political murder touched off widespread anti-Marcos protests, and in 1986 he agreed to hold a new presidential election. Aquino's widow, Corazon Aquino, ran against Marcos, and on February 7, 1986, the election was held. Marcos was declared victorious, but independent observers charged the regime with widespread electoral fraud. Aquino's followers proclaimed her president, and much of the military defected to her side as massive anti-Marcos demonstrations were held. On 25 FEB, Marcos, his wife, and their entourage were airlifted from the presidential palace in Manila by U.S. helicopters and fled to Hawaii.

After substantial evidence of Marcos' corruption emerged, including the looting of billions of dollars from the Philippine economy, Marcos and his wife were indicted by the U.S. government on embezzlement charges. After Ferdinand Marcos' death in 1989, Imelda was cleared of the charges, and she was allowed to return to the Philippines in 1991, where she unsuccessfully ran for the presidency the following year. In 1993, Imelda Marcos was convicted of corruption by a Philippine court, but she avoided serving her 12-year prison sentence. In 1995, she was elected to the House of Representatives. In 1998, she unsuccessfully ran for president again and subsequently retired from political life.

- **Dec 30 1970 – Vietnam War:** *U.S. Navy transfers some responsibility to South Vietnamese* » The South Vietnamese Navy receives 125 U.S. vessels in a ceremony marking the end of the U.S. Navy's four-year role in inland waterway combat. This brings the total number of vessels turned over to the South Vietnamese Navy to 650. About 17,000 Americans remained with the South Vietnamese Navy in shore positions and as advisers aboard South Vietnamese vessels. The transfer of inland waterway combat responsibility was part of President Nixon's Vietnamization program, in which the war effort was transferred to the South Vietnam so U.S. troops could be withdrawn.
- **Dec 30 1972 – Vietnam War:** *Negotiations to resume in Paris* » Officials in Washington, D.C., announce that the peace talks in Paris between National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger and North Vietnamese negotiator Le Duc Tho will resume on 2 JAN.

On 28 DEC, Hanoi agreed to return to the negotiations, and President Nixon ordered a halt to Linebacker II, the intensive bombing campaign of North Vietnam. Nixon initiated the campaign on 18 DEC when the North Vietnamese, who walked out of the peace negotiations in Paris, refused his ultimatum to return to the talks. During the course of the bombing, 700 B-52 sorties and more than 1,000 fighter-bombers dropped an estimated 20,000 tons of bombs, mostly over the densely populated area between Hanoi and Haiphong. When the communist negotiators returned to Paris, the peace talks

moved along quickly. On January 23, 1973, the United States, North Vietnam, the Republic of Vietnam, and the Viet Cong signed a cease-fire agreement that took effect five days later.

- **Dec 30 2006 – Iraq:** Former President Saddam Hussein is executed. His last words are, “To the hell that is Iraq!?” Video at <https://youtu.be/n6IFzM3eoss>.



- **Dec 30 2009 – Afghanistan:** A suicide bomber kills nine people at Forward Operating Base Chapman, a key facility of the Central Intelligence Agency.

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- **Dec 31 1775 – American Revolution:** *Patriots defeated at Quebec* » Patriot forces under generals Benedict Arnold and Richard Montgomery are defeated by the British defenders of the city of Quebec in Canada.

On 2 DEC, Arnold and Montgomery met on the outskirts of Quebec and demanded the surrender of the city. Governor Sir Guy Carleton rejected their demand, and on 9 DEC the Patriots commenced a bombardment of Quebec, which was met by a counterbattery by the British defenders that disabled several of the Patriots’ guns. At approximately 4 a.m. on 31 DEC, the Patriot forces advanced on the city under the cover of a blizzard. The British defenders were ready, however, and when Montgomery’s forces came within 50 yards of the fortified city they opened fire with a barrage of artillery and musket fire. Montgomery was killed in the first assault, and, after several more attempts at penetrating Quebec’s defenses, his men were forced into retreat.

Meanwhile, Arnold’s division suffered a similar fate during their attack of the northern wall of the city. A two-gun battery opened fire on the advancing Americans, killing a number of Americans and wounding Benedict Arnold in the leg. Patriot Daniel Morgan assumed command, made progress against the defenders, but halted at the second wall of fortifications to wait for reinforcements. By the time the rest of Arnold’s army finally arrived, the British had reorganized and the attack was called off. Of the 900 Americans who participated in the siege, 60 were killed and wounded and more than 400 were captured.

The remaining Patriot forces then retreated from the invasion of Canada. As the Americans crossed the St. Lawrence River to safety, Benedict Arnold remained in Canadian territory until the last of his soldiers had escaped. With the pursuing British forces almost in firing range, Arnold checked one last time to make sure all his men had escaped. He then shot his horse and fled down the St. Lawrence in a canoe.

Less than five years later, Benedict Arnold, as commander of West Point, famously became a traitor when he agreed to surrender the important Hudson River fort to the British for a bribe of \$20,000. The plot was uncovered after British spy John André was captured with incriminating papers, forcing Arnold to flee to British protection and join in their fight against the country that he once so valiantly served.

- **Dec 31 1775 – American Revolution:** George Washington orders recruiting officers to accept free blacks into the army.
- **Dec 31 1862 – Civil War:** *Battle of Parker's Crossroads* » Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest narrowly escapes capture during a raid at Parker's Crossroads in western Tennessee. Despite the close call, the raid was instrumental in forcing Union General Ulysses S. Grant to abandon his first attempt to capture Vicksburg, Mississippi.

Forrest set out from Columbus, Tennessee, on 11 DEC to raid Union supply lines. He defeated a Union force at Lexington, Tennessee, on 18 DEC and spent the week of Christmas destroying Federal rail lines north of Jackson, Tennessee. By the end of December, several Union forces were bearing down on Forrest's cavalry. As the Confederates approached Parker's Crossroads, they detected a Yankee force ahead and Forrest decided to attack.

Forrest approached the Union troops and sent part of his force around their flank. His dismounted cavalry were enjoying great success when firing suddenly sounded behind Forrest's troops. Another Yankee detachment had surprised the Confederates. The men assigned to hold the horses of the attacking Confederates were now fleeing in panic right past Forrest. At one point, Forrest himself came upon Union troops, who demanded that he surrender. He agreed and rode off to gather his force. The Rebel commander then surveyed the situation and reportedly said, "Charge them both ways." He diverted some of his men from the initial attack to turn against the Federals coming from behind.

Though around 300 of Forrest's men were captured, the bulk of his forces escaped. The close call only served to enhance Forrest's reputation as a brilliant battlefield commander. Despite the losses, the raid—combined with Confederate General Earl Van Dorn's raid on Union supply lines further to the west—convinced Grant to abort his attempt on Vicksburg.

- **Dec 31 1862 – Civil War:** *Battle of Parker's Crossing* » Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest narrowly escapes capture during a raid at the Crossroads in western Tennessee. Despite the close call, the raid was instrumental in forcing Union General Ulysses S. Grant to abandon his first attempt to capture Vicksburg, Mississippi.
- **Dec 31 1862 – Civil War:** Union General William Rosecrans' army repels two Confederate attacks at the Battle of Murfreesboro (Stone's River).
- **Dec 31 1862 – Civil War:** Abraham Lincoln signs an act that admits West Virginia to the Union, thus dividing Virginia in two.

- **Dec 31 1915 WWI:** The Germans torpedo the British liner Persia without any warning killing 335 passengers.
- **Dec 31 1941 WW2:** General MacArthur reports that U.S. lines in Manila have been pushed back by the Japanese.
- **Dec 31 1942 – WW2:** After five months of battle, Emperor Hirohito allows the Japanese commanders at Guadalcanal to retreat. Casualties and losses: US 7,104 – Japan 32,000.
- **Dec 31 1944 – WW2:** *Hungary declares war on Germany* » The provisional government of Hungary officially declares war on Germany, bringing an end to Hungary’s cooperation—sometimes free, sometimes coerced—with the Axis power.

Miklas Horthy, the anticommunist regent and virtual dictator of Hungary, who had once hoped to keep his country nonbelligerent in the war, had reluctantly aligned Hungary with Hitler in November 1940. While ideologically not fascist, Hungary had many radical right-wing elements at play in its politics, as well as a history of anti-Semitism. Those radical forces saw many common “ideals” with Nazism and believed the future lay with Germany. So though Horthy little admired Hitler personally, he felt the need to placate influential parties within his own country and protect his nation from Soviet domination.

When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union, Hitler demanded that Hungary mobilize its military against the Soviets as well. So on June 29, 1941, Hungary declared war on the USSR. In March 1942, Horthy replaced Prime Minister Lazlo Bardossy, (a political manipulator too eager to piggyback on German territorial expansion and turn on former allies for the sake of personal gains), with Miklos Kallay, who shared the regent’s goal of regaining the favor of the Western—non-Soviet—Allies. Kallay was able to communicate to the Allies that Hungary was open to switching sides again should they make it to Hungary’s border and offer Hungary protection from German and/or Soviet occupation.

In January 1943, the Battle of Voronezh against the USSR saw Hungary’s entire 2nd Army decimated by the Soviets, rendering Hungary militarily impotent. Hitler, who learned of Kallay’s sly communiques with the West, gave Horthy an ultimatum: Either cooperate fully with the German regime or suffer German occupation. Horthy chose to collaborate, which meant the suppression of left-leaning political parties and an intense persecution of Hungary’s Jews, including massive deportations to Auschwitz, something Kallay, to his credit, had fought to prevent. (More than 550,000 Hungarian Jews—out of 750,000—would die during the war.)

As Soviet troops began to occupy more Hungarian territory, a desperate Horthy signed an armistice with Moscow. When the regent announced this on radio, he was kidnapped by the Germans and forced to abdicate. Ferenc Szalasi, leader of the fascist Arrow Cross Party, was made head of the country on October 15, 1944, though he was little more than a puppet of the Germans. His rule of terror, especially against Hungary’s Jews, would become infamous. Soviet troops finally liberated the bulk of Hungary from German rule in December 1944. On 31 DEC, a Provisional National Assembly, composed of Communists loyal to the USSR, officially declared war on Germany. The Assembly would go on to sign an armistice with all the Allies in January of 1945.

- **Dec 31 1944 – WW2:** Operation Nordwind, the last major German offensive on the Western Front begins.
- **Dec 31 1946 – WW2:** *War related deaths* » US President Harry S. Truman officially proclaims the end of hostilities in World War II as of this date. Total deaths resulting from the conflict are reported to be U.S. 418,500 - Germany 7 to 9M - Japan 2.6 to 3.1M - Total 60 to 85M.
- **Dec 31 1968 – Vietnam War:** The bloodiest year of the war. At year's end, 536,040 American servicemen were stationed in Vietnam. Estimates indicated that 181,150 Viet Cong and North Vietnamese were killed during the year. Allied losses were 43,463 KIA. Since January 1961, more than 31,000 U.S. servicemen had been killed in Vietnam and over 200,000 U.S. personnel had been wounded.
- **Dec 31 1968 – Aviation:** *Soviets test supersonic airliner* » The Soviet Union's TU-144 supersonic airliner makes its first flight, several months ahead of the Anglo-French Concorde. The TU-144 so closely resembled the Concorde that the Western press dubbed it the "Konkordski."



In 1962, 15 years after U.S. pilot Chuck Yeager first broke the sound barrier, Britain and France signed a treaty to develop the world's first supersonic passenger airline. The next year, President John F. Kennedy proposed a similar U.S. project. Meanwhile, in the USSR, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev ordered his top aviation engineers to beat the West to the achievement. There were immense technical challenges in building a supersonic airliner. Engines would need to be twice as powerful as those built for normal jets, and the aircraft's frame would have to withstand immense pressure from shock waves and endure high temperatures caused by air friction. In the United States, Boeing tackled the supersonic project but soon ran into trouble with its swing-wing design. In England and France, however, early results were much more promising, and Khrushchev ordered Soviet intelligence to find out as much as possible about the Anglo-French prototypes.

In 1965, the French arrested Sergei Pavlov, head of the Paris office of the Soviet airliner Aeroflot, for illegally obtaining classified information about France's supersonic project. Another high-level Soviet spy remained unknown, however, and continued to feed the Soviets information about the Concorde until the spy was identified and arrested in 1967. On December 31, 1968, just three months before the first scheduled flight of the Concorde prototype, the fruits of Soviet industrial espionage were revealed when the Soviet's TU-144 became the world's first supersonic airliner to fly.

In 1969, the Concorde began its test flights. Two years later, the United States abandoned its supersonic program, citing budget and environmental concerns. It was now up to Western Europe to make supersonic airline service viable before the Soviets. Tests continued, and in 1973 the TU-144 came to the West to appear alongside the Concorde at the Paris Air Show at Le Bourget airport. On June 3, in front of 200,000 spectators, the Concorde flew a flawless demonstration. Then it was the TU-144's turn. The aircraft made a successful 360-degree turn and then began a steep ascent. Abruptly, it leveled off and began a sharp descent. Some 1,500 feet above the ground, it broke up from overstress and came crashing into the ground, killing all six Soviet crew members and eight French civilians.

Soviet and French investigators ruled that pilot error was the cause of the accident. However, in recent years, several of the Soviet investigators have disclosed that a French Mirage intelligence aircraft was photographing the TU-144 from above during the flight. A French investigator confirmed that the Soviet pilot was not told that the Mirage was there, a breach of air regulations. After beginning his ascent, the pilot may have abruptly leveled off the TU-144 for fear of crashing into this aircraft. In the sudden evasive maneuver, the thrust probably failed, and the pilot then tried to restart the engines by entering a dive. He was too close to the ground, however, and tried to pull up too soon, thus overstressing the aircraft.

In exchange for Soviet cooperation in the cover-up, the French investigators agreed not to criticize the TU-144's design or engineering. Nevertheless, further problems with the TU-144, which was designed hastily in its bid to beat the Concorde into the air, delayed the beginning of Soviet commercial service. Concorde passenger service began with much fanfare in January 1976. Western Europe had won its supersonic race with the Soviets, who eventually allowed just 100 domestic flights with the TU-144 before discontinuing the airliner.

The Concorde was not a great commercial success, however, and people complained bitterly about the noise pollution caused by its sonic booms and loud engines. Most airlines declined to purchase the aircraft, and just 16 Concorde were built for British Airways and Air France. Service was eventually limited between London and New York and Paris and New York, and luxury travelers appreciated the less than four-hour journey across the Atlantic.

On July 25, 2000, an Air France Concorde crashed 60 seconds after taking off from Paris en route to New York. All 109 people aboard and four on the ground were killed. The accident was caused by a burst tire that ruptured a fuel tank, creating a fire that led to engine failure. The fatal accident—the first in the Concorde's history—signaled the decline of the aircraft. However, the United States, which is working on a larger and more efficient supersonic airliner, will soon carry the supersonic torch. NASA and the U.S. companies involved are being aided in their efforts by the Russians, who have provided a TU-144 for experimental flights.

- **Dec 31 1971 – Vietnam War:** *U.S. annual casualty figures down* » The gradual U.S. withdrawal from the conflict in Southeast Asia is reflected in reduced annual casualty figures. The number of Americans killed in action dropped to 1,386 from the previous year total of 4,204. South Vietnam losses for the year totaled 21,500 men, while the combined Viet Cong and North Vietnamese total was estimated at 97,000 killed in action.

After 10 years of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, a total of 45,627 American soldiers had been killed. The U.S. troop levels, which started the year at 280,000, were down to 159,000. This troop

reduction was a direct result of the shifting American goal for the Vietnam War—no longer attempting a military victory, the U.S. was trying to gracefully extricate itself from the situation by transferring responsibility for the war to the South Vietnamese.

- **Dec 31 1972 – Vietnam War:** *U.S. and communist negotiators prepare to return to the Paris talks* » With the end of Linebacker II, the most intense U.S. bombing operation of the Vietnam War, U.S. and communist negotiators prepare to return to the secret Paris peace talks scheduled to reconvene on 2 JAN.

In a statement issued in Paris, the Hanoi delegation to the public peace talks asserted that the U.S. bombing did not succeed in “subjugating the Vietnamese people,” and called attention to the losses of U.S. planes and the unfavorable world reaction to the raids. Despite the public denial that the Linebacker II raids forced them back, the communists returned to the negotiating table. When the negotiators met in January, the talks moved along quickly and on January 23, 1973, the United States, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam), the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam), and the Viet Cong signed a cease-fire agreement that took effect five days later.

In 1972, the American troop level in South Vietnam was reduced from 159,000 to only 24,000. Under the terms of the Paris Peace Accords, all of the personnel would be withdrawn by March 1973.

- **Dec 31 1977 – Vietnam War:** Cambodia breaks relations with Vietnam.
- **Dec 31 1978 – Cold War:** *United States ends official relations with Nationalist China* » Flags at both the American embassy in Taipei and the Taiwanese embassy in the United States are lowered for the last time as U.S. relations with Taiwan officially come to an end. On January 1, 1979 the United States officially recognized the government of the People’s Republic of China in Beijing.

The American decision to sever relations with Taiwan and grant recognition to the People’s Republic of China was hotly resented by representatives of the Chinese Nationalist government. In a brief ceremony accompanying the lowering of the Taiwanese flag, a Chinese Nationalist official declared that the action “did not mean that we are giving up our fight against communism.” He strongly criticized American President Jimmy Carter for cutting off ties with “a loyal friend and ally of the United States” in exchange for normalizing relations with “our enemy, the Chinese Communist regime.” American officials had little comment, except to assure those seeking visas and other services in Taiwan that the U.S. embassy would continue to help them until March 1, 1979. At that time, a “nongovernmental” office would take over those duties.

It was a rather quiet end to nearly 30 years of American refusal to grant official recognition to the communist government of mainland China. The U.S. decision to maintain strong relations with the Nationalist government on Taiwan had been the main roadblock to diplomatic relations between America and the People’s Republic of China. By the late 1970s, the desire for closer economic relations with communist China and the belief that diplomatic relations with the PRC might act as a buffer against Soviet aggression led U.S. officials to view continued relations with Taiwan as counterproductive. President Carter’s decision to sever relations with Taiwan removed that obstacle. One of the oldest and most antagonistic relationships of the Cold War seemed to be thawing.

- **Dec 31 1999 – Panama:** *Panama Canal turned over to Panama* » The United States, in accordance with the Torrijos-Carter Treaties, officially hands over control of the Panama Canal, putting the strategic waterway into Panamanian hands for the first time. Crowds of Panamanians celebrated the transfer of the 50-mile canal, which links the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and officially opened when the SS Arcon sailed through on August 15, 1914. Since then, over 922,000 ships have used the canal.



Interest in finding a shortcut from the Atlantic to the Pacific originated with explorers in Central America in the early 1500s. In 1523, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V commissioned a survey of the Isthmus of Panama and several plans for a canal were produced, but none ever implemented. U.S. interest in building a canal was sparked with the expansion of the American West and the California gold rush in 1848. (Today, a ship heading from New York to San Francisco can save about 7,800 miles by taking the Panama Canal rather than sailing around South America.)

In 1880 a French company run by the builder of the Suez Canal started digging a canal across the Isthmus of Panama (then a part of Colombia). More than 22,000 workers died from tropical diseases such as yellow fever during this early phase of construction and the company eventually went bankrupt, selling its project rights to the United States in 1902 for \$40 million. President Theodore Roosevelt championed the canal, viewing it as important to America's economic and military interests. In 1903, Panama declared its independence from Colombia in a U.S.-backed revolution and the U.S. and Panama signed the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty, in which the U.S. agreed to pay Panama \$10 million for a perpetual lease on land for the canal, plus \$250,000 annually in rent.

Over 56,000 people worked on the canal between 1904 and 1913 and over 5,600 lost their lives. When finished, the canal, which cost the U.S. \$375 million to build, was considered a great engineering marvel and represented America's emergence as a world power.

In 1977, responding to nearly 20 years of Panamanian protest, U.S. President Jimmy Carter and Panama's General Omar Torrijos signed two new treaties that replaced the original 1903 agreement and called for a transfer of canal control in 1999. The treaty, narrowly ratified by the U.S. Senate, gave America the ongoing right to defend the canal against any threats to its neutrality. In October 2006, Panamanian voters approved a \$5.25 billion plan to double the canal's size by 2015 to better accommodate modern ships.

Ships pay tolls to use the canal, based on each vessel's size and cargo volume. In May 2006, the Maersk Delys paid a record toll of \$249,165. The smallest-ever toll—36 cents—was paid by Richard Halliburton, who swam the canal in 1928. The United States, in accordance with the Torrijos-Carter



Treaties, officially hands over control of the Panama Canal, putting the strategic 50 mile waterway into Panamanian hands for the first time.

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