October in History


U. S. history has been shaped by global events as well as those that have occurred on our own soil in the month of October, and I’ve listed a few of the most memorable ones.

October 1
1908 - Henry Ford's Model T went on sale for the first time.

October 2
1967 - Thurgood Marshall (1908-1993) was sworn in as the first African American Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. He served until 1991 and was known for opposing discrimination, the death penalty, championing free speech and civil liberties.

October 3
1739, George Washington proclaimed the first National Thanksgiving. President Abraham Lincoln later declared Thanksgiving to be the last Thursday of November.

October 4
1965 - Pope Paul VI became the first Pope to visit the U.S. and the first to address the United Nations.

October 5
1986 - Former U.S. Marine Eugene Hasenfus was captured by Nicaraguan Sandinistas after his plane carrying arms for the Nicaraguan rebels (Contras) was shot down over Nicaragua. This incident led to the "Iran-Contra" controversy and scandal for the Reagan Administration.

1882 -“Father of the Space Age,” Robert Goddard (1882-1945) was publicly ridiculed for constructing a space flight machine. He later launched the world's first liquid-fueled rocket and another which surpassed the speed of sound. Further developments included a steering apparatus for rocket machines, high-altitude staged rockets, rocket fuel pumps, and a self-cooling rocket motor.

October 6
1949 - Tokyo Rose was sentenced for treason, but later pardoned. She had broadcast music and Japanese propaganda to American troops in the Pacific during World War II.

1985 - Palestinian terrorists seized the Italian passenger ship Achille Lauro threatening to blow it up if Israel did not free 50 Palestinian prisoners. Leon Klinghoffer, an elderly wheelchair-bound American, was murdered.
October 8
1871 - The Great Fire of Chicago erupted. Supposedly, the blaze was started by Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicking over a lantern in her barn. Over 300 persons were killed and 90,000 were left homeless as the fire leveled 3.5 square miles, destroying 17,450 buildings. Financial losses totaled over $200 million.

1918 - During World War I in the Argonne Forest in France, U.S. Sergeant Alvin C. York single-handedly took out a German machine-gun battalion, killing over a dozen and capturing 132. He was later awarded the Medal of Honor and the French Croix de Guerre.

1998 - The U.S. House of Representatives voted to approve launching an impeachment inquiry of President Bill Clinton. He was the third sitting president to be so charged, the others being Andrew Johnson and Richard Nixon.

October 10
1973 - Spiro T. Agnew resigned the office of Vice President over charges of income tax evasion on illegal payments allegedly received while he was Governor of Maryland and Vice President. Gerald R. Ford succeeded him as Vice President and became President upon the resignation of Richard M. Nixon.

October 12
1492 - After a 33-day voyage, Christopher Columbus made his first landfall in the New World in the Bahamas. He named the first sighted land El Salvador in honor of the Spanish Crown. Columbus, seeking a western sea route from Europe to Asia, believed he had found an island of the Indies, and called the natives, 'Indians.'

October 13
1792 - George Washington laid the cornerstone of the White House. Located at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, the building is three stories tall with over 100 rooms, and was designed by James Hoban. It was first known as the "Presidential Palace," but acquired the name "White House" 10 years after completion. Burned by British troops in 1814, it was then reconstructed, refurbished and reoccupied in 1817.

October 14
1912 - Former President Theodore Roosevelt was shot by a fanatic while campaigning in Milwaukee. His life was spared by his thick overcoat, a glasses case and a folded speech in his breast pocket, which slowed the bullet. Although wounded, he insisted on making the speech with the bullet lodged in his chest and didn’t go to the hospital until the meeting ended. The rugged outdoorsman recovered completely within two weeks.

1947 - U.S. Air Force Captain Chuck Yeager became the first man to break the sound barrier, flying in a rocket-powered research aircraft.
October 15
1917 - World War I spy Mata Hari was executed by a French firing squad at Vincennes Barracks near Paris.

1991 - The U.S. Senate confirmed Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court following hearings before the Senate Judiciary Committee concerning a former aide’s sexual harassment charges. Thomas became the second African American to sit on the Court, replacing Thurgood Marshall.

October 17
1777 - During the American Revolutionary War, British General John Burgoyne and his entire army of 5,700 men surrendered to American General Horatio Gates after the Battle of Saratoga. This was the first big American victory.

1944 - The Battle of Leyte Gulf, the largest naval battle in history, took place off the Philippine Islands, during World War II in the Pacific. The battle involved 216 U.S. warships and 64 Japanese ships, and resulted in the destruction of the Japanese Navy.

October 19
1960 - The U.S. embargo of Cuba began as the State Department prohibited shipment of all goods except medicine and food.

1987 - "Black Monday" occurred on Wall Street with stocks plunging a record 508 points or 22.6 per cent. It was the largest one-day drop in stock market history.

October 20
1944 - During World War II in the Pacific, General Douglas MacArthur, fulfilling his promise of “I shall return,” set foot on Philippine soil for the first time since his escape in 1942.

1973 - The 'Saturday Night Massacre” occurred during the Watergate scandal when President Richard M. Nixon fired Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox and Deputy Attorney General William Ruckelshaus. Attorney General Elliot Richardson resigned amid a firestorm of political protest which erupted over the firing. This led to widespread demands for Nixon's impeachment.

October 21
1879 - Thomas Edison successfully tested an electric incandescent lamp with a carbonized filament at his laboratory in Menlo Park, New Jersey. He kept it lit for over 13 hours.

1915 - The first radio voice message from Virginia to Paris, was made by the American Telephone and Telegraph Company.

1967 - During a rally against the Viet Nam War, thousands of anti-war protesters stormed the Pentagon. About 250 were arrested.
October 22
1962 - President John F. Kennedy informed citizens of the presence of Russian missiles in Cuba. The demand to remove the missiles and an order to “quarantine” Cuba until they were removed, resulted in Russia’s promise to do so. In return, the U.S. later removed missiles from Turkey.


October 25
1983 - The Reagan administration, claiming that the Caribbean island of Grenada had become a "Soviet-Cuban colony," ordered an invasion of the island by U.S. military forces to restore "order and democracy."

October 26
1825 - The Erie Canal opened as the first major man-made waterway in America, linking Lake Erie with the Hudson River, bypassing the British-controlled lower St. Lawrence. The canal cost over $7 million and took eight years to complete.

October 27
1787 - The first of 85 Federalist Papers appeared in print in a New York City newspaper. The essays argued for the adoption of the new U.S. Constitution. They were written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay.

October 29
1929 - The stock market crashed as over 16 million shares were dumped amid tumbling prices. The Great Depression followed in America, lasting until the outbreak of World War II.

October 31