

This week in history: July 13-19

13 July 2015

25 Years Ago | 50 Years Ago | 75 Years Ago | 100 Years Ago

25 years ago: Luzon earthquake devastates the Philippines

On July 16, 1990, a tremor measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale hit the densely populated Philippines island of Luzon at 4:26 PM. The shock produced an 80 mile-long ground rupture in the central eastern region of the island and devastated towns and cities in Central Luzon, killing some 2,000 people.

The tourist destination of Baguio City was among the hardest hit, with 28 major buildings flattened, and the city left with no water, electricity or telephone service. The collapsed buildings, including schools, hotels, government buildings and factories, left scores of people trapped under the rubble. The city, at an elevation of 5,000 feet, was isolated from land access as roads leading in and out were closed due to landslides. It took three days to clear the roads enough to provide limited access to Baguio from outside.

Scores of buildings collapsed in other towns and cities in Luzon, leaving hundreds trapped under the rubble. Some 100,000 families were displaced, when two coastal villages sank as a result of liquefaction of the ground under them.

The epicenter of the quake was near Cabanatuan City, 60 miles north of the capital of Manila. Officials reported that at least 70 aftershocks occurred after the initial tremor.

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50 years ago: Mariner IV photographs surface of Mars

On July 14, 1965, the Mariner IV satellite, part of NASA's Mars-Mariner program, sent back to Earth the photographic images of Mars, the first-ever close-up images of a deep space body.

Launched on November 28, 1964, Mariner IV was equipped with a number of scientific instruments designed to gain information about interplanetary space and Mars, including the intensity of charged particles, the characteristics of magnetic fields, the intensity and direction of low-energy particles, and cosmic dust.

It also included a television camera, mounted underneath the spacecraft, to obtain close-up images of Mars. The camera was comprised of a Cassegrain telescope, a shutter and red-green filter assembly, and a vidicon tube that translated the image into an electronic signal.

Mariner IV dispelled the notion, then still widely held, that the Red Planet might be hospitable for life. The transmission of radio signals demonstrated a remarkably low atmospheric pressure, which it was immediately discerned would make an eventual landing on Mars more difficult. Scientists also concluded that, based on the low atmospheric pressure, that dust storms on Mars, visible from Earth, must be of unusual ferocity.

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75 years ago: British government rejects overtures from Hitler

On the evening of July 19, 1940, Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler made a lengthy speech at the Reichstag in Berlin, in which he called for a negotiated settlement with Great Britain. The broadly hinted *quid pro quo* would be that Britain would be allowed to hold on to its vast colonial empire, while Germany would be left unencumbered to pursue its own imperial aims in Europe.

"I feel a deep disgust for this type of unscrupulous

politician who wrecks whole nations,” Hitler said of Churchill. “I feel it to be my duty before my own conscience to appeal once more to reason and common sense in Great Britain as much as elsewhere. I consider myself in a position to make this appeal since I am not the vanquished begging favors, but the victor speaking in the name of reason.”

The peace offer, such as it was, was categorically rejected within the hour from London.

Hitler offered too little to those cabinet members like Chamberlain, Halifax and Lloyd George, who might, given the right circumstances, wish to make a peaceful settlement with Nazi Germany. But Churchill and his supporters within the government calculated that sooner rather than later the German army would be compelled to attack the Soviet Union, and in doing so, open another military front to Germany’s east. The British ruling class also calculated that the United States, sooner or later, would enter the war on the British side.

Hitler was, in fact, preparing for war. Three days earlier, he had assembled the Wehrmacht High Command, which was tasked with developing a plan for the subjugation of Britain. The military brass warned Hitler that a large-scale invasion across the English Channel would prove difficult, given British naval superiority. Hitler was increasingly tempted by an argument from Luftwaffe head Herman Goering, that Britain could be brought to its knees through aerial bombardment.

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100 years ago: Coal miners strike in Wales

On July 15, 1915, some 200,000 coal miners in Wales went on strike, defying calls for the abolition of industrial action under wartime conditions.

After the outbreak of the war, the working and living conditions of the working class deteriorated rapidly, with employers demanding extended working hours and higher productivity to meet the demand for both raw materials and equipment for the war. As the war continued, there were also steep increases in the cost of living, impacting most sharply on the working class. Industrial and civil unrest grew.

The British Labour Party had called for an industrial truce within a month of the outbreak of war. In February 1915, 9,000 engineering workers in Glasgow went on

strike. Worried about industrial unrest impacting on the war effort, the government called for a meeting with the trade union leaderships. These meetings resulted in the Treasury Agreements, signed in March 1915 by union leaders from a broad range of industries. These were agreements to abandon independent union rights and conditions and to halt all industrial disputes for the duration of the war. Only with this full collaboration of the unions was the government able to pursue its war policy.

The industrial agenda was to ban strikes and lockouts, enforce compulsory arbitration and suspend restrictive trade practices, such as the requirement for skilled laborers to work on production in some industries. The Munitions Act, enacted in July 1915, built on this agenda, and broadened the terms of the original agreements to include all wartime industry. It outlawed strikes and lockouts and extended the power of the government to apply the act to any other work stoppages.

In March 1915, the Miners’ Federation claim for a national wage increase to meet the rising costs of living was rejected by the government. This led to widespread unrest in South Wales.

The government proclaimed that the mines came under the purview of the Munitions Act, thereby denouncing the strike as unlawful and requiring the dispute to go to compulsory arbitration. Angered by and in defiance of the government’s claim of illegality, the miners continued with their strike. Government figures, including the Minister of Munitions Lloyd George, sought to intervene in the dispute. A deal was struck with union representatives, when coal mine owners turned to government officials to resolve the dispute. The miners’ claim for pay increases was met; however the Munitions Act was used to place the mines under state control, when unrest broke out again in 1916.

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