

## This week in history: July 7-13

This column profiles important historical events which took place during this week, 25 years ago, 50 years ago, 75 years ago and 100 years ago

6 July 2025

### 25 years ago: Hundreds perish in Philippines garbage landslide

On July 10, 2000, an enormous garbage dump in the Philippines—covering an area of 74 acres and rising as high as seven stories—collapsed like an avalanche on the impoverished ghettos outside the capital city of Manila. The town, named Lupang Pangako, or the Promised Land, had more than 100 shacks and huts constructed by displaced rural peasants and farmers, and housed around 800 families. Most made a miserable living scavenging through the trash for metals, trinkets, and any items worth some change to hand over to middlemen and landlords who pocketed the profits.

Two tropical typhoons hit the deadly teetering mountain of refuse, loosening the debris and the land under it, and sowing the conditions for mudslides. The collapsing mass of garbage caught fire, triggered either by methane gas trapped within the rotting waste, fallen power cables, or overturned makeshift stoves from shanties. Hundreds of impoverished people died, suffocating or being burnt alive, and many were buried beneath the smoldering pile of waste.

Survivors recounted the horrors leading up to the deadly catastrophe and the tragic rescue efforts. Nine-year-old Nelda Taglo said: “I was sleeping when I thought I heard an airplane coming. Then there was an explosion. My Papa saved me.” Conchita Ramos, broke down and cried: “They have found my daughter’s body and it was badly burned. They also found the body of her daughter but its head was gone.”

The flagrant disregard of the health and safety of the Filipino people, combined with the gross endemic poverty and inequality throughout the country, combined to produce the disaster. According to some estimates, more than 1,000 people perished, with many more suffering the trauma of the death of a loved one, parent, or sibling.

The response of the Filipino ruling class was to deflect any culpability for the deaths and to propose solutions that would come at the expense of the working class. This would include forcibly removing the people living near or on the garbage site, itself a product of governmental neglect and lucrative contracts for officials and private trucking companies who paid just \$2.25 to dump waste. Lupang Pangako had been set to be closed the previous December, but the residents at the new garbage location protested, fearful for their own survival.

President Joseph Estrada, who won office in mid-1998 with the slogan “Erap (buddy) for the poor,” responded by promising that bidding would ensue for a safer garbage system for Manila.

“Hopefully in the next few months we will have a solution to the problem,” he said. For Estrada, however, the garbage was the problem, not the people who were forced to scavenge to survive or had to live next to the potential danger.

### 50 years ago: MPLA offensive in Angolan capital ousts US-backed forces

On July 9, 1975, military forces of the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) launched a decisive offensive against the US-backed National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA). The surprise operation drove the FNLA out of the capital city of Luanda and marked the end of the imperialist-backed provisional government that was set up to manage the country’s transition out of Portuguese colonial control.

During the offensive, the MPLA systematically overran all FNLA barracks and offices throughout Luanda. Within days, the MPLA had successfully expelled the FNLA from the capital, forcing its fighters and political leaders to flee north toward their strongholds near the border with Zaire. Another nationalist faction, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), initially backed by China but later by the US and South Africa, also withdrew its representatives from Luanda, leaving the MPLA to establish itself as the legitimate government of Angola.

Following the Carnation Revolution in Portugal which overthrew the fascist Estado Novo regime, the new government in Lisbon was compelled to end its colonial wars and grant independence to its African territories. The Alvor Agreement of January 1975 established a tripartite transitional government composed of the MPLA, FNLA and UNITA. In the scramble to control the immense oil and diamond resources of Angola, the US financed the viciously anti-communist FNLA led by longtime CIA asset Holden Roberto.

The July offensive was not the first time the three parties had clashed with one another. While still engaged in an unstable coalition during the war against Portuguese rule, the factions often fought skirmishes. In the months leading up to July, unorganized street fighting in Luanda was frequent between the MPLA and FNLA.

Led by Angolan intellectuals, the MPLA had support from millions of working and oppressed masses in the country, particularly in the

cities, due to their claim to support socialist policies. After declaring their support for “Marxist-Leninism” to curry favor with the Stalinists in Moscow, they received military aid from the Soviet Union. This only accelerated the operations of the US in Angola against the MPLA, looking to stop any further expansion of Soviet influence.

The FNLA received the support of the US through the CIA’s “Operation IA Feature,” which coordinated efforts against the MPLA with the US-backed dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko in neighboring Zaire and the apartheid regime in South Africa. Following the July MPLA takeover of Luanda, South African troops were deployed directly to Angola to aid the anti-communist forces.

While the MPLA consolidated control over the capital, the coast, and much of the northern region of Angola, UNITA still controlled much of the central and southern regions, and the civil war dragged on for more than two decades. US and South African support would shift to UNITA, whose leader, Jonas Savimbi, denounced his prior allegiance to Maoism and embraced anti-communism.

### **75 years ago: North Korean military victory at Chochiwon**

On July 12, 1950, North Korean military forces captured the village of Chochiwon in an early engagement of the Korean War, which had begun just over two weeks prior. The Battle of Chochiwon was fought between the United States Army and the Korean People’s Army (KPA) for three days before concluding with a defeat of US forces.

It was the third successive defeat for the US military in Korea since they entered the war to aid the Republic of Korea (ROK), the South Korean regime headed by right-wing dictator Syngman Rhee. The Battle of Chochiwon began less than a week after the defeat of the US Army’s Task Force Smith at the Battle of Osan, the first military engagement between the US and North Korean forces.

In the subsequent days, US forces were similarly defeated at Pyeongtaek and Chonan as the KPA continued to advance south. Two infantry regiments of the KPA, numbering around 12,000, marched south to Chochiwon, where the US Army’s 21st Infantry Regiment had set up on July 7. Two days later, KPA forces led by tanks advanced on the American position at Chochiwon.

Soviet T-34 tanks had been critical in the KPA’s military success so far, but at Chochiwon, the US Air Force was called in for an air strike which destroyed several dozen of the tanks as well as over 100 trucks. Nevertheless, the KPA infantry far outnumbered the Americans, and the latter were overrun after the third day by the KPA infantry and the remaining T-34 tanks. The defeat forced a further southern retreat of US forces, with the KPA capturing Chochiwon and at this point in the war controlling around 90 percent of the Korean peninsula.

The conflict at Chochiwon was the deadliest of the Korean War to date for American forces. By the end of the battle, over 200 US soldiers were killed, a casualty figure larger than that of the previous three battles (at Osan, Pyeongtaek and Chonan) combined. The remainder of the 21st Infantry Regiment regrouped with additional US forces near the city of Taejon, where they would again engage KPA forces a week later.

### **100 years ago: Archaeologists discover world’s oldest ceramic figurine**

On July 13, 1925, two members of a team led by Czech paleontologist Karel Absolon discovered what is thought to be the world’s oldest ceramic object, one of the “Venus figurines” from a paleolithic culture that inhabited central Europe from 27,000 to 20,000 BCE.

Absolon’s team had been excavating an upper paleolithic site near a village called Dolní Věstonice, at the foot of Mt. Dvůr, south of the Czech city of Brno, in what was then Czechoslovakia and is now the Czech Republic. Absolon was then a curator of the Moravian Museum in Brno.

Excavation began in 1924 in what was later identified as a camp area of the Gravettian culture, one of the early modern *homo sapiens* cultures in Europe. Burial sites were discovered, as were imprints in clay of textiles and nets. The site was particularly rich in artifacts for which the Gravettian culture is well known, such as carvings of animals, including lions, rhinoceroses, foxes, owls and mammoths. Some figurines were carved in ivory, including some of the earliest representations of a human face.

Some objects were made of fired clay, making them among the earliest examples of the use of this technology. The most notable, and the one which makes the site and Absolon himself best known, is the Venus of Dolní Věstonice, a three-dimensional depiction of a wide-hipped, nude female of the kind found in paleolithic cultures, including the famous Venus of Willendorf.

The statuette is 4.4 inches (111 millimeters) tall with a width of 1.7 inches (43 millimeters) and made of a clay fired at a low temperature, 900-1500 degrees Fahrenheit (about 500-800 degrees Celsius). The figurine was found in a layer of ash and broken in two pieces. In 2004, imaging of the figurine found the fingerprint of a child who handled it before it was fired.

As with all of the paleolithic Venus figurines discovered in Europe, the purpose of the Venus of Dolní Věstonice is unknown, though archeologists speculate that it may have had a ritual use.



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