

This week in History

As I sit writing this column, and looked at what happened today, 3 February, in history, I found some interesting things. On 3 February, 1959 Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and the 'Big Bopper' J. P. Richardson all boarded an airplane in Clear Lake Iowa along with pilot Roger Peterson. We all know it as "The Day the Music Died" after singer-songwriter Don McLean referred to it in his 1971 song "American Pie". The plane took off late at night in wintery conditions and crashed soon after takeoff killing all onboard. The group of musicians were on their way to perform at the Moorhead Armory after performing at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake. Not as well known is that Waylon Jennings, a member of Bobby Holly's band, gave up his seat to The Big Bopper because the Bopper had the flu and didn't want to ride the chilly bus to Moorhead. Richie Valens got his seat on the plane when he won a coin toss with Tommy Allsup, another member of Buddy Holly's band. Holly had chartered the flight. Fifteen-year-old Bobby Vee was hired to fill in for Holly at the performance in Moorhead and got his start in the music industry.

On 2 February 1848 the war between the US and Mexico ended with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In exchange for \$15 million, the US acquired the areas encompassing parts or all of present-day California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming and Texas.

In February, 1861, representatives from six Southern US states met in Montgomery, Alabama to formally establish a government, the beginning of the Confederate States of America. On 9 February, Jefferson Davis of Mississippi was elected their first president. On 12 April 1861, the Confederate's artillery started shelling Fort Sumter, considered the beginning of the American Civil War which lasted until 1865. The war is the deadliest war in US history, with almost 365,000 Union and over 600,000 Confederate soldiers killed.

On 3 February 1870 the 15th Amendment to the US Constitution was ratified, guaranteeing the right of citizens to vote, regardless of race or color. Of course, it was for males only. Interestingly the 16th Amendment was ratified the same day, giving Congress the authority to collect income taxes.

On 4 February 1913, Rosa Louise McCauley was born in Tuskegee, Alabama. She became famous under her married name, Rosa Parks when she refused to give up her bus seat in 1955. Most of her life was spent in civil rights activities, she was an administrative aide in the Detroit office of Congressman John Conyers and following her death was the first American who was not an elected official to lie in state in the rotunda of the US Capitol. Her home town has significance in WWII because African American airmen were trained at Tuskegee. Known as the Tuskegee Airmen, they distinguished themselves as combat pilots in Europe. February is officially Black History month.