

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE A-15

WASHINGTON POST  
26 August 1985

*Philip Geyelin*  
**Who Says  
August Is  
A Quiet  
Month?**

August has been getting a bum rap. This isn't at all a slow and somnolent time of year. Just because a lot of folks are sitting around some lakeside or building sand castles or otherwise goofing off doesn't mean that nothing is going on.

On the wall just above my typewriter hangs a calendar, courtesy of Foreign Policy Magazine, which tells you the anniversaries of interesting things that happened in international affairs day-by-day. Consider some of these entries for August:

First, of course, it cannot have escaped your notice by now that the 6th, 9th and 14th of August this year were the 40th anniversaries of Hiroshima, Nagasaki and V-J Day, which some would say is proof enough that August is no slow month.

But how many recall that on Aug. 2, 1939, Albert Einstein wasn't goofing off. He was writing a letter to Franklin D. Roosevelt saying, "It may become possible to set up a nuclear chain reaction in a large mass of uranium." That's where the Manhattan project and the Alamogordo first test shot—and, indeed, the first use of nuclear weapons in war—began.

On that same day in August 1964, North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked the destroyer U.S.S. Maddox in the Gulf of Tonkin. Two days later, even as American bombers were striking back against North Vietnam, President Johnson said: "We still seek no wider war."

Three days after that, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution giving Johnson a license to do pretty much anything he wanted in pursuit of whatever policy caught his fancy in Vietnam. You could argue that we are in safer hands when Congress, as is the case this year, closes down for August.

On Aug. 9, 1974, President Nixon

closed down his presidency by resigning the office and brought an end to a threatening constitutional crisis called Watergate. Nixon pleaded not guilty, an exercise in semantics that was matched by the next day (Aug. 10) in 1949, when the War Department officially became the Defense Department.

American imperialism has had its flings in August. On the 12th, in 1898, we formally annexed Hawaii. On the 15th, in 1914, the Panama Canal opened for business. And on the 27th, the president of the United States made the following statement: "We are not making war on Nicaragua any more than a policeman on the street is making war on passersby."

In case you have wondered why Calvin Coolidge is said to be one of Ronald Reagan's favorite presidents, that was Coolidge commenting, in 1926, on the landing of U.S. Marines in Nicaragua.

Speaking of imperialism, the shah of Iran was restored to his throne on Aug. 19, 1953, with a crucial helping hand from the CIA. Historians will be a long time contemplating whether the regime he replaced would not have been a better way for Iran to go than the way it has been going since the Ayatollah Khomeini replaced the shah and gave us, among other things, the year-long hostage crisis in 1980.

August has been particularly big on good intentions. On the first of this month 10 years ago we got the final act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, at Helsinki. On Aug. 27, 1928, we got the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which was supposed to be an agreement banning war. On Aug. 30, 1963, a "hot line" was established between Washington and Moscow for the purpose of providing a quick way to cool off a superpower confrontation and reduce the risk of accidental war.

On Aug. 21, 1944, the United States, British, Chinese and Soviet representatives met at Dumbarton Oaks here to try to devise an international organization for the purpose of promoting, according to my calendar, "peaceful and legal solutions to world problems."

The British are notorious for swarming off to their own (or continental) beaches in August, leaving London (as is also the case with Paris) to the tourists until the heat and the humidity subside. But not in August of 1812, when on the 16th, U.S. Gen. William Hull surrendered Detroit to

the British. Two years later, in 1814, the British outdid themselves right here in Washington. When the temperature must have already been reasonably close to unbearable, British troops burned the Capitol and the White House as well.

I could go on, but it gets grimmer. On the last day of August in 1983, South Korea's KAL 007 was shot down by a Soviet fighter. And on V-J Day in 1969, North Koreans shot down an American reconnaissance plane over international waters off the North Korean coast, killing 31 Americans.

Finally, again on Aug. 14, Ronald Reagan's national security adviser William Clark, gave me a good reason for bringing this recital to a close (and taking what's left of the month off). "I have never felt inhibited by a lack of background," Clark said, adding: "We have too many facts."