

## This Day in History... April 27, 1822

# Happy Birthday Ulysses S. Grant

Hiram Ulysses Grant was born on April 27, 1822, in Point Pleasant, Ohio. He was a small, sensitive, and quiet child, which earned him ridicule in school by children who confused his silence for stupidity, nicknaming him "Useless."

From an early age, Grant displayed a high level of skill in horsemanship, and he was known throughout town for his talent at handling unruly horses. In 1839, Grant's father heard of a vacancy at West Point. He asked Congressman Thomas L. Hamer to appoint his son to fill the spot. Grant was hesitant at first, but grew excited at the chance to travel and receive a better education.



1894 Grant stamp printed by the BEP

Having limited education beforehand, Grant struggled at West Point, although he did do well in math and drawing. Where he excelled was with horses. He amazed his classmates and teachers with his riding abilities, earning a reputation as a fearless and expert horseman. He also set an equestrian high jump record that was not broken for almost 25 years. Because of his skill with horses, many expected he would join the cavalry, but his poor grades placed him 21st in a class of 39 and he was made a regimental quartermaster in the infantry, managing equipment and supplies.

Upon graduating from West Point in 1843, Grant was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the 4th Infantry Regiment south of St. Louis, Missouri. Grant received two citations for his bravery at Molino del Rey and Chapultepec during the Mexican-American War. Spending much of his time at the front lines, Grant closely observed colonels and generals, and especially admired how Zachary Taylor led his campaign. However, he was critical of the war itself, calling it "one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation."



1898 stamp printed to meet Universal Postal Union color standards

When the war was over, Grant married Julia Dent. Amidst a number of relocations, the Grants had one baby and another on the way. But when he couldn't afford to support his family in the California frontier, he became depressed and left the Army suddenly to return home to them. He spent the next few years in a variety of jobs, but with little success.

With the breakout of Civil War in 1861, the North was in desperate need of experienced officers. The governor of Illinois asked Grant to take over a volunteer regiment that no one had been able to train. He enthusiastically accepted the task, instituting discipline and showing the men how to focus on their main goals.

Grant began recruiting and training volunteers. His effective and energetic style earned him a promotion to colonel, and then brigadier general, of volunteers. His early engagements revolved around the area where the Ohio River meets the Mississippi River. Although some of these early battles were draws or losses, Grant was well respected. Unlike most Union leaders of the time, he had a willingness to fight.

In February of the following year, Grant led the successful captures of Fort Henry and Fort Donelson. These were the Union's first major victories of the war, and the success gained Grant national fame overnight. His surrender terms soon became famous as well – "no terms except unconditional and immediate surrender." In light of these victories, President Abraham Lincoln promoted Grant to major general of volunteers.



Series of 1922-25 stamp printed on the flat plate press

That April, the Battle of Shiloh was one of the bloodiest conflicts of the war. About 13,000 Union troops and nearly 11,000 Confederate troops died at the battle. Many Northerners were outraged by the loss of life and called for Grant's replacement. But President Abraham Lincoln refused, stating, "I can't spare this man – he fights."

Despite the criticism he received in the press, Grant was the first Union leader to push the war into the South and force the Confederates to defend their territory. He was well respected in the field for his calmness in the heat of battle, delivering clear, concise orders. Following his successful 1863 Vicksburg Campaign, which gave the Union control



From the 1890-93 Regular Issues printed by the American Bank Note Company



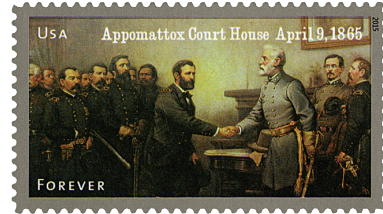
1895 stamp printed by the BEP



From the ornately designed Series of 1902

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of the Mississippi River and split the South in two, Grant was promoted to major general of the regular army and given command of the entire western theater. And following his victory in the Battles for Chattanooga, he was promoted to lieutenant general, becoming the first person regularly promoted to the rank since George Washington. This placed him in charge of the entire Union Army. Grant was relentless, but his tough tactics paid off. Grant cornered the Confederate Army at Appomattox Court House, forcing General Lee's surrender on April 9, 1865, and ultimately



*Civil War Sesquicentennial stamp picturing Thomas Nast's 1895 painting Peace in Union, depicting Robert E. Lee's surrender to Grant at Appomattox.*

ending the war. A national hero, Grant was named general of the Army, a new rank similar to the general of the armies rank that previously had been held by George Washington only.



*This stamp paid the 4-ounce letter rate and could also be used on certain airmail letters.*

President Andrew Johnson appointed Grant secretary of War to replace Edwin Stanton. When Congress declared the move illegal, Grant willingly left the position, which made him a hero to the Radical Republicans. They nominated him as their candidate for president in the 1868 election. In his acceptance letter, his closing words were "Let us have peace," which was used as his campaign slogan. Grant won the election with a 300,000 vote lead over his opponent, Horatio Seymour, and an Electoral College landslide of 214 votes to Seymour's 80.

Having never held a political office before, President Grant had little knowledge of the inner workings of the government. He appointed to his cabinet friends and people who helped him during his military years. While some of these appointments, such as Secretary of State Hamilton Fish, were good choices, many resulted in scandal.



*Series of 1926-27 stamp printed on the rotary press*

Over the course of Grant's two-term presidency, 11 scandals were discovered, and many involved his personal secretary Orville E. Babcock. Although these scandals tarnished Grant's time in office, he was never a part of any of them. His greatest criticism in relation to the scandals was his inability to remove the offenders from office.



*Stamp picturing Grant with fellow Civil War generals William T. Sherman and Philip Sheridan.*

In the wake of these scandals, Grant attempted to improve the way people were appointed to government positions. He appointed America's first Civil Service Commission, which suggested giving exams and creating regulations in relation to the hiring and promotion of government employees. This went into effect in 1872, but Congress refused to take the proper actions to make this system permanent.

Grant did not let scandals keep him from doing what he set out to do as president, which was largely promote civil rights and peace. Congress passed the 15th Amendment in 1869 that gave freedmen the right to vote.



*Grant stamp from the 1995 Civil War sheet*



*Grant stamp from the 1938 "Prexies"*

The 1871 Ku Klux Klan Act gave the federal government the power "to arrest and break up disguised night marauders." Grant also pushed for the freedmen's civil rights, saying they should be "possessed of the civil rights which citizenship should carry with it." When more racist organizations began to appear and threaten the blacks out of voting, Grant signed the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which required equal treatment in public housing and jury selection. The president also aimed to extend civil rights to the Native Americans, lobbying to preserve their land from American westward expansion.

Upon leaving office, Grant admitted his mistaken appointments were "errors of judgment." He and his wife spent the next two years traveling the world. Grant spent his last days composing his memoirs, at the suggestion of his friend, Mark Twain. The former president died on July 23, 1885, just days after completing his memoirs. Twain promoted Grant's book as "the most remarkable work of its kind since the *Commentaries of Julius Caesar*."

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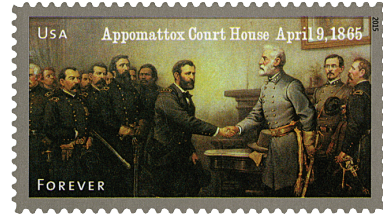


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