

This Day in History... August 31, 1957

Champions of Liberty Series

On August 31, 1957, the US Post Office issued an 8¢ stamp honoring Ramon Magsaysay, the first stamp in a new Champions of Liberty Series.

The stamp was issued just five months after Magsaysay, the seventh president of the Philippines, had died in a plane crash. Magsaysay's administration was noted for its freedom from corruption. Under his direction, the Philippines joined the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). The Magsaysay stamp was issued on his birthday and was the largest US postage stamp issued up to that time.

That stamp would be the first in a new series, dubbed "Champions of Liberty." As America was embroiled in the Cold War, the Eisenhower administration saw these stamps as a way to combat Soviet totalitarianism by honoring men who fought for freedom in their homelands. Each of the people honored in the Champions of Liberty Series struggled courageously to protect their homeland from tyranny and further the cause of freedom.

After Magsaysay's single commemorative stamp was issued, the rest of the series had two stamps printed for each subject – one in a single color, and one with three colors. The pairs were also of different denominations. The single color stamps covered the domestic rate, while the multi-color stamps paid the international rate, to "carry the message of freedom around the world."

Simón Bolívar was nicknamed the "George Washington of South America." For over 20 years, Bolívar worked tirelessly to liberate its lands. Through a series of battles, Bolívar invaded and took over Merida, Caracas, and Venezuela, at which point he was proclaimed *El Libertador*.

Lajos Kossuth, a Hungarian revolutionary, fought tirelessly for independence for Hungary. He served briefly as governor-president when the country earned its independence in 1849. However, in 1851, the government collapsed as the area was taken over by Austria, and Lajos moved to America. His popularity was so great that it caused tensions between the United States and Austria, who wanted him given into their custody.

José de San Martín was one of the key figures in the Spanish American Wars of Independence in the early 1800s. San Martín is considered the greatest of the *Libertadores* of South America, along with Simon Bolívar. He led the campaigns that liberated Argentina, Chile, and Peru.



This stamp was issued on Magsaysay's 50th birthday.



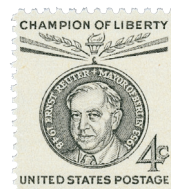
Simón Bolívar – issued July 24, 1958



Lajos Kossuth – issued September 19, 1958



José de San Martín – issued February 25, 1959



Ernst Reuter – issued September 29, 1959

This Day in History... August 31, 1957 continued

Ernst Reuter was the mayor of West Berlin during the early years of the Cold War. As the Soviets tried to block access to West Berlin, Reuter became the spokesman for the West Berlin citizens, appealing to the world before a crowd of 300,000 to not abandon Berlin. In response, the Allies coordinated the “Berlin Airlift,” a massive effort of over 200,000 flights to provide supplies.

Tomáš Masaryk was born in Austria-Hungary, and later became the founder and first president of the Czechoslovakia Republic. Masaryk was a member of the Austrian parliament, and tried to reform the Hapsburg Empire into a democratic state. After the Austria-Hungary Empire was dissolved following World War I, Masaryk was named head of the provisional government. He was elected first president of the Czechoslovak Republic in November 1918.

Born in Poland, Ignacy Paderewski was arguably the finest musician of his era, and also famed for his wit. Paderewski frequently performed before huge crowds in the US and championed Poland’s independence. He later served as its third prime minister.

Born in the Grand Duchy of Finland, Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim rose to the rank of general in the Russian Army. When Finland was at war with the Soviet Union between 1939 and 1944, Mannerheim became commander of Finland’s armed forces. He later served as marshal and president of Finland.

Giuseppe Garibaldi was born in Nice, in the Kingdom of Sardinia. After participating in a failed republican revolution in Piedmont, he was sentenced to death. He escaped to Brazil where he joined the gaucho rebels in their fight for independence in the Republic of Rio Grande do Sul. In 1842, he led the “Italian Legion” in the Uruguayan Civil War. Garibaldi went on to participate in the Wars for Italian Independence and later served in the Italian parliament.

Mahatma Gandhi, or “Great Soul,” was the foremost political and spiritual leader of India during that nation’s independence movement. He founded the idea of satyagraha, or “soul force,” which is a form of nonviolent resistance, which included civil disobedience. He initiated campaigns to reduce poverty, increase women’s rights, ease religious tensions, and raise economic self-reliance. Not only did Gandhi’s ideas of nonviolent resistance help India get its independence, but it inspired civil rights movements around the world.



Tomáš Masaryk – issued March 7, 1960



Ignacy Jan Paderewski – issued October 8, 1960



Gustaf Mannerheim – issued October 26, 1960



Giuseppe Garibaldi – issued November 2, 1960



Mahatma Gandhi – issued January 26, 1961

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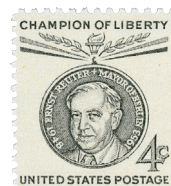
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