

This Day in History... October 27, 1948

Rough Riders Stamp

On October 27, 1948, the US Post Office issued a stamp honoring the 50th anniversary of the Rough Riders. The stamp also marked Theodore Roosevelt's 90th birthday.

Theodore Roosevelt was serving as assistant secretary of the navy when the battleship *Maine* suddenly exploded in Havana Harbor in February 1898. Ten days later, Roosevelt's superior was unconscious for four hours, making him acting secretary. Wasting no time, Roosevelt told the Navy to prepare for war, ordered ammunition and supplies, consulted experts, and asked Congress for the authority to recruit sailors, which helped move America toward the Spanish-American War.

With America's declaration of war, Roosevelt resigned from his post to raise a group of volunteers to fight. He got cowboys from the West and Ivy League friends from New York, creating the First US Volunteer Cavalry Regiment, nicknamed the "Rough Riders." Landing in Daiquiri, Cuba, on June 23, 1898, the Rough Riders marched past the 1st Infantry Division and engaged with the Spanish forces at the Battle of Las Guasimas. They forced their way through the Spanish lines, causing the enemy to retreat earlier than planned.

The Rough Riders then marched to San Juan Heights on the outskirts of Santiago. Inspired by Roosevelt, who rode on horseback, the Rough Riders claimed Kettle Hill. By August, the Spanish surrendered their control of Cuba to the US. The Rough Riders were disbanded the following month, but their reputation for bravery lived on.



Issued on Roosevelt's birthday in 1922.

The Story Behind the Stamp

The Rough Riders stamp was issued in Prescott, Arizona, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Rough Riders. While the Rough Riders are most often associated with Theodore Roosevelt, the stamp shows an image of William "Buckey" O'Neill.

O'Neill was a journalist in Prescott who also served in the Arizona Militia. He eventually became mayor. In 1889, O'Neill took part in a four-man posse who captured four train robbers. When the Spanish-American War broke out, he helped form the volunteer unit of the Rough Riders and was named captain of Troop A. In an odd twist, one of the train robbers he had captured nine years earlier, William Sterin, served in O'Neill's company as a sergeant under the name "Henry Nash."

O'Neill was killed in action during the Battle of San Juan Hill. Roosevelt later wrote that O'Neill's death was "the most serious loss that I and the regiment could have suffered."

The image on the stamp is of a statue made in O'Neill's honor by Gutzon Borglum, the chief sculptor of Mount Rushmore. The statue stands at the north entrance of Yavapai County Court House in Prescott. At the time of its release, there was controversy that a stamp honoring the Rough Riders didn't include Roosevelt, its most famous member. But the stamp's first day of issue was on October 27, 1948 – the 90th anniversary of Roosevelt's birth.



Rough Riders stamp issued on this day in 1948.



Roosevelt stamp from the Liberty Series

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