

1968

Fifty years ago from August 26 thru 29, the Democratic National Convention was held in Chicago. It was one of the most significant events in a year full of events. The war in Vietnam was not going well, civil unrest was rampant in our country. Senator Eugene McCarthy (MN) entered the campaign in November 1967 and was regarded as the peace candidate. Robert Kennedy entered the race in March 1968. Lyndon Johnson announced in March that he was not seeking the nomination. After the Kennedy assassination, Senator George McGovern (SD) appealed to Kennedy supporters. The convention had competing slates of delegates from some states, causing credential fights on the convention floor. Hubert Humphrey from Minnesota and Edmund Muskie of Maine were nominated. In researching the convention, I found it very interesting that Alabama football coach received 1.5 vote. Meanwhile, outside the convention center, approximately 10,000 anti-war demonstrators were met by 23,000 Chicago police and Illinois National Guard. Yippie leader Jerry Rubin, folk singer Phil Ochs, and other activists held their own presidential nominating convention with their candidate Pigasus, an actual pig. Clashes between demonstrators and police followed. Tom Hayden, one of the leaders of the Students for a Democratic Society urged demonstrators to move about the city and not stay in Grant Park. Hayden's second wife was none other than Hanoi Jane Fonda.

1968 started with the North Koreans capturing the Navy USS Pueblo. North Korea claimed it was a spy ship, which it was and was in Korean waters, which it was not. I was in Japan at the time and saw a message sent to the Pacific Fleet Commander giving him the option of doing 'whatever necessary to rescue the ship and its crew'. The Commander chose the option of diplomatic means. Our base in Japan went on 24 hour alert. In Vietnam, during the lunar New Year, the North Vietnamese launched massive attacks known as the Tet Offensive. On April 4 while in Memphis to support striking sanitation workers, the civil right leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his Promised Land speech. The following day he was assassinated outside his motel room. On June 5, the night of the California primary, Robert F. Kennedy was shot after addressing a large crowd of supporters. On July 15, Les Bakke separated from the Air Force and returned to college. During the Summer Olympics in Mexico City, US athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos bowed their head and raised their fists during the playing of the Star-Spangled Banner. On election day, November 5 Richard Nixon won the electoral college vote with a very small margin of victory in the popular vote, defeating Hubert Humphrey and former Alabama governor, George Wallace who captured 13.5 percent of the popular vote and carried five southern states.

The year ended on a much more positive note as three astronauts, Jim Lovell, Bill Anders and Frank Borman became the first humans to orbit the moon on December 24. Our country and our democracy survived.