90 Years Ago - 1930
December 30: A rocket launched by Dr. Robert H. Goddard in New Mexico reached an altitude of 2,000 feet and a speed of 500 mph.

75 Years Ago - 1945
December 10: Fifty-five German specialists arrived at Fort Bliss, TX, and White Sands Proving Grounds, NM, where they were joined by seven specialists headed by Dr. Wernher von Braun.

60 Years Ago – 1960
December 1: Sputnik 6 launch from Baikonur; unsuccessful reentry. (Carried Two Dogs: Pchelka & Mushka).
December 4: Explorer S-56 failed to orbit, 4:14 p.m., EST, WFF, VA. Scout launcher. It was the first attempt to place a satellite in orbit using an all-solid propellant launch vehicle and the first orbital attempt made from NASA's Wallops Island facility.

December 7: Discoverer 18 (CORONA Mission 9012) launched by Thor Agena, 3:21 p.m., EST, Vandenberg AFB, CA.

December 15: Atlas Able 5B / Pioneer 31 / Pioneer Z, lunar satellite exploded on launch, 4:11 a.m., EST, Cape Canaveral, Fla.

December 15: Echo 1 commemorative stamp issued, Washington, D.C.

December 19: MR-1A suborbital flight, 11:15 a.m., EST, Cape Canaveral, Fla. The first Mercury-Redstone capsule.

December 20: Discoverer 19 orbited by Thor, 3:37 a.m., EST, Vandenberg AFB, CA. Though part of the CORONA program, Discoverer 19 did not carry a film capsule. It was orbited as a test for the Midas missile-detection system.

55 Years Ago - 1965
December 4: Gemini Titan 7 launched by Titan 2, 2:30 p.m., EST, Cape Canaveral, Fla. Astronauts Frank Borman and James A. Lovell, Jr. on a 14-day mission.

December 6: French 1 (FR 1) launched by Scout, 4:06 p.m., EST, Vandenberg AFB, CA.

December 15: Gemini Titan 6 launched by Titan 2, 8:37 a.m., EST, Cape Canaveral, Fla. Astronauts Walter M. Schirra, Jr. and Thomas P. Stafford; rendezvous mission with GT-7.

December 16: Pioneer 6 launched by Thor Delta, 2:31 a.m., EST, Cape Canaveral, Fla.

50 Years Ago - 1970
December 11: NOAA 1 launched by Thor Delta, (ITOS-A), 6:35 a.m., EST, Cape Canaveral, Fla.


45 Years Ago – 1975
December 5: DAD launched by Scout. Failed to orbit, 7:35 p.m., PST, Vandenberg AFB, CA.

December 16: China 5 (aka Mao 5). Part of JSSW (Ji Shu Shiyen Weixing or "Technical Test Satellite") series orbited by Feng Bao 1 (Storm) rocket from Shuang Cheng-Tzu.
40 Years Ago - 1980
December 6: Intelsat 5 F-2 orbited by Atlas-Centaur, 6:31 p.m., EST, Cape Canaveral, Fla.

30 Years Ago - 1990

December 17: The Advisory Committee on the Future of the U.S. Space Program report (aka the Augustine Report because it was chaired by Norman Augustine, chief executive office of Martin Marietta) submitted to NASA delineating the need for a balanced space program within a tightly constrained budget.

25 Years Ago - 1995
December 2: Joint ESA-NASA launch of Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO) from Cape Canaveral Air Station by an Atlas 2AS rocket. It carried three American and nine European instruments to observe the Sun and its corona.

December 7: Galileo released probe into Jupiter's atmosphere.

20 Years Ago – 2000

15 Years Ago – 2005
December 28: Giove-A (Galileo In-Orbit Validation Element), a European (ESA) navigational satellite, was launched by a Soyuz-Fregat rocket from Baikonur at 05:19 UTC. It is the first member of a planned fleet of 30 Galileo satellites to operate independent of the American GPS and the Russian GLONASS fleets.

10 Years Ago – 2010
December 6: At 1:31 a.m. EST, NASA for the first time successfully ejected a nanosatellite from a free-flying microsatellite. NanoSail-D ejected from the Fast, Affordable, Science and Technology Satellite, FASTSAT, demonstrating the capability to deploy a small cubesat payload from an autonomous microsatellite in space.

December 8: Dragon C1 launched from Cape Canaveral at 15:43 UTC on a Falcon 9 rocket. The spacecraft conducted a series of demonstrations in orbit as part of NASA's Commercial Orbital Transportation Services (COTS) program in support of the International Space Station. This was the first time a commercial organization has recovered a spacecraft from orbit.

December 15: Soyuz-TMA 20 launched from Baikonur at 19:09 UTC. Crew: a Russian cosmonaut (Dmitry Kondratyev), an Italian astronaut (Paolo Nespoli), and a NASA astronaut (Catherine Coleman). Docked with the International Space Station (ISS) at the Mini Research Module-1 (MRM-1) Nadir port on December 17, 2010 at 20:11 UTC.

December 15: On the 3,340th day since its arrival in October 2001, Mars Odyssey orbiter passed the Martian career longevity record set by Mars Global Surveyor.
5 Years Ago – 2015
December 3: LISA Pathfinder, originally named SMART 2 (one of ESA's Small Missions for Application Research and Technology), launched at 04:04:00 UTC by a Vega Launch vehicle from Kourou, French Guiana. It is a mission to demonstrate in orbit the technologies for LISA, the ESA/NASA Laser Interferometry Satellite Antenna gravitational wave observatory. The basic principle of LISA is to measure the changes in distance between freely floating 'test masses', literally, small gold blocks held in place by carefully controlled electrostatic fields.

December 15: Soyuz TMA-19M launched from Baikonur at 11:03:00 UTC by a Soyuz FG launch vehicle. Crew: Tim Kopra, Yuri Malenchenko, and Tim Peake. (ISS Expedition 46).