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Yesterday was when Yankee soldiers decisively defeated Confederate defenders in the brief Battle of New Bern, and then grimly learned the possible potency of germ warfare.

Although it wasn't contrived by the vanquished, yellow fever attacked occupying Union forces. So many deliriously died that a National Cemetery had to be provided here.

Some, perhaps a majority, of those beneath the sod, gambled their lives for relatively small sums of money and lost. Under a Federal ruling, rich Northerners could hire those with little to take their place in the draft.

This editor's paternal grandfather, who joined retreating Rebels as they passed through Jones County en route to Kinston, didn't have to wait long to find that General Sherman's definition of war was a gross understatement.

A few hours after he left his plow in the field, he was blinded by enemy gunfire, captured, and on his way to a Federal hospital in Maryland. Later he was imprisoned until the end of hostilities.

Yesterday was when there were fewer light bulbs glowing in all the stores along Middle Street than you'll now find beaming in a single place of business. Even so, little shoplifting occurred. Thieves, like customers, could hardly see their way around.

Neon illumination would come along much later, despite the fact that back in 1898 an English chemist had discovered the remarkable gas. Initially a few outdoor signs sprouted here, and eventually merchants invested in tubing for inside use.

The stuff is in the air you breathe, and always has been. Its proportion in the atmosphere is 18 parts in a million. Its usual color is bright scarlet, but adding a few drops of mercury produces a brilliant blue. Other colors depend on tinting of the glass tubing containing it.

Since the gas is rather expensive, it is fortunate that a little goes a long way. A quart or less will fill a tube almost 300 feet in length. Effective in penetrating fog, neon beacons can be seen 20 miles by plane pilots under conditions that blot out other lights.

Yesterday was when the only flying saucers that people talked about were the ones that local wives threw when their husbands staggered home from one of the town's several saloons. And no male with a creased cranium ever had to swear to skeptics that what he encountered was for real.

Yesterday was when every lad got reminded that if he studied hard and had enough ambition, he could end up being President of the United States. Today such a pitch holds no appeal for the average youngster, and parents, weary of Watergate, can appreciate this lack of enthusiasm.

Yesterday was when no one
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READY FOR THE HOLIDAYS