



Ronald Reagan
Feb. 6, 1911–June 5, 2004

A Remarkable Life

Self-assured man of vision made Americans feel good about themselves again.

By ANN MCFEATHERS
Scraps Howard

Ronald Wilson Reagan, whose sunny charm and can-do patriotism made him an enormously popular two-term president and a Republican Party icon, died Saturday in California at age 93.

Reagan's death, more than 10 years since leaving office, came after a long physical and mental decline due to Alzheimer's disease.

A onetime B-list Hollywood actor, Reagan recast himself as a politician after serving two stints as head of the Screen Actors Guild. He was a far bigger hit on the campaign trail than on the silver screen. After winning two terms as governor of California, Reagan rode his conservative, small-government philosophy into the White House in 1980.

His tough anti-communism and aggressive defense spending was credited with contributing to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. His domestic economic policies, combining heavy military spending with large tax cuts, produced an economic recovery but record peacetime budget deficits.

Reagan's efforts to return authority from the federal government to the states — the so-called Reagan Revolution — became a call to arms for a generation of conservatives.

A witty and engaging storyteller, he was known as "The Great Communicator" for his charm and easy connection with his audience. Critics called him "The Teflon President" for his ability to escape personal responsibility for his administration's missteps.

Reagan's optimism and grand personal style energized his party and the nation. His determination to reassert U.S. military and economic power worldwide became a beacon of hope for a nation stuck in what his predecessor, Democrat Jimmy Carter, complained was a "national malaise."

Reagan's first Inauguration Day symbolized the nation's newfound optimism when Iran released the

U.S. hostages who had been held for 444 days.

But his presidency was marked by both great victories and devastating losses.

Less than three months into his first term, Reagan was seriously wounded by John Hinckley Jr. in an assassination attempt. The ricochet bullet that came within inches of Reagan's heart probably would have killed him had medical attention been delayed five more minutes.

Even gravely wounded, Reagan flashed his famous wit. He memorably joked to his wife, Nancy, from his hospital gurney, "Honey, I forgot to duck." He told the doctors who were about to operate on him that he hoped they were Republicans.

Reagan bravely endured a long convalescence, but he never fully recovered, and the injuries triggered a steady mental and physical decline, according to his authorized biographer.

At age 69, Reagan was the oldest man ever elected president. Early on he was impatient with the detail work involved in the presidency, delegating great chunks of his decision-making power.

By the end of his second term, he sometimes appeared befuddled and disinterested in his administration's policies. Tell-all books by former top aides painted a portrait of a remarkably passive president.

But that didn't seem to matter to voters. Reagan left office with one of the highest popularity ratings ever recorded for a president.

Reagan's life is memorialized in the \$60 million Ronald Reagan Library and Museum in Simi Valley, Calif. Most historians put him in the second tier of U.S. presidents, rating him a good-hearted, amiable and self-assured man who made Americans feel good about themselves.

But his Washington legacy is heavy with irony. Although he came to the White House promising to reduce the size and cost of the federal government, they actually increased, both in terms of number of employees and total budget, while he was in office. The most prominent Washington building named for him was widely criticized as a gigantic and expensive waste of tax money.

Congress also renamed Washington National Airport after him, although he warred openly with, and broke the union of, the air traf-

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Feb. 6, 1911
Ronald Wilson Reagan is born in Tampico, Ill., population 849, the younger of two sons born to John Edward and Nelle Wilson Reagan. His father is a shoe salesman, and his mother gives dramatic readings in prisons and hospitals.

1920
The Reagans move to Dixon, Ill., a town of 10,000 where Jack Reagan had become a partner in a shoe store. Reagan lives there until college. "Everyone has a place to go back to," the president once said. "For me, that place is Dixon."

1924
Reagan, 13, enters Northside High School in Dixon. He is elected student body president in his senior year.



September, 1928
Reagan enters Eureka College in Illinois. He chooses economics and sociology for his major subjects, because they afforded him more free time for things he liked better — dramatics, football and politics. He plays lead in most school plays and is elected student body president.

November, 1928
A rousing speech by freshman Reagan ignites a first-ever student strike at Eureka over proposed course reductions and teacher layoffs. On Dec. 7 college President Bert Wilson resigns, and the classes were restored.

June 7, 1932
Reagan graduates from Eureka College with a bachelor's degree. By

April 1933, he works for WHO in Des Moines, a 50,000-watt NBC affiliate, re-creating baseball games and providing live coverage of Big Ten football and other sports events.

Spring, 1937
While covering Chicago Cubs spring training at Catalina Island, Reagan tells a friend that he wants to become an actor. She introduces him to an agent who gets him a Warner Brothers screen test, which leads to a \$200-per-week contract.

Jan. 26, 1940
Reagan, 28, marries actress Jane Wyman, 24, in Hollywood. The marriage produces a daughter, Maureen Elizabeth Reagan, and the couple adopts a son, Michael Edward Reagan, but divorces on June 28, 1948.

1940
After making some 20 "B-Grade" pictures, Reagan convinces the producer of "Klute Rockne — All American" to cast him as Notre Dame halfback George Gipp, whose career Reagan had followed as a sportscaster.

April 14, 1942
Reagan enters the U.S. Army, but is disqualified from combat duty by poor eyesight, spending most of the war making Air Force training films and discharged as a captain on Dec. 9, 1945.

1947
Reagan becomes president of the Screen Actors Guild. As Guild president he maintains anti-communist views, appearing before the House Un-American Activities Committee in October 1947 to downplay Communist

influence in Hollywood.

March 4, 1952
Reagan marries actress Nancy Davis in Hollywood. She is believed by some to have been among his most valued advisers, and is also thought to have influenced his transformation to conservatism.

Nov. 8, 1966
Reagan is elected governor of California with 57.8 percent of the vote over Democratic incumbent Edmund G. "Pat" Brown.

Aug. 19, 1976
President Gerald Ford narrowly wins the GOP nomination over Reagan.

Nov. 13, 1979
After more than a year of preparation, Reagan announces his candidacy for president.

Nov. 4, 1980
Reagan defeats Carter for presi winning 51 percent of the vote to incumbent's 41 percent.

March 30, 1981
Reagan is shot and wounded by Hinckley Jr. in an assassination attempt at a Washington, D.C., I He returns to full-time duties ab month later.

July 7, 1981
Reagan names Sandra Day O'Connor of Arizona to be the first woman of the U.S. Supreme Court.

July 29, 1981
Congress approves Reagan's p for a three-year tax cut, a prime of what became known as Reaganomics.