

# Ronald Reagan

By Mary L. Bushong

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Many people have hailed Ronald Reagan as one of the greatest presidents ever to lead the United States, while those who disliked him minimized his accomplishments. People found they either loved Reagan or hated him, there was no middle ground.

Ronald Wilson Reagan was born in Tampico, Illinois on February 6, 1911. As a baby, his father nick named him "Dutch" (short for fat little Dutchman), and the name stuck. Jack Reagan had trouble holding steady jobs. The family moved from town to town before finally staying in Dixon Illinois. In his teens, Ronald worked as a life guard and was credited with saving several lives.

After graduating from Eureka College, he began working as a radio sports announcer for a station in Iowa. During a trip to California when he was 26, Reagan met an agent who signed him for his first film, "Love is On the Air." His career went on to include more than 50 films, the last one in 1964. His two best known roles were in "Knut Rockne-All American" and King's Row."



In 1942, Ronald Reagan took time out from acting to serve his country during World War II. After being discharged with a rank of Captain, he began his political career. Two years after the war, he was elected for the first of six one-year terms as president of the Screen Actor's Guild. During that time, he became involved in disputes over the issue of communism throughout the movie industry. Those investigations changed his political beliefs from those of a New Deal liberal to those of a conservative. He officially joined the Republican Party in 1962.

Ronald's first marriage to Jane Wyman ended in divorce in 1949. They had two children, Michael and Maureen. Then in 1952, he married his current wife, Nancy Davis. They also had two children, Patricia and Ronald.

After a televised speech to support Barry Goldwater's campaign for president in 1962, Reagan was approached to run for the governorship of California. He won that election 2 years later by a margin of nearly a million votes. He went on to serve two terms. His position as governor gave him political exposure on a national scale.

Reagan did not run for a third term as governor, but instead set his sights on the presidential election. He had hoped for the Republican nomination in 1976, but Gerald Ford wanted to run as the incumbent. (Ford later lost the election to Jimmy Carter.) When Ford was defeated, Reagan began his own campaign for the presidential nomination in 1980. His hard work eventually paid off. He won the office in a landslide victory.

When Reagan first became president, he had several problems to solve. The two most important were high inflation and high unemployment. Reagan implemented tax cuts so the people could increase their spending with more money in their pockets. He also cut spending on social programs and increased spending for the military.

When it came to foreign affairs, Reagan's anti-communist views came out strongly. Tensions mounted when a South Korean airliner was shot down by a Soviet military aircraft in 1983. Relations between the U.S. and the Soviets stayed cold until two years later, when Reagan met Gorbachev in person. Two years after that, they met again and signed a treaty to get rid of intermediate range nuclear missiles.

Reagan took military action several times during his term in office, including the invasion of Grenada and action against Libyan terrorists. The Iran-Contra affair in 1987 was damaging to his foreign policy and resulted in the downfall of both Lt. Col. Oliver North and Vice Admiral John Poindexter. Because nothing seemed to stick to him personally, Reagan gained the reputation as a Teflon president.

Ronald Reagan's constant optimism and self confidence made him popular among the people. His eloquent tribute to the Challenger crew helped salve the nation's grief in 1986. He also survived an assassin's attempt in 1981. Unfortunately, as Reagan's second term came to an end, it was obvious that his health was failing. By the time he left office, it had been announced that he was suffering from Alzheimer's disease, which would eventually rob him of his memory. He retired to his California ranch with his wife Nancy.

Name \_\_\_\_\_



Date \_\_\_\_\_

Ronald Reagan's speaking ability earned him the name, "the Great Communicator." He used his ability, during his eight years as president, to try to make the world more peaceful and to increase America's pride in itself.

Ronald Reagan

## Questions

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1. What would make people strongly like or dislike another person?

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\_\_\_\_\_ 2. What was Reagan's nickname "Dutch" stand for?

- A. Fat little Dutch man
- B. Dutchman
- C. Fat little Dutch boy
- D. Jolly Dutchman

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Reagan's first job was

- A. newspaper carrier
- B. life guard
- C. being a radio announcer
- D. actor

4. How would the governorship of California give Ronald Reagan national political exposure?

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5. What two economic problems were important for Reagan to deal with at the start of his presidential administration?

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\_\_\_\_\_ 6. What event made relations between the United States and the Soviets grow colder?

- A. Shooting down of the South Korean airliner
- B. Tearing down the Berlin Wall
- C. Attack by Libyan terrorists
- D. Invasion of Grenada

Name \_\_\_\_\_



Date \_\_\_\_\_

7. The two super powers eventually signed a treaty to get rid of which nuclear missiles?

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\_\_\_\_\_ 8. Which of these statements is not true?

- A. Reagan changed from the Democratic to Republican parties
- B. Reagan was the "Teflon" president
- C. Reagan was known as "the Great Communicator."
- D. Reagan continued to act after leaving office

9. Why do you think it was such a tragedy for Reagan to get Alzheimer's disease?

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