

[a man in full]

# We Shall Not See His Like Again

Not all political lives end in failure.

**By Patrick J. Buchanan**

“HOPEFUL, BIG-HEARTED, IDEALISTIC—daring, decent and fair.” So Ronald Reagan said of America in his second inaugural. And so it shall be said of him.

He came from another time and place, Ronald Reagan did, a time long ago when love of country was as natural for a boy growing up in Illinois as was a faith that nothing was beyond the capacity of the great and good people whence he had come.

He had a lifelong love affair with America, with her history, heroes, stories, and legends. Now he is one of those legends.

In life and as an actor, he relished romantic and heroic roles, whether as the lifeguard who pulled 77 swimmers to safety, the legendary “Gipper” of Knute Rockne’s Notre Dame, or the statesman who walked out of a summit in Iceland rather than compromise the security of the country he had been elected to protect.

When America began to tear herself apart over morality, race, and Vietnam in the 1960s, the old certitudes he articulated and the old virtues he personified held a magnetic attraction for a people bewildered by what was happening to their country. When he spoke, he took

us to a higher ground, above petty and partisan squabbles and divisions, where we could dream and be one people again.

In the crushing defeat of Barry Goldwater in 1964, Reagan’s speech of blazing defiance vaulted him into the leadership of the conservative movement. And after Watergate and the loss of Vietnam, with the Soviet Empire rampant and America held hostage, the country, unready for Ronald Reagan or conservatism in 1964, took a chance in 1980. And when she did, America won the lottery.

With the help of tough Paul Volcker at the Federal Reserve, Ronald Reagan’s tax cuts, once they took effect in 1983, ignited a 17-year boom unlike any in the 20th century. America was back.

His sunny persona, his grace under fire after the attempt on his life, endeared him forever to his countrymen. When he came out of the anesthesia after the surgery to remove the bullet so near his heart, he looked up at the nervous nurses hovering over him and said, “Okay, let’s do the whole scene over again, beginning at the hotel.”

His resolve to restore the morale and the might of the armed forces he loved,

of which he was commander in chief, converted millions to conservatism and created a new constituency all his own: the Reagan Democrats. I do not know if Ronald Reagan would have cared that they named that big new building in Washington after him, but he sure would have loved that aircraft carrier.

In the 1960s, it was a handicap in a presidential campaign to be a conservative. Republicans shied away from the label that a hostile media had equated with extremism. With Reagan, it was an honor. He was never embarrassed or ashamed at being a man of the Right. He was as proud of it as we were to have such a leader.

Every year he would speak at the Conservative Political Action Committee. In every State of the Union he demanded that a line be inserted calling for an amendment to the Constitution to protect the life of the unborn. He believed God had spared him and that the time left to him was to be spent doing God’s work here on earth.

Where other politicians avoided battles over philosophy and principle, Reagan relished that conflict. Nominated in 1980, he demanded a “no pale pastels” platform—then ran on it.

He had a wonderful sense of humor and loved stories. Seconds before going out to face the press in primetime news conferences that 80 million Americans and the whole world would watch, he was still telling jokes. He was devoid of ego and of the boastfulness so common in this capital. "There is no limit to how far a man can go," read a plaque in his office, "so long as he is willing to let someone else get the credit."

Yet he was proud of what he had accomplished. His friend and barber Milt Pitts told that me that when last he saw Ronald Reagan, the ex-president mused that he had come to Washington do to five things: cut taxes, rebuild America's military might, unleash the American economy from the burden of government, lead America and the West to face the challenge of the Soviet Empire—and balance the budget. "Four out of five ain't bad!" he told Milt.

He was a big man who could concede a mistake and who had the largeness of character to change course. Persuaded to put Marines into Lebanon a second time, after they had escorted the PLO out, he watched in horror as 241 were killed in the terrorist attack on their Beirut barracks. He used U.S. airpower and the *USS New Jersey* to retaliate. But then he withdrew the Marines.

Some still insist he should have retaliated more violently and intervened more massively. But Ronald Reagan realized he had put U.S. Marines at risk in a civil war that was not our war, and so he accepted the onus of his greatest mistake rather than compound it.

On only two other occasions did he use U.S. military force. In Grenada, when Marxist thugs murdered the prime minister of that Caribbean island and posed a threat to American medical students, and in retaliation for Khadafi's bombing of the La Belle discotheque in Berlin, where an American soldier died and dozens were wounded.

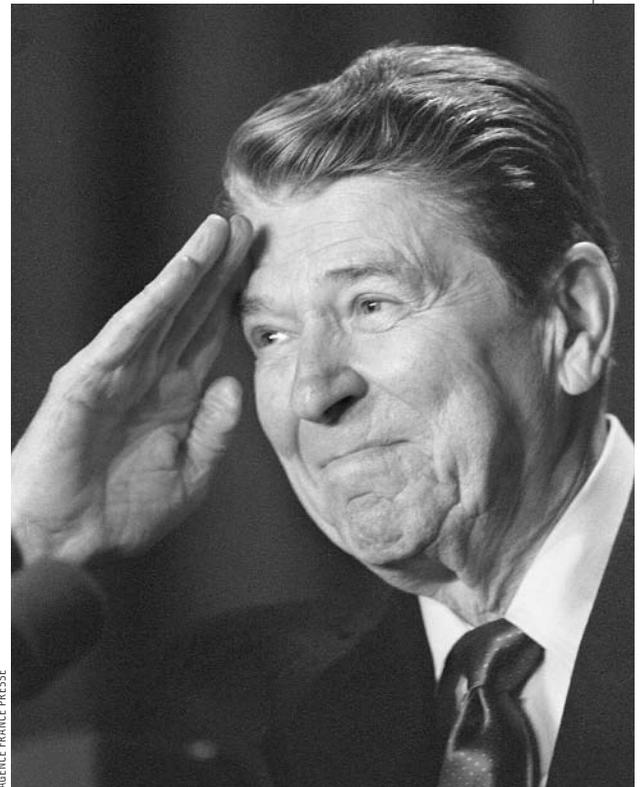
While the liberation of Grenada is today disparaged, it was the first time in the Cold War the United States recaptured territory from the Soviet Empire. It swept a Soviet pawn off the chessboard and shocked Castro's Cuba and Sandinista Nicaragua because it sent a message that, in the last analysis, you criminals continue to exist only at the sufferance of the United States. And should we come for you, your friends in Moscow will not save you.

Before taking office, Reagan was depicted as a warmonger. In office he proved himself a fearless statesman but also a leader of prudence, determined to avoid war with the Soviet Empire, for he knew in his heart time was on America's side in the Cold War.

Thus, he checkmated Moscow's mass deployment of SS-20 missiles trained on Western Europe by targeting hundreds of Pershing and cruise missiles on Eastern Europe and Moscow. When the Soviets agreed to take their missiles down, if we would pull our missiles out, Reagan agreed to the first great arms-reduction treaty of the Cold War.

When Poland's General Jaruzelski, on Moscow's orders, crushed Solidarity, some of us urged Reagan to put Warsaw in default on its foreign debts and destroy the credit rating of Soviet bloc. Reagan declined. He considered the crushing of Solidarity but a temporary setback in a struggle the outcome of which was foreordained by the superiority of the United States of America and the unquenchable thirst of the people of Eastern Europe for freedom. No need to risk confrontation. Time was on our side.

In the Cold War, Reagan always exhibited what Mark Twain called the "calm



confidence of a Christian with four aces."

What did he achieve? Ronald Reagan let the American eagle soar. He cut tax rates from 70 to 28 percent, restored our spirit, rebuilt the armed forces into the most formidable the world had ever seen, and led us to bloodless victory in the Cold War. God bless him.

*Time* declared Mikhail Gorbachev Man of the Decade. America knows better. Branded by a hostile liberal city "an amiable dunce," he paid no heed. Ronald Reagan was more concerned with what his friends at *Human Events* wrote about him than what his adversaries at the *Washington Post* or *New York Times* said about him.

He was warned that his determination to challenge the Soviet Empire philosophically and strategically in Afghanistan, Angola, and Nicaragua, risked war. Yet this 70-year-old man who began his presidency calling the Soviet Union an Evil Empire ended it strolling through Red Square arm-in-arm with the last leader of that empire.

A British statesman once said all political lives end in failure. As always, Ronald Reagan is the exception. We shall not see his like again. ■

[strength & peace]

## American Realist

Hefting a big stick, using it sparingly

By Doug Bandow

ALZHEIMER'S ROBBED Ronald Reagan of knowledge of the world around him, but his policies continue to shape that world. Even before his death, the scramble had begun to claim his legacy.

Most obviously, George W. Bush has sought to don the Reagan mantle as he advances his foreign policy of global social engineering: aggressive war to impose democracy and preventive war against any country posing the vaguest potential threat to America. "Bush, like Reagan, is waging a battle against evil," writes Frank Gaffney of the Center for Security Policy.

There is a superficial similarity between the two presidents: tough, no-nonsense hawks pushing the U.S. to take on all comers. But the details of their policies are dramatically different.

Ronald Reagan believed in hefting a big military stick, but used it only sparingly. Even as he rejected allied policies, Reagan sought to preserve allied relations. He recognized that circumstances changed and policies failed and shifted course accordingly.

And Reagan passionately believed in the importance of ideas and husbanded rather than squandered America's credibility. When Ronald Reagan left office the U.S. truly did stand tall, a far cry from its status today as an isolated, distrusted giant. President Reagan likely would have been horrified: the

U.S. initiating war on a lie and then finding itself caught in an unnecessary guerilla war that has made the West less secure and America more hated by more people than at any point in its history.

When Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980, the Cold War raged unabated. Although in retrospect we know the USSR was weaker than it looked, America faced serious security challenges the world over. Reagan responded by strengthening U.S. military capabilities. And then using them almost not at all.

Instead, he employed a strategy of "appeasement." For instance, even as Reagan moved to bolster U.S. military forces after taking office, he dropped the grain embargo against the Soviet Union. There were obvious economic and political reasons to do so, but Reagan also cited the goal of encouraging "meaningful and constructive dialogue."

Reagan confronted the Soviets in Afghanistan and Soviet clients in Central America, but only indirectly, through proxies. Thus, American aid to the mujahedeen and Contras. He rebuffed the European allies over Nicaragua, but never tarnished transatlantic relationships with dismissive name-calling.

Similar was Reagan's approach to Poland. The Gdansk shipyard electrician Lech Walesa and his Solidarity movement spurred hope of freedom. But memories of prior political awaken-



AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

ings that ended disastrously were revived when the Polish military cracked down in 1981.

Washington's response? "Appeasement." No military action, no threats, not even economic sanctions. Instead, Reagan backed his tough attitude toward the Soviets by allowing private forces stealthily to undermine the Polish communist regime: Pope John Paul II's dramatic moral challenge, financial assistance from U.S. labor unions, and smuggled literature and books from groups including my own Cato Institute.