

This Day in History... July 14, 1913

Happy Birthday Gerald Ford!

Leslie Lynch King Jr., better known as Gerald Rudolph Ford Jr., was born on July 14, 1913, in Omaha, Nebraska. He was the only US president not elected to the presidency or vice presidency.

The future president's parents separated when he was very young. His mother eventually moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan, where she married a man named Gerald Rudolff Ford. In 1916, they changed the young boy's name to Gerald Rudolff Ford Jr. When he legally changed his name in 1935, he adopted the more conventional spelling of his middle name.

Ford would go on to become a Boy Scout (he would be the first Eagle Scout to reach the Oval Office) and a football star. In fact, he had the opportunity to play professional football, but instead chose to pursue a career in law. He attended Yale Law School and returned to Grand Rapids to open a law practice. However, the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 caused him to change his plans.

Ford didn't want to wait for the draft, so he joined the Navy. He reported for active duty on April 20, 1942. After a month of training Ford became an instructor for seamanship, ordnance, gunnery, first aid, and military drill. He also coached all nine sports taught at the Preflight School. By 1943, Ford was promoted to lieutenant.

Ford then applied for sea duty and was assigned to the USS *Monterey*. He served as the ship's assistant navigator, athletic officer, and anti-aircraft battery officer. During Ford's time aboard the *Monterey*, he participated in several Pacific actions with the Third and Fifth Fleets. They helped protect Makin Island in the Gilberts, launched strikes against Kavieng, New Ireland, the Marianas, Western Carolines, and Northern New Guinea, supported the landings at Kwajalein and Eniwetok, and participated in the Battle of Philippine Sea. They also participated in battles at Wake Island, the Philippines and Ryukus, Leyte, and Mindoro.

Ford was also present on the *Monterey* when it was hit by Typhoon Cobra on December 18 and 19, 1944. Shortly after he finished serving as the *Monterey's* officer of the deck on the midnight-to-4-a.m. watch, Ford was awoken by a call to general quarters. Several of the ship's planes had broke loose from their cables and started fires. On his way to the pilothouse, the ship rolled 25 degrees, making him lose his footing, and he began to slide down the flight deck. He nearly slid overboard, but was saved by the two-inch steel ridge around the deck. He later recalled, "I was lucky; I could have easily gone overboard."

After that typhoon, the *Monterey* was deemed unfit for service. Ford was then sent to California where he worked in the Athletic Department of the Navy Pre-Flight School. He was released from the Navy in 1946. For his service, Ford received the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with nine engagement stars, as well as the Philippine Liberation and World War II Victory Medals.

Ford resumed his law career in Grand Rapids after the war and was elected to



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Congress in 1948. In 1953, he was named to the defense subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee. He was elected chairman of the Republican Conference of the House in 1963. President Johnson appointed Ford to serve on the Warren Commission, which investigated President Kennedy's assassination. In 1965, he was chosen as the House minority leader.

In 1973, federal investigators uncovered evidence that Vice President Spiro Agnew had accepted bribes. Agnew resigned, and Ford was named his replacement. Just before Nixon had been re-elected, Congress initiated impeachment charges against him, believing he was involved in the Watergate Scandal. Nixon denied any wrongdoing, and Vice President Ford went on a speaking tour to restore faith in the president. However, by July 1974, the House Judiciary Committee recommended that Nixon be impeached.

On August 9, 1974, Nixon resigned. Ford became America's 38th president later that day. At his inaugural address Ford said, "...our long national nightmare is over. Our Constitution works." Nelson A. Rockefeller became vice president. Ford's early popularity was damaged when he pardoned former President Nixon. Ford believed the pardon was necessary to heal the nation's wounds. However, the nation's reaction was mostly negative.

President Ford dealt with several foreign crises. These included the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, the collapse of South Vietnam and the end of American involvement there, and the seizure of a US merchant ship by Cambodian Communist troops, which, under Ford's orders, was recovered.

At home, America was plagued by unemployment and inflation, which Ford called "public enemy number 1." The president battled with a Democratic Congress and Senate, vetoing 39 measures in his first 14 months in office. Despite their differences, Congress agreed with Ford that they needed to get inflation under control. Together, the two branches established the Council on Wage and Price Stability to fight inflation by watching wage and price increases. The president then worked to create public service jobs for the unemployed and lowered federal income taxes. Two separate attempts were made on Ford's life in September 1975. Interestingly, both were made by women.

President Ford won the Republican nomination in 1976, but lost the election to Jimmy Carter. At his inauguration, Carter began his speech, "For myself and our Nation, I want to thank my predecessor for all he has done to heal our land."

After the election, Ford served on the board of directors of several companies. He also spent a great deal of time lecturing at colleges, universities, and other organizations. He also worked with the Reagan administration. The Gerald R. Ford Museum opened in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the Gerald R. Ford Library opened in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1981. Ford died on December 26, 2006.



Ford started collecting stamps when he was twelve or thirteen years old. Relatives of his father sometimes received letters with unique foreign stamps, prompting an interest in postage. Many of his stamps were later put up for auction at the opening of his presidential museum.

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