

# Reagan troops invade

## Reagan

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inside a large machine shed for their top-brass guest, several hundred more were "permitted" to wait in a lower pasture and watch from across a creek the landing of the presidential helicopter.

Meanwhile, dozens of Secret Servicemen, state and local police patrolled every inch of the area. Guards could be seen atop buildings, along the hillsides and even among cattle.

After what seemed like hours, a lone helicopter, large and very military, appeared and brought the crowd to its feet. As the doors banged open, out jumped the White House press corps. More than 40 people, laden with cameras, tripods and other paraphernalia converged on the Wilkinson pasture like stormtroopers hitting the beaches. Recognizing the false alarm, the crowd settled back.

Two more helicopters arrived within minutes of each other. They quickly unloaded their cargo of Marines and more Secret Servicemen but again no president.

Finally, the blue sky produced one more chopper and this time the crowd sensed it was the 'real McCoy.' The tall dark-haired man, looking more like a retired athlete than a president, had an ear-to-ear grin as he descended from the chopper.

Reagan momentarily disappeared in a crowd of guards and then reappeared flanked by U.S. Agriculture Secretary John Block and his dairyman host Leon Wilkinson.

The trio walked to a fenced-in area which contained about 25 dry cows and one small calf. While the president joked with reporters who were trying vainly to keep their footing on a tilted hay wagon, Wilkinson and Block guided the day-old heifer to her first and probably only presidential audience.

"She was born this morning," said Wilkinson, "and we named her Number One Nancy." The president seemed pleased to meet his wife's namesake, but his tight schedule prohibited him to linger with the gentle cattle and within minutes he was off to a large building at the rear of the farm where a few hundred farmers awaited.

Upon entering the building,

Reagan was met with a deafening standing ovation. His white shirt and tie contrasted sharply with the surrounding flannel and denim workshirts and jeans. As the din faded, the president, Block and Wilkinson settled back on straw bales where they would entertain the crowd for the next 45 minutes.

"Well," joked Reagan scanning the crowd, "I wonder whose tending the farm." The crowd laughed its approval. Throughout the morning, the chief executive laced his talk with humor, which helped the crowd stay friendly.

The president admitted that no part of American economy has been caught harder in a cost-price squeeze than agriculture.

"I have a personal example of that," Reagan said. "I have a ranch of my own. Well, it's actually a hobby ranch. Since, I'm doing what I'm doing — living in public housing in Washington — I can't do much farming." More laughter.

An obliging farmer offered some advice, "You should put on some cows...but I don't know if that's a good idea right now."

However, Reagan showed his serious side when addressing high interest rates and inflation. He explained that financial and business leaders who have met with the president have expressed little optimism toward a falling interest rate.

"It is pessimism, based on past experience, that over the years we've had seven recessions since World War Two," said Reagan.

"And every time the government has gone for the quick fix...artificial stimulant of the money supply, artificial government spending."

The result, said Reagan, has been spiralling inflation. He did admit that a "quick fix" had a temporary affect on improving unemployment.

"But it's like trying to treat a fever by eating a thermometer," the president explained.

Reagan told farmers that bankers and other loan agencies are pessimistic because they think that government will follow its old pattern of using a temporary solution only to be followed by a worse recession in the future.

"Well the government is not following the old pattern," Reagan assured. "We're battling to prevent that."

"If the Congress will vote the budget that you want, with again the continued cut in spending, interest rates will come down," he explained.

One Chester County farmer reminded the president that he was visiting the mushroom capital of the world. On a somber note, the farmer also added that the U.S. mushroom industry is being devastated by foreign imports.

The president said he is aware of the mushroom problem and explained that Secretary Block is currently working on the mushroom situation.

When asked why U.S. farmers aren't competitive in the world market, Reagan replied that while government is not trying to run private farms the 'feds' are looking at ways to stimulate and open up the export market.

"We're one of the few countries that is not only able to feed more people per farmer than anybody else in the world but we have a surplus that be can sold to help out the world," said Reagan.

In seeking solutions to the current dairy situation, a producer asked the president what can dairy farmers and government leaders do to work together to solve the problem.

Reagan recognized the fact the problem was produced by the government, which is now spending about \$2 billion dollars this year in support. The chief executive briefly noted two provisions in Block's proposed emergency dairy plan.

"We are seeking legislation which would allow the Secretary of Agriculture to use his discretion to set support levels," he explained.

"We are also looking at import levels of casein," he noted.

The president explained that the quarrel with the present support program is that the government is too rigid.

"We all recognize the problem. You can't take a system that has been going on and that people have geared themselves to and then pull the rug out all at once."

"First of all nothing is going to be done before January first. But, this is why we want the Secretary of Agriculture to have the flexibility instead of this rigid system that is set by legislation."

While the president did not tell the farmers anything new, many seemed encouraged and supportive.

One young farmer told Reagan, "I wish you were in office in 1976, because I wouldn't be in the fix I'm in now."

His remark met with applause from most farmers and welcome relief from the president.

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While some birds can be a pest to farmers, this whirlybird and its presidential cargo was a welcome site at the Leon Wilkinson dairy farm.



With a wave of a farm cap, President Reagan bids farewell to the hundreds of people fortunate enough to meet him.



Block, Reagan and Wilkinson discuss the ins and outs of dairy farming before meeting with a barnful of guests for questions.



A day-old calf, dubbed "Number One Nancy," receives a presidential greeting. farm owner Leon Wilkinson, right, looks on. Assisting the U.S. Agriculture Secretary John