

Aristotle Onassis, 69,

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Aristotle Onassis reached for the skies and got them. An Olympian figure in life, in death at age 69 he took his place among the legendary personalities of Greece.

A child of an ordinary Greek family from Asia Minor, Onassis might have died the happiest of men, as well as one of the richest, if his only son Alexander had survived him.

But Alexander, the heir to the empire, died in an air crash in 1973. Family friends said the tragedy caused his father to lose interest in a life that was long and full of publicity.

Onassis married Jacqueline Kennedy, the widow of the late President John F. Kennedy. He had a lengthy and intimate friendship with New York-born opera singer Maria Callas, who divorced her Italian husband for Onassis' love.

He was a close companion of the late Sir Winston Churchill, who spent several summer vacations cruising with Onassis on the Mediterranean aboard Onassis's 325-foot yacht Christina.

Onassis owned more than six million tons of shipping and was worth more than half a billion dollars. He enjoyed telling friends he arrived in Greece with less than \$60 in his pocket.

He said he hated photographers and he had a feud with a New York photographer for allegedly pestering his wife Jacqueline and her children. But he posed for photos more often than any other international jetsetter.

Pictures showed him dancing the Syrtaki with actress Melina Mercouri in an Athens taverna, drinking ouzo with Jacqueline on a Nydri cafe, kissing actress Elizabeth Taylor in Paris, dining with Greta Garbo in Geneva.

Onassis was born in Izmir, now part of Turkey, in 1906, the son of tobacco merchant Socrates Onassis and Penelope Dologlu Onassis.

When Turkish troops recaptured Izmir from the Greeks during the 1922 war, Onassis fled to Greece and then to Argentina.

He started as a telephone operator and lineman for the Buenos Aires telephone company in 1923 and worked his way up into the tobacco import business.

His trade name was Omega — the first letter of his name and the last of the Greek alphabet.

In 1930 he was named Greek consul general for Argentina and the next year he entered the shipping business by taking advantage of a wave of South American currency devaluations which allowed him to buy three Canadian freighters at a bargain price of \$120,000.

He went on to build one of the largest privately owned fleets in history, concentrated on oil tankers but including a big whaling fleet, cruise ships and a variety of other vessels sailing every ocean.

His most famous ship was probably the Christina named after his late former wife Christina "Tina" Livanos who died last October from an overdose of sleeping pills.

Tina, daughter of Greek shipping czar Stavros Livanos, married Onassis after World War II. Her sister Eugenia at the same time married another Greek shipping millionaire, Stavros Niarchos.

The couple had two children, Christina and Alexander. Tina divorced him in 1960, succeeding in avoiding all publicity with a "quickie" decree granted in the tiny Alabama town of Chatom, 60 miles north of Mobile.

She herself was wealthy, and an American citizen.

She did not ask for alimony, but Onassis was quoted at the time as saying that if her income fell below a certain figure, he would provide additional funds.

Onassis and Niarchos became open rivals. They tried to outdo each in business dens as well as in giving expensive presents to their wives.

"My favorite country is the one that grants maxi-

mum immunity from taxes, trade restrictions and unreasonable regulations," Onassis once said. "Greece during its seven years of military rule was not a reasonable county." When democracy returned in July 1974, Onassis did not help repair ruins in the economy. He also gave up the ownership and operation of Greece's national airline, Olympic Airways.

For a man who easily attracted women's attention with his personality, wit and manly attitude, Onassis had few known romances after his first marriage. Only his close association with Maria Callas attracted worldwide publicity.

Onassis did not like opera and even Callas' emotional singing did not stop him from sleeping during her performances. He met her in 1956 and they almost immediately became close friends.

Both divorced their spouses in 1960 but never married each other, remaining close friends.

Instead, Onassis in 1968 married Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, America's former First Lady, on his private island of Skorpios.

News of the marriage shocked many Americans who found it difficult to ac-

dies in Paris

cept that four years after Kennedy's assassination his widow had chosen to marry an international playboy.

Onassis and Jacqueline first met in 1963 when she spent a brief vacation in Greece after the death of her infant son Patrick Bouvier Kennedy.

The marriage saddened

the Onassis children. The couple divided their times between New York and Skorpios.

They stopped going to Skorpios after Alexander's death in 1973. Onassis turned the island's small church, where they had been wed, into a mausoleum for his 23-year-old son.