

Beat: Vips

`Great Train Robber` Ronnie Biggs dead at 84

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USPA News - Ronnie Biggs, one of Britain's most notorious criminals of the 20th century for his role in the Great Train Robbery of 1963 and his eventual escape from prison, died in London on early Wednesday, his spokeswoman said. He was 84 years old.

Biggs died in the early morning hours of Wednesday at the Carlton Court Care Home in North London. "Sadly we lost Ron during the night. As always, his timing was perfect to the end. Keep him and his family in your thoughts," his spokeswoman said. He had been unable to speak and had difficulty walking after a series of strokes. On his 34th birthday, in August 1963, Biggs was part of a 15-member gang that held up a Royal Mail train near a village northwest of London. They got away with more than £2.6 million (\$4.2 million), equivalent to some £40 million (\$65.5 million) today, but seriously injured train driver Jack Mills in the process. Most of the gang was arrested about three weeks later and nine of them - including Biggs - were sentenced to up to 30 years of imprisonment. But just over a year into his sentence, in July 1965, Biggs was able to escape from Wandsworth Prison by scaling the wall with a rope ladder and dropping onto a waiting removal van. He fled the country soon after. The bulk of the stolen money was never recovered, and Biggs told the BBC in 1993 that he had spent his share - approximately £147,000 (\$240,000) - within three years. "I squandered it totally. Within 3 years it was all gone," he said. He returned to the United Kingdom in May 2001, in part to seek medical treatment, but was imprisoned until his release on "compassionate grounds" in August 2009.

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