Traditions and Protocol of a Presidential Funeral

Although there are no laws mandating presidential funerals, certain protocol and traditions are maintained. A deceased Philippine president may be given a state funeral, which involves funeral expenses defrayed by the State; a Book of Condolence opened for local and foreign dignitaries in the Philippines; lying in state for public viewing; and arrival, departure, and final military honors. The Philippine government closely adheres to the protocol of the government of the United States for the conduct of a state funeral. The last Philippine president to receive a state funeral was Diosdado Macapagal in 1997.  

Period of National Mourning

Once a president or former president dies, the incumbent President issues a proclamation declaring a ten-day period of national mourning, during which the flag is flown at half-mast as per Republic Act No. 8491, or the Flag and Heraldic Code of the Philippines. However, longer periods have also been declared in the past; for instance, when former President Elpidio Quirino died on February 29, 1956, President Ramon Magsaysay declared a 15-day period of mourning from March 1 to 15 through Proclamation No. 269.

The President also appoints a Committee on Funeral Arrangements and Burial. In previous presidential funerals, the Committee typically consisted of the Executive Secretary, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, the Secretary of National Defense, the Governor of the deceased president’s home province, a member of the deceased president’s family, and representatives from the Senate, the Supreme Court, and the House of Representatives.
Following the death of President Elpidio Quirino in 1956, President Ramon Magsaysay issued Administrative Order No. 181 to create a committee tasked to arrange the necrological services and state funeral for the late president. Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.

The said committee was chaired by Executive Secretary Fortunate de Leon. President Magsaysay, seen in this photo standing behind the coffin of President Quirino, also declared a period of national mourning via Proclamation No. 269 from March 1 to 15, 1956.

President Diosdado Macapagal and Senate President Ferdinand Marcos during the burial of former President Emilio Aguinaldo following his death from coronary thrombosis in 1964. Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.
Lying in state refers to the public viewing of the deceased during a state funeral. Traditionally, the President’s body lies in state in the Rizal Ceremonial Hall, the largest room in the Palace. When the casket arrives at Malacañan Palace, the incumbent President leads in the rendering of arrival honors.[3]

The casket of President Manuel L. Quezon entering Malacañan Palace one last time in 1946. In this photo are President Manuel Roxas along with President Quezon’s family led by Mrs. Aurora Aragon Quezon. Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.
The remains of President Quezon lying in state in Malacañan Palace, 1946. Photo courtesy of the Presidential Museum and Library.

Military honors for the late President Manuel Roxas upon the arrival of his remains from Clark Air Base. Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.
The coffin of President Manuel Roxas as he lies in state in the Ceremonial Hall of Malacañan Palace, 1948. Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.

President Elpidio Quirino’s remains lie in state in Malacañan Palace, 1956. Photo from the Quezon Family Collection.
The remains of President Ramon Magsaysay, who died in a tragic plane crash while still in office, is seen here lying in state at the Ceremonial Hall of Malacañan Palace in 1957. Photo courtesy of LIFE Magazine.

After the public viewing at the Palace, a necrological service during a Joint Session of Congress specially convened for that purpose may be held if the deceased President also served in the House of Representatives or the Senate. The body of the deceased President may also be sent to his hometown for public viewing. Arrival and departure honors are rendered whenever the casket enters and leaves a venue.[4]

The coffin of President Manuel Roxas during the public viewing in Congress after his death from a fatal heart attack in 1948. Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.
Photo showing President Quirino’s casket being lifted to the presidential caisson in front of the Legislative Building, 1956. Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.

President Magsaysay’s casket being brought down the Palace steps, which he ascended just three years prior during his inauguration, 1957. Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.
The casket containing the remains of President Ramon Magsaysay in the House of Representatives Session Hall, 1957. Magsaysay served as the Representative of Zambales from 1946 to 1950. Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.

President Sergio Osmeña’s remains atop the presidential caisson as it leaves the Legislative Building, 1961. Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.
President Emilio Aguinaldo’s remains being carried into his house in Kawit Cavite, 1964. Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.
Gov. Lino I. Chatto and Bohol officials lead the vigil of President Carlos P. Garcia’s wake at the Bohol Cultural Center, Tagbilaran City, 1971. Photo from Carlos P. Garcia: Radiant Symbol of Filipinism: His Life and Labors, 1896-1971 by Gregorio C. Eronico Sr.

**Funeral Procession**

If the funeral includes a religious service, the funeral escort forms a line outside, flanked by the band. The deceased President’s immediate family members, relatives, and friends enter ahead of the casket, occupying the front-most seats to the right of the church. A few moments before the beginning of the service, the hearse bearing the casket approaches and military honors are rendered. The casket is then brought into the church for the service.[5]

Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.
After the public viewing in the Legislative Building one day prior, President Quezon’s coffin was transferred to the University of Santo Tomas (UST) Chapel on July 29, 1946 and remained there until the body was reinterred at the Manila North Cemetery on August 1, 1946, exactly two years after his death.[6]

The funeral procession of President Manuel L. Quezon during his reinterment in 1946. Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.

Seen here atop the presidential caisson during the funeral procession, President Manuel Roxas’ casket is later brought to Manila North Cemetery where his remains were to be buried, 1948. Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.
The funeral procession of President Ramon Magsaysay as it leaves Malacañan Palace, 1957. Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.

Funeral mass for President Ramon Magsaysay, Quirino Grandstand, Rizal Park, Manila, March, 1957. Photo from the National Library of the Philippines.
After the religious service, the cortege exits the church in the same order as the entrance, and departure honors will be rendered. The cortege will proceed to the burial site, marching slowly to solemn music played by the band.

In previous presidential funerals, the caisson bearing the casket was drawn by either soldiers (following the British tradition[^3]), horses (following the American tradition[^4]), or a motorized military vehicle, which is most common. In 1944, President Quezon’s funeral caisson in Arlington was drawn by white horses, but for his reinterment in 1946, it was pulled by Battle of Bataan veterans and guerrillas. Subsequent presidential funerals used motorized military vehicles.
President Quezon’s funeral procession in Arlington National Cemetery, a United States military cemetery in Arlington County, Virginia, 1944. The use of horse-drawn caisson is a practice borrowed from American state funeral protocol. Photo from the Quezon Family Collection.

A large crowd watches as veterans and guerillas from the Battle of Bataan pull the funeral caisson of President Quezon during his reinterment in 1946. Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.
Another practice borrowed from the American state funeral is the riderless caparisoned horse with stirrups in reverse following the caisson, symbolizing the fallen leader. [10]

President Manuel Roxas’ funeral procession followed by a riderless caparisoned horse to symbolize the fallen leader, 1948. Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.

The symbolic caparisoned horse trailed after President Ramon Magsaysay’s caisson in his funeral procession in 1957. Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.
Interment and Reinterment

Presidential burial sites in the past include the Manila North Cemetery, the Manila South Cemetery, and the Libingan ng mga Bayani.

Once the cortege arrives at the burial site, the band and military escort move to form a line within view of the deceased President’s family, with the firing party positioned to fire over the burial plot. The honorary pallbearers form two ranks, creating an aisle from the hearse to the burial plot, with the most senior pallbearer closest to the hearse. In cases when the plot is too close to the road to make this formation possible, pallbearers form around the plot instead.

The tomb of President Manuel Roxas in Manila North Cemetery. First Lady Trinidad de Leon Roxas and son Senator Gerardo “Gerry” Roxas are buried in the same rotunda as the former president. Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.

President Jose P. Laurel was buried in a lot owned by his family in their hometown Tanauan, Batangas. Photo courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines.
Military honors are rendered before the last viewing and benediction. Before the casket is lowered into the plot, the firing party performs the 21-gun salute while the band’s bugler or trumpeter plays “Taps.” The Philippine flag on the casket is removed, folded, and presented to the heirs of the deceased, concluding the state funeral.

There have been instances when the remains of former Presidents have been exhumed and reinterred in a different location. For instance, President Manuel L. Quezon was reinterred twice. Quezon’s remains were exhumed from his vault in Arlington National Cemetery in Washington D.C. for reburial in the Manila North Cemetery on August 1, 1946, the second anniversary of his death. To commemorate Quezon’s 35th death anniversary, Quezon’s remains were exhumed once more and permanently interred at the Quezon Memorial Shrine in Quezon City on August 1, 1979.
The scene at the Quezon Memorial Shrine in Quezon City during the late president’s reinterment in August 1, 1979 in commemoration of his 35th death anniversary. Photos from the Quezon Family Collection.
Presidential Burial Sites

Presidential burial sites today include the Manila North Cemetery, the Manila South Cemetery, and the Libingan ng mga Bayani. Before President Carlos P. Garcia’s death in 1971, presidents were buried in the Manila North Cemetery simply due to circumstances. This was because the government primarily considers the wishes of the president’s widow or the president’s family members. However, the government would always propose a dignified location fit for the stature of the Presidency.

The first president to be buried in the Manila North Cemetery was President Manuel L. Quezon, who had a family plot existing in the said cemetery when his remains was repatriated and buried there in 1946. In 1979, Quezon’s remains would be reinterred in the Quezon Memorial Shrine.

When President Manuel Roxas died on April 15, 1948, the government decided that it was proper that his remains be buried where President Quezon was. This was not the case, however, when President Elpidio Quirino died on February 29, 1956. The Quirinos owned a family plot in the Manila South Cemetery, where his late wife Alicia Syquia-Quirino and his two other children were buried, having been killed in the Battle of Manila of 1945. With the wishes of the Quirino family considered, President Quirino was buried in the family plot in the said cemetery.

Manila North Cemetery would again be the burial place of another president, when President Ramon Magsaysay died in a plane crash on March 17, 1957. His remains, following the precedents of two earlier presidents, was interred in the Manila North Cemetery.

In 1959, upon President Jose P. Laurel’s death, no state funeral was arranged or proposed since at the time, the Second Philippine Republic was not yet officially recognized nor supported by public opinion. Hence, Laurel was buried in his hometown, at Tanauan, Batangas, as per the wishes of his family.

In 1964, President Emilio Aguinaldo passed away in old age, and due to his wishes, was buried in his garden at the Aguinaldo Mansion House. Prior to his death, Aguinaldo donated the Mansion House to the country. Hence, his burial on the site symbolized the transformation of his home from a National Monument into a National Shrine.

In 1967, President Ferdinand E. Marcos reserved 142 hectares from the Fort Bonifacio Military Reserve (formerly known as Fort McKinley) in consideration for extending the Libingan ng mga Bayani to serve not only as a cemetery for military personnel but also as a national shrine for fallen heroes, national artists and national scientists, as well as the burial site for prominent Filipinos who have served in the government. Hence by 1971, the first President to be buried there was President Carlos P. Garcia, followed by President Diosdado Macapagal in 1997. President Elpidio Quirino would be the third president to be reinterred there on February 29, 2016.

Endnotes


Ref.: http://malacanang.gov.ph/76818-presidential-funerals/

**Look also** [www.folklore.aboutphilippines.ph](http://www.folklore.aboutphilippines.ph)