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HEADLINE: Agnew recalled as 'regular guy'; Simple burial service in Timonium attended by former officials

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BODY:

They laid him to rest beneath an oak tree in the gentle hills of suburbia.

It was the sort of landscape where Spiro T. Agnew was always appreciated the most, whether by the Nixon-era "silent majority" of Middle America or the men of Maryland and California who regularly strolled with him across golf greens and tennis courts.

And, for the most part, that was the flavor of the crowd that turned out to say goodbye yesterday afternoon at Dulaney Valley Memorial Gardens in Timonium.

Clustered at graveside along with family members and a military honor guard were Kiwanians and former Secret Service agents, former neighbors and former White House staff.

There were no ex-presidents, no recognizable Hollywood luminaries.

The closest thing to a big shot among the invited crowd of about 80 people was Patrick J. Buchanan, the populist Republican presidential candidate who long ago co-wrote the vice presidential speeches that made Agnew a sensation, alliterative anthems that may forever define his legacy.

Former Rep. Helen Delich Bentley and former Baltimore Mayor Thomas J. D'Alesandro III attended, but their connections were as much personal as political. Bentley is a friend of the family. D'Alesandro, a Democratic mayor when Agnew was Maryland's Republican governor, was to have played golf with Agnew a day earlier, with a 10: 10 a.m. tee-off time set for Thursday.

The Secret Service men, built like aging linebackers and still wearing pins on their suits as if on duty for life, were among those who always hailed Agnew as "a regular guy," neither cool nor aloof like others they'd protected, a fellow who not only played cards with them but often preferred their company.

One of them, glancing around as if by habit before the service began, jested to another with a line Agnew might

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have chuckled over: "I think everybody here [from the Secret Service] is retired, so we can kick the s--- out of any press if we want to."

The service was simple, with the Rev. John Buchheister, a retired Methodist minister and a cousin of Agnew's wife, Judy, doing most of the talking.

Honor guard attended

The crowd of earlier arrivals parted as a caravan of six vehicles drove up. An honor guard of Washington troops representing the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force and Coast Guard removed a flag and a marbled urn containing Agnew's ashes from the back seat of a dark Mercedes.

They then marched the items to beneath a green canopy at graveside, where a bronze marker with Agnew's name rested in the ground a few feet from a similar marker with the names of his mother and father, both buried before he became governor.

The family, led by his widow in a black-and-white print dress, moved solemnly to their seats.

'Completely at ease'

Buchheister prayed and read Scripture, then told of meeting Agnew for the first time 54 years ago, when the man who would become vice president was a young newlywed in a snappy uniform, armed with his Army pistol for World War II.

"But the thing I remember most was not that gun, not that snappy uniform, but his eyes. Everyone here knows about those eyes. You feel completely at ease, completely comfortable, like you met a friend."

Buchheister then recalled the way he followed Agnew's rapid rise in politics -- elected Baltimore County executive in 1962, elected governor in 1966, elected vice president in 1968.

The career chronicle ended there, with no painful allusions to Agnew's 1973 resignation in the face of a kickback scandal that had begun in these very suburbs.

Judy Agnew sat quietly throughout, maintaining stoic composure with the help of daughter Susan, who sat beside her, at times clasping both her mother's hands tightly in her own, while whispering words of support.

A small contingent of men from AHEPA, the American Hellenic Educational and Progressive Association, followed with brief remarks. Agnew joined the Greek-American organization in 1947, following in his father's footsteps.

21-gun salute, taps

The service ended with a 21-gun salute -- a line of seven riflemen firing three times in succession from a small hill 40 yards away. A bugler played taps. Then, all were invited to a coffee social at the home of old friends Bill and Mary Carroll -- practically just around the corner, Bill Carroll said.

It was the right sort of touch for a regular guy from the suburbs.

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GRAPHIC: COLOR PHOTO 1, PERRY THORSVIK : SUN STAFF PHOTOS, Burial: Spiro T. Agnew's widow, Judy, holds a flag at Dulaney Valley Memorial Gardens.; COLOR PHOTO 2, PERRY THORSVIK : SUN STAFF PHOTOS, Taps: Army Master Sgt. Dennis Edelbrock plays taps at the Timonium cemetery.

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