

“Thousands wait for cortege and be part of U.S. History”

By Joseph Weber

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A light fog was settling on the District late yesterday afternoon when Joe Callaghan began his nearly five-hour wait to see the casket of former President Gerald R. Ford lie in state inside the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol.

"This is U.S. history, and I wanted to be a part of it," said Mr. Callaghan, 47, a Florida resident who was returning from Pennsylvania, where he was visiting family for the holidays. "President Ford was a good man. I'm not of the [Republican Party], but he was a good man."

Mr. Callaghan was one of hundreds who began standing in line long before the public viewing began after 8 p.m., and among the thousands who came to the region to mourn the death of the 38th president.

Mike Cole, 43, of Mansfield, Ohio, also was traveling in the region and changed plans so his family could witness history and pay their respects to Mr. Ford.

"I was a kid during Watergate and when Ford later became president, so I didn't know much about him at that time," said Mr. Cole, standing with his wife and two children at the National World War II Memorial hours before the motorcade arrived. "Now I look back and realize he did a good job. He brought some order to this country."

The Ford family requested the brief ceremony at the memorial, off 17th Street Northwest, to honor the president's service in the Navy during World War II.

Veterans and Boy Scouts saluted as they waited inside the memorial grounds, whose Pacific Theater arch was lighted to honor Mr. Ford's duty aboard the aircraft carrier USS Monterey.

Senior Chief Boatswain Mate Carlos Ribott, a U.S. Navy piper, played "Piping Ashore," a whistle traditionally used to welcome officers aboard ship and now to honor naval service.

The casket arrived at Andrews Air Force Base at about 5:30 p.m., then joined the awaiting motorcade, which traveled along the Capital Beltway, past the Ford family's former home in Alexandria, across the Memorial Bridge, into the District and past the war memorial before reaching the East Steps of the Capitol at about 7:15 p.m.

Mourners applauded the motorcade, trimmed in flags and bunting, throughout the procession. The route was most crowded along the final leg, on Constitution Avenue Northwest, with hundreds sitting on sidewalks and on the steps of such historic U.S. landmarks as the National Archives building and the Smithsonian Institution museums.

Additional officers from the Metropolitan Police Department, the U.S. Capitol Police and other agencies were on duty yesterday, lining the motorcade route, other city streets and walking the Capitol grounds. However, no arrests or other problems were

reported.

"He was my boss. He was the commander in chief," said Maj. Mike Conroy, who was commissioned in the Army in 1975. "He brought Midwestern values and common sense to the presidency at a time when the nation was hurting. I also admired his athleticism, including his football career at the University of Michigan and his low handicap in golf."

Maj. Conroy, 54, stood at the foot of Capitol Hill, along the procession route, where many people used their cell phones and cameras to take pictures of the motorcade of gleaming black limousines.

Among them was Micah Kauffman, 31, a missionary working with orphans in Romania who brought his camera.

"Ford was president when I was boy, the first one I remember," said Mr. Kauffman, a member of the Christian Aid Ministry. "I'm going to take these pictures back to show the children."

Mr. Ford, 93, died Tuesday night at his home in Rancho Mirage, Calif. He was honored Friday with prayer services at St. Margaret's Church in Palm Desert, Calif. The casket was flown from California yesterday morning.

The public viewing last night followed a ceremony in the House of Representatives, where Mr. Ford served for 24 years. The casket was then moved to the Rotunda. The public viewing continued until midnight. The viewings resume today and tomorrow from 9 a.m. until 6 p.m. The national funeral service is Tuesday and includes a ceremony at the Washington National Cathedral. Mr. Ford will be buried Wednesday in his hometown of Grand Rapids, Mich.

"I want my children to see this," said Mark Remington, 46, of Clifton, who stood along Constitution Avenue with his wife and six children, ages 2 to 12. "I want them to be part of history."