

This Day in History... August 31, 1907

Birth of Ramon Magsaysay

Ramon del Fierro Magsaysay Sr. was born on August 31, 1907, in Iba, Zambales, Philippine Islands. The Philippines' seventh president, his administration was known for being free of corruption. He was later called the "Champion of the Masses" and "Defender of Democracy."

Magsaysay grew up in the Zambales province of the Philippines. He attended the University of the Philippines, initially enrolling in the pre-medical program and later studying engineering. He worked as a chauffeur to pay his way and then transferred to the Institute of Commerce at José Rizal College.



Corregidor was captured after the fall of Bataan.

Magsaysay worked as an automobile mechanic until World War II began. He then joined the Philippine Army's 31st Infantry Division motor pool. Magsaysay escaped Japanese capture after the fall of Bataan and organized the Western Luzon Guerrilla Forces.

Commissioned as a captain, he eventually commanded a force of 10,000 soldiers that dislodged Japanese forces from the Zambales coast before the arrival of American troops in January 1944.

After the war, Magsaysay's former guerrillas encouraged him to run for office and he was elected to the Philippine House of Representatives in 1946. Two years later, he went to Washington, DC, as chairman of the Committee on Guerrilla Affairs to help get a bill passed that would give benefits to Philippine veterans. Magsaysay was elected to a second term in 1949 and served as chairman of the House National Defense Committee during both terms.

In 1950, Magsaysay encouraged the Philippine president to make him secretary of National Defence. At the time, they were fighting communist guerrillas and he believed his experience as a former guerrilla would prove beneficial. His methods helped improve the situation and he launched a counterinsurgency, delivering food and supplies to rural communities that had previously distrusted the Army. This helped to earn their respect.

Magsaysay ran for president in 1953, aiming to oust the corrupt administration that he felt hadn't done enough about the communist guerrillas. He easily won that election and became a close ally of the US. He helped found the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), which sought to end communist movements in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Southwestern Pacific.

Magsaysay opened the Presidential Palace to the public and established the Presidential Complaints and Action Committee. This committee heard 60,000 complaints in a year, settling half with direct action and the rest with follow up from the appropriate agencies. This immensely helped to increase people's faith in their government.

Magsaysay instituted several major agrarian reform policies. These provided farmland to thousands of families, offered reasonable credit to farmers, improved irrigation, and more. Magsaysay also negotiated a trade agreement with the US and established the Joint US-Philippines Defense Council with John Foster Dulles.

Magsaysay's time in office has been called the Philippines' "Golden Years." He had the most corruption-free administration in recent history and many industries prospered. The military was at its best and the country earned international acclaim in sports, culture, and foreign affairs.

On March 16, 1957, Magsaysay flew to Cebu City to speak at three schools. On the return flight, the plane was reported missing in the early hours of March 17. By that afternoon, it was discovered that the plane had crashed and Magsaysay and all but one person aboard had died. About two million people would attend his funeral and he became known as the "Champion of the Masses" and "Defender of Democracy."



This was the first stamp in the Champions of Liberty Series and was issued just five months after Magsaysay's death.



Magsaysay helped found SEATO in 1954.

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