

Rodolfo Sanchez
First Resident Philippine Consul
in Laos in the 1960s

Ambassador Rodolfo S. Sanchez passed away on January 28, 2006 in Manila at the age of 72. The cause of death was kidney failure.



By [Pete Fuentesilla](#)

When “Rody” arrived in Vientiane on September 17, 1965, he was the first Filipino diplomat (Foreign Service Officer Class III) posted onsite to the Kingdom. Before his assignment, Filipino residents in Laos were served by the Philippine embassies in either Bangkok or Saigon – hardly a convenient arrangement as the Filipino population in Laos had swelled to 900-plus by the time he was assigned there.

In the weeks to come, in his black bow tie, dashing around in a white Fiat sedan, he became a familiar sight as he attended to his consular duties. The first days were hectic – renting a temporary office at the Lane Xang Hotel, registering a cable address, obtaining a car, seeking a suitable building as the official chancery as well as a residence for the incoming first resident Ambassador, due to arrive in a month.

“I met my first Filipinos, Vito Naranjo and Boni Gillego at the OB office who jokingly told me that they mistook me for a drug salesman. Then and there, I felt that Laos was going to be a pleasant assignment after all. And indeed it was. For in Laos I had the pleasure of meeting and associating with some of the finest people I have met in my lifetime. There were more or less a thousand Filipinos within the jurisdiction of the Kingdom. I recall, rather proudly, that I had a first-name relationship with many of them.”

The day he accompanied Ambassador Felipe Mabilangan Sr. to present his credentials at the King’s palace in the royal capital of Luang Prabang, it was raining. His Barong Tagalog spotted with rain drops as the strains of the Philippine national anthem sounded officially for the first time. The lyrics wafted towards the majestic splendor and embrace of the rolling hills around the capital. The scene still lives vividly in his memory, he said during an interview in 2002.

Before his Laos assignment, Rody served for three years with the Philippine Embassy in Rangoon, Myanmar (formerly Burma), a tranquil post spent reporting on political affairs. Transferred to Vientiane at the height of the Vietnam war, he found the capital a hotbed of political intrigue while various combatants, both local and international, turned the countryside into a war zone. Fortunately Vientiane was spared much of the carnage during his time. Moreover, his consular chores were assisted by expert advice of long-time Filipino residents. The Filipino Association of Laos presented a handcarved Embassy seal that adorned the new chancery on Kilometer 3 Tha Deua Road.

“My Laotian assignment gave me the learning experience that I would need in my profession,” he said. “In later years, I was to find out that working with expatriate Filipino communities is not the easiest job in the world.” He recalled some cases.

“ One involved a young man from Batangas who shot a Laotian military officer one night in Vieng Ratty. He came to me in the middle of the night after the incident. And I ended up hiding him in my house, and lest I be charged with obstruction of justice and be expelled, I later surrendered him to the police authorities. This was towards the end of my term in Laos. I was able to visit him in prison before I left. In another case, in the OB Hospital, I held the hand of another Filipino, dying from a gunshot wound, feeling so lonely and so fearful of death in that faraway land. I learned later that he was a fugitive from justice in the Philippines.”

Rody left Laos on August 6, 1967 and was assigned to the Foreign Affairs office in Manila. As consul general in Chicago from 1975 to 1985 , he renewed friendships with former Laos constituents, now Illinois residents Dicknoi and Lily Abad as well as with Edith and Dr. Pete Paluay. He was Philippine Deputy Representative to the United Nations in New York from 1985 to 1988. His last assignment before he retired in 1999 was Ambassador to the Hague in the Netherlands. During his retirement in the Philippines he wrote for former Jovito Salonga’s monthly magazine “Kilos Bayan”.

Rody joined the foreign service in 1957, two years after graduating from the University of the Philippines. He was our keynote speaker during our reunion dinner dance at the Hyatt Regency on August 7, 2004.

Born on January 20, 1934 in Manila, he is survived by his wife the former Ofelia Angeles, and their children Jocelyn Long of Chicago, Edwin Sanchez of East Rutherford, New Jersey and Cecile Maniquis of Skokie, Illinois and a grandson Christopher Sanchez. Mekong Circle members can send their messages to 8 Kapitan Ato St., Barangay Santa Cruz, Pasay City, Metro Manila, Philippines or e-mail cmaniquis@sbcglobal.net.