
BRITAIN'S PRINCE PHILIP MAKES FINAL PUBLIC APPEARANCE

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After a lifetime of public service by the side of Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Philip is finally retiring at the age of 96. He is known for his frequent offensive quips at the expense of racial and cultural minorities.

The 96-year-old Duke of Edinburgh has taken his first steps toward retirement, with the last of his 22,219 solo public engagements scheduled for Wednesday.

"I reckon I've done my bit so I want to enjoy myself a bit now," he said shortly after announcing he would be stepping down.

Since his wife Elizabeth II became queen in 1952, Prince Philip has also attended countless events by her side, but the nonagenarians have increasingly handed over responsibilities to the younger royals.

"Prince Philip is entitled to slow down a bit," read an editorial in the Daily Telegraph. "This is a man who has always put his country first."

Philip's final engagement - at a charity event with the Royal Marines - will honor his own military background as a naval officer during World War II. He has also served as captain general of the Royal Marines since 1953, when he took over from the queen's father, King George VI, who had died the year before.

Philip has carried out 637 overseas visits on his own in the past 65 years, given almost 5,500 speeches, and served as patron, president or member of more than 780 organizations.

Elizabeth has called Philip, her husband of almost 70 years and the longest-serving consort in British history, "my strength and stay." Good for her, then, that Philip remains healthy for a man of his age despite his two-night hospitalization in June for the treatment of an undisclosed infection.

Though the queen supports her husband's decision to retire, she has no plans to do the same as her nation navigates its Brexit from the European Union.

"Her Majesty will continue to carry out a full program of official engagements with the support of members of the royal family," the palace announced earlier this year.

And Brits may not have seen the last of their aged prince. A spokesperson said that, though Philip's string of individual events has come to an end, "he may choose to attend engagements alongside the queen from time to time."

Prince of Greece and Denmark

Philip has held royal titles since his birth on June 10, 1921, in Corfu. As the only son of Prince Andrew of Greece and Princess Alice of Battenberg, he was born the Prince of Greece and Denmark - titles he would relinquish upon marrying Princess Elizabeth. After fleeing unrest in Greece at just 18 months, Philip went on to become a naturalized British citizen.

His six and a half decades of diplomacy were not without controversy, however. His propensity for gaffes caused no end of headlines and official apologies from Buckingham Palace. In 1997, he called German Chancellor Helmut Kohl "Reichskanzler" - the title taken by Adolf Hitler. He once asked an Aboriginal Australian whether indigenous people "still throw spears at each other" and told a teenager with sky-high dreams that he was "too fat to be an astronaut."

In 1995, he publicly wondered whether Scots could be kept "off the booze long enough" to pass a driving test. And once told a group of British exchange students in China they would be "all-slitty-eyed," if they stayed in the country much longer.

Generally, Philip was forgiven for his faux pas. "Humor is important," as the Telegraph put it. "The Duke's has brightened these decades."

mkg/rt (AFP, dpa)

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