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Tens of Thousands Mourn Kalashnikov Designer in His Hometown

By The Moscow Times

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Mikhail Kalashnikov in a meeting with President Vladimir Putin during his visit to the Izhevsk plant in September. .

Tens of thousands of people gathered to say their farewells to Mikhail Kalashnikov, the designer of the AK-47 assault rifle, at a two-day memorial service that ended Thursday with the coffin's departure for Moscow.

The service in Kalashnikov's hometown Izhevsk in the republic of Udmurtia was attended by Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, the heads of defense companies and local government officials as well as numerous friends, family members and Izhevsk residents, with an estimated 60,000 visitors in total, Interfax reported.

“We are parting with him today, but we could hardly agree that the age of Kalashnikov is departing. It isn't leaving. It won't leave,” Rogozin said, reminding the gathered crowds of the weapons manufacturer and school of Russian armorers that will carry on the designer's

name.

When the ceremony ended and after a moment of silence, the pallbearers carried the coffin out of St. Michael's Cathedral and past the places where Kalashnikov had lived and worked before setting off for the airport.

The coffin will now be transported to Moscow, where a state funeral is to be held Friday at the Federal Military Memorial Cemetery in the suburb of Mytischi.

Udmurtia has decreed two days of mourning, and Russian flags throughout the country are being flown at half-mast on Thursday and Friday in honor of the arms designer's death.

Kalashnikov had been in poor health for the past year. He was hospitalized in May and underwent a pacemaker operation in June.

He became a national icon and famous worldwide for designing the AK-47, believed by some analysts to be superior to its Western equivalents.

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