

Spiro T. Agnew: *A tragic career*

AN EDITORIAL in *The Evening Capital* on Oct. 11, 1973, started this way: "No thoughtful American takes any pleasure in the tragedy that has encompassed former Vice President Spiro Agnew. Nor is it amiss to feel personal compassion for the man and for his family."

But the editorial — like others published around the country that day — went on to talk about "the continuing pattern of deceit, dishonor and corruption that has surrounded Mr. Agnew as county executive of Baltimore County, as governor of this state and as vice president."

That verdict on Mr. Agnew was the general one in 1973. And although the rough edges may have been worn away by time, it hasn't really changed, and it won't be altered by his death Tuesday at age 77.

His career is tragic in so many ways. The son of an immigrant, he was a man of considerable ability — and, initially, enormous luck. He could have brought honor to this state and himself as the person to bind this country together after the Nixon administration self-destructed. Instead, he tossed away a chance to make history because he didn't have the foresight or integrity to rise above the petty corruption endemic in Maryland politics in his day.

Mr. Agnew was a tank company commander in World War II, served at the Battle of the Bulge, and earned four battle stars, the Bronze Star and the Combat Infantryman's Badge. As a politician, he did good work for his county, his state and his country, and he will be fondly remembered by many friends, acquaintances and ideological allies. That all of this will be overshadowed by the way his career in public life ended is another tragedy.

Of course, failure in public life is not the be-all and end-all of a person's worth — although it is, perhaps, the only area in which newspaper editorials are entitled to pass judgment. Mr. Agnew's friends and family will remember him as he wanted to be remembered — and we offer them our sincere condolences.