

Recalling a Great Polish and American Patriot

October 11, 2020 marks the 241th Anniversary of the death of General Kazimierz Pulaski, best known in America as Casimir Pulaski.

Pulaski was born on March 4, 1747 in Warka, Poland into a staunchly patriotic, gentry family. Having completed his education in legal and military studies he became engaged in 1768 in a patriotic movement created in the eastern Polish town of Bar, a movement that became known as the *Confederation of Bar*. The movement aimed at reversing Poland's long slide into subservience to imperial Russia.

Between 1768 and 1772, Pulaski distinguished himself in a series of cavalry battles against the Russian army that entered his unhappy land to put down the revolt. In 1771 he heroically defended Czestochowa from an attack by a much larger Russian force. His victory there is immortalized in Jozef Chelmonski's painting, "Pulaski at Czestochowa." But when Russia crushed the Confederation, Pulaski was forced into exile, first in Turkey then in France.

In France, Pulaski learned of the American colonies' declaration of independence. Making his way to Paris, he met Benjamin Franklin, the emissary to France of the newly formed American government. There he volunteered his services to the independence cause. Franklin was much impressed by Pulaski; in his letter introducing him to his compatriots in America he described Pulaski as "an officer famous throughout Europe for his bravery and conduct in defense of the liberties of his country."

Following his arrival in America, Pulaski was given a commission as a cavalry officer by the Continental Congress. Not long after, he played a

key role at the battle of Brandywine in leading his men in protecting General George Washington's forces from being overtaken and possibly destroyed by the British army. His actions won his promotion to the rank of Brigadier General with the responsibility of organizing all mounted troops in the land. Thus, he is rightly recognized as the "father of the American Cavalry."

Later, Pulaski organized and financed his own legion, a force of 268 men, which fought with great courage and success for the independence cause. The banner flown by his men in battle became famous and was remembered years later in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's stirring poem, "The Hymn of the Moravian Nuns."

Sent south to the Carolinas, Pulaski's legion successfully defended Charlestown from the British. He and his men then took part in a French-American attack aimed at recapturing the town of Savannah, Georgia.

There on October 11, 1779 Pulaski was mortally wounded leading his men in a charge on the British entrenchments. His death was mourned throughout the colonies. Indeed, the Continental Congress approved a resolution to erect a monument in honor of his devotion to the American independence cause.

Over a century later, a monument to him was erected and at the government's expense in Washington, D.C. It was dedicated by the President of the United States, William Howard Taft, on May 11, 1910, along with a second monument to his countryman and fellow patriot, Tadeusz Kosciuszko. (That monument was funded by the Polish National Alliance as a "gift to the American people.")

Indeed, there are scores of other memorials to Pulaski. They include Fort Pulaski near Savannah. Pulaski monuments are in five states. And six counties and twenty towns are named after Pulaski, as are a number of streets, including Pulaski Road in Chicago.

In 1929, the 150th anniversary of his death, President Herbert Hoover proclaimed Pulaski Day as a Day of Observance throughout the country. On November 6, 2009 President Barack Obama signed legislation approved by Congress making Pulaski a citizen of the United States. (March 4, the day of Pulaski's birth, is also formally recognized in the states of Illinois and Wisconsin.)

For many years Pulaski's remains were believed to have been placed aboard an American warship after the battle and buried at sea. But thanks to the research of Polonia activist Edward Pinkowski, it has been shown that Pulaski's remains lie under the monument in his honor in Savannah.

The remarkable Kazimierz Pulaski is remembered today as a dedicated fighter for freedom – both for his homeland and America - and one who gave his very life to the American independence cause. He, like his compatriot Tadeusz Kosciuszko, along with the famed Polish Constitution of the May the Third, 1791, have come to symbolize the unbreakable solidarity of values that unite the freedom loving peoples of Poland and the United States of America.

Donald Pienkos with thanks to Drs Francis Kajencki of Texas and Angela Pienkos of Wisconsin for their research on Pulaski.