

General Casimir Pulaski (1745-1779)



Casimir Pulaski, son of Count Joseph Pulaski, was born in Warsaw, Poland, on March 6, 1745. At the age of fifteen, he joined his father and other members of the Polish nobility in opposing the Russian and Prussian interference in Polish affairs. Outlawed by Russia for his actions on behalf of Polish liberty, he traveled to Paris where he met Benjamin Franklin, who induced him to support the colonies against England in the American Revolution. Pulaski, impressed with the ideals of a new nation struggling to be free, volunteered his services. Franklin wrote to George Washington describing the young Pole as “an officer renowned throughout Europe for the courage and bravery he displayed in defense of his country’s freedom.”

In 1777, Pulaski arrived in Philadelphia where he met General Washington, Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army. Later, at Brandywine, he came to the aid of Washington’s forces and distinguished himself as a brilliant military tactician. For his efforts, Congress appointed him Brigadier-General in charge of Four Horse Brigades. Then again, at the Battle of Germantown, Pulaski’s knowledge of warfare assisted General Washington and his men in securing victory for American forces.

Later in 1778, through Washington’s intervention, Congress approved the establishment of the Cavalry and put Pulaski at its head. Pulaski, who became known as the “Father of the American Cavalry,” demanded much of his men and trained them in tried and tested cavalry tactics, many of which he used in his fight for freedom in Poland. Pulaski often used his own personal finances, when allocations from Congress were scarce, in order to assure his forces of the finest equipment and personal safety.

Pulaski and his Legion were then ordered to defend Little Egg Harbor in New Jersey and Minisink on the Delaware; they then proceeded south to Charleston, South Carolina. It was on October 9, 1779, during the Battle of Savannah, that General Pulaski, charging into battle on horseback, fell to the ground mortally wounded by the blast of a cannon. Pulaski’s enemies were so impressed with his courage, that they spared him the musket and permitted him to be carried from the battlefield. Pulaski died several days later on October 15, 1779, at age 34. The Pulaski Monument, erected in his honor, is located in Monterey Square, Savannah, Georgia.

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