

Speech delivered at  
 Memorial Services for Marshal Joseph Pilsudski  
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### MARSHAL JOSEPH PILSUDSKI

He died two years ago - two years ago today on May 12, 1935. If there be truth in the quotation that:

"Death is as the foreshadowing of life. We die  
 that we may die no more",

then Marshal Pilsudski died that he might die no more. Now, therefore, he lives - he lives forever. He lives in the memory of all man. His qualities have a universal touch and are especially admired and respected by us - by all Americans. Therefore, we gather here tonight to do him honor.

Eric Patterson in his study of Marshal Pilsudski's life and work wrote the following:

"His body was removed from the Belvedere to the Cathedral of St. John at Warsaw in solemn procession through streets crowded with people, yet where the silence was so intense that only the bells of the churches could be heard. There Mass was said, and afterwards began that march past of the citizens paying their tribute to the dead.

"From Warsaw the body was taken by train to Cracow. The journey took over fourteen hours, for the provincial population too wished to make its reverence, and thus the train had to be continually halted. The coffin was on a gun-carriage, and that was placed on an open truck illuminated by several lights. Six generals stood on guard. In spite of the cold, station platforms were crowded, and in many places peasants stood on either side of the railway tracks, whilst from the hills bonfires were lighted in honour of the departed.

"At Cracow he was taken to the Wawel Castle, and there in the crypt of the church was the last ceremonial, and he was laid to rest.

"He lies in the Wawel, shrine of Polish history, treasure-house of Polish destiny, where lie buried many of the Polish kings and heroes such as Kosciuszko, and by him is a vase of earth from his mother's grave.

"To the shades of kings," said his friend, President Moscicki, "is added a new companion in eternal rest. Though his head bears no crown and his hand carries no sceptre, he was king of our hearts and master of our desires."

He died in Warsaw at the age of 67. His entire life was devoted with extraordinary singleness of purpose to the re-establishment of the Polish nation. Every other interest in his life was subordinated to that ruling objective. In order to understand the nature of his accomplishment, it is essential that the historical and political background of his life's work be understood.

When the republic of Poland was established in 1918 as one of the results of the defeat of the central powers in the great war, it had been for a century and a half deprived of its independence and divided into three parts subject respectively to Russia, Germany and Austria.

The loss of independence in 1815 resulted not only from the aggressiveness of Poland's great neighbors but also in part from the independent spirit of the Polish nobility and gentry, a spirit which for generations had prevented the establishment of a firm central authority such as Poland's great neighbors, Russia, Germany, and Austria possessed. This spirit of independence had its particular manifestation in the peculiar institution of the liberum veto, that is, the right of any one member of the Polish diet, or assembly, to prevent the enactment of any measure. This right was based on the assumption that Polish gentlemen were all equals, and no one was to be coerced by the others. So, every measure had to be adopted unanimously or not at all. If any member believed that a measure was objectionable he could cause its defeat by his single vote. Moreover any one member could by his own action dissolve the assembly and thereby annul all the measures it had already adopted. Furthermore, Poland had been a monarchy but her monarchs were dependent for their succession not upon heredity but on election by the Polish nobility. They were not necessarily Polish themselves. Under such circumstances the choice of a king was rendered extremely difficult; all the more so because this Polish love of individual freedom afforded a basis for the fomenting of dissensions among the Polish nobility.

Under the constitution of May 3, 1791, the liberum veto was abolished and the monarchy was made hereditary. These measures of authority came too late to save Poland's independence however. She was overrun by the forces of her neighbors and her territory was divided among them. This third and final partition occurred in 1796, and was never even partially undone until the conclusion of the war in 1918.

During the long period of her partition among the three great neighboring powers - covering the entire 19th century - consistent efforts were made to erase the cultural characteristics of her people and thus to force a fusion with the peoples to which she was subject.

It is natural that this intensified in the hearts of individuals their affection for the traditions and culture of their own people. Pilsudski himself belonged to a noble family deeply and passionately devoted to Polish culture and the ideal of Polish independence. Pilsudski's mother was especially devoted and all his life Pilsudski acknowledged that his fierce attachment to Poland's cause was due largely to her influence; he directed that at his death his heart should be buried at her feet.

For years he carried on his efforts on behalf of Poland under extreme difficulty and danger. While he was still a student he was arrested for complicity in a plot against the Czar and sent to Siberia. He was there for five years and was then released because he was believed to be dying. After his return he recovered and became more active than ever. He studied military science and organized a secret military force. He set up secretly, in the small apartment in which he and his wife lived a printing press on which he printed the paper he edited and issued for furtherance of the cause of Polish independence. He had extraordinary courage and resourcefulness, an attractive personality, a keen sense of humor, deep convictions, and an unshakable will. He never sought wealth nor power nor distinction for himself, but lived a life of danger, privation, and intensely hard work. His influence grew and strengthened. After several years of publication, his printing press was located by the police and he was again imprisoned. He feigned insanity and was transferred for examination from a prison in Warsaw to one in what was then St. Petersburg. Before the specialists had an opportunity to discover that his insanity was assumed, he was helped to escape and made his way to London. He returned to Poland and continued his activities, but with more emphasis upon direct action.

When the war broke out in 1914, it presented to Polish patriots both an opportunity and a dilemma, for their country was divided between rulers who were now at war with one another. Pilsudski's own policy was firmly realistic. He realized the enormous practical difficulties of the situation and so he put his military force on the side of the Central Powers. His troops took part in numerous engagements, distinguishing themselves for bravery and discipline, and Pilsudski showed himself to be a remarkable military leader. He refused however to let his legions be used outside Polish territory. Because he refused to meet certain conditions which they decided to impose upon the Polish legions he was again imprisoned. For a year he was kept in solitary confinement but received respectful treatment in comfortable quarters. His imprisonment continued until the end of the war when he was released and allowed to return to Poland where the provisional government had already appointed him Chief of State while he was still a prisoner.

From then on his task was to render substantial and secure the independence which the Allies had agreed that Poland should have. The difficulties and the dangers were now no less than they had been before, though quite different in nature. In the century and a half of partition among the three powers, differences had been developed among the Poles which were now hard to reconcile. Although the spirit of loyalty to the old traditions had persisted, nevertheless several generations had now passed during which laws, customs, education, and economic relationships had created substantial differences of interest. These had now to be broken down. New laws, new institutions, new trade relationships had to be substituted for the old. These changes involved established interests, and they were hard to effect. The country endured the constant threat of disturbance and dissension, and a constant succession of crises. There was the difficulty of determining what the boundaries of Poland should be. There was warfare with Bolshevik Russia, whose armies at one time pressed victoriously forward until they were within a few miles of the Polish capital. At that crisis Pilsudski personally assumed command of the troops, whose morale

as well as that of the civilian population was dangerously impaired, and dramatically and decisively he turned the scales and drove back the Russians at the very moment when their victory seemed practically assured.

In 1923 he retired from public life, but in 1926, exasperated by the factions wrangling of the assembly, he put himself at the head of an army and marched on Warsaw. He was met on the Poniatowski bridge by the Polish president, who ordered him to withdraw his troops. He refused, except on conditions which the government would not meet. After two days of fighting he captured the city. Following resignation of the president and cabinet, he was elected president but refused the office.

Nevertheless he remained in fact the head of the government, though never an avowed dictator. The constitutional forms were continued, though dominated by his will and his ideals. He was a man of extraordinary concentration, resolution, courage, and faith. As was natural, he was the object of intense hatreds and his character was not of the sort that made compromise easy. Yet he had a grim sense of humor which kept him from taking political criticisms as a personal affront. He was a true realist in all things - even in his private life. Just to show that he was human - and real - a popular Polish cartoon represented him as searching in the dictionary for new swear words with which to replenish his vocabulary. His nature was vigorous and intense and always human. He gave hard blows, but he also took them. He was a man of truly heroic qualities.

Concluding, therefore, we recall that:

"Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime  
And departing leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time"

and naturally we look for high ideals as we

"Worship heroes from afar."

These ideals

"Show us our deficiencies and spur us on to  
higher and better things."

This was effectively expressed by Rudyard Kipling when he wrote:

"If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,  
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
But make allowance for their doubting too;  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
Or being hated don't give way to hating,  
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

"If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;  
 If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim,  
 If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
 And treat those two imposters just the same;  
 If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
 Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
 Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,  
 And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

"If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
 And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
 And lose, and start again at your beginnings  
 And never breathe a word about your loss;  
 If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
 To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
 And to hold on when there is nothing in you  
 Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

"If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
 Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch,  
 If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
 If all men count with you, but none too much;  
 If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
 With sixty-seconds' worth of distance run,  
 Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
 And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!"

It seems fitting, therefore, that, borrowing from Shakespear at the end of this quotation from Kipling, we should end our remarks on life of Marshal Filsudski with the spontaneous outburst:

"Here was a man."