

Speech delivered at  
Unveiling of Pulaski Monument  
Poughkeepsie, New York  
September 8, 1940

We meet here to unveil a monument to the memory of General Pulaski who fought and died for the freedom and the liberty of these United States.

We are commemorating today a young soldier who faced problems very much like those we, ourselves, are now facing. Casimir Pulaski's brief life was spent in fighting forces of repression that in his day, as now in ours, were threatening humanity. He was not a mere seeker of thrills and excitement. He had ideals, convictions, sympathies, and it was for these he fought. He was a lover of freedom. He was a lover of the human spirit. It was important in his eyes that men and women be able to live their lives according to their own judgment and wishes, and not in servile, unthinking obedience to the dictation of others. Brave, eager, and generous, he was moved by the cause of human liberty. It was the same cause then as now. It was the same cause in Europe as in America. He fought for it in Europe, he fought for it in America, and fighting for it here, he died. The cause and the country he fought for still live, thanks to his, and his associates' vision and sacrifice. We are the beneficiaries of his life's work. We are the beneficiaries of his death. We are the inheritors of his principles.

He was young - he was active - he was alert - he was industrious and he was able. He had indeed a splendid future ahead of him. All this he sacrificed for this country.

He was of nobility. He had much of the earthly possessions to live with and to live for. This, too, he gave up for this country.

He was a practical and an experienced military leader. He was instrumental in developing the first cavalry in this country. He fought at Brandywine, Germantown, Trenton, and Princeton. He organized the Pulaski Legion and fought in the defense of Charleston, South Carolina. He was finally wounded in the Battle of Savannah in 1779 and died in this country, on board ship. When he died he was only 31 years of age.

We have been living through a period in which exploits such as those of Pulaski and other young men who fought for their country in past wars, seem strange and only half real. When peace prevails and people are preoccupied wholly with their civil occupations, their personal ambitions, and their family interests, it is sometimes hard to realize the spirit that again and again in the past has led young men to offer themselves eagerly for the defense of their freedom and their country's freedom. Moreover, when such a period of peace draws to a close with the approach of danger, it is hard to make adjustment to the strange necessities of sacrifice. We became so used to the daily routine of civil employment and to the comforts of life at home that any other way of living is difficult to conceive. We hear of it and read of it as if it were something belonging not to our world but to another. But the thing that was at first remote becomes immediate. Gradually but steadily the danger and the necessity come closer and closer. As they

approach, it becomes clearer day by day that we must accustom ourselves to the obligations of a new order.

Isn't it true that today we face sacrifice and self-discipline? Isn't it true that we must discipline ourselves now, and isn't it true that we must face reality - harsh reality - and discipline ourselves rigidly now - now lest we lose what General Pulaski and others courageously fought and died for - lose our freedom and our liberty, and what is more, lest we be disciplined later by a force - not our own - by a force not from within ourselves?

We frequently hear it said that the fervor which characterizes military activity is merely hysterical. There is such a thing, of course, as war hysteria, but we make a grave mistake if we fail to realize that there is an enthusiasm involved in the defense of ideals that is quite different from mere excitement and frenzy. In a free country they have something to defend - seriously, deliberately, devotedly. The things we have to defend are so familiar - are so much a matter of our daily life and experience - that they are too often taken for granted. But at this moment they cannot be taken for granted. We are involved in a conflict between different conceptions of how life should be lived. There are enemies to our way of life. They mock our democracy and our freedom and would destroy them from the face of the earth.

Frankly, we face a test. History will record whether you and I were able to face this test as did General Pulaski and meet the test as did General Pulaski. To his memory monuments are being erected.

In every man's life there is sadness, brought on by untoward happenings, that almost kill his spirit. The greatness of each individual is measured by his ability to overcome and to win, and the greater the misfortunes that shatter his mind and tear apart his heart, the greater the victory of the individual.

The issue is a national one but also a personal one. We can face it despondently, regretfully, and with heavy hearts, or we can face it as Pulaski did in a spirit of venture and noble generosity. We can think of it as a task for others or as a personal responsibility of our own. There is no doubt in my mind which way we shall choose.

Is there any one who will say - now when over a century and a half has past - that Pulaski chose wrong? Should he rather have sought safety, compromise, and ease? Or does it seem to us that he did well and wisely when he chose the hard and dangerous course, when he chose to strive and dare, when he chose to throw the full weight of his strength against the evils of force? The willingness to accept that challenge is one of the greatest satisfactions the human heart can know. We too can share that satisfaction. We are the beneficiaries of those who chose in the past to build our heritage with their convictions and their sacrifices. And we are the inheritors not only of the blessings they secured for us, but of the obligation to defend the spirit of liberty and civilization as they defended it and to maintain with our strength, our property, and even our lives the right to call ourselves free men - Americans!

General Pulaski - truly, we honor ourselves by honoring you!