

## 2014 MARKS BEGINNING OF WORLD WAR I CENTENNIAL

### *Polish American Congress Launches Interest in U.S. Postage Stamp*

COMMEMORATING CONTRIBUTIONS MADE BY THE POLISH AMERICAN SOLDIER  
AND AMERICA'S VOLUNTEERS TO GENERAL HALLER'S POLISH ARMY OF FRANCE



Oct. 4, 2013 – CHICAGO, IL – POLISH AMERICAN CONGRESS (PAC) COUNCIL OF NATIONAL DIRECTORS – Acting upon a proposal made by Steve Flor before the Committee on Cultural Affairs, a motion introduced by Tim Kuzma, and seconded by PAC VP of Membership Richard Mazella, unanimously passed appointing Mr. Flor to promote and assess public interest in issuing a U.S. postage stamp during the World War One Centennial in 2017 commemorating America's Volunteers to the Polish Army of France. Pictured here, presenting a possible rendition of the stamp (from left to right): PAC National Director from Western New York Steve Flor - PAC representative to the International Joint Committee on Camp Kosciuszko which oversees the Republic of Poland's National Military Cemetery of General Haller's Recruits in Niagara-On-The-Lake, Ontario, Canada; PAC National President Frank Spula - National President of the Polish National Alliance of North America; Honorary Consul of the Republic of Poland Debbie Majka - PAC VP of Cultural Affairs; PAC National Secretary Tim Kuzma - National President of the Polish Falcons of America; PAC National First Vice President Delphine Huneycutt - National President of the Polish Women's Alliance of America; and PAC National Director Camille Kopielski - National President of the American Council for Polish Culture.

“This is a part of Our Great American Heritage!” Flor noted in his proposal. “As the Centennial of America’s entrance into World War I approaches in 2017, as Americans, we should now pursue efforts with the U.S. Postal Service to issue a stamp commemorating the contributions made by the Polish American Soldier in WWI. Polish Americans served in all branches of the service, in countless divisions and units throughout the war. In a special way, the men of this unit, General Haller’s Army, symbolizes the values and valor exhibited by all of the 300,000 Polish Americans who served in World War I.”

#### - Brief History –

“Since the time General Count Casimir Pulaski, laid down his life for America’s freedom during the American Revolutionary War, and General Thaddeus Kosciuszko, fought valiantly in obtaining the *Blessings of Liberty* for our American Nation and returned to Poland to defend the first constitution in Europe, the *Flame of Liberty* has burned ardently in the hearts of the Polish People! The formation of General Haller’s Army in America is the culmination of 123 years of the dreams and aspirations held within the hearts of Polish Americans for the freedom of both our great nations.”

The ideals embodied in our nation’s founding principals, of the *Inalienable Rights of Man*, threatened the established monarchs of Europe. In 1795, the dream that Kosciuszko carried back to Poland, caused her to be wiped from the map of Europe. It would not be for another 123 years that Poland would again be free.

Although enslaved under foreign powers, the *Flame of Liberty* was not extinguished within the hearts of the Polish People. During the War of 1812, cries of *Jeszcze Polska Nie Zginieła* “Our Poland is Not Yet Lost” echoed the countryside as Dombrowski’s Legion marched to regain Poland’s freedom. Poles arose in insurrection in 1831 and 1847, and each time their defeats were more tragic, with the reprisals from their captors more severe.

150 years ago, our United States was engaged in a Great Civil War, fought for the proposition that “All Men are created equal,” and that “Government, Of the People, By the People, and For the People, should not perish from the Earth”. And so too, elsewhere on this Earth, the people of Poland rose in the January Insurrection of 1863 in *Freedom’s Name*. The insurrection was crushed. The leaders were executed. The freedom fighters rounded up, arrested, and deported to Siberia. Driven into exile, many of these veterans eventually found their way to *Freedom’s Shore* in America.

As such, the Founding Fathers of our nation's oldest Polish American fraternal organizations were veterans of the January Uprising of 1863. Many took part in forming the Polish National Alliance in 1880, the largest Polish American fraternal organization in North America. In 1887, 127 years ago, they formed the Polish Falcons of America. A Resolution in 2012 of the Council of National Directors of the Polish American Congress encourages all Polish Americans to commemorate this noble event appropriately and to pay honor to our forefathers who endured the struggle and laid the foundation of our present-day Polish American community in the United States.

The example set by these veterans inspired the youth of our growing Polish American immigrant community. At the outbreak of World War I, the Polish American community in the United States numbered about 3 million people. As the immigrant community grew, so grew the desire for a free Poland.

Although the United States government was neutral at the outbreak of the First World War, Polish America's largest organizations, including the Polish National Alliance of North America, the Polish Roman Catholic Union of America, the Polish Women's Alliance of America, and the Polish Falcons of America, declared themselves on the side of England and France.

Ultimately, through the recruitment efforts of these organizations, over 300,000 Polish Americans served in the armed forces of the United States during World War I.

It is estimated, that through the pre-war efforts of the Falcons alone, some 70,000 Polish Americans prepared for combat. According to statistics, within the first three months of the war, 38,000 Polish American volunteers joined the U.S. Army. In South Bend, Indiana, for example, during the first days of the war, out of 100 enlistees, 94 were Polish. The recruitment officer received a personal acknowledgement from President Woodrow Wilson.

As testament to the gallantry exhibited by the Polish American soldier on the field of battle, although Poles accounted for only four percent of the U.S. population in WWI, Polish Americans accounted for 12 percent of the casualties suffered by U. S. forces.

It is noted that the first American soldier who died in WWI was Polish, P. Wojtalewicz from Chicago, and the first American to be decorated the Grand Cross of Valor by France was an American of Polish descent, John Kuroski of Milwaukee, WI.

On April 1-4 of 1917, still before the U.S. entered the war, the Polish Falcons held a Special General Convention in Pittsburgh to receive an appeal from the *Champion of Liberty*\*, Ignacy Jan Paderewski. In his address, Paderewski called for a 100,000 strong Kosciuszko Army to fight along side the American Army. The idea was rejected by U.S. authorities as it was against policy to have a foreign army on U.S. soil. Two weeks later, on April 17, 1917, the United States declared war on Germany.



IN THE U.S. POSAGE STAMP SERIES HONORING “CHAMPIONS OF LIBERTY”, TWO POSTAGE STAMPS WERE ISSUED HONORING IGNACY PADERSEWSKI, in 1960, a 4 cent and an 8 cent version. Paderewski was instrumental in organizing America’s Volunteers to the Polish Army of France, and in influencing President Woodrow Wilson’s 14 Points that lead to the Rebirth of Poland at the armistice of WWI. By a unique Act of Congress, he was interred in Arlington National Cemetery. Upon Poland’s Freedom, the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic, in 1992, his body was brought to [Warsaw](#) and placed in [St. John's Archcathedral](#). His heart is encased in a bronze sculpture in the [National Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa](#) near [Doylestown, Pennsylvania](#).<sup>[12]</sup>

Six weeks later, on June 4, 1917, through the efforts of Paderewski and the Polish National Committee in Paris, French President Raymond Poincare decreed the formation of an autonomous Polish Army under French command. The training camp for the army, financed by France, was established by the Canadian Government at Fort George in Niagara-On-The-Lake, Ontario, Canada. As the recruits’ patron, in honor of values and ideals exemplified by the U.S. Army General of the American Revolutionary War, Hero of Two Continents, who commanded the struggle for democracy in Poland 120 years earlier, it became known as Camp Kosciuszko.

By August 1917, a Polish military commission arrived in the U.S. headed by Prince Stanislaw Poniatowski, successor to the Polish Crown established by the May 3<sup>rd</sup> Polish Constitution. On October 6, 1917, the United States government agreed to allow men from America, in-eligible for the U.S. draft, to enlist in the Polish Army of France. Rapidly, 48 recruitment stations were opened across the United States. Over 38,000 men volunteered. Niagara-On-The-Lake was overflowed and an auxiliary camp was established on U.S. soil at Fort Niagara.

Ultimately, 20,702 soldiers completed training and went on to fight along side American forces on the battlefields of France. Polish American soldiers fought bravely in World War I, and as a result of Woodrow Wilson’s 14 points, in 1918, after 123 years of foreign enslavement, on the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month, Poland emerged, reborn, a free and independent nation!



“Upon this centennial, the service of the Polish American Soldier enters into being an indelible part of Our Great American Heritage. The formation of General Haller’s Army is perhaps unprecedented in American history. One is hard pressed to think of another example in the history of our great American nation, where so many men from America formed so large a unit for service in a foreign army,” Flor recanted “to spread back to other nations of the world the principles of free government that they enjoyed in America, back to their fellow countrymen that they left behind.”

With the advent of the World War One Centennial upon us, I am sure that the postal service will consider issuing stamps for the more well known and popularized units of Americans in foreign service. Everyone has heard of the Lafayette Escadrille. Hollywood has vividly glamorized, and Americans pride a mystic of the role of the Lafayette Escadrille. Numerous movies about the American “Fly Boys” in the French Air Force have been made throughout the years. Their numbers counted 200. Twenty-six American authors, such as Ernst Hemmingway, in “The Adventures of a Young Man”, served and wrote profusely about their role of America’s volunteers to the Ambulance Corps of France and Italy. With American doctors, their numbers accounted for 2000 volunteers. Their roles are so well known, and have been so immortalized in films and novels, it would be hard pressed if the U.S. Postal Service didn’t remember them during the Centennial. The American volunteers to the Polish Army of France numbered 20,000!

“If the postal service does honor these men, we will have performed a great disservice to our heritage, if we failed to act, and did not bring to their attention, this less well known or glamorized unit of Americans that served equally as valiantly,” Flor continued “they may not issue a stamp for the Escadrille, or the Ambulance Corps, but if they do, then America should remember these men as well, the Polish Americans that history may have forgotten, America’s Volunteers to the Polish Army of France!



THE U.S. RECRUITMENT POSTER FORM WWI  
A POTENTIAL IMAGE FOR THE STAMP.

The work to gain passage of a postage stamp will be monumental. There are so many decedents and relatives of volunteers who served in the U.S. Armed Forces and Haller's Army in WWI. The men who volunteered came virtually from all across America, recruited from within Polish American parishes and communities, from lodges of the Polish Roman Catholic Union of America, the oldest Polish American fraternal organization in America, the Polish National Alliance, today's largest Polish American fraternal organization in North America, the Polish Women's Alliance of America, and the Polish Falcons of America, instrumental in the formation of the army. If these groups were able to recruit an army, so to should they be able to honor those men from amongst them who responded to their call, and work for the passage of this stamp. Help from the American Legion, formed by the returning U.S. veterans from WWI, the Polish Army Veterans Association of America, the group formed by the returning veterans of Haller's Army, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Polish Legion of American Veterans and the Polish Combatants Association, will be vital in gaining this recognition.

As a unifying force, the Polish American Congress is now spearheading this effort and reaching out to all Polish American groups and individuals to unite in this noble effort. Immediately, we need to assess the interest in this effort and set up a mechanism to gage, and hopefully pursue this interest. If there are those who are interested, and believe in their heritage, it will only be through your efforts that this will happen. We need to encourage every lodge, post, and nest, from across the U.S. to form subcommittees to work on their local levels to achieve this stamp. It will take a great effort. Any group or person who wants more information, or who wants to report interest, should immediately contact the Polish American Congress, in care of, and by Email to [stephenflor.pacwny@yahoo.com](mailto:stephenflor.pacwny@yahoo.com).

Passage of this stamp will not only honor this past generation's contribution to our Great American Heritage, but also serve as an incentive and inspiration to currant and future generations to uphold and live the ideals, values and principles that these men fought, died and lived for.



THE AMERICA CROSS, A POSSIBLE RENDITION OF THE STAMP, WAS AWARDED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF POLAND TO THE VOLUNTEERS FROM AMERICA.