

Polonia Bids Farewell to a Distinguished Polish American, Casimir Lenard, a Veteran of Three United States Wars and Long-Time Polish American Congress Activist



On Friday, December 7, 2007, Colonel Casimir Lenard, passed away in Washington, D.C. Colonel Lenard is well remembered as a veteran of three U.S. wars and his long-time efforts to promote the causes of the Polish American community and the people of Poland. Mr. Lenard was 89 years old.

He died on the afternoon and at the exact time the Polish American Congress, the organization with which he was closely associated for more than 30 years, was holding a recognition ceremony during which Lenard was awarded with the first-ever Polish American Congress Medal of Freedom.

"Poles around the world are in mourning over this terrible loss of someone who served in the trenches fighting for freedom around the world," said Frank Spula, president of the Polish American Congress.

"Cas and his late wife, Myra, both of whom served as directors of the Washington D.C. office of the Polish American Congress, worked tirelessly on behalf of our organization for the betterment of more than 10 million Americans of Polish heritage. We honor his memory as we do for Kosciuszko, Pulaski and all those who have honored the Polish motto 'For Your Freedom and Ours.'"

Cas Lenard was born on March 10, 1918 to a family of Polish immigrants in Chicago. At the age of ten he was enrolled in the Jesuit Gimnazjum in Chyrow, Poland, where he completed the eight-year course of study. Upon his return to the United States he attended Northwestern University, in Evanston, Illinois, where he received a Bachelor of Science degree in Economic History.

In reaction to the September 1, 1939, Nazi invasion of Poland he joined, as a private, the Chicago Black Horse Troop, 106th Cavalry, Illinois National Guard. In 1941 he was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant, Cavalry with duty at Fort Riley, Kansas. He requested and was assigned to the 1st U.S. Infantry Division "The Big Red One" scheduled to be the first U.S. Army unit to go overseas (on the H.M.S. Queen Mary, August 2, 1942).

As a member of the 1st Reconnaissance Troop, Lenard was engaged in overseas combat duty from 1942 to 1945. He participated in Operation Torch with the 1st Infantry Division as part of The Center Task Force amphibious landing on November 8, 1942 at Oran, North Africa; in Operation Husky, one of the largest combined operations of World War II the invasion of Sicily, on July 10, 1943 at Gela, Sicily; and, in the D-Day amphibious landing of the 1st U.S. Infantry Division on June 6, 1944 at Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. He also served as press and radio censor with the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in London, Paris, Spa (Belgium), and Luxembourg City.

After his discharge from Army active duty in 1945, he married Casimira (Myra) Lamot, and participated in his family restaurant business, known as "Lenard's Little Poland" in Chicago and "Lenard's Casino" Summer Resort in Beverly Shores, Indiana.

During the Korean War, he volunteered for active army duty, from August 1951 to 1957, under special assignment with the Headquarters Berlin Command and later at Headquarters Fifth U.S. Army in Chicago, Illinois.

In 1962, he was selected from more than 40 candidates nationwide, for a five-year tour of active duty with the General Staff at the Pentagon, where he became Chief of the Army Intelligence Reserve Office. Starting in 1967 he served one year in Vietnam, as Commanding Officer, Technical Intelligence Detachment, and later as director, U.S. Element Combined Military Interrogation Center in Saigon (disseminating studies and reports world-wide.) From September 1968 to June 30, 1970 he was a military intelligence research analyst at the U.S. Army Institute of Land Combat at Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

Col. Lenard retired after 30 years of distinguished military service, for which he was awarded the Silver Star Medal with Cluster, the Legion of Merit, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Bronze Star Medal with "V" for Valor, the French Croix de Guerre with Palm, seven overseas campaign ribbons (Algeria-French Morocco, Tunisia, Sicily, Normandy, Northern France, Ardennes-Alsace and Rhineland) and numerous other citations, the last being the Normandy Medal of the Jubilee of Liberty, presented by Virginia Congressman Thomas M. Davis III on Capitol Hill on May 15, 2001.

Upon retirement from the military, he became the first executive director of the Polish America Congress, Washington D.C. Office, from July 1970 to 1974.

After leaving the Polish American Congress Washington D.C. Office in 1974, he became Project Manager of the US Bicentennial Ethnic Racial Council, which organized nationwide conferences and coordinated local and national U.S. Bicentennial activities, providing many opportunities for Polonia participation.

From 1991 to 2000, as a volunteer and team member he worked with Myra on a large number of projects, such as:

- The administration of grants of The National Endowment for Democracy (NED), totaling several million dollars, through the Polish American Congress Charitable Foundation (PACCF), to support the budding Polish underground, Solidarity, and Citizens' Committees with urgently needed technical resources and finances.
- Playing a lead role with Myra in supporting Poland's membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).
- Reinvigorating national ethnic community leaders into the Central and East European Coalition (CEEC) to work harmoniously on common issues, precipitated by threats of Russian moves at re-establishing its sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe, most specifically US Foreign Assistance programs and NATO enlargement.
- Forming, in the final days of the campaign, the NATO Ratification Working Group, going beyond the ethnic organizations to include nationwide veterans, religious, and union groups to support the ratification in the US Senate of the accession of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic into NATO.

Col. Lenard also served on the Board of Directors of the American Red Cross, Baltimore Office, which is the seat of the International Tracing Center for uniting families separated by war; as well as membership as a board member of the Citizens Flag Alliance, a coalition of more than 140 nationwide organizations including 13 Polish American organizations, working for the passage of the Flag Protection Amendment to the US Constitution. He was well-known for his advocacy of close relations between Poles and Jews, the two groups that suffered the most under German Nazi rule.

For his work with the Polish American Community, the Polish American Congress, and dealing with improving Poland's position in the world, Colonel Lenard and his wife Myra, either jointly or as individuals, received, among others, the following awards.

- Commander's Cross of The Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland with Star, presented by Jerzy Kozminski, Poland's Ambassador to the USA (individually, on February 25, 2000);
- Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland, presented by Poland's Foreign Minister, Wladyslaw Bartoszewski (individually, on May 3, 1995);
- A Polish Cavalry saber with inscription "For Your Freedom and Ours From the Grateful Nation of Poland," presented by Poland's Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek during the NATO Summit in Washington DC (jointly, in April 1999);
- The Polish National Alliance's "Gold Cross Legion of Honor" (awarded jointly in December, 1998) by Mr. Edward J. Moskal, President of Polish National Alliance and the Polish American Congress;
- The Polish Apostolate "Pride of Polish American Community Award, presented by Adam Cardinal Maida, Archbishop of Detroit on August 29, 1999 (awarded jointly);
- The Founders Award (presented individually on November 22, 1992) by the PAC Washington Metropolitan Area Division; and
- The Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland by Lech Kaczynski, President of the Republic of Poland, presented by Poland's Defense Minister Mr. Aleksander Szczyglo on July 15, 2007.
- The Polish American Congress Medal of Freedom (awarded individually) on December 7, 2007.

"Cas' loyalty and devotion were, outside of his family, always first and foremost to the Polish American community here in the United States," Spula added. "He was a soldier in every sense of that word and his example of selfless dedication was inspiring for all who had the privilege of working with him. This organization, like many others, needs many Cas Lenards to succeed."

When he was awarded the Polish American Congress Medal of Freedom, in a ceremony that due to his illness he could not attend, Lenard issued the following greeting:

"Of all of my associations, my involvement with the Polish American Congress and time with the Washington office are some of the most memorable and rewarding. I know that my wonderful life partner, Myra, felt the same way. I accept this honor on behalf of both of us."

Myra Lenard died on May 1, 2000. They are survived by their three children: George, Antoinette and Elizabeth as well as their grandson Jeffrey Lenard a member of the Washington D.C. Fire Department.

The viewing was held on Friday, December 14, 2007, from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm at Murphy Funeral Home in Arlington, VA.

Col. Lenard will be buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery on February 14, 2008. A Mass of Christian Burial will precede the funeral at the Ft. Myer Chapel at 10:15 a.m.