

Grunwald in Poland from I

yelled, whacking an errant knight with the flat of his sword.

The original battle on July 15, 1410, helped speed the decline of the mainly-German Order of the Teutonic Knights, warrior-monks who wielded power along the Baltic coast from the 13th century.

Victory fuelled the rise of a powerful Polish-Lithuanian united state which lasted four centuries, and the battle enjoys iconic status in both nations today.

Jarosław Struczyński, who acts as the Teutonic Knights' Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen, was booed by the crowd as he rode sneering onto the field.

"I figured someone had to play him," said Struczyński ahead of the battle.

Von Jungingen died in the battle, so Struczyński, one of the founders of the reenactment, has had to hit the deck more than a dozen times.

What started as a low-key gathering of Polish Grunwald fans in the early 1990s has spiralled into an ultra-authentic event which organisers say is Europe's largest knightly reenactment.

Along with participants playing peasant levies and camp-followers -- who take the total number to 6,000 -- the knights spend a week camping out living history-style.

The event draws participants from across the region, with Poles and Lithuanians fighting alongside Ukrainians, Russians and Belarussians, as well as re-enactors from France, Germany, Italy, Belgium and Britain.

Sweltering in his armour was Russian re-enactor Dmitry, dressed as a warrior from the western Russian city of Smolensk, which sent units to fight the Teutonic Knights 600. "This gear weighs 30 kilos (66 pounds)," he said.

The hordes of tourists cheered on their armoured heroes Saturday.

"I've been to the battlefield before to see the monument to Grunwald, but seeing the reenactment for the first time brings the original event to life. I know the history of Grunwald and I've read books about it, but this feels like the real thing," said Józef Pecka, 71, from Poznań in western Poland.

The memory of Grunwald helped keep the dream of freedom alive when the Polish-Lithuanian state was wiped out at the end of the 18th century. The two only reemerged as independent nations after World War I.

"Grunwald means a lot to me, just like any Polish patriot," said Pecka. □

Grunwald in NYC from I

the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Grunwald had no plans to do so, it went smoothly. So far this writer only has heard regret expressed concerning two elements of the program. First, last minute technical difficulties prevented the world premiere of "Szarze" ("The Charge"), powerful music prepared especially for the 17 July event by a rising star among young Polish composers, Łukasz Pieprzyk. Second, though invited to attend, NO official of the Consulate General of the Republic of Lithuania attended the event.

In Poland, Wysocki sought advice on how best to marshal: music, painting, sculpture, poetry, period actors, and new perspectives by historians to show the contemporary relevance and enduring consequences of the victory of King Władysław II Jagiełło of Poland-Lithuania over the army of the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights, Ulrich von Jungingen. What Wysocki learned about new ways to commemorate the Battle of Grunwald also applies to other important events in Poland's history that had a strong impact on our civilization which our fellow Americans should understand.

Some of the authorities with whom Wysocki met last month in Poland include: Vitomila Wolk-Jeziarska, who is chair of the Warsaw Committee of Katyń Families; Jerzy Robert Nowak, who just

finished his new book "History of Poland"; Piotr Żuchowski, Secretary of Poland's Ministry of Culture; Andrzej Zawistowski, who is head of the Historical Education Division of Poland's Institute of National Remembrance (IPN); and Jolanta Zaleczny, who earned a Ph.D. in history and who works in the Special Projects Division of Poland's Museum of Independence.

Most importantly, the Assistant Director of Poland's National Museum in Warsaw, Poland's flagship public art museum, Kazimierz Mazan took prompt action and authorized the preparation of a high definition digital copy of Jan Matejko's monumental history painting, the "Battle of Grunwald", which illustrated the multi-media commemoration on 17 July.

Wysocki also met with a group of patriotic Polish artists. They want to publicize the contributions of Poland and the Poles to our civilization with particular emphasis on the role of Poles in promoting human rights and fair play for all countries, whether large, small, or medium size states like Poland with a large sense of vocation, in international politics. A contemporary Polish sculptor known for his masterful compositions, Marek Jerzy Nowakowski and Wysocki will develop plans for using sculpture in future commemorations.

The 17 July commemoration began promptly at 5 p.m. With period music playing, a member of the Project Grunwald: Victory for Humanity committee, Mrs. Margaret Stanco-McGrath and her Ladies (Sarah Hill-Gyiraszi, Monica Sońnica, Ewa Strzałkowski, and Evelina Sudol) who were elegantly dressed in early fifteenth century courtly costumes, which were sponsored by the McGrath family, passed out brochures, which described the Battle of Grunwald, to the audience.

The terrace in front of Stanisław Kazimierz Ostrowski's magnificent equestrian statue of King Władysław II Jagiełło, which stands at the eastern shore of Turtle Pond and just west of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, served as the stage for the commemoration. The improvised stage was decorated with shields showing the combatants' coats-of arms, and the huge reproduction of Matejko's canvas. Student volunteers and a member of the committee, Mr. Piotr Nawrot, put on period Polish knights' armour and wielded swords, lances, and axes. Two student volunteers in hussar armour stood Honor Guard.

Next, the ladies and gentlemen of the Aria Chorus #303 of the Polish Singers Alliance of America, based in Wallington, NJ performed two ancient knights' songs by Mikołaj Gomolka. The president of the Aria Chorus is Jadwiga Chudy. Dr. Stanisław Śliwowski, a member of the Project Grunwald: Victory for Humanity committee sponsored bus transportation to and from the event for the Aria Chorus which received enthusiastic applause from the audience. Alicja Rusewicz Pagórek, who majored in music at Zielona Góra University, is director of the Aria Chorus. This year, at the 49th International Convention of the Polish Singers Alliance of America's tri-annual contest, the Aria Chorus won top honors and returned from Buffalo with the legendary silver cup, the Cardinal Hlond Trophy, which was first awarded in 1934.

Wysocki then came to the microphone to welcome participants and our special guest, Consul Małgorzata Kosik of the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland. Next, Wysocki underlined the fact that all of us at the commemoration, and especially members of the organizing committee, are participating as individuals and NOT as representatives of the organizations of which they are members. This point is important to remember because several members of Project Grunwald: Victory for Humanity, like Andrzej Burghardt, Artur Kowalski, Krzysztof Nowak, Dr. Stanisław Śliwowski, and John Sołowiej are leaders of Polish American organizations, and

Glenn Urbanas, a Lithuanian American is Secretary of La Societe des Amis de Kościuszko.

Wysocki continued by observing that what unites all participants is their commitment to democratic values and to the defense of individual rights through limited government -- safeguards for liberty first put into practice by Jagiellonian Poland and now part of the American political tradition. Moreover, these values must be protected by our vigilance in an increasingly dangerous world. Commemorations are all about reaffirming our key principles through new and exciting media, and this energizes us to put our principles into practice with power to make them prevail. This is how commemorations, like the one today, strengthen a moral and intellectual movement like ours for Poland, and for those values and practices that we trace back to Jagiellonian Poland that today continue to define our civilization.

The next speaker, Jerzy Prus came to the United States as part of the Second (or Solidarity Era) Great Emigration, and he delivered the keynote speech. He is a former Executive Director of the Józef Piłsudski Institute of America in New York City. Participants at the 17 July event included the vice-president of the Piłsudski Institute, Dr. Marek Zieliński, and a member of that organization's Board of Directors, Krzysztof Langowski. Several years ago Prus organized the Klub Jagiełłoński (KJ) discussion group which holds monthly meetings at Saint Casimir's Roman Catholic Church in Newark, NJ. Rev. Andrzej Ostaszewski is Chaplain of the KJ.

The key point of Prus's speech is that the contemporary relevance of the Battle of Grunwald for today's Polish leadership, whom Prus finds woefully lacking in vision, is that just as King Władysław II Jagiełło defeated the most powerful military force in early modern Europe, the Teutonic Knights, by forming coalitions and alliances with neighboring states, so Poland today needs to set up an East Central European organization for common defense. While it is true that United States policy has tried, acting through NATO, to attenuate the anti-Polish sentiments of both Russia and Germany, very recent developments make us question the value of NATO as a deterrent. Just as the leaders of Poland should try to forge strong links with neighboring countries that lie between Germany and Russia, so must we in America work with Americans of East Central European heritage to build a strong lobby for our kin countries on Capitol Hill.

King Władysław II Jagiełło organized victory against the aggression of the Teutonic Knights by building a strong coalition of allies and his victory at Grunwald changed the balance of power in North-East Europe. This fact is closely linked with the juridical, intellectual, and moral victory of Poland at the Council of Constanz (1414-1417). Paweł Włodkowić (Paulus Vladimiri) was a particularly persuasive canon lawyer, but the redressment of power in Poland's favor, after the Teutonic Knights were finished as a serious fighting force, helps to explain why the Council thoroughly accepted Włodkowić's two principal positions. First, henceforth a war will not be considered by Christendom to be a just war only because of the unilateral declaration of a sovereign. Włodkowić persuaded the Council that several wise men must review the facts and either agree, or disagree that the war is in fact just. Second, the Council registered its preference for the Polish method of conversion through persuasion, the way the Poles converted the Lithuanians, rather than conversion at the point of a sword as practiced by the Teutonic Knights. The Council's acceptance of Włodkowić's intellectual and moral arguments advanced the cause of respect

for human rights in early modern Europe, and in this sense Grunwald was a victory for humanity. Moreover, without the triumph of Polish power at Grunwald, it is unlikely that Polish principles would have prevailed at Constanz. Power and principle still go hand-in-hand, this is the lesson of Grunwald for our times, and this is why today a strong Poland is vital for a stable and just East Central Europe.

Prus also observed that this year is the 400th anniversary of the Polish victory over the Muscovites at the Battle of Kluszyń. Russian public opinion is still being manipulated by the Kremlin to regard Poles as unrepentant imperialists. Prus cited the anti-Polish film "1612" as an example of this tendency in Russia. Meanwhile, and especially since the disaster at Smolensk Military Airfield on 10 April 2010, the Polish Government has been doing all it can to abate anti-Russian and anti-Kremlin sentiments in Polish public opinion. Yet there is no spirit of reciprocity in Russia's relations toward Poland, according to the Kremlin, Poles are a gang of imperialists who merit surveillance. The plain just west of Moscow, where Kluszyń, Smolensk, and Katyń are all located is a place of spectacular Polish victories and defeats. Polish victories over the Muscovites in 1610 at Kluszyń and in 1812 at Smolensk were followed by the mass murder of Polish officers at Katyń Forest in 1940 that was ordered by the leaders of Stalin's Soviet Union and by this year's 10 April disaster at Smolensk Military Airfield.

The keynote speaker concluded by observing that we must believe that we can prevail and then we will succeed in helping to build a strong Poland allied to the United States and the United Kingdom in a self-confident and secure East Central Europe. We must take forceful political action to achieve this goal by working with our fellow Americans whose kin countries are in East Central Europe. The key lesson of Grunwald for our times is that Poland and Polonia must build coalitions to put power behind high-minded Polish principles.

At the event, this writer gave a summary in English of the keynote speech which Prus delivered in Polish and added the following observation. The question mark which Prus mentioned in his talk, regarding the commitment of the United States to defend Poland from both German and Russian ambitions, is in fact a very large question mark. Following the Kremlin's war games of October 2009, which were designed to intimidate Poland and Lithuania, President Barack Hussein Obama asked, at a NATO Ministerial Conference shortly after the war games played by the Russian Federation last October, what contingency plans does NATO have to defend Poland and the Baltic States?

None was the response received by President Obama, who then ordered the drafting of contingency plans for NATO to defend Poland if Poland is attacked. Even if these contingency plans are ever drafted, there is no firm guarantee that they will in fact be put into practice if Poland is attacked from the East. Article V of NATO boldly calls an attack against one NATO country an attack on all countries that have acceded to NATO, but nothing in the Treaty that created NATO, or North Atlantic Treaty Organization, requires one or more NATO countries to come with armed force to the aid of a NATO country that was attacked. There is a big difference between making a declaration and taking action. American Polonia urgently needs to work with our fellow Americans whose kin countries are in East Central Europe to persuade American political decision-makers that a strong and independent East Central Europe is in the national interest of the United States. NATO does not guarantee that the United States will come to Poland's aid with armed force in the event that Poland is attacked. □