

**Plaque Dedication Commemorating Merian Cooper - Welcoming
Remarks
Ambassador Stephen D. Mull
October 24, 2014**

Thank you for inviting me to join you today as we dedicate a plaque to commemorate the extraordinary life of Merian C. Cooper.

I would like to thank Grzegorz Popielarz and the Bemowo Local Council for inviting me to this event honoring an American who distinguished himself through his service both to the United States and to Poland.

It's a privilege to be in the presence of so many distinguished Polish military and government officials: Krzysztof Strzałkowski Mayor of the Bemowo District, His Excellency Józef Guzdek - Field Bishop of the Polish Army, General Wiesław Grudziński - Chief of the Warsaw Garrison and other representatives of the Polish army and the Polish church.

I am especially pleased to be able to greet Małgorzata Pierzchalska and Wojciech Słomczyński, the grandchildren of Merian Cooper. It is an honor to have you with us today.

The story of Merian Cooper's life reads like a novel, but his friends and admirers in Poland know it's all true. He was an aviator and a war hero. He was a renowned screenwriter, film producer, and director, creating Hollywood classics including *King Kong*.

We are here today, however, because Merian Cooper was a man who put his life on the line for what he believed, because he was a man who fought for democracy and freedom when it faced a threat from Soviet aggression.

In doing so, he followed in the footsteps of his great-great-grandfather, Colonel John Cooper, who had fought in the American Revolution alongside his close friend, Polish soldier and "father of the American cavalry" Kazimierz Pułaski .

Merian Cooper loved the United States and he loved Poland. He demonstrated this devotion through selfless service, exceptional bravery, and bold leadership.

Merian Cooper served in the U.S. Air Force in both World Wars, rising to the rank of Brigadier General. On a mission during WWI, his plane was shot down. He was captured and became a prisoner of war. This did not deter him, however, from volunteering to fight for Poland just a few years later during the Poland-Soviet War.

Merian Cooper founded the famous Kościuszko Squadron, comprised of American pilots who came to Poland's defense.

Once again, Merion Cooper put himself in harm's way. Once again, his plane was shot down in combat. This time, he spent nine months in a Soviet prisoner of war camp.

Lieutenant Colonel Cooper, and the Squadron's commander, Colonel Cedric E. Fauntleroy, were later awarded Poland's highest military decoration: *The Virtuti Militari*.

The Kościuszko Squadron distinguished itself during the war. Its pilots participated in several key battles during the war, including the defense of Lwow, the Battle of Komarow, and most importantly, the Battle of Warsaw. It was here that the Polish Army, on the brink of defeat, showed extraordinary tenacity and pushed the Red Army back East. This victory ensured that Poland would remain independent in the interwar years.

The very name of the Kościuszko Squadron invokes the long tradition of mutual U.S.-Polish support that stretches back to the very beginning of the United States, when Kościuszko came to America to fight "for your freedom and ours."

The tradition continued with And it continues today with American aircraft and tanks and their crews and paratroopers who have been serving in Poland since the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis, and will continue to be here as long as necessary, to show the world that, as President Obama said in Warsaw in June, Poland does not stand alone.

The plaque we are unveiling today honors the bravery, dedication, and sacrifice of Merian Cooper. May the example of his life continue to inspire us -- to deepen the friendship between Poland and the United States and to strengthen our commitment to defend one another.