

## Plane Crash Claims Polish Solidarity Hero who loved San Francisco

By: **Christopher A. Kerosky**

Honorary Consul for the Republic of Poland in San Francisco

Among those who died in the tragic crash of the Polish Presidential plane last weekend was a Polish hero of the Solidarity period who loved San Francisco.

Janusz Krupski was a leading Minister in the Polish government at the time of the accident. He was part of the delegation to Russia, to honor the victims of the Katyn massacre on the occasion of its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Minister Krupski had been a very active member of the Solidarity movement in 1980 and 1981. Like many leaders of Solidarity, he was ordered arrested by the Polish secret police when martial law was declared. Mr. Krupski went underground, eluding the Communist authorities for several years. He continued to publish and work within the Solidarity underground while he hid from the ubiquitous Polish militia. Mr. Krupski was the very last Solidarity activist in hiding that the Communist government found. They imprisoned him, but he was released sometime later after an amnesty was announced.

When the first post-war democratic government took power in Poland in 1989, Mr. Krupski was appointed to serve his national government, and he has been a high-ranking official in several Polish national governments over the last 20 years.

In 2007, the Minister came to San Francisco, heading a delegation to meet with civic leaders and the Polish community here. In a ceremony at the Polish House in the Mission District, Minister Krupski presented medals from the Polish government to many Polish veterans of World War II, honoring their service in the Polish and Allied armies in the fight against the Nazis. He spoke admiringly of these veterans devotion to a free Poland, a devotion he himself exhibited throughout his adult life.

After that ceremony in 2007, I spent several hours with the Minister and his deputy, Dr. Janusz Ciechanowski, giving them a tour of San Francisco. Afterwards, I spent another hour talking to them at their hotel about the Minister's incredible past. When we finished, Minister Krupski told me that he felt San Francisco was one of the most beautiful cities he had visited in all his travels. We made plans for his return trip, which sadly never occurred.

Poland's history is one of invasions by its neighbors, brutal occupations and devastating wars; in every case, it has been a cause for Polish national unity and courage. Poland had the largest underground army in world history during World War II. Inspired by Pope John Paul II, the Polish people 30 years ago started Solidarity, the first non-communist union behind the Iron Curtain which first threatened and then helped topple the Communist regime imposed by the Soviets. Now, the Poles confront another challenge after this tragic accident has claimed the lives of its President, First Lady and many of its political and military leaders, including Minister Krupski.

However, it is because of the indomitable spirit of Poles like Janusz Krupski that the country has endured throughout its difficult history. Poland is now one of the most stable democracies in Eastern Europe, with a growing economy, a free press and a strong alliance with the West. I have no doubt that Poland will come through this challenge stronger than ever. □

## Fog - Katyn air crash from 4

procedures concerning the flight of the presidential plane to Smolensk were followed.

Fairly or unfairly, Minister of Defence Bogdan Klich, a doctor of psychiatry, has been singled out as the key figure responsible not only for the crisis in the system of national defence but also for the strategy in the investigation which is now under Russian control. It is a Russian commission that will issue the final report of the catastrophe.

The Chief Military Prosecutor's Office and General Public Prosecutor's Office have issued a statement in which they point out four initial directions from which the investigation will follow: the crew's errors, technical failure, a third party's action (assassination or pressure from the cabin), poor organization and flight protection. In the meantime, Polish investigators have received satellite pictures of the catastrophe site from the U.S. Despite the fact that more than two weeks have passed since the accident, investigators still don't know the exact time of the crash.

An embarrassing criticism from the victims' families has been leveled against the Polish government. According to the relatives, the government is doing little or nothing in order to expose the true nature of what really happened in Smolensk.

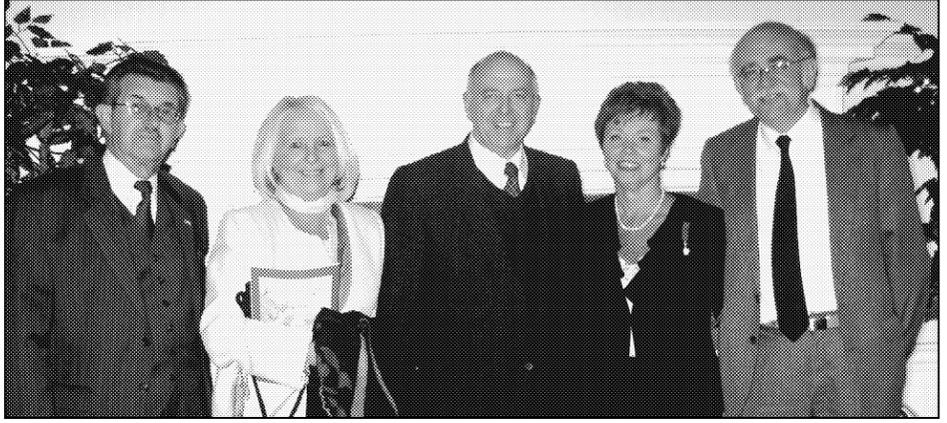
Prime Minister Donald Tusk appealed to MPs and journalists to restrain from making speculations or delving into conspiracy theories concerning the catastrophe. Mr. Tusk also warned against using the disaster for political gain in the upcoming presidential campaign.

In late April, the Huffington Post revealed that the ongoing investigation might be hampered because of political pressure being exerted due to unusual circumstances - the tragic death of the president and the whole range of top military officials on the territory of a foreign country. If the investigation concludes that a Russian flight controller's error or the faultiness of the navigation equipment at the Smolensk military airport is the main cause of the crash, it will almost certainly harm Polish-Russian relations.

Immediately following the catastrophe, however, the Polish mainstream media noted a rush of warm feelings from Russians and an outpouring of sympathy and compassion from Russian leaders. "This is of course first and foremost Poland's tragedy and that of the Polish people, but it is also our tragedy. We mourn with you," Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said in an interview with Polish television. It is possible that the tragedy can have a positive impact on the strained, emotionally charged Polish-Russian relationship. Some newspapers have pointed out that this process may even lead to reconciliation between the two countries after the centuries of historical animosity. The tragedy has already opened a broader dialogue about the 1940 Katyń massacre, first with the unprecedented showing of Andrzej Wajda's film Katyń on Russian state television, to a reported three million viewers. This was followed by the publishing of documents on the Katyń massacre on 28 April, which had previously only been available at the request of specialised researchers. For years, the Polish government pressed Russia to release the files to the public. Now they have been published in full online. According to the BBC, this was at the direct request of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.

The wartime murder of 22,000 Polish officers and intellectual elite by the Soviet secret service was a continuously open wound and the constant denial of Soviet responsibility by the Russian authorities held Polish society in a psychological state of tension, frightened of the true

## ACPC Honors Piasecki from 4



L. - Joseph and Marti Zazyczny, Janusz Romański, Debbie Majka, Peter Obst

Piasecki. These were: Lt. Col. Paul Riegert USMC who praised Piasecki's advanced helicopter designs in military application; Mike Walsh from the Office of the Secretary of Defense; Col. Andrzej Kopacki, Assistant Military Attaché at the Polish Embassy; Prof. Marek Konarzewski, Minister Counselor for Science and Technology at the Polish Embassy, and Janusz Zastocki, Honorary President of Polonia Technica, the Polish engineers' association in the United States. Prof. Konarzewski's reference to the indomitable Polish spirit, evident both in cases of disaster, such as the recent airplane crash, and in the development of new inventions to benefit mankind, drew spontaneous applause from listeners. In conclusion Fred Piasecki thanked the guests for their participation and members of the audience gradually started for home.

As they left, guests were able to take home an event journal produced by Peter Obst, which included a detailed biography of Frank N. Piasecki and many interesting photographs. So ended a very memorable banquet that capped the ceremonies devoted to honoring the aviation pioneer. This marker is only the twelfth of those commemorating Polish-American contributions to the history of the Keystone State, interspersed among the two-thousand-plus that have been placed to-date along the roadways. Many more markers could still be created to recognize the impact that Polish immigrants and their children have had on this major industrial state. Those who are interested in the Pennsylvania Marker Program should look at the PHMC website: [http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/pennsylvania\\_historical\\_marker\\_program/](http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/pennsylvania_historical_marker_program/)

The Polish Heritage Society of Philadelphia would like to express its gratitude to all persons who participated in organizing the event or purchased ads in the program, the income from which will be distributed to deserving students of Polish background as part of the Frank N. Piasecki Scholarship. We would also like to convey our special appreciation to the Piasecki Family, and to Piasecki Aircraft Corporation, especially John Piasecki, President and CEO, for being the main sponsor of the marker and the street ceremony for which he provided not only funds but his personal time and attention. In addition we acknowledge Dr. Janusz Romański, VP of Polonia Technica, for his assistance in publicizing the event and in fundraising for the Piasecki Scholarship Fund. □

# POLAM FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

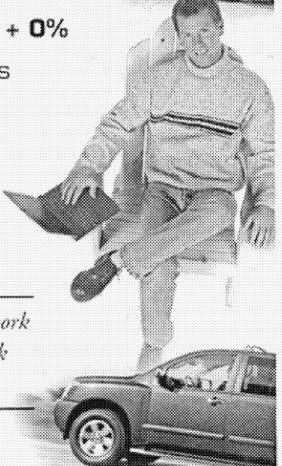
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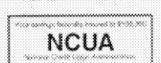





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intentions of Russian leaders.

The way this disaster will affect relations between both countries will profoundly depend on how Russia conducts the investigation into the tragedy. The ultimate reports surrounding the circumstances of the crash and the few seconds beforehand, if accurate, would certainly help to clarify all doubts concerning this event. □