

## **Plane Crash Claims Polish Solidarity Hero Who Loved 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 Katyń 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.

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