



Powinność, nie zdrada

ARTYKUŁ

## Duty, not treason

HISTORICAL ERA

(1980-1990) Epoka Solidarności

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The Soviet propaganda branded him “a traitor”, the Soviet martial court of the Polish People’s Republic sentenced him to die; today, in a PR style, some try to sell him as “an atomic spy”; prof. Zbigniew Brzeziński, one of the first to learn of David’s fight against Goliath, described him as “the first Polish officer in NATO”. On November 7, 1981, the CIA evacuated Colonel Ryszard Kukliński from the Polish People’s Republic.

He was intelligent, observant and incredibly hard-working. Despite the fact he was part of the underground resistance organisation “Sword and Plough” during the German occupation, which the communist military internal services knew about, he quickly advanced in the structures of the Polish People’s Army.



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**Portrait of Colonel Ryszard Kukliński. Digital copies of the photography and other documentation connected with Col. Ryszard Kukliński were donated to the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance by the American government agency — CIA. Author unknown (photo from the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance)**

### **One of the most skilled, according to the Soviets**

Kukliński ended up at the General Command of the Polish Army, became the liaison officer between the Polish

command and the Soviet army, and got the recognition of the Soviet commanders. He was the most skilled Polish staff officer in their eyes.

The entirety of the NATO nuclear operation was to focus on the territory of the Polish People's Republic, between the Oder and Vistula rivers.

In 1973, during military exercises of the Warsaw Pact in East Germany, Kukliński gained the trust of the USSR's minister of defence, Denis Ustinov. He did so by doing well in the drills preparing for a nuclear attack of the Warsaw Pact countries on NATO member states. During that time, Kukliński had already been providing the Americans the most valuable, top secret military files.

Why did an intelligent man, an officer of the Polish People's Army, praised by Soviet generals, wage a one-man war against the system which was at the height of its power during the rules of Brezhnev?



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**Wedding photo of Ryszard Kukliński and Joanna (Hanka) Kuklińska, maiden name Christ. Author unknown. 1952 (photo from the archives of the Institute**

## A difficult choice?

Colonel Kukliński knew and understood the “war doctrine of the Warsaw Pact” (a document known to a very small group of people). Operational tasks of the Polish People’s Army, under the Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact, assumed the use of Polish troops in the first line in an event of an armed conflict. NATO, knowing the Soviet Army’s potential, understood that after repelling the first echelon of Warsaw Pact troops, the second, Soviet advance would be impossible to defend against. In such a case, the West would respond with a nuclear strike, which would cause the divisions of the first echelon to suffer the loss of up to 50% of its personnel. The entirety of the NATO nuclear operation was to focus on the territory of the Polish People’s Republic, between the Oder and Vistula rivers.



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**Summit of the Warsaw Pact leaders at the main headquarters in Moscow. Col. Ryszard Kukliński assists the defence minister of the Soviet Union, Marshal Dmitry Ustinov, during the signing of documents. Author unknown. Moscow, 1979 (photo from the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance)**



**Generals of the Polish Army during the summit of Warsaw Pact leaders at the main headquarters in Moscow, in 1979. Colonel Ryszard Kukliński assists General Wojciech Jaruzelski during the signing of documents. Author unknown. Moscow, 1979 (photo from the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance)**

What was then the choice facing the Polish officer, raised in a spirit of independence, who learned and understood the consequences of the planned events? Would the Soviet generals, also the ones in Polish uniforms, be capable of protecting the Polish nation from the impending doom, desired by many hard-headed Moscow commanders?

Many aspects of Jack Strong's story are still shrouded in secrecy. This is also true regarding the evacuation of the Kukliński family from the Polish People's Republic.

In 1986, U.S. president Ronald Reagan and secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, met in Reykjavik to try and initiate a thaw in bilateral relations. The latter, initially hesitant

towards the negotiations, changed his mind when he saw the documents confirming NATO's knowledge on the locations of the most important Soviet command shelters in case of an outbreak of the Third World War. Then, Gorbachev realised he needed to take care of his own safety and joined the talks with more openness. The documents, which forced the Soviets to begin negotiations on the eradication of nuclear arsenals, had been provided to the Americans by Jack Strong — the soldier of the Republic of Poland, Col. Ryszard Kukliński.

## **Martial law plans**

Kukliński also provided the Americans with the communist's plans for introducing martial law in the Polish People's Republic, meaning the armed pacification of the political opposition. The trail found by the counterintelligence services of the Polish People's Republic in the Vatican would inevitably lead them to Col. Kukliński. The race for his life had begun. The CIA prepared a plan for the evacuation of Kukliński, but it did not include his family. Nevertheless, Kukliński and his wife Joanna, whom he told about his double-life, decided that the Americans needed to try and get the entire family out, including their two sons: Bogdan and Waldemar.



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**Fragment of the map (territory of the Polish People's Republic) presenting the situation on the front after more than a dozen days since the beginning of World War Three. Red nuclear mushroom clouds mark the planned strikes of the Warsaw Pact, while the blue clouds mark NATO retaliation. (Photo from the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance)**



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**Plan of an offensive coastal operation. Operational plans of the Warsaw Pact were donated to the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance by the Central Military Archives in Rembertów (photo from the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance)**

Many aspects of Jack Strong's story are still shrouded in secrecy. This is also true regarding the evacuation of the Kukliński family from the Polish People's Republic. The colonel himself gave two versions of the escape. According to one of them, the family was smuggled into an American military base in West Berlin, hidden inside sealed crates with diplomatic correspondence. The second version paints the evacuation as a large operation, involving dozens of people. In a special CIA apartment in Warsaw, Kukliński was to adopt the identity of an English gentleman. Wearing make-up and a disguise, he managed to fly away to London. He reconnected with his family in West Germany, as his wife and sons were taken there with American diplomatic passports.

Ryszard Kukliński passed away on June 19, 2004. Thanks to, among others, the then president of Warsaw, Lech Kaczyński, the urn with Kukliński's ashes was buried at the Powązki Military Cemetery, at the Alley of Merit.

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