



Frank and his wife, Sandra, at Frank's Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum exhibit. Note the case holding Frank's actual flight suit he wore the day he escaped and a replica of the MiG 15 BIS that Frank flew out from behind the iron curtain.

# Escape to the West

## EYC Member is National Hero in Poland

by Erika Jarecki, edited by P/C John Ashby

Last summer, while sitting comfortably at the bar, I noticed that there were four or five strangers, obviously part of a film crew, shooting video in the grillroom. The next thing I know, Frank Jarecki sits down next to me and says "talk to me!" Today I'm wondering if I've made my film debut in a Polish TV documentary partially shot right here in our Clubhouse.

Escape to the West....this is the Frank Jarecki's story

In early 1953, with a smoldering "Cold War" in Europe and a very hot Korean War raging in Asia, USAF Intelligence was scouring the world trying to obtain information on modern Soviet aircraft. Suddenly, on March 5, 1953, news of two startling events flashed around the globe. The Soviet dictator, Joseph Stalin, was dead and a young Polish Air Force pilot had escaped to the Danish island of Bornholm in a Russian-built MiG jet fighter.

Lt. Franciszek Jarecki assigned to the 28th Fighter Squadron stationed at the Polish Air Force Base at Slupsk, located just west of Danzig near the Baltic Sea, had taken off in a MiG-15 BIS (first version of the MiG-17), Aircraft No. 731, and headed to the West. He eluded all pursuit and landed on a small cow pasture with the aircraft intact. It was an intelligence prize of enormous value to the Free World...especially the USAF.

In 1939 Poland was a divided country occupied by Germany in the west and Russia in the east. Jarecki had lost his father, an officer in the Polish Army, at a very early age to the Russians. His mother Valerie Jarecki worked long hours in a Russian Hospital. Jarecki remembers, "During the summer, I went to a Russian School. We were playing outside one day when all of a sudden they called everybody to get together and took us to the

railway station. I was told I was returning to my home in Stanislawow. When I got off the train I just stood there dumfounded watching German planes bomb the railroad station. Suddenly some man picked me up and dragged me safely to a house far away from the station. That was the beginning of the German invasion of the Eastern (Russian) part of Poland on September 1, 1939, the beginning of the Second World War."

Frank enrolled in Glider school at the age of fifteen. Although the required age was sixteen, Frank, determined to fly, lied about his age. He finished out his high school career focusing on mechanics in Bytom, where an instructor took notice of his excellent grades and flying talents. He confided in Frank that to make his dreams of flying come true he should remain a loyal friend to "the Party." So Frank joined the Communist Polish Youth

Alliance where he formed his own local chapter, the Friends of the Soviet Union..."the things you do, if you want to fly," remembers Frank.

Frank's hard work paid off in 1950 when he enlisted in the Air Force Academy in Deblin, forging his mother's name on the consent slip. Out of 10,000 applicants, Frank was one of the lucky 150 accepted in the Academy. However, after the government's initial acceptance, the men are put through a series of tests, not just for common knowledge or knowledge of mechanics, but also their knowledge of Communism. The men who passed this test were sent one by one into a tribunal. The tribunal judges could not see through Frank's web of lies. They did not detect his bitterness being the son of a slain Polish Army officer, that he was a year younger than he had claimed, or that he had



**Frank on Art Linkletter's show. It looks like he's really having fun, but he has no idea what's going on because he couldn't speak any English yet.**

relatives living in the United States. If they had known any one of these facts, Frank never would have become a pilot for the Royal Polish Air Force.

Frank kept up his political studies and flying came naturally to him. He distinguished himself becoming number one in his class of 100 men. On the day of his graduation, Frank was summoned to General Ivan Turkiel. The Russian was "concerned" about Frank not joining the Communist Party. In the most polite way possible the General hinted that Frank should either join the Party or sacrifice his wings. That day, April 6th, 1952, Frank became a member of the Communist Party and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant.



**President Eisenhower signing Frank's "Special Congressional Citizenship" document... Note the two future Presidents as onlookers, John Kennedy and Gerald Ford.**

Only the top dozen pilots with the best grades were sent to Warsaw, where the first Regiment was located. Frank was so highly commended for his handling of the Old MIG 15's that the wing commander erected a sign at the entrance to regimental headquarters stating, "PILOTS! FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF LT. JARECKI." And Frank was happy, as long as "The Party" left him alone.

It was in June 1952 that Frank got a taste of what he was in for. He was told to spy on his friends and fellow officers. He was to meet every week and report any wrong doing he observed, such as slandering of the Communist Party or any ideas of escape. And if Frank should not cooperate or should betray "The Party", he would be sentenced to death. But since Frank had been schooled in what mannerisms to look for in those planning to escape, it kept him safe while planning his own escape. Frank knew exactly what "NOT" to do.

Frank's first spying appointment was to meet a man in a park in Warsaw where he was to slip him his written report. Frank showed up at the park, spotted his contact man, but never approached him and never handed him any report. Frank heard no more of that incident for months.

In September, Frank was invited to fly the latest MIG-15 BIS in Slipsk, however in order to do so he had to get the signatures of fourteen officers, one of these being the man Frank was to have given his spying report to! The officer refused to sign Frank's transfer papers until he received his report. Frank went back to his barracks and forged the officers signature. Now Frank was playing a really dangerous game and it was only a matter of time until he would be discovered. Frank

knew that he had to get out, so he bought a little calendar and every time he opened it, it opened on the same date, March 5th.

In January of 1953, Frank's luck skyrocketed. A Colonel had announced that they were receiving ten of the new MIG-15 BIS'. These were the first version of the advanced MIG-17's, which were lighter, faster and had more operational space than the MIG-15.



**Frank and Sandra with Bob Hope at an Air Force Society dinner in New York. Sandra is a realtor with Howard Hanna.**

Frank had chosen his escape destination of Bornholm, Denmark from remembering a propaganda comic book he had seen years before. He had heard that the island was occupied by Americans. He had no map of Bornholm because the Western Countries were left off their maps. Also Frank had no idea how the Americans would feel about him being a communist fighter pilot...maybe

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Cover Photo in the "This Week Magazine" section of the Boston Sunday Herald newspaper, on August 23, 1953.

he would be shot out of the sky before being given a chance to explain that he was not one of them...that he was not "really a communist."

On March 5, 1953 Frank had a long sleepless night. After breakfast he headed out to the flight line. He noticed some of MIG's off to the side were fully armed and ready to take flight. He knew these would be the fighters that they would send after him. So Frank walked over to a Russian Lieutenant and gave him some flying "advice" while clandestinely checking to see what frequency the armed MiG's radios were on.

Frank was leading a four plane squadron. He instructed two of his men to stay close to the coastline while Frank and the other pilot would be on the sea side and flying a little higher. Knowing that Stalin had fallen deathly ill the day before, Frank had told his men that he was flying higher because he was on



Contestant Frank on Groucho Marx's "You Bet Your Life" TV Show.

a special mission. At 9:10am, Frank's squadron was cleared for take off, once in the air he knew there was no turning back.

He switched places with his wing man and near Kolobrzeg he jettisoned his wing tanks for extra speed and went into a steep dive 20,000 feet above the Baltic Sea. Immediately "731 escaping" came blasting over the radio. The first thing out of Frank's mouth was, "I am on a secret mission to get medicine for Papa Stalin." Then he heard the order for the four armed MIG's to pursue 731



Frank and Clark Gable on the movie set of "King and Four Queens". Frank recalls "he was a very down to earth great guy"

and shoot him down. Frank came out of the dive at 1500 feet which was low enough to avoid the Russian radar. Traveling at over 700 mph, the plane was hard to maneuver and Frank had a difficult time pulling out of the dive. After spotting Bornholm, Frank circled the island trying to find a place to land. He spotted a small cow pasture down the center of the island. It looked to be roughly half the length needed to land the MiG. With no alternatives, Frank had to take his chances. He touched down safely and could hear the sound of the pursuit MIGs above him.

He got out of the plane and looking around saw a sign that was in Russian. Fearing he was still on Russian soil, Frank panicked, so he grabbed his pistol and cocked it thinking "the Russians will not take me alive." In the distance he spotted a farmhouse with a woman and a baby standing outside staring at him. He began to approach her when a group of men came out of the woods. The men assumed Frank was Russian. Finally realizing he was safe he announced, "Communist Kaput Asylum".

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Jarecki (in dark flying gear) and his undamaged MIG-15 BIS shortly after landing on the Danish island of Bornholm.

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After several weeks, the Danes returned the aircraft to Poland in crates by ship. Some of the parts still retained traces of gypsum plaster used to make casting of them. Frank was sent to the United States after a brief stop in London where he was recognized for his courage by the Free Polish government. In the U.S. Franciszek Jarecki was personally welcomed by President Eisenhower and granted American citizenship by a special Act of Congress.

Today Frank's story is not forgotten. His flight suit was inducted into the Smithsonian in December of 2003. Erika Jarecki and Colin Korbela, of Stellarlight Entertainment, have secured the Life Rights to his story and are currently adapting it into a motion picture.

For the last thirty years Frank has been living here in Erie with his wife and five children. Although being a pilot was part of his past, he never outgrew his love of mechanics. Frank founded Jarecki Industries, located in Fairview, where he has been manufacturing metal and resilient seated ball and specialty check valves for over twenty-five years. Dealing with his customers himself, Frank



To Frank Jarecki,  
with appreciation and best wishes  
Ronald Reagan

As a member of the Senatorial Advisory Board Frank was invited to the White House where he met President Ronald Reagan.

flies several times a month, the exception is that Frank sits in business class, letting someone else take him to his destination.



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