

## 2. NIGHT HAWK

### *Szczytno-Szymany International Airport Near Stare Kiejkuty, Poland*

Flight 602 was a non-scheduled “business” flight from London’s Northolt Airport to Warsaw’s Frederic Chopin Airport in eastern Poland. In actuality, Northolt was a small RAF airfield on the city’s north side. Though used primarily for government and diplomatic traffic, it wasn’t unusual for an occasional civilian jet to land or takeoff from there. The long-range Learjet 35A aircraft designated Flight 602 was registered to Acworth Marketing, a Texas-based U.S. corporation, whose address was simply a post office box in the heart of Houston’s central business district. Typically, seven passengers occupied the mid-size corporate jet’s plush leather and burled walnut interior. Tonight though, excluding the two pilots in the cockpit, there were only three other people on board.

The jet’s exact destination was Szczytno-Szymany International Airport in northeast Poland, the only airport designed for domestic and international air traffic service in Warmia-Mazury province. However, the Polish Transport Ministry listed it as “temporarily closed to air traffic.” In reality, it was one of several military facilities used by the U.S. as a staging area for the ongoing counter-insurgency efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The airfield was located roughly ten kilometers from the village of

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Stare Kiejkuty and once served as a military airfield in northeastern Poland.

During World War II, it was a staging base for the German Luftwaffe to conduct bombing raids against Warsaw. The airstrip's importance grew during the Cold War since it was one of several able to handle the large Soviet-made military planes of the Warsaw Pact. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the airport's significance gradually diminished and its relevance was all but lost—that is, until now. Launched by the Americans in 2002, Operation Enduring Freedom thrust Szczytno-Szymany International Airport into prominence once again.

The airport served as a gateway to a Polish intelligence training school near the village of Stare Kiejkuty, located about twenty kilometers from Szczytno-Szymany International Airport. The complex was a Soviet-era compound once used to train Communist agents and assassins. Still operational, the Polish army now ran the school. Unbeknown to the outside world, there was something else far more secretive taking place behind the barbed wire and chain link fences of the Polish-run intelligence complex at Stare Kiejkuty.

The CIA operated an interrogation and short-term detention facility for suspected al-Qaeda and Taliban terrorist suspects there. Stare Kiejkuty was part of a network of secret facilities or “black sites” scattered throughout Eastern Europe used for covert activities. Prisoners whom the CIA or British MI6 captured using extraordinary rendition were secretly flown to this site—or others like it—for interrogation and temporary detention.

The CIA's Counter Terrorist Intelligence Center, or CTIC, at Langley conducted these clandestine flights. To

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mask the program, detainees bounced from one site to another, and were never held in one place long enough to attract unwanted attention. It was a simple concept and it worked.

The Learjet 35A aircraft bore no markings except for a small FAA N-number registration on its tail and was painted Juneau white, hence its nickname, "Snow White." When fully loaded with seven passengers, crews jokingly referred to it as "Snow White and the seven dwarfs." Two of the passengers on board this flight were CIA officers. They were escorting a detainee captured the night before to Stare Kiejkuty for "low level" interrogation. That was the kind reserved for detainees who, when captured, showed some interest in cooperating with the CIA and MI6 afterward, most often as an informant inside a terrorist cell.

The Learjet 35A neared the end of its flight plan route, Frederic Chopin Airport in Warsaw, but did not descend to land. Instead, it streaked onward through the nighttime sky some one hundred and fifty kilometers north of the capital toward its secret destination. It was early November and the weather in this region of Poland was typical for the time of year. A blustery north wind accompanied a low overcast and white flecks of snow swirled through the air. Though closed, Polish air traffic controllers cleared the Learjet for an ILS/DME approach to Runway 02 at Szczytno-Szymany International Airport. The jet landed, rolled to the end of the 7,000-foot runway and turned left onto taxiway Echo.

The crew taxied southbound and followed taxiways Alpha-3 and Alpha-4 to the parking stand marked "1." No other aircraft were on the ramp and there was no marshal to guide Snow White into place. The pilots had

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flown into Szczytno-Szymany many times during the last few months on similar missions, though, and were familiar with the layout. A small, camouflaged military truck was waiting when the Learjet came to a stop. The captain shut the engines down and the copilot went back and opened the cabin door. The two CIA officers and their black-hooded charge climbed down the steps and quickly walked to the waiting truck. They got in and the truck drove away, fading into the cold winter night.



**IT WAS** a short thirty-minute drive from the Szczytno-Szymany International Airport to the complex at Stare Kiejkuty. After a brief stop at the main gate, the truck entered. Once inside, it rumbled along, passing two watchtowers before it turned off the road and stopped in front of a nondescript, gray cinder block building. The CIA officers climbed out with their prisoner and whisked him through the entrance. They kept his hood on and wound their way through a series of narrow corridors to a small, cell-like room. One of them opened the door while the other ushered the detainee into the room. The agents plopped the prisoner down on a metal chair in the middle of the room and stood next to him, resting their hands on his shoulders.

A few seconds later, another man entered the room and approached the trio. He stopped two feet from them and studied the prisoner for a long moment. Suddenly, the man grabbed the detainee's black hood and yanked it off his head. Not expecting it, the startled prisoner jumped up from his seat but the two CIA men held him down. Free

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of the hood, he looked about the room and tried to get a better glimpse of his captors, but the bright lights made it impossible. The man bent low, brought his face close to the detainee's, and stared at him in silence.

After a long pause, the man straightened and lit a cigarette. He took several drags and exhaled in one slow, deep breath. A cloud of bluish smoke filled the room and hung in the air. The man looked directly at the prisoner and addressed him in a low, rather menacing voice, "Hello, Jamal."