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HEADLINE: Poland's Soldier-Leader Remains National Enigma

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For millions of Poles, the turbulent year of martial-law rule ended the way it began, with the clipped, measured language of their austere soldier-leader, Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski.

It was in Jaruzelski's predawn, nationally televised speech Dec. 13, 1981, that Poles learned of the sweeping military crackdown that ended a 16-month popular challenge to Communist Party authority. They heard Jaruzelski say a "national catastrophe" had been averted by hours, that the nation hovered at the edge of "an abyss."

A year later, Dec. 12, 1982, Jaruzelski went on television to tell the nation "the worst is behind us," and to announce martial law would be formally suspended Jan. 1.

It was probably fitting that the speeches by Jaruzelski, a Soviet-trained career officer who has accumulated power unprecedented in postwar Poland, should frame the 12 months of martial-law rule.

Jaruzelski's regime broke up and ultimately abolished the independent labor movement Solidarity, which claimed 10 million members when martial law was imposed. Hundreds of Solidarity leaders were swept into internment centers. The union's clandestine remnants were pursued relentlessly, until their voice in Poland was muffled, if not ignored. Underground calls for public protests were answered with intimidating displays of force; in all, 15 Poles died in clashes with security forces.

Jaruzelski rebuffed _ some Poles say humiliated _ Solidarity's leader, Lech Walesa.

Walesa was seized in the first hours of the military crackdown and kept under house arrest for 11 months. He was released only after writing a letter to Jaruzelski, proposing "a serious discussion of the problems of our country."

The letter, Walesa acknowledged in mid-December, went unanswered.

More than 10,000 Solidarity members also were placed in detention after martial law was imposed. All but seven of them _ those held on criminal charges _ were released just before Christmas.

Jaruzelski's imprint on daily life extends far beyond his dealings with Solidarity. Many of the sternest and most restrictive features of military rule have been incorporated into criminal

and civil codes. When martial law is suspended, the country will be a far more confining and restrictive place than before December 1981.

Jaruzelski also fended off mild challenges to his authority within Poland's demoralized Communist Party, of which he is first secretary. Jaruzelski, a four-star general, is also Poland's premier, defense minister and head of the ruling, 21-man Military Council of National Salvation.

Yet, for all the various ways he has invoked his power, Jaruzelski remains, for many Poles, the grim face of uniformed authority, the remote center of power more feared than hated _ and understood least of all.

Jaruzelski, who shields his chronically inflamed eyes behind dark glasses, reveals little of himself in public appearances. He seems awkward to the point of embarrassment, stiff when he has to engage in small talk. During occasional visits to factories, Jaruzelski commonly asks men about their military record and women about the size of their family.

Jaruzelski is married and has a daughter but rarely appears in public with his family.

Even when the Sejm (parliament) voted in October to abolish Solidarity _ which must have been a source of considerable personal satisfaction _ Jaruzelski merely applauded, discreetly.

Government sources characterize Jaruzelski, who turns 60 in July, as a tireless administrator, given to working 16- to 18-hour days and sometimes sleeping in his office. He likes to hunt, ride horses and play tennis. He indulges in few vices, these sources said, and dislikes drinking. He took up cigarettes shortly after the martial law decree and is now understood to smoke heavily.

Western sources in Warsaw have expressed surprise at the physical distance Jaruzelski has managed to keep from the Soviet leadership.

"I think he has done a pretty good job of staying out of their public hands," said one diplomat, referring to the four announced trips Jaruzelski has made to the Soviet Union since imposing martial law.

Though he is from a landowning family in Kurowie, in Lublin province, Jaruzelski is no stranger to the Soviet system. According to his official biography, Jaruzelski was a laborer in the Soviet Union at the start of World War II. He joined the Soviet-sponsored 1st Polish Army in 1943, and was an infantry officer in battles in Poland and Germany. Afterward, according to his biography, he "fought the reactionary underground forces" in Poland. No details were given, however.

Jaruzelski's postwar career was untainted by scandal, and unimpeded by the changes in power in Warsaw. He was appointed defense minister in 1968 during the regime of Wladyslaw Gomulka, and a member of the Politburo in 1971 when Edward Gierek was in power.

Jaruzelski was named premier in February 1981 and party leader in October 1981 _

becoming the third man to hold those posts since the August 1980 workers protests that gave rise to Solidarity.

Although his authority is unquestioned, there is scant evidence Jaruzelski has won much public confidence. And at times he seems acutely public-relations conscious. In his Dec. 12 speech, for example, Jaruzelski said, "Perhaps more was expected today. Perhaps sensational statements were expected.

"I think, however, that it is better when we solve Polish matters realistically ... when emotions give place to the desire for a calm and normal life."