



Polish aircrew serving with 304 Squadron
with their Wellington maritime patrol aircraft

The Polish Air Force in the United Kingdom, 1939-1946

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This paper focuses on the legal status of the Polish Air Force during World War Two, when its personnel and combat units were based in the United Kingdom. The history of the Polish Air Force in the United Kingdom begins in October 1939 and ends in late 1946. Neither the inauspicious beginning, nor its sad demise when the Polish Air Force faded into historical oblivion and ambiguity, augured or reflected its war time accomplishments.

This six year history of diplomatic, legalistic and military vicissitudes is one that remains in some respects at best murky or distorted. Viewed through many different historical perceptions, albeit most quite sympathetic, the picture that has been presented is in many aspects very erroneous history, although the PAF's martial deeds have been well documented in many excellent books.¹

The background to the history of the Poles in exile

The unusual alliance had its roots in March 1939 when the British Government reluctantly acknowledged that Germany threatened its traditional balance of power policy. The very tempestuous summer of 1939 which followed saw the British, with French support, attempting to dissuade Hitler from war and also seeking an Eastern ally. This led to the Polish-British Treaty of Mutual Support.²

Following the invasion and partition of Poland by the Germans and the Soviets in September 1939 the Polish Government was reformed in Paris, according to Polish constitutional prerogatives, and was recognized by all countries except for the two partitioning

dictatorships. Even Italy continued to have formal relations with the Polish Government in Paris until it entered the war in June 1940. At the same time the new Polish Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief, General Wladyslaw Sikorski, declared that the Polish Armed Forces would be recreated on the territories of its western allies, France and the United Kingdom.³ At a Polish Cabinet meeting on January 23rd 1940 General Wladyslaw Sikorski stated that "the recreation of the Polish Army in its greatest size is the most important and essential goal of the [Polish] Government".⁴ This goal was to be accomplished by the evacuation of the nearly 40,000 Polish military interned in Hungary and Romania, and the conscription of Polish citizens living in France of whom there were approximately one million. About 8,000 Polish airmen, approximately 60% of the mobilized Polish air personnel in 1939 were located in Romania and a smaller number of less than 1,000 in Lithuania.⁵

Once in Romania, the Polish military were interned but it has to be emphasized that the conditions of internment were reasonable and the availability of an active Polish embassy in Bucharest with sufficient gold to back the exchange of the Polish zloty, did allow expeditious, although clandestine, evacuation to France.⁶

First period

October 1939 through June 1940

As early as October 1939 the Polish ambassador and military attaché in Romania approached the British air attaché in Bucharest suggesting that all interned Polish air personnel be directly evacuated by clandestine means to the United Kingdom. Their action was not without precedent as a Polish Destroyer Division had already been deployed to British ports prior to the War and two submarines had escaped to Britain from the Baltic after the Polish ports were occupied by the Germans. The

Poles were also motivated by their own conviction that the Royal Air Force was a better role model than French aviation because of its superior infrastructure, advanced industrial base, and the performance of its planes in service. Hence there was a political, military and psychological reason for this Polish initiative.

The British air attaché in Bucharest responded in a sympathetic fashion and promised to alert his superiors in London to the Polish wishes. The Poles with help from the French and British, and a passive sympathetic stance on the part of most Romanians, organized their clandestine escapes to French territories and to France. But time was pressing and there was ever growing concern that German and probably Soviet pressure on the Romanians would make escapes from internment camps ever more difficult. There was also considerable anxiety that, following the assassination of Armand Calinescu on 21 September 1939, and the ever growing influence of the pro-German factions, the Poles in Romania would not just be exposed to increased hardship but that they might be delivered to the Germans. At the same time the British consular office in Bucharest sought instructions from the Foreign Office in London about the policy of granting visas to Polish citizens.⁷

During trilateral French-Polish-British discussions in Paris on 25 October 1939 the Poles put forward their case for centralizing all their air personnel in Britain. The Polish argument was that the Poles were more familiar with British Engines which had been built in Poland under licenses, so it was natural for the air force to be recreated in the United Kingdom. But while the first and basic step in evacuating personnel from Romania to France was effectively managed over the next six months, the actual formation of Polish aviation

units in the two allied countries became mired in French bureaucratic apathy and British Air Ministry ambivalence, if not outright reluctance. It is evident that the British were very much influenced in their negotiating posture by their perception of the Polish capabilities. Early on a strong if exaggerated perception of Polish failure ran as an undercurrent beneath the surface of the British position.⁸

An arrangement was arrived at by the British and French that the "burden" of dealing with the Polish airmen would be shared fifty-fifty. At that point in time, the British burden would have been about 2,000 Polish airmen.⁹ The cornerstone of British policy was the memorandum of Air Vice-Marshal Evill of 25 October 1939 which can be summarized as follows: "The British Government has agreed to receive in England such Polish air personnel as the Polish Government may consider desirable". However, further conditions quickly followed. The British agreed that two active and two reserve bomber squadrons equipped with Fairey Battles would be formed from the Polish personnel¹⁰, but adamantly refused to consider the formation of Polish fighter squadrons. One of the excuses was that the French had expressed a wish to have such squadrons on French soil. The real reason was undoubtedly much more complicated and involved the reasonable question of English language proficiency as well as concern that demoralized Polish pilots would have a negative impact on their British colleagues.

Furthermore the British Air Ministry (the Minister for Air was Sir Kingsley Wood in the Chamberlain Government) insisted that all Polish Air Personnel, who were to be transferred to the UK from France were for administrative reasons to be enrolled in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve and take an oath of allegiance to the King. The

major argument was that the unwritten British constitution precluded the basing of foreign troops on British territory. It should be pointed out that Polish naval units were operating out of British ports and the Polish Navy Headquarters were in London. One could argue in a casuistic fashion that Polish sailors were aboard Polish ships and wore Polish uniforms on shore leave. Given how quickly the British modified their constitutional issues in July 1940 one can only infer that this was much more an excuse than a real impediment.¹¹

But this was only the beginning of many petty conditions. The British Air Ministry insisted that all Polish Air Force officers regardless of their Polish rank were to be commissioned as pilot officers, and all officer cadets and all Polish non-commissioned officers, even warrant officers, were to be privates. Only RAF insignia could be worn and Polish decorations only by permission of the local RAF commanding officer. From all available archival and other accounts including the memoirs of the Polish Air Force Inspector and thus GOC, Jozef Zajac, there was a prolonged negotiating stalemate. While the Poles refused to sign the agreement they abided by British conditions and enforced it on the Polish personnel being moved to the United Kingdom. For very junior officers, who were mere *pod-poruczniki* (sub-lieutenants) these conditions were acceptable. For mid level or senior officers and senior and well trained non-commissioned rank they were an unwelcome abomination.¹²

In December 1939 Zajac minuted the British agreeing in principle to the Air Ministry conditions and asking that the Poles be moved to Britain as 'urgently as possible'. The official Polish position seemed to be to ignore British conditions and hope for the best. In fact Zajac obviously hoped for changes to be negotiated by calling the British position and his agreement a "mala

umowa" or little agreement. The Poles began to arrive at RAF Eastchurch in late December 1939 and found it a civilized haven after the miserable living conditions in France. In France the Polish airmen were primarily located in a number of primitive camps, such as the summer Olympic athletes' village near Lyons which was unheated. The Polish personnel lacked any semi-martial activity, were unpaid for months, and had no uniforms. With nothing to occupy their time, they became disgruntled and blamed their own superiors for the French malaise. Concern about their families in occupied Poland and homesickness further lowered morale.

What ensued was a series of uncoordinated Polish interventions to modify the British conditions. The Polish side was seriously handicapped by the fact that, except for the Polish air attaché in London, Lt Colonel B Kwiecinski, none of the other Polish generals or senior officers spoke English. The Polish Air Force GOC (General J Zajaac) procrastinated in having the agreement actually signed but insisted that the Poles, picked by a joint Polish-British Commission, abide by the British rules for the sake of the Polish Service.¹³ At this stage alarmed by the tenor of the wording, General Sikorski wrote a personal letter to Sir Kingsley Wood requesting that certain British conditions be modified. These primarily dealt with the status of the Polish officers, and the British limitation on the total number of Poles to be transferred.¹⁴

Sir Kingsley Wood gave a diplomatic but negative response. General Sikorski then wrote to the Polish ambassador in London seeking intervention but again achieved nothing. The British Air Ministry was adamant. General Sikorski was cognizant of his success in November 1939 when, during his visit to the United Kingdom and Inspection of the Polish Warships in British ports,

a very satisfactory Polish-British Naval Agreement was concluded.¹⁵ He was not enjoying such success with the Air Ministry.

Lt Colonel Kwiecinski's letter to the Polish Headquarters in Paris of February 1940 reflects the Polish ambiguity and confusion. The letter portrays a man who feels that he is being wrongly blamed for the unsatisfactory aspects of the proposed agreement. Kwiecinski categorically states that he had neither approved nor disapproved the Air Ministry memorandum and that in fact the GOC of the Polish Air Force in Paris had approved it. Lt Colonel Kwiecinski was so incensed by the implication that he had signed off on this process that he formally requested that if was suspected of playing a negative role a formal enquiry be convened which would be a first step to a court martial. Kwiecinski, in a letter to Paris stated the situation starkly: 'we (ie the Poles) can either accept British conditions, give up on the hope of having bomber squadrons in the United Kingdom, or wait for a constitutional change in the British posture'.

Nothing of the sort occurred and Kwiecinski stayed in his post as Polish attaché throughout the war. In April 1940 General Sikorski now wrote to the British Prime Minister. The Air Ministry stood firm but did allow the Poles certain concessions. These were that Polish decorations could be worn as brevets, Polish technical insignia could be worn, and that the term Polish units 'incorporated into the RAF would be changed to 'Polish Squadrons with the RAF'.

The British were crystal clear how far they were prepared to go in their negotiations, while the Polish side as one reviews the situation emerge as at best careless and sloppy, possibly because they were increasingly desperate to address a deteriorating morale issue in France. One can also argue that the

newly formed Polish staffs in France, none of whom spoke English, were simply overworked and lacking finesse in negotiations. But inevitably there has to be a contrast to the Polish-British Naval agreement. The Polish naval personnel were treated as fully armed allies and not as escaping refugees. While miniscule compared to the Royal Navy the high degree of professionalism of the Polish crews and the epic escape of the submarine *ORP Orzel* attracted favourable attention in a service which seemed far more open to foreign allies than the British Air Ministry.¹⁶ The Polish warships began operations out of British ports even before the September Campaign was finished and their performance was accepted as being on a par with Royal Navy expectations. Financial issues for the upkeep of the ships as well as pay for personnel were all expeditiously addressed. The Polish Naval personnel all continued to wear pre-war style uniforms. They kept their Polish ranks and did not take an oath of allegiance to the King.

The PAF were very much aware of and influenced by the situation wherein the Polish Naval units were fully engaged in combat operations and enjoyed cordial relations with the RN in contrast with the humiliating position of the PAF as applicants to the Air Ministry.

Given the inchoate confusion in France and the contrast with the civility and order in the United Kingdom it is hardly surprising that the Poles pushed hard for moving as many as possible of their aviation personnel to Britain as quickly as possible.

In May and early June 1940 as the whole western alliance was reeling under German blows in Norway, Holland, Belgium and of course in Northern France, and as Chamberlain had been replaced by Churchill, Sikorski finally acceded to the final British wording and on 11 June 1940, signed the agreement which accepted the British conditions.



Pilots from 303 Squadron

Why at such a late date, after the fine performance of the Polish land and naval units in the Norwegian campaign, such a disgraceful agreement was signed by the Polish Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief, remains a mystery.

This was the end of the first period of the Polish Air Force presence in the United Kingdom. It was a very painful time for the Poles, dispirited by the defeat in September and very much aware that they were viewed by their allies as 'pauvres polonaises'. The air personnel were viewed as a burden to be shared with the French, while their competence was distrusted. During the Phoney War there was little urgency or necessity for the Poles to be made combat ready. Slow as the French were in arming Poles the fact is that Polish fighter units were entering operations in France, while at RAF Eastchurch the Poles were still learning English and King's Regulations, square bashing and admiring British planes from afar.

The capitulation of France, the threat to the British Islands and the reports of fine performance by the Polish pilots in the French campaign led to a dramatic re-appraisal.

But this short period, of less than 8 months in duration in a war of well over

five years, determined the perception of the history of the Polish Air Force in the United Kingdom. They are consistently portrayed as a group of refugees who, on their own initiative, flocked to Britain and volunteered for service with the RAF.¹⁷ In fact the Polish personnel, all pre-war professionals, did not see themselves as volunteers in the RAF at all, though many treasured their association with the Royal Air Force.

But how did the British view them in 1940?

A Foreign Office memo of January 1940 discusses the problems of moving the Poles to Britain. It speaks to the 'Transfer of Polish air personnel from France to the United Kingdom'.¹⁸ Specifically addressing the question as to the 'The arrangement reached in Paris last October with the Poles and the French by Air Vice-Marshal Evill was *'that the Polish Air Force personnel already in France shall be divided up under Polish direction and half of it sent forward to England'*.

In May 1940 the RAF Liaison Officer for contacts with Poles minuted his superiors in a memorandum entitled "Polish Air Force Contingent in England". He expressed his concerns at some length:

'I am extremely perturbed over the present situation of the Polish Air Force Contingent in England, and I consider it very likely that a justifiably explosive representation will be made on the subject by the Polish Government in the near future'.

Now why would the Polish Government's explosive representation be of any concern to a Royal Air Force officer about his officers and men, unless he accepted the fact that they were in fact part of the Polish Air Force? He goes on to write of:

'... some 200 officers and 2000 airmen of the Polish Air Force serving in our RAFVR ... I cannot help feeling that there must be

a growing feeling of impatience and unrest amongst so large a body of men whose sole aim in coming here was to help the Allied cause in their particular sphere of the air and who at this crucial moment find themselves limited to such duties as foot drill, guarding their station, lectures, etc. This must rankle much more since their compatriots who elected to work with the French are either flying operationally or serving with their army in the field, and the French express greatest admiration for their efficiency, usefulness and enthusiasm'.¹⁹

There is an expression, 'follow the money'. In May 1940 the British Treasury refers to the fact that on 15 November 1939 they undertook to provide credits for the Polish personnel and equipment. Why would the British Treasury expect reimbursement (from the credit advanced to the Polish Government) for capitation rates, aircraft on flying basis and mechanical transport on a mileage basis if these were in fact RAF personnel?²⁰

Furthermore, the Royal Air Force accepted that the Polish Air Force Headquarters in Paris would send official inspectors to Eastchurch and the Poles chose Major General Wladyslaw Kalkus who did not speak English!

It is absurd to think that in early 1940 every month hundreds of Poles deserted the Polish Air Force in France to come to the United Kingdom in organized groups to be volunteers in the RAF.²¹

Second period

June 1940 to April 1944

But everything changed with the French capitulation and the evacuation of the remnants of the only recently formed Polish Army to Britain. This included the 5,000 Polish airmen who had not originally been selected for transfer to Britain who now found themselves in the United Kingdom. The British referred to them as the "French Poles" as opposed to the "British Poles". Regardless, they were all now in Britain



302 Squadron Spitfire

and whatever the British constitution, unwritten as it was, they were physically present and given the situation in which the United Kingdom found itself, important to Britain's defence and its policies. In particular the Polish dowry of an extensive network of intelligence agents on the Continent of Europe was a big asset.²²

Churchill on 2 July 1940 minuted his staffs, 'In principle we are to make the most of the Poles. They should be assembled, made comfortable, and re-equipped as soon as possible'.²³

On 12 July 1940, General Zajac much to the dismay of the British Air Ministry, issued orders that the newly arrived (French) Poles were not to enrol in the RAFVR. This was most likely due to the fact that the 'French Poles' were unwilling to take an oath of allegiance to the King and very bitter about their status as pilot officers. However, the British could not impose the first, and the Poles could not correct the second. Possibly the instruction came down from Sikorski.²⁴ On 18 July 1940 General Zajac resigned as Commanding Officer of the Polish Air Force, but in practical reality little changed. The British

posture was to continue treating all Polish air personnel as if they were in the RAFVR, whether they had signed in or not.

In June 1940 the British military situation had changed dramatically and Britain, having decided to continue the war, was in mortal peril. The RAF's fighter squadrons had taken very heavy losses in France and in protecting the British evacuation from Dunkirk. The British were short of pilots though the production of planes was keeping up with wastage. The Air Ministry was culling pilots from all different commands, and, since the Polish fighter pilots in France had done a credible job, which was noted by the British, the net was cast wider. A RAF internal memo spells out on 4 June 1940 [that is well before the final evacuation from France on 22 June] that 'in view of the present shortage of fighter pilots, D of I has suggested that we should make use of the experienced Polish flying personnel which is now in this country. You will see from minutes that there are upward of 70 experienced Polish fighter pilots available. The Poles are apparently willing to agree that these pilots should be taken over by us and used in British fighter squadrons. I think it would very foolish not to accept this offer'.

Polish pilots originally destined for the light bomber squadrons but with some proficiency in English were inserted into RAF squadrons.²⁵ Polish fighter pilots who had flown in France and been evacuated began to train in all Polish units, albeit with heavy RAF personnel supervision. The British needed fighter pilots but were unhappy about the Polish negotiating position of striving for complete national autonomy. As the Poles were negotiating a new agreement the British were obviously preparing for a fight for their life. On 6 July 1940 the RAF HQ document that, 'It has been decided that on Polish (Fighter) Squadron shall be formed in Fighter Command

from the experienced personnel recently evacuated from France. This will be designated as 302 (Polish Fighter) Squadron, Royal Air Force'.²⁶

Sikorski now in Britain, realized that he now had a stronger political, though not necessarily a military, negotiating position and through General Kazimierz Sosnkowski negotiated hard for independent status for the Polish Armed Forces, to which the British War Ministry agreed to, but which the Air Ministry strenuously opposed. It proved easier for the Poles to negotiate a reasonable land army agreement than to renegotiate the air force one, just signed by Sikorski, albeit in different circumstances. As a result of the changed situation the seminal military agreement with regard to the air force was short of what the Poles aspired to, but conceded more than the Air Ministry would have wished. It also should be emphasized that General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, who now conducted most of the overall Polish-British military discussions, stipulated that the largest Polish air component operational unit would be a squadron. However, he strenuously argued that there should be an autonomous Polish army co-operation squadron assigned to the Polish land forces in Scotland, under Polish command, and essentially won the point.

The British position was well expressed by Sir Cyril Newall (Chief of Air Staff 1937-1940) in a letter to General Sosnkowski:

'We attach great importance to the maintenance of the status of the Polish Armed Forces as those of an independent and sovereign state, and we would not wish to differentiate the position of the Polish Air Force from that of the Polish Army and Navy, except in so far as operational considerations make a very close liaison with the Royal Air Force essential'.

From an objective view this was a reasonable point. Whenever form

interferes with function, the results are deplorable. But the British insisted on more than function, their views which prevailed were in fact contrary to their statement of treating the Polish Air Force as analogous to the Polish navy and land forces.

Newall also wrote in the same letter 'we welcome the proposal that an Army Co-operation squadron should also be formed, and that it should co-operate with the Polish Army in the field, under the operational control of the Polish Commander, and standing in the same relation to him as an 'Air Component' squadron acting with a similar formation of the British Army'.

It has to be also emphasized that given the dire straits in which Britain found itself in the summer of 1940, the amount of time given to the Poles by many in the British Government was considerable and in most instances very sympathetic unless it was perceived as inconsistent with British policies. Also at the conclusion of the Battle of Britain when the invasion crisis had passed, though the blitz continued, the Air Ministry became very accommodating and flexible in their interpretation of the agreement.²⁷

The British were aware of the Polish position and in a summary on foreign Allied air personnel dated 29 July 1940 (ie before the August agreement was signed) noted. 'Although there are now nearly 9000 Polish air personnel in Great Britain. The formation of additional squadrons was delayed by the sudden decision of the Polish Government to press for a Polish Air Force separate from the RAF. This has now been agreed in principle, the RAF retaining control so far as operations, discipline, finances, etc, are concerned and a new Polish fighter squadron is forming today (22nd July) and a second is due to be formed on the 24th of July'.²⁸

On 5 August 1940 the Polish Prime Minister, General W Sikorski and

the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill signed the Polish-British Agreement 'respecting the Polish Forces in the United Kingdom'. It is important to note that Article 1 of the agreement spells out that:

'The Polish Armed Forces (comprising Land, Sea and Air Forces) shall be organized and employed under British command, in its character as the allied High Command, as the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland allied with the United Kingdom'.²⁹

The Polish-British Military Agreement of 5 August 1940, in practice did little to enhance the Polish Air Force as an autonomous national force, but it did build a symbolic foundation. While the Polish General Staff acceded to British operational control and combined disciplinary jurisdiction they also agreed to accept the financial obligation from the credits granted to the Polish Government.

A nagging issue which was never completely resolved was the question of rank and promotion. The RAF authorities held firmly to the position that rank was a function of responsibility and part of the overall issue of RAF operational control. While the Polish personnel were no longer in the RAFVR, the pattern of functional rank, pay and combat assignments was strictly adhered to by the British. Therefore while perfectly logical to the RAF authorities, Polish Air Force officers, many of the rank of major and even higher, who had operational and or staff appointments during the September 1939 Campaign, were now pilot officers pending a specific appointment or posting. The British essentially viewed the Polish Air Force – whether national or not – as having a new beginning in the United Kingdom. It was a tabula rasa. Nothing that had happened before the Poles arrived in the United Kingdom was of any significance to the Air Ministry in the Summer of 1940.

The young aircrew officers and non-commissioned personnel wrote an immortal tale of heroism on this *tabula rasa*, but the cadre of mid level and senior officers felt disenfranchised. They had in fact, for better or worse, fought in command positions in September 1939, they had provided the foundations for the training schools in pre-war Poland and had provided instruction for the young who were now winning accolades for the Polish Air Force. They were understandably dismayed by their treatment.

The elimination of the obligation to swear allegiance to the King was the first and most visible prerogative of Polish national sovereignty. A further British concession allowing the red-white Polish Air Force checkerboard to be painted on the cowling of planes in Polish squadrons was close to the hearts of all Poles, and not just airmen. Another symbolic issue which initially was ignored by the British was the sovereign Polish right that any award presented to Polish military, by the British, had to have authorization from the appropriate Polish authority.

Obviously the Poles strictly adhered to this, as did the British when the British were the recipients of Polish decorations. With time this convention was adhered to and was obviously always graciously granted.³⁰ Having noted that General Zajac had stepped down as General Officer Commanding the Polish Air Force, it is also important to note that this post was not continued under the new agreement, which restricted the Polish Air Force to having an Inspector of the Air Force. This post was now filled by Major General S Ujejski with the functional rank of Air Vice-Marshal.³¹

The excellent performance of the two Polish fighter squadrons in the Battle of Britain did finally pave the way for

a more reasonable policy, particularly since the Polish Government had accepted that all salaries, equipment (eg planes) would be a Polish debit. In March 1941 after prolonged interventions by Sikorski with Sir Archibald Sinclair, the new Secretary of State for Air, a compromise of sorts was reached. All Polish Air Force officers were granted 'permanent war rank' which was one step below their Polish rank. In other words a Polish major was automatically a RAF flight lieutenant but if assigned to a function which had a higher RAF functional responsibility he would for the time of holding that post also have a higher functional RAF rank.

However, he could never drop more than one increment below his Polish rank. Also at this point the officers of the Polish Air Force became entitled and expected to wear their Polish ranks on their collars. All non-commissioned officers were given ranks equivalent to their Polish grade, except that warrant officers were held up at a sergeant level for six months.

It is hardly surprising that many younger officers, Polish second lieutenants or lieutenants (*podporucznik* or *porucznik*) who had achieved success in the fighter squadrons and were often already in command of squadrons, and held functional ranks of squadron leader, failed to conform to this order. Such is human nature.³² From 1939 to August 1940 the relationship between the two allies as far as the air force was concerned was that of a poor, close to disreputable family member whose presence was at best tolerated but always with the hope that good manners would lead to at least being quiet at the end of the table. From August 1940, at the height of the Battle of Britain, until April 1944 the gallant exploits of the Polish fighter squadrons, and the heroic participation of the four Wellington-equipped bomber squadrons

in the offensive against Germany earned the Polish ally respect and good will. During all this time, General Sikorski spared no effort to build up his service



305 Squadron Mosquitos

and to develop training bases and command posts.

In July 1941 the archives of DAFL show a positive response to the Polish request that Polish officers having completed their tour of combat missions be allowed to serve in Group and Command headquarters as well as at Staff College.³³ What ensued in that short year was an example of amazing degree of harmony and trust between the Royal Air Force and the Polish Air Force after a very sobering beginning. This was at every level, from the high corridors of the Air Ministry, the RAF Home Commands and on down to the squadron level. It was a mutual esteem that was earned by the bonds of fighting in the same cause. Polish officers and Polish crews were national and Polish wings began to be formed but the operational functions were integrated.

1943 was a watershed year for Polish political fortunes. In April 1943 the discovery of mass graves in German occupied Russia, near Katyn, led to a break up of the very recently diplomatic relations between the Polish Government and the Soviet Union.³⁴

This short interlude of restored diplomatic relations had allowed many thousands of Poles to leave the Soviet Union. In addition to the famed 2

Corps, many thousands of young lads had volunteered for the Polish Air Force and as the war ground on they began to fill out the ranks of the bloodied Polish squadrons.³⁵ In July 1943 the Polish Prime Ministry and Commander in Chief, General Wladyslaw Sikorski, was killed in a plane off Gibraltar.³⁶ His successor as Commander-in-Chief (but not prime minister) was General Kazimierz Sosnkowski.³⁷

At this point, General Ujejski resigned as Inspector of the Polish Air Force and was quickly succeeded by Colonel Mateusz Izycki who was shortly promoted Major General and also held the functional rank of Air Vice-Marshal. He proved himself to be an adroit negotiator, understood British methods, and by April 1944 had succeeded in preparing a new Polish-British air agreement.

Third phase April 1944 through July 1945

The third phase of the Polish Air Force's legal status in the United Kingdom occurred on April 1944 when the British took one more careful step in acceding and expanding the original agreement about the national character of the Polish Air Force. The following preamble is an excellent summary of the many points of the new agreement.

'Desiring to make fresh provisions for the organisation and employment of the Polish Air Force in association with the Royal Air Force, as well as for the exercise of jurisdiction over members of the Polish Air Force in the United Kingdom or any territory outside the United Kingdom which is under the authority of the Government of the United Kingdom'.

While many issues were now ceded to the Polish High Command, such as complete disciplinary authority, it still spelled out that the 'operational control of units of the Polish Air Force shall remain vested in the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Royal Air Force Command concerned'.³⁸

Major Gneeral Izycki's position now underwent a significant name change. He became the Commanding Officer of the Polish Air Force, and the staff of the Inspector was enlarged and became the Polish Air Force Headquarters.

It should be emphasized that the Royal Air Force went out of their way at this point to address the spirit and not just the words of the new agreement. The British Air Ministry sent a memorandum to all Commands stipulating that 'each Royal Air Force Command, Group and Station Headquarter ensure the provision of training facilities for Polish Staff Officers'. The memorandum pointed out that 'The Polish Air Force is serving within the framework of the Royal Air Force and all its units operational and non-operational are under the control of the RAF Commands concerned. Except for one wing in the 2n TAF the Polish Air Force has no executive control above squadron level'.³⁹

In July 1944 a very important, but nearly unnoticed agreement was signed by the Polish and British Governments. In the words of the Secretary of the War Cabinet Allied Forces (Official) Committee the agreement made 'fresh arrangements for the attribution of expenditures incurred in the application of the Agreements and Protocols which have been concluded between the two Governments in London regarding the organisation and employment of the Polish Armed Forces during the present war'. In Article 1 the agreement stated:

'The Government of the United Kingdom will not, as from the date of the signature of this Protocol, claim reimbursement of the cost of the equipment (including the supply of war material) and of the maintenance of the Polish Armed Forces by Departments or agencies of the Government of the United Kingdom'.⁴⁰

The growth of the Polish Air Force and its ubiquitous presence was merely limited by the manpower shortages in

the Polish military in exile. While there was a push to recruit suitable candidates from the land forces and the creation of a Polish women's auxiliary component, the final results were inevitably short of what the Polish Air Force Headquarters aspired to, and which was well within the limits of what the British were prepared to accept.

The very supportive attitude of the British Air Ministry and of the various Command staffs, to say nothing of the Air Chief of Staff, allowed the Polish air personnel to avail themselves of experiences in various command positions including an Air Force Staff College.⁴¹

In spite of the major attrition in the bomber squadrons, by war's end the actual roll call in the Polish Air Force was close to 14,000 versus the 9,000 who arrived on British shores by June 1940.

But as the war was drawing to a close and possibly also as a reflection of the Yalta Big Three Conference, the Air Ministry combined with the Foreign Office to start the process of phasing down the training of new Polish air crew. Both Sir Archibald Sinclair and Anthony Eden in March 1945 sent a memorandum to the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, urging a reduction in the intake of Polish aircrew for training. The fact is that the British in March 1945 were indeed phasing down their training capacity. The Air Secretary wrote to the Foreign Secretary urging a joint intervention with Churchill in the following memorandum:

'... we are now receiving an intake of 125 Polish aircrews a month into our training organisation, although an intake of 35 aircrews a month would be sufficient to meet the Polish aircrews requirements, including the build up to 17 squadrons in Stage II. At the time we are building up this large surplus of Polish aircrews, shortage of manpower on the ground is

compelling us to contemplate the rolling up of squadrons'.

'We foresaw this situation last year and cut down the intake of Poles as well as of other Allies into our training organisation. The Poles, however, appealed to the Prime Minister and he ruled that the Polish intake must be maintained as a matter which was political in the highest sense'.

Churchill on 3 April 1945 responded in his distinctive manner to both.

*'We shall see much more clearly on this field before the month of April is over. Meanwhile, no change, but bring up then'.*⁴²

It seems logical and intuitive to attribute this postponement to the Churchillian last ditch attempt to get the Russians to abide by their agreements at Yalta. On 3 March 1945 Churchill wrote to Roosevelt:

'At Yalta we agreed to take the Russian view of the frontier line, Poland has lost her frontier. Is she now to lose her freedom?'

Churchill further admitted Britain's relative impotence when he continued in his message:

*'That is the question which will undoubtedly have to be fought out in Parliament and in public here. I do not wish to reveal a divergence between the British and the United States Government's, but it would certainly be necessary for me to make it clear that we are in presence of a great failure and an utter breakdown of what was settled at Yalta, but that we British have not the necessary strength to carry the matter further and that the limits of our capacity have been reached'.*⁴³

We learnt relatively recently as the National Archives opened the files, that at this same time, Churchill requested his Chiefs of Staff to prepare plans for 'Operation Unthinkable' which in the words of Lord Ismay, Deputy Minister of Defence, had the overall objective of 'imposing upon Russia the will of the

United States and British Empire'. The Joint Planning Staff of the War Cabinet further spelled out, 'Even though *the will* of those countries may be defined as no more than a square deal for Poland'. In this plan which was presented to the Prime Minister on 8 June 1945 the Polish Armed Forces in the West figured prominently.⁴⁴

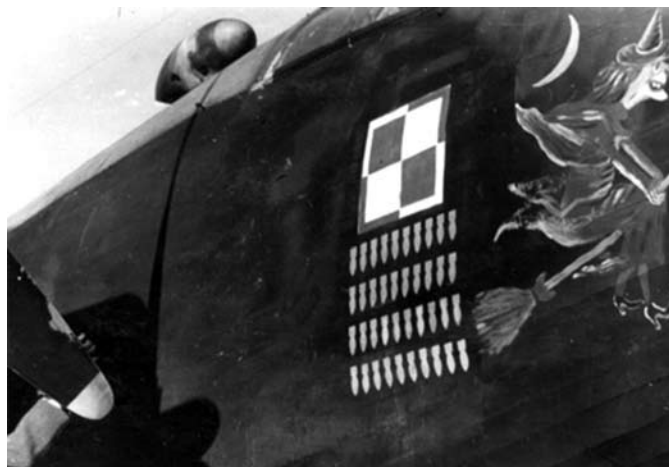
In hindsight we know how disinclined Truman and his post Roosevelt administration was to get involved in European issues particularly with Japan still to be defeated. We also know that Britain by itself could not meet this challenge and the British public was not merely war weary but still under the influence of war time propaganda of the adulation of Stalin and his Soviet army.⁴⁵ But it is also obvious from all secondary sources that the Americans worried far more about British Imperialism than Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe, and were vehemently critical of British intervention in Greece. Two events followed in quick succession. In July 1945 the two allied western powers recognised the Warsaw based 'Lublin' government as the provisional government of national unity of Poland pending free and unfettered elections. On 26 July 1945 the British electorate gave a landslide victory to the Labour Party and thus made Clement Attlee the new Prime Minister.

This began the fourth chapter of the legal status of the Polish Air Force in the United Kingdom.

Fourth phase

July 1945 through December 1946

The facts confronting the British after 5 July 1945 were that they had helped to create a large, very well armed army, many thousands actually based on their own soil, that was loyal to a government which the British no longer recognized. This made all British-Polish allied forces agreements moot. It was the largest private army on British soil in the history of Britain. The British



Missions completed, recorded on the side of a 301 Sqn Wellington

slowly unravelled the Polish chain of command and after rescinding their recognition of the Polish Government they also shortly announced that they would no longer recognize the post of Commander-in-Chief (General Tadeusz Bor-Komorowski who had succeeded General Sosnkowski) or Minister of Defence (General Marian Kukiel).

The issue was stark. The military agreements had been signed by the British with a Polish Government in London. Most issues of discipline were handled by Polish military courts. Who would now exercise legal control. At least as long as the Poles were in uniform, they would obey their officers, even if the so-called legal issues were no longer valid. The provisional government of so-called national unity in Warsaw, dominated by communists initially urged that the Polish Armed Forces return as a coherent organized force. The British certainly strongly favoured the return of the Poles to Poland, but such a return was certainly not on the cards for the Soviets and very shortly all kinds of obviously impossible conditions began to be offered.

The next two years saw a bizarre diplomatic dance in which the parties

involved, namely the British, the Polish communists, the Soviets and of course the Poles in the west all attempted to gain their ends. The Polish Armed Forces wanted to stay in the west as organized units at least until the called for 'free elections' were held. The Poles in the West correctly assumed that the elections would be rigged and that following such a dénouement the status of the Polish Armed Forces would not be changed and that possibly Western policy would also be modified.

By early 1946 the Polish Provisional Government notified the British ambassador that the Polish Armed Forces in the west were no longer part of the Polish Armed Forces and all who wished to return had to apply to the Polish Consulate in London for permission to return. By late 1946 the British officially notified the Polish General Staff that the time had come to demobilise the Polish Armed Forces. Since the British were aware that many thousands of Polish military were not prepared to go back to a Soviet communist dominated Poland they created the Polish Re-Settlement Corps in June 1946 to prepare the Polish military for demobilization and civilian training and life in the United Kingdom. One of the most impressive British initiatives was the formation of the Committee for the Education of Poles in Great Britain, which funded stipends for military personnel and their dependents to pursue education at British technical schools, polytechnics and universities. The author of this paper was funded for six years to pursue medical studies.⁴⁶

In January 1947 the Polish Communists held elections in Poland, which gave overwhelming majorities to the communists and were universally condemned as rigged.⁴⁷

The close and warm relationship between the RAF and the Poles continued. In 1949 a lovely monument

to the Polish Air Force was unveiled at Northolt. The British also published their elegant book on the Polish Air Force evocatively titled – *Destiny Can Wait* – with a very gracious foreword by Marshal of the Royal Air Force Viscount Portal of Hungerford GCB DSO MC who was Chief of the Air Staff through most of the war.

In the official history of the Royal Air Force an elegant tribute is also given:

'All these allied contingents gave something unique; and if we mention especially the Polish airmen, it is not only that their contribution was the greatest in size – with fourteen squadrons and some fifteen thousand men, including their own ground staff, besides many pilots in the British squadrons – and that their fighting record in all Home Commands and Europe and the Mediterranean was unsurpassed, but also that victory brought them no reward only further exile from home and loved ones they had fought so long and bravely to regain'.⁴⁸

Yet, in the same volume, there is no mention that the Squadrons of 131 Wing of No 84 Group comprising 302, 308 and 317 are Polish. This carelessness or worse in an official history adds to my theses that ambiguity about the Polish Air Force is endemic.⁴⁹

Accounting

While men fought and died, accountants kept books. Polish/British financial negotiations began in April 1939.⁵⁰

On 7 September 1939 and subsequently in June 1940 the Polish Government received cash credits from which the costs of maintaining the Polish Armed Forces in the West were debited. At the end of the war in Europe these accounts began to be settled.

In December 1945 the Air Ministry sent a letter to the Secretary of the Treasury. The gist of this was the fact that the Polish Air Force Headquarters on 20 November 1945 stipulated to

the following Polish debit for Polish Air Force personnel costs. The cost of supplies, planes, bombs and petrol had been deemed as non recoverable due to the Lend – Lease protocol signed on 29 June 1944.

'The total charges against the Polish Military Credit in respect of supplies and services rendered by the Air Ministry to 29th June 1944 amounted to 42,107,637 Pounds and twelve shillings and one pence! This was the date when the Polish-British agreement regarding the 'attribution of expenditures' was signed. The Air Ministry spelled out 5,434,255 (plus change) remained a charge against the Polish credit, while the balance of 36,673,381 was 'now deemed to be none recoverable under the Agreement'.⁵¹

Polish sources also stipulate to the Polish debt for their armed forces. Specifically the debits for the Air Force are spelled out in two Polish studies. Personnel costs of the Polish Air Force from August 1940 to July 1945 being the date when the British rescinded recognition of the Polish Government in London in favour of the provisional government in Warsaw are: £8,269,873, 11 shillings and 11 pence. This sum is significantly bigger than the sum cited in the National Archives file. Kalinowski writes that the sum of £39,566,437, 16 shillings and 8 pence was described as cancelled as a result of the 29 June 1944 Anglo-Polish agreement. Again this sum is larger than the National Archives file. Kalinowski writes that overall cost of the Polish Air Force in the United Kingdom to December 1945 amounted to approximately L 107,650,000.⁵²

It probably would require a chartered account to do a forensic analysis of the disparity but from a historical point of view these differences while financially significant are actually irrelevant. They prove that both partners accepted the reality that the Polish Government was



Spitfire XVI's of 308 Squadron

legally responsible for its air personnel which fought in the West.

It is not quite clear what the final debit was. But in the negotiations by the British with the Polish communists over Poland's debit and the question of how much Polish Gold would be retained by the British to recover the debt the following is the figure: military credit (all services) 122 Million Pounds of which 75 was deleted under the Polish-British military agreement of June 1944.

Salaries etc of Polish Military was estimated at 47 (plus) million.⁵³

Postscript

It may be pertinent to summarize the major British decorations awarded to Polish Air Force personnel.

Generals Stanislaw Ujejski and Mateusz Izycki were both honoured and appointed Honorary Knights Commander of the Order of the Bath, Military Division in January 1941 and October 1945 respectively. Lt General Jozef Zajac was appointed Honorary Companion of the Order of the Bath, Military Division, in December 1944 but this was for services as Polish GOC in the Middle East. Information from

Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood, St James's Palace, London.

In addition Polish air personnel were awarded 8 DSOs, 14 OBEs, 186 DFCs and 68 DFMs.

Notes

1 Adam Zamoyski, *The Forgotten Few: The Polish Air Force in the Second World War*, New York, Hippocrene Books, 1995. Robert Gretzyngier and Wojtek Matusiak, *Polish Aces of World War 2*, Osprey, Botley, 1998. Robert Gretzyngier, *Poles in Defence of Britain. A Day-by-Day Chronology of Polish Day and Night Fighter Pilot Operations: June 1940-July 1941*, Grub Street, London, 2001.

2 Simon Newman, *March 1939: The British Guarantee to Poland*, Oxford University Press, London, 1976. Elizabeth Turnbull and Andrzej Suchcitz, eds. *Edward Roland Sword. The Diary and Despatches of a Military Attaché in Warsaw, 1938-39*, Caldra House Limited, Hove, 2001. See also, Roderick Macleod and Denis Kelly, eds. *Time Unguarded. The Ironside Diaries, 1937-1940*, David McKay Company, Inc. NY. 1963. Anita Prazmowska, *Britain, Poland and the Eastern Front, 1939*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1987. Anna K Cieniala, *Poland and the Western Powers, 1938-1939*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1968. *British War Blue Book. Documents Concerning German-Polish Relations and the Outbreak of Hostilities between Great Britain and Germany on September, 3, 1939*. His Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1939.

3 The best English language accounts of the background of the formation of the Polish coalition government in exile is to be found in Anton Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland, 1921-1939*, Oxford University Press, London, 1972, pp 502-505.

4 General W Sikorski was a great advocate and proponent of aviation though possibly overtly optimistic and uncritical and under the influence of the 'big bomber' potential. See General Wladyslaw Sikorski, *Modern Warfare*, New York, Roy Publishers, 1943. Chapter II pp 168-207, *The Air Force and Anti-Aircraft Defence*. Also see, Robert M Ponichtera, "The Military Thought of Wladyslaw Sikorski", *Journal of Military History*, 59 (April 1995): 279-302. On March 15 1940 General Sikorski

was appointed honorary Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire. Information from Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood, St James's Palace, London.

5 This was due to the attempt made by Smigly-Rydz to anchor the last stand against the Germans on the Romanian border with the hope and some expectation that supplies from the west would come through the Romania ports. It was also due to the fact that the Polish Government was led to believe that French Morane-Saulnier fighters and British Fairey Battles were being shipped through Romania ports for delivery to Poland. Hence those aviation units which had suffered severe losses had their personnel moved to the Romania border to take on incoming equipment. The Soviet invasion on September made all such plans moot and the loss of bases and territory forced all Polish military that had organic motorized support to Romania. A very similar situation confronted the RAF in France in June 1940. Once bases and support services were lost there was nothing more to be done. In addition to ground personnel and aircrew that had lost their planes, a considerable number of operational planes were also flown to Romania. Statiev, Alexander, *Antonescu's Eagles Against Stalin's Falcons: The Romania Air Force, 1920-1941*. The Journal of Military History, Vol 66, No 4, October 2002, "about two hundred Polish aircraft that took refuge in Romania after Poland fell to the Germans in 1939", p 1087. Also, Mark Axworthy, *Cornel Scafes and Christian Craciunoiu, Third Axis, Fourth Ally, Arms and Armour Press, London, 1995*. "When Poland fell in 1939 more than 200 Polish aircraft were flown to Romania", p 277. The Royal Romanian Air Force [Fortele Aeriene Regale ale Romaniei or FARR] was thus able to equip two fighter squadrons with PZL-11Cs, two medium bomber squadrons with PZL 37A and B and one light bomber squadron with PZL 23. The fact that over 200 Polish military aircraft flew into Romania should not have escaped the notice of the British military attachés. Yet the myth of the Polish Air Force being destroyed on the first day of the War persisted. See also Endnote # 8.

6 Wojciech Roek, *Odyseja Skarbu Rzeczypospolitej. Losy złota Banku Polskiego, 1939-1950*, [The Odyssey of Polish Gold], Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow, 2000. Gold bullion of the Polish Emission Bank was evacuated to France in 1939 but some was used in Romania for use in aiding Polish military,

pages 422-454. In September 1939 the Poles agreed for the following exchange rate: 1 zloty = 20 lei. Total exchanged was 11,733,702 zloty. After the War there were prolonged negotiations between the British Government and the Polish Provisional Government in Warsaw regarding how much of the gold needed to be transferred to the British as payment for credits advanced to the Polish Government for military and civilian expenditures. See, section – accounting.

7 The National Archives, London, henceforth cited as TNA FO 371/2315 and 22479 and 25243 eg. My father an Air Force officer was as many hundreds of other Polish military issued a false Polish passport, using an assumed name and identifying him as a civilian and also unable to perform military duties. On the basis of this passport he was issued a British entry visa in late October 1939. Hundreds of such visas were issued by a British consulate undoubtedly more than aware of the deception being practiced. It needs to be emphasized that the Romanians in general were also undoubtedly quite sentient of this deception.

8 This canard seems to have stemmed from a report by the Head of the British Military Mission to Poland in 1939, namely General Carton de Wiart VC found in TNA HS4/223 and 225. It should be emphasized that this Englishman, cast in a heroic mould, was a great friend of the Poles. His source appears to have been the Polish General L Rayski with whom he met on September 10th while still in Poland. See also Peter Wilkinson, *Foreign Fields: The Story of an SOE Operative*, Tauris, London, 1997, p 79. See also the German historian, Cajus Bekker, "Despite all assertions to the contrary, the Polish Air Force was not destroyed on the ground in the first two days of fighting. The bomber brigade in particular continued to make determined attacks on the German forces up to September 16th". Bekker does not make it clear that the reasons for the 16th being the last day was in fact the Soviet invasion in the early hours of September 17th which forced an organized evacuation of all planes and personnel to Romania. See also Jeremy Black, editor, *The Second World War. Volume 1 The German War, 1939-1942*, Chapter 1 Michael Alfred Peszke, "The Forgotten Campaign. Poland's Military Aviation in September 1939", Ashgate Publishing, Burlington, Vermont USA and Aldershot, England, 2007, pp 1-72.

9 Alan Brown, *Airmen in Exile*, The Allied Air Forces in the Second World War, Sutton Publishing, Stroud, 2000. The excellent book conveys the deprecatory assessment of Poles in the corridors of power in the Air Ministry. The innate insular and xenophobic attributes were further inflamed by the one RAF expert on all things Polish, namely Squadron Leader Landau. See also TNA AIR/4213 from March 1940.

10 *Destiny Can Wait* The Polish Air Force in the Second World War, Heinemann London, 1949, pp 373-375. It is obvious that the formation of Polish air force squadrons in the UK in late 1939 and early 1940 was seen as a nuisance by most of the Air Ministry and the RAF staffs. The question has to be raised, why in those circumstances as early as October 1939 the British so readily agreed to form two Polish light bomber squadrons. A plausible answer would seem to be that the Battles were already seen by the British Air Ministry as being owned by the Poles. See, TNA T 160/880 when in June 1939 Sir Kingsley Wood (Secretary for Air) writes to Lord Halifax, "we have agreed to release 100 Battle aircraft to the Poles". On 1st July 1939 Polish Air Attaché in London telegrams to Warsaw that the British had agreed to transfer 100 Battles plus all equipment; as well as 14 Hurricane to Poland. APISM LOT AI 2/15. The author would appreciate if any reader could shed more light on this issue.

11 George Kacewicz, *Great Britain, The Soviet Union and the Polish Government in Exile (1939-1945)*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague, Boston and London, 1979, "Polish Forces in Britain: Legal Status", pp 52-70.

12 See the following for details of the service expectations in the RAF Volunteer Reserve, *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w Drugiej Wojnie Światowej*. Tom II *Kampania na Obczyźnie*, czesc 1. Gryf Printers, London, 1959, pp 203-206.

13 In his post war memoirs General Zajac hardly mentions the negotiations over the air force agreement. Jozef Zajac, *Dwie Wojny*, op cit.

14 Archives of the Polish Institute and General Sikorski Museum, London. Henceforth cited as APISM LOT A IV 13b.

15 TNA WO 33/2339 gives the comprehensive text of the agreements pertaining to all 3 Polish services.

The naval agreement signed on 18 November 1939 and the agreements on land and air forces signed in August 1940. This will be discussed later in the paper.

16 Winston S Churchill, Vol 1. *The Second World War*. *The Gathering Storm*, of the six volume *The Second World War*, London, Cassell & C Ltd, 1948 (English edition), wrote in his memoirs: "the young Polish Navy distinguished itself" and also that "the escape of the Orzel is an epic", p 345.

17 For many years the West Point Academy Museum exhibited the uniform of a Polish Air Force warrant officer from the period of 1943. The exhibit was captioned as follows: "After the fall of Poland many Poles who managed to escape or were at the time living abroad volunteered for Service with the British military". Also an exchange of correspondence with the editors of a prominent aviation journal in the United States their riposte to my correction regarding alleged Polish volunteers in the RAF was an insouciant reply that it not known how the Polish pilots identified themselves; and after all they were flying Hurricanes not PZL 11c. My reply was according to their logic the Poles became members of the USAAF when they got Mustangs (P-51) fighter planes.

18 TNA FO 371/24463.

19 TNA AIR 2/4213.

20 The first accounting for the expenses of the Polish Air Force in the United Kingdom is in T 160/1412 for the period ending December 1940. Captioned as "Statement of Charges for Services for Polish Air Force Squadrons and Units in the United Kingdom for the Period to December 31st 1940". This financial sheet of many pages lists four Polish bomber squadrons, five fighter squadrons (more were to come in 1941) and one Army co-operation squadron plus 18 OUT and detailed miscellaneous charges for salaries, barracks fuel, spares, bombs, and on and on. The grand total for period L6,267,150. The initial equipment of the 300 and 301 Bomber Squadrons with Battles is assessed as L870,000 per squadron. This figure is in the ball park of the sum of L1,500,000 cited in T160/880.

21 One of those Polish pilots was Janusz Zurakowski who writes: "I was reluctant to leave France and thought that the selection of pilots to

embark for England was too arbitrary. I spoke French, so naturally I was sent to England". Zurakowski leaves out the second fact of importance, namely that he was a pre-war Polish fighter pilot and instructor in the Polish Special Training unit of the Advanced Flying School at Ulez, near Deblin. Bill Zuk and Janusz Zurakowski, *Janusz Zurakowski. Legend in the Skies*, Crecy Publishing, Manchester, 2004, p 72.

22 Anglo-Polish Historical Committee, (Tessa Stirling, Daria Nalecz, Tadeusz Dubicki, eds) *Intelligence Co-operation between Poland and Great Britain during World War II*, Oregon, Portland, Vallentine Mitchell, 2005, Vol 1 AND, *Polsko-Brytyjska współpraca wywiadowcza podczas II wojny Swiatowej. Wybór Dokumentow. Intelligence Co-operation between Poland and Great Britain during World War II, Vol II Documents. Naczelną Dyrekcja Archiwow Panstwowych*, Warsaw, 2005.

23 TNA PREM 712/83781.

24 TNA AIR 20/1823.

25 The story of Zurakowski illustrates in a nut shell the evolution of acceptance of the Polish air personnel. Zurakowski, being a "British Pole", and thus a "bomber" pilot found himself culled to 152 Fighter Squadron on 5 August 1940. Later he was transferred to 234 RAF Squadron in which he fought throughout the Battle of Britain. By November 1940 there were 85 Polish pilots in RAF squadrons. After the Battle of Britain all Polish pilots eventually returned to Polish squadrons and with the influx of further new personnel, 6 other Polish fighter squadrons were formed in late 1940. The heroic tale of the "gallant few" who won the Battle of Britain does not reflect how close the outcome really was. RAF Squadron 234 was withdrawn from battle since 15 of the 22 pilots had been lost and of the original complement only 3 were left. Zurakowski had 4 confirmed air victories, one short to entitle him to the accolade of "ace". Since Zurakowski was in a RAF squadron and his immediate superiors were British his exceptional skills were recognized and in March 1941 he was posted to 57 Operational Training Unit in March 1942 to train new fighter pilots. He spent the next 9 months in various RAF training bases which also included the training of the influx of young Polish pilots. In December 1941 he finally got a posting to an all-Polish squadron,

the 315 Deblinski. In April 1942 he was promoted to porucznik pilot with a RAF functional rank of flight lieutenant and took over command of a flight of the 306 Torunski Squadron. In June 1942 he was given the functional rank of squadron leader and took command of the 316 Warszawski Squadron. The squadron was one of three squadrons comprising the Polish First Fighter Wing. Again his expertise and experience was noted and he went to RAF Northolt as Sector Gunnery Officer. At this point in time it was an all-Polish base with a Polish base commander, the indomitable Colonel Mieczyslaw Mumler who commanded the Polish Poznanski Army fighter wing in September 1939. In July 1943 Zurakowski became deputy commander of the Polish Fighter Wing at Northolt and led its three squadrons on 46 combat missions. RAF authorities again took notice and in October 1943 Zurakowski was posted to the Royal Air Force Fighter Command Headquarters and placed in charge of tactics and training. After the war he became a test pilot for Gloster and famed for his "cartwheel" at Farnborough. Zuk, Bill, Janusz Zurakowski. *Legends in the Sky*, op cit, pp 119. As the war went on the British recognized and appreciated the qualities of the Polish personnel. Major Stanislaw Skalski took over the command of the 601 RAF Fighter Squadron in Malta. While in 1944 Colonel Alexander Gabszewicz during OVERLORD, commanded the 18th Sector which initially consisted of three Allied wings composed of nine fighter squadrons. Five were Polish, namely 302, 306, 308, 315 and 317; while 2 were RAF, one Belgian and one Royal New Zealand Air Force.

26 TNA 20/1823. Since the new agreement had not been signed, the British were quite correctly operating under the signed agreement of 11 June 1940, and the formal identification of the 302 and the 303 as RAF is legally correct. Unfortunately this persisted after the August 1940 agreement and even worse the identification of "Polish" tended to be ignored in many even official publications. It is a pleasure to read the correct captions of the two Polish squadrons which fought in the Battle of Britain in Mason's book. Francis K Mason, *Battle over Britain*, New York, Doubleday & Company Inc, 1969. In the index, they are cited correctly as: 302 (Polish) City of Poznan and 303 (Polish) Kosciuszko.

27 TNA AIR 8/295, 12 July 1940.

28 TNA AIR 8/370. These were the 302 (Poznanski)

and the 303 (Kosciuszko) squadrons. It is rather curious as to what the RAF authorities thought was being left to the Poles with the proviso of "etc". Certainly this memo regarding finances became moot since the agreement's Article 4 spelled out that "any costs incurred by or on behalf of the any Department of the Government of the United Kingdom in connection with the application of the present agreement shall be refunded out of the credit granted by His Majesty's Government to the Polish Government to finance the cost of maintaining the Polish military effort".

29 TNA WO 33/2389 and AIR 2/2413 also *Destiny Can Wait*, op cit, pp 377-382.

30 TNA Air 2/6154.

31 Major General S Ujejski was chief of the Air Section of the Polish General Staff in 1939.

32 The Polish military did not have a functional or brevet ranks system. There were salary adjustments concomitant with responsibility of command or function. In the army many divisions were commanded by colonels, and I know of at least one Army Commander (Army Krakow consisting of five infantry divisions) who was a mere major general, namely Antoni Szylling.

33 TNA AIR 8/295 80530.

34 Anna Cienciala, Natalia Lebedeva, Wojciech Materski, *Katyn – A Crime Without Punishment*, Yale University Press, 2007. Also Janusz Zawodny, *Death in the Forest, The Story of the Katyn Forest Massacre*, U of Notre Dame Press, First printing, 1962. Also Churchill, *Hinge of Fate*, p 760. Also in Sir Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, Volume III, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1971, specifically Chapters XXXIX pp 154-217, XL pp 218-335 and XLV pp 490-558 which deal with Great Britain and Russo-Polish relations.

35 One of these was Alexander Maisner, who on being liberated joined the Polish Army and then transferred to the Polish Air Force in 1943. Finished pilot training and after the war was accepted into RAF service achieving the rank of Air Vice-Marshal. He was also president of the Polish Air Force Association based in London.

36 The accident remains controversial and the

British RAF enquiry did little to reassure or answer the question; was it an accident or sabotage. TNA AIR 2/9234 and TNA PREM 13/264. If sabotage, then who was responsible and who was the intended victim; the Polish Prime Minister or Victor Cazalet MP, a local critic of Churchill's policy of seeming accommodation of Stalin at Polish territorial expense? See, *Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-1945*, edited by David Dilks, GP Putnam's Sons, NY, 1972, pp 446-448. "Thursday 23 April 1942 Message from Joe (ie Stalin) about our visitor from Moscow who will give us a rough passage over the Treaty (which I hear is beginning to cause a stink amongst MPs egged on by Victor Cazalet)".

37 It is important to clarify the Polish constitutional position of the Naczelnny Wodz in wartime. He was appointed by the President and only accountable to the President, not the prime minister and the cabinet and only for the duration of war. It was an issue of acrimony and misunderstanding in the British mass media. In March 1940 General Kazimierz Sosnkowski was appointed Honorary Knight Commander of the Military Division of the Order of the British Empire. Information from Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood, St James's Palace, London.

38 *Destiny Can Wait*, op cit, pp 383-389.

39 TNA AIR 2 37/90/96925.

40 TNA T160/399. This agreement signed by Raczynski and Cadogan is important in understanding the final accounting negotiations following the end of the war in Europe.

41 *Destiny Can Wait*, op cit, and J Cynk, op cit, both give detailed accounts of the Polish Air Force training and support services. TNA AIR 8/1155.

42 TNA FO 371/47662.

43 Kimball, *Churchill and Roosevelt*, p 565. Also, *Churchill, Triumph and Tragedy*, p 374.

44 TNA CAB 120/691. Also Lewis, Julian, *Changing Direction: British Military Planning for Post-war Strategic Defence, 1942-1947*, Sherbrook Press, London, 1988.

45 Sir Michael Howard, an eminent military historian and distinguished serving officer in WWII, wrote

(The Second World War in Perspective, RUSI, 150, No 4, 2005, pp 56-59) "... the belief that we surrendered Eastern Europe to the Soviets in Yalta is sheer nonsense. It was not ours to surrender. Soviet Armies were already in occupation and regarded these territories as the legitimate spoils of a terrible war. Similarly, any idea that the British and American Armies might have pushed the Russians back from already agreed occupation zones is equally fantastic. British and American troops, desperate to go home would have mutinied if called on to do anything of the kind, and done so with the full support of electorates that had, rightly or wrongly, learned to regard the Soviet Armed Forces with admiration and gratitude".

46 Michael Hope, *The Abandoned Legion. A Study of the Background and Process of the Post-War Dissolution of Polish Forces in the West*, Veritas, London, 2005. This is the only English language text on this sad event, but its title has to give some pause since the Polish Armed Forces in Exile were never called a legion.

47 Krystyna Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943-1948*, University of California Press, Oxford, 1991, pp 285-344.

48 Hilary St George Sanders, *Royal Air Force, 1939-1945, Vol 3. The Fight is Won*, HMSO, London, Third Impression 1993, p 370.

49 *Ibid*, p 414.

50 TNA PREM 1/357, also see David E Kaiser, *Economic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Second World War. Germany, Britain, France and Eastern Europe, 1930-1939*, Princeton U Press, Princeton, NJ, 1980, p 308.

51 TNA T 160/1399.

52 The Official Polish post war report about the Polish Air Force, written by the Historical Commission, chaired by Colonel Olgiered Tuszkiewicz in manuscript form promulgated in 1947. (Copy in author's possession); and the Franciszek Kalinowski, *Lotnictwo Polskie w Wielkiej Brytanii, 1940-1945* [Polish Air Force in Great Britain, 1940-1945], Institute Litteraire, Paris, 1969.

53 TNA T 160/1399.

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