
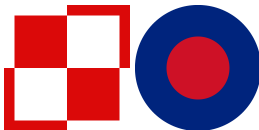



Polish Air Forces in France and Great Britain

Polish Air Forces in France and Great Britain	
	
Founded	18 May 1940
Country	United Kingdom, France
Allegiance	Polish government-in-exile
Insignia	
Identification symbol	
Fin flash	
Aircraft flown	
Attack	Caudron C.714, Hawker Hurricane, Supermarine Spitfire

The **Polish Air Forces** (*Polskie Siły Powietrzne*) was the name of the Polish Air Forces formed in France and the United Kingdom during World War II. The core of the Polish air units fighting alongside the Allies were experienced veterans of the 1939 Invasion of Poland. They contributed to the Allied victory in the Battle of Britain and most World War II air operations.

A total of 145 Polish fighter pilots served in the RAF during the Battle of Britain, making up the largest non-British contribution.^[1] By the end of the war, around 19,400 Poles were serving in the RAF.^[2]

History

After the joint German-Soviet victory in the Invasion of Poland of 1939, most of the flying personnel and technicians of the Polish Air Force were evacuated to Romania and Hungary, after which thousands found their way to France. There, in accordance with the Franco-Polish Military Alliance of 1921 and the amendments of 1939, Polish Air Force units were to be re-created. However, the French headquarters was hesitant about creating large Polish air units, and instead most Polish pilots were attached to small units, so-called *keys*. Only one large unit was formed, the *Groupe de Chasse polonaise I/145* stationed at Mions airfield. However, it was not until May 18, 1940 that this unit was equipped with planes - and even then these were the completely obsolete Caudron C.714 fighters. After 23 sorties the bad opinion of the plane was confirmed by the front-line pilots. It was seriously underpowered and was no match for the enemy fighters of the period. Because of that, on May 25, only a week after the plane was introduced to active service,

French minister of war Guy la Chambre ordered all C.710s withdrawn. However, since the French authorities had no other planes to offer, the Polish pilots ignored the order and continued to use the planes. Although the planes were



Monument to fallen Polish airmen; Warsaw, Pole Mokotowskie

hopelessly outdated compared to the Messerschmitt Me 109E's they faced, the Polish pilots nevertheless scored 12 confirmed and 3 unconfirmed kills in three battles between June 8 and June 11, losing 9 in the air and 9 more on the ground. Interestingly, among the planes claimed shot down were four Dornier Do 17 bombers, but also three Messerschmitt Bf 109 and five Messerschmitt Bf 110 fighters. The rest of the Polish units were using the Morane-Saulnier M.S.406 fighter, slightly more reliable.

Altogether, the Polish pilots flew 714 sorties during the Battle of France. According to Jerzy Cynk, they shot down 51.9 enemy planes (summing fraction kills - 57 kills including 16 shared victories), in addition to 3 unconfirmed kills and 6 3/5 damaged. According to Bartłomiej Belcarz they shot down 53 aircraft, including 19 kills shared with the French. These 53 victories makes 7.93% of 693 allied air victories in the French campaign. At the same time they lost 44 planes (in combat, accidents and on the ground) and lost 8 fighter pilots in combat, 1 missing, and 4 in accidents.^[3]

After the collapse of France in 1940, a large part of the Polish Air Force contingent was withdrawn to the United Kingdom. However, the RAF Air Staff were not willing to accept the independence and sovereignty of Polish forces. Air Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding later admitted he had been "a little doubtful" at first about the Polish airmen. British government informed General Sikorski that at the end of the war, Poland would be charged for all costs involved in maintaining Polish forces in Britain. Plans for the airmen greatly disappointed them: they would only be allowed to join the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, wear British uniforms, fly British flags and be required to take two oaths, one to the Polish government and the other to King George VI of the United Kingdom; each officer was required to have a British counterpart, and all Polish pilots were to begin with the rank of "pilot officer", the lowest rank for a commissioned officer in the RAF. Only after posting would anyone be promoted to a higher grade.^[4] Because of this, the majority of highly experienced Polish pilots had to wait in training centres, learning English Command procedures and language, while the RAF suffered heavy losses due to lack of experienced pilots. On June 11, 1940, a preliminary agreement was signed by the Polish and British governments and soon the British authorities finally allowed for creation of two bomber squadrons and a training centre as part of the Royal Air Force.

The first squadrons were 300 and 301 bomber squadrons and 302 and 303 fighter squadrons. The fighter squadrons, flying the Hawker Hurricane, first saw action in the third phase of the Battle of Britain in late August 1940, quickly becoming highly effective. Polish flying skills were well-developed from the Invasion of Poland and the pilots were regarded as fearless and sometimes bordering on reckless. Their success rates were very high in comparison to the less-experienced British Commonwealth pilots.^[5] The 303 squadron became the most efficient RAF fighter unit at that time.^[6] Many Polish pilots flew in other RAF squadrons. Later, further Polish squadrons were created: 304 (bomber, then Coastal Command), 305 (bomber), 306 (fighter), 307 (night fighter), 308 (fighter), 309 (reconnaissance, then fighter), 315 (fighter), 316 (fighter), 317 (fighter), 318 (fighter-reconnaissance) and 663 (air observation/artillery spotting). The fighter squadrons initially flew Hurricanes, then Supermarine Spitfires, and eventually some were equipped with North American Mustangs. Night fighters used by 307 were the Boulton-Paul Defiant, Bristol Beaufighter and the de Havilland Mosquito. The bomber squadrons were initially equipped with Fairey Battles and Vickers Wellingtons, then Avro Lancasters (300 sqn), Handley Page Halifaxes and Consolidated Liberators (301 sqn) and de Havilland Mosquitos and North American Mitchells (305 sqn). 663 flew Auster AOP Mk Vs.

On April 6, 1944, a further agreement was reached and the Polish Air Forces in Great Britain came under Polish command, without RAF officers. This resulted in the creation of a dedicated Polish Air Force staff college at RAF Weston-super-Mare, which remained open until April 1946.^[7]

After the war, in a changed political situation, their equipment was returned to the British. Due to the fact that Poland ended the war under Soviet occupation, only a small proportion of the pilots returned to Poland, while the rest remained in exile.

A memorial to those Polish pilots killed while on RAF service has been erected at the south-eastern corner of RAF Northolt aerodrome.

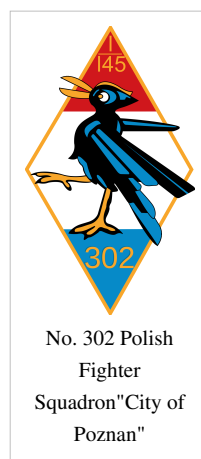
On the public highway, it is accessible without entering RAF areas. It is adjacent to a junction on the A40 Western Avenue; the official name for this junction is still "Polish War Memorial". A large memorial to Polish Air Force squadrons in the war is situated on the floor of the north aisle of the reconstructed Wren church St Clement Danes, London.

The Polish-American fighter ace Francis S. "Gabby" Gabreski flew his first combat missions attached to a Polish RAF squadron.

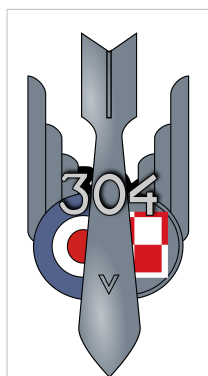
King George VI, on visiting a Polish squadron, asked a Polish airman what was the toughest thing he had to deal with in the war. The reply was "King's Regulations...."

Polish Volunteer Air Force Squadrons Coat of Arms

No.303 Squadron inherited the traditions of previous Squadrons of the PAF such as Polish 7th Air Escadrille & Polish 111th Fighter Escadrille



Polish Air Force memorial, St Clement Danes, London



No. 304 Polish Bomber Squadron "Land of Silesia-Ks. Józefa Poniatowskiego"



No. 305 Polish Bomber Squadron "Land of Greater Poland-Marshal Josef Pilsudski"



No. 306 Polish Fighter Squadron "City of Torun"



No. 307 Polish Night Fighter Squadron "Lwów Eagle-owls"



No. 308 Polish Fighter Squadron "City of Krakow"



No. 309 Polish Fighter-Reconnaissance Squadron "Land of Czerwien"



No. 315 Polish Fighter Squadron "City of Deblin"



No. 316 Polish Fighter Squadron "City of Warsaw"



No. 317 Polish Fighter Squadron "City of Wilno"



No. 318 Polish Fighter-Reconnaissance Squadron "City of Gdansk"



No. 663 Squadron RAFNo. 663 Artillery Observation Squadron "We Fly for the Guns"



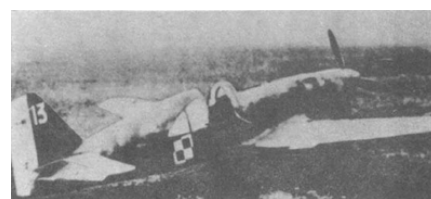
Polish Fighting Team {attached to No. 145 RAF Squadron} "Skalski's Circus"

Polish volunteer wings in Allied Air forces, 1940-45

France

List of Polish units based on Bartłomiej Belcarz's research and publications.^{[3][8]}

- **Armée de l'Air, May 10, 1940** - Zone d'Operations Aériennes des Alpes
 - *Groupe de Chasse de Varsovie* at Lyon-Bron
 - Section no.1 Łaskiewicz GC III/2
 - Section no.2 Pentz GC II/6
 - Section no.3 Sulerzycki GC III/6
 - Section no.4 Bursztyn GC III/1
 - Section no.5 Brzeziński GC I/2
 - Section no.6 Goettel GC II/7
 - Jasionowski Koolhoven Flight
 - DAT section Krasnodębski GC I/55 based at Châteaudun and Étampes
 - DAT section Skiba GC I/55
 - DAT section Kuzian based at Nantes
 - DAT section Opulski based at Romorantin
 - DAT section Krasnodębski based at Toulouse-Franczal
 - Centre d'Instruction d'Aviation de Chasse at Montpellier
 - Ecole de Pilotage No 1 (Chasse) at Etampes
 - Ecole de Pilotage at Avord
 - Centre d'Instruction at Tours
 - Depot d'Instruction de l'Aviation Polonaise at Lyon-Bron
 - Montpellier Flight



Caudron CR.714 fighter plane of Groupe de Chasse I/145, June 1940

United Kingdom

- **Royal Air Force (Home Command), June 6, 1944**
 - RAF Bomber Command*
 - No. 1 Bomber Group
 - No. 300 Polish Bomber Squadron "Masovia" RAF Faldingworth (Avro Lancaster Mk. I & III)
 - No. 301 Polish Bomber Squadron "Pomerania" RAF Faldingworth (Handley Page Halifax Mk. III)
- **Allied Expeditionary Air Force**
 - Air Defence of Great Britain
 - No. 11 (Fighter) Group
 - No. 303 Polish Fighter Squadron "Kosciuszko" Horne (Supermarine Spitfire Mk VB)
 - No. 307 Polish Fighter Squadron "City of Lwow" Church Fenton (De Havilland Mosquito Mk-NF.XIII)
 - No. 12 (Fighter) Group
 - No. 309 Polish Fighter-Reconnaissance Squadron "Czerwien" "B" (Flight) Hutton Cranswick (Hawker Hurricane Mk. IIC)
 - No. 316 Polish Fighter Squadron "City of Warsaw" RAF Coltishall (North American Mustang III)
 - No. 13 Fighter Group

- No. 309 Polish Fighter-Reconnaissance Squadron "Czerwien" "A" (Flight) RAF Drem (Hawker Hurricane Mk. IIC)
- **2nd Tactical Air Force**
 - No. 305 Polish Bomber Squadron "Greater Poland" Lasham (de Havilland Mosquito F.B. Mk VI)
- No. 84 Group RAF
 - 131 Wing
 - No. 302 Polish Fighter Squadron "City of Poznan" Chailey (Supermarine Spitfire Mk. IX)
 - No. 308 Polish Fighter Squadron "City of Krakow" Chailey (Supermarine Spitfire Mk. IX)
 - No. 317 Polish Fighter Squadron "City of Wilno" Chailey (Supermarine Spitfire Mk. IX)
 - II Corps (Poland)
 - No. 318 Polish Fighter-Reconnaissance Squadron "City of Gdansk" Chailey (Supermarine Spitfire P.R. Mk. IX)
 - No. 663 Polish Artillery Observation Squadron (Italy) (British Taylorcraft Auster III, IV and V)
- 133 Wing
 - No. 306 Polish Fighter Squadron "City of Torun" Coolham (North American Mustang III)
 - No. 315 Polish Fighter Squadron "City of Deblin" Coolham (North American Mustang III)
- **Coastal Command**
 - No 19 (GR) Group
 - No. 304 Polish Bomber Squadron "Silesia" RAF Chivenor (Vickers Wellington Mk. XIV)
- **Polish Fighting Team**
 - Polski Zespół Myśliwski (Polish Fighting Team) (also known as Skalski's Circus) (Supermarine Spitfire F VB Trop and VC, later Supermarine Spitfire F IXC)

Bases

- RAF West Kirby (England) - First base
- In African area
 - Bu Grara
 - La Fauconnerie
 - Goubaine
 - Hergla
 - Ben Gardane

Stats

		1940 ^[9]	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	total
Fighters ^[10]	sorties	4,115	13,032	10,390	13,266	25,399	9,238	73,524
	hours	4,533	16,722	15,365	23,264	46,595	18,575	122,816
Bombers ^[11]	sorties	97	1,357	2,999	1,895	3,607	1,751	11,706
	hours	367.5	7,451	17,788	11,482.5	18,126	8,889	64,113
Special ^[12]	sorties	-	2	104	191	943	95	1,335
	hours	-	22	835	1,573	6,781	716	9,927
Transport ^[13]	sorties	163	1,475	2,648	3,995	6,747	3,760	18,788
	hours	261	14,868	16,914	20,111	30,204	14,709	97,067

	1940 ^[9]	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	total
destroyed	266 1/6	202	90	114¾	103	38½	769 5/12
probable	38	52	36	42	10	2	177
damaged	43⅔ + 3/5	60½	43	66	27	18	252 1/6

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- [6] **(English)** Jerzy B. Cynk. 1998. The Polish Air Force at War: The Official History, 1943–1945. Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 1998, ISBN 0-7643-0560-3.
- [7] "RAF Weston-super-Mare" (<http://www.rafweb.org/Stations/Stations-W.htm#Weston-super-Mare>). rafweb.org. . Retrieved 2009-07-12.
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- [9] Including Polish units both in France and in United Kingdom
- [10] Including all Polish air units in France, as well as Polish fighter units of RAF Fighter Command; excluding the pilots of the Polish Fighting Team, as well as Polish pilots fighting in the RAF and USAAF
- [11] Including the Polish units of Bomber Command, Coastal Command and Tactical Air Force, but excluding the special units of No. 138 Squadron RAF, No. 1586 Polish Special Duties Flight and No. 301 Polish Bomber Squadron
- [12] No. 138 Squadron RAF, No. 1586 Polish Special Duties Flight and No. 301 Polish Bomber Squadron
- [13] Including Polish units of the Transport Command and Air Transport Auxiliary

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External links

- Polish squadrons in the RAF ("Flight") (<http://www.flightglobal.com/pdfarchive/view/1942/1942 - 1647.html>)

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