

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

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Information

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PNIEWSKI Wiktor

Person

PNIEWSKI Wiktor

Born

1891

Died

1974

Description

“With a cry of justice, the same aeroplanes whose black crosses were to bring the world to ruin, with the hum of their engines brought news of freedom and independence to a nation oppressed for centuries”. With these words, in the early 1930s, Wiktor Pniewski recalled his participation in the seizure of one of the largest spoils of war in the history of Polish weaponry. Owing to

Pniewski's efforts, in the first days of the Greater Poland Uprising the soldiers managed to seize military equipment worth several million German marks from the defeated Germans. This equipment made it possible to immediately form four air force squadrons and to send a considerable part of it directly to Warsaw.

Pniewski, one of the pioneers of Polish military aviation, achieved this great success when he was merely 27 years old. The path that led him to Ławica in the autumn of 1918, a village in the vicinity of Poznań, started in Kłecko. Here, on 5 December 1891, Wiktor Pniewski was born to the family of Stanisław - a post office clerk, and Anna, née Chrzanowska. He was educated in Poznań, where he was involved in the activity of underground organisations such as the Tomasz Zan Society. Having graduated from trade school, in 1910 he got his first job as a... cosmetician. He gave up his career in this trade in 1911 when he was called up for military service in the German army. From then on, he was absolutely fascinated with the craft of war, which he started to master at the 9th Hussar Regiment in Strasbourg. One thing, however, was crucial, in December 1913, when he started working as an assistant mechanic at the 4th Air Force Battalion, he became familiar with his greatest passion - aviation, which he described as the "true future of modern weaponry." In October 1916, he was sent on a course at the Aviation School in Koszalin, which he completed in June 1917 with the rank of sergeant pilot. From there, he was sent to the Western Front. After being wounded and subject to convalescence, in October 1918 he was luckily moved to Poznań, and to the Ławica Air Station.

Having joined the Polish Military Organisation of the Former Prussian Partition, Wiktor Pniewski was soon engaged in the organisation of the future air force cadres of the Greater Poland

Uprising and of the Greater Poland Army, taking advantage of his strong position in the Worker and Soldier Council. Due to his efforts, the Germans failed to transport the aeronautical equipment, which was later used by the insurgents, away from Ławica (and, consequently, from Winiary). Years later, Pniewski wrote: "We knew we would have to fight. The fight required preparations, so we needed guns, cannons and aeroplanes. All of that was in German hands, but we managed to get hold of the equipment for a single reason - we wanted to have it [bolded as in the original]." Our hero, who made his mark in the insurgents' successful occupation of Ławica airport during the night of 5 to 6 January 1919, was immediately appointed its first Polish commandant. On the next day - as he wrote in a very emotional fragment of text - "the first aviators with Polish markings were flying over Poznań.". On the following day (8 January 1919), in response to the Germans bombing of Ławica, he made the bold decision for Polish soldiers to organise a retaliation raid. Even if the raid did not actually take place in the end, which remains the subject of constant dispute between military historians, and the Polish planes sent to Frankfurt-on-Oder were actually ordered to return to Poznań just as they reached the line of the Zbąszyńskie Lakes, the campaign itself had an important preventive result for Poland. In January 1919, Wiktor Pniewski was promoted to the rank of second lieutenant and instantly started his military career in the Polish Wings.

At the end of January and the beginning of February 1919, the young pilot from Kłecko formed, among others, the 1st Greater Poland Air Force Squadron, with which he set off for Lviv, to the front of the Polish-Ukrainian war. A year later, he organised the Reserve Air Force Battalion and was further promoted to the rank of

captain. In 1925, having completed complimentary courses for staff officers in Rembertów and for quartermasters in the Military War School, he kept climbing the career ladder in Polish military aviation. The positions he occupied in the years 1925-1939 included: Commander of the 2nd Division at the 3rd Air Force Regiment, Quartermaster at the 3rd Air Force Regiment in Poznań, Base Commander of the 6th Air Force Regiment in Lviv (1932-1935) and the Air Force Training Centre No. 1 in Dęblin (1935-1936), and, last but not least, (already as lieutenant colonel) Deputy Head of Air Force Supply Management in Warsaw (1936-1939). The tough pilot from Greater Poland was not broken by the assault by the Nazi Germans in September 1939. Having managed to break through Romania to France and, after its fall, to Great Britain, Pniewski took the position of commandant of the Polish Air Force Camp in RAF bases in Blackpool and Dunholme-Lodge (1940-1945).

In 1947, he made the difficult decision to return to Poland which was now ruled by Communists. For the next 5 years, with the rank of colonel (until his retirement in 1952), he was, among others, the Head of the Military Department in the State Institute of Hydrology and Meteorology. He was also involved in the work of the Senior Club at the People's Republic of Poland's Aeroclub. He died on 13 August 1974 and was buried in the parish cemetery in Rozdrażewo (powiat of Krotoszyn). Since 17 May 2019, the 33rd Powidz Transport Aviation Base has borne his name.

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Bibliography

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