

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

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The Greater Poland Air Force 1919-1920

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Select Pages

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[In connection with the arrival of the 3rd Squadron \(...\)](#)

[These veteran officers of German aircraft lacked \(...\)](#)

The history of Polish air force has, for many years, been a subject which is rather difficult to ignore. However, the interest of historians is not distributed evenly. Those subjects related specifically to the glory of the Polish wings, i.e. the air campaigns during World War II, have always enjoyed much greater popularity, while less is written about the beginnings of the Polish Air Force. Among the few publications which do touch upon the history of Polish aviation in the years 1918-1920, a certain selectiveness may be noticed. Researchers place more emphasis on the

presentation of the participation of the Polish Air Force in the shaping of the Eastern border, and less attention is paid to the representation of the events in Greater Poland. This situation could lead to a failure to appreciate the contribution of Greater Poland in the building of the Air Force of the Second Republic of Poland; it is certainly worth taking the time to reflect on the history of aviation in this region in the years 1919-1920.

The centre, around which the air forces took shape in the former Prussian partition, was the airport in Ławica near Poznań. Until the end of the year 1918, the Reserve Aviation Unit No. 4 was stationed at the airport in Ławica. The activities of this unit were concentrated on the training of flying personnel (pilots and observers) and auxiliary personnel. Also repairs and checks of aeroplanes were performed in Ławica.

There were about 200 soldiers in service in this unit. For the most part, these were Germans, but this group also included several dozen Poles. Among the soldiers of Polish nationality, there was Sergeant Pilot Wiktor Pniewski, a member of the Polish Military Organisation of the Prussian Partition who was assigned the task of the initiation of the preparations for the organisation of a Polish aviation unit. At the very beginning, the Polish pilot focused on acquiring weapons and checking the contents of the warehouses and hangars in Ławica. Pniewski managed to engage 5 other pilots, 2 observers and 2 aviation

mechanics, also of Polish nationality, in these covert activities.

The outbreak of the uprising in Poznań surprised the Germans, who were pushed out of the administrative borders of Greater Poland within just a couple of days. However, the command of the insurgent armies had to struggle with the problem of what to do with the nearby Ławica, where German soldiers from defeated units had found refuge.



The buildings of the Air Base in Ławica. Photo from the year 1919, from the collection of the Digital National Library - "Polona"

There were two opposing views among the members of City Command. The Polish Military Organisation of the Prussian Partition (PMOPP) suggested capturing the Air Base because, on the one hand, it was striving for the expansion of the territory occupied by the Poles, and on the other hand, it was afraid of the armed Germans in the immediate vicinity of Poznań. Furthermore, there

was the risk that the German soldiers, deprived of supplies, could start confiscating food in the surrounding areas. The stance taken by the PMOPP was opposed by the members of the Commissariat of the Supreme People's Council, who were afraid of the German response (including the possible bombardment of Poznań).

The members of the PMOPP managed to push through their postulates on 4 January and one day later, representatives of the insurgents were sent to the airport. The Polish demand of non-conditional capitulation was strongly rejected. Conversely, the Poles also did not wish to agree to the German proposals.

After returning from Ławica, the insurgents involved themselves in the preparation of a plan for the seizure of the Air Base. Before the attack, the main electric cable which connected Ławica with Poznań was cut, and as a consequence of this the Air Base was plunged into darkness; this was to ensure the surprise necessary for the success of the attack. The attack on the airport was delegated to three infantry companies, a mounted riflemen platoon, several units of the PMOPP and a sanitary unit. Support was to be provided by two 80mm cannons and several machine guns. The command of the entire operation was taken by Second Lieutenant Andrzej Kopa. Among the insurgents who attacked Ławica at that time, there were a few of the subsequent prominent aviators: Second

Lieutenant Observer Franciszek Stempniewicz, Sergeant Pilot Wiktor Pniewski, Sergeant Pilot Józef Mańczak and Sergeant Observer Andrzej Płachta.

The main forces were to strike from the side of the Ławica village. The artillery, protected by an infantry unit, took up positions in the area of the Poznań-Wola railway station. The cavalry and volunteers from the PMO were assigned the task of a diversionary attack from the direction of Poznań. Early in the morning, on 6 January 1919, the airport in Ławica was seized by force. Yet again, the insurgents sent envoys, but to no avail. Taking advantage of the darkness, the attackers managed to get very close to the airport. The German machine gun crews aimed too high and therefore did not create any serious obstacle.



The interior of the aircraft hangar in Winiary near Poznań, filled with airframes. Visible are the fuselages of the following aeroplanes: Albatros B.II, AEG C.IV, AEG N.I and LVG C.V. Photo from the collections of the "Polona" Digital National Library

The Polish cannons fired only four times, so as not to cause a fire at the airport by accident. The losses of both parties to the conflict were insignificant and were limited to only a few dead and wounded. 26 fully operational aeroplanes and 20 machine guns were captured in Ławica. At the same time, over one hundred prisoners of war were taken. The Polish acquisitions were significantly increased as a result of the capture of an aircraft hangar in the nearby Winiary - the insurgents managed to seize about 215 airframes there. Two-seater aeroplanes such as LVGs, Rumplers, Albatrosses and Halberstadts, one-seater fighters such as Albatrosses and Fokkers, and two-seater training Albatros aeroplanes were seized. As well as the aeroplanes, which were now in the hands of insurgents, there were also several dozen aircraft engines, spare parts, ammunition and aerial bombs, on-board weapons, field hangars, cars, motorcycles, carts, photographic equipment, aviation equipment and also some balloon equipment.

On the day of the seizure of Ławica by the Poles, Sergeant W. Pniewski was appointed as the commandant of the Air Base. Four companies were formed at the airport. The 1st aviation company included pilots and a group of mechanics. This was, in principle, the flight school, in charge of which was Sergeant Pilot J. Mańczak. Sergeant Franciszek Gruszkiewicz

commanded the 2nd workshop company, while the 3rd guard company was commanded by Sergeant Józef Szyfter. The last subunit of the Air Base was the 4th recruit company.

As part of the first company, a Combat Group was also formed. The group was composed of the most experienced aviators commanded directly by the commandant of the Air Base. The latter was subordinated to the Central Command of the Uprising through the aviation department which was headed by Second Lieutenant Observer F. Stempniewicz. The aviation department was also established on 7 January.

On the same day, three or four German Gotha G.IV bombers appeared over the Air Base. They flew from the airport in Frankfurt an der Oder. The Germans dropped 18 bombs and although it is true that the bombardment per se did not cause any losses in people, a wooden barrack-house did catch fire. The losses could have been much greater, because the Poles had not managed to organise any solid anti-aircraft defence. It was only after the bombardment that the Air Base was reinforced with two companies which were ordered to prepare machine guns to repulse attacks from the air.

This anti-aircraft defence passed its exam on the

following day, when the Germans arrived with another air raid. The formation of three Gotha G.IV bombers did not manage to get through to the airport, however, one aeroplane was forced to carry out an emergency landing. The German aviators did manage to destroy their damaged Gotha before they were taken into captivity and imprisoned in the Citadel.

The first flight, providing support to the armies on the Front, was carried out by the Greater Poland aviators on 17 January 1919. The crew, which consisted of Pilot Ludwik Piechowiak and Sergeant Observer Andrzej Płachta, conducted reconnaissance over the region to the west of Leszno. After a few days, the Polish aeroplane conducted reconnaissance with regards to the situation in the direction of Zbąszyń. On their way back, the Polish aviators decided to land near Posadowo, so that Sergeant Płachta could report directly to the commander of the section. Piechowiak and Płachta also flew several missions over northern Greater Poland. Such tasks were performed by the most experienced pilots and observers of the Air Base, which was now the assembly point for all of the Polish aviators in Greater Poland.

The next days and weeks brought a re-organisation of the Greater Poland Air Force, which was now starting to resemble a regular

army. This was, after all, a general trend noticeable in all of the insurgent armed forces. On 18 January, Second Lieutenant Pilot Jerzy Dziembowski became the temporary commander of the Greater Poland Uprising. However, he held this position for a short time, as four days later General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki handed command of the Greater Poland Air Force over to Colonel Pilot Gustaw Macewicz.

On 31 January, the manning of the Air Force Command was established. The position of commander (inspector) of the Air Force should now be taken by a pilot with the rank of general major, general second lieutenant or possibly colonel, and a colonel pilot should fulfil the function of his assistant, but because of a shortage of officers, the giving of this function to a subaltern was permitted. Places for one officer responsible for technical issues and one officer responsible for economic and front-related issues were provided for in the Command. Also an adjutant and a secretary were supposed to serve as staff members. These two people were also supposed to be part of the flying personnel.

The Air Force Command was subordinated to the Commander of Polish Armed Forces in the Former Prussian Partition. The competences of the Air Force Command included all matters

related to the air force, aviation schools, workshops and depots.

Also, on 31 January, the manning of the air squadron was announced. A unit of this size was supposed to be commanded by a captain pilot (or otherwise possibly a lieutenant pilot).

Furthermore, the flying personnel should consist of six pilots, four observers and two aircraft gunners. The squadron also comprised 125 people in the ground crew. The unit was supposed to be provided with seven aeroplanes: five reconnaissance aircraft, one fighter plane and one attack plane. All this should be complemented by two reserve aircraft. One tool kit and six spare part kits were to be assigned to each aircraft. Two kits of spare parts were ensured for each aircraft engine. The squadron would also receive 5 reserve propellers, 7 hangars, 8 heavy machine guns, a set of gunner tools, 2 cameras, 10 signal pistols, ammunition for machine guns, bombs and flares.

Based on this, the organisation of squadrons was started in February and March 1919. The relevant order was given on 12 February, and one day later, Second Lieutenant Pilot W. Pniewski started working on the establishment of the 1st Greater Poland Air Force Squadron. Second Lieutenant Pilot J. Dziembowski was appointed as the new commandant of the Air Base in Ławica. Pniewski's squadron was provided with six aeroplanes: five LVG C.V reconnaissance aircraft and one Albatros D.Va fighter plane. Colonel Pilot G. Macewicz, who commanded the entire Greater Poland Air

Forces, not only oversaw the air force in the former Prussian partition, but also bore the difficult situation faced by the Polish squadrons in Galicia in mind. The commander of the Air Force in Greater Poland decided to send the 1st Greater Poland Squadron to Lesser Poland in order to support the countrymen there. He could afford to send this squadron to the east because another combat unit was feverishly being organised at the airport in Ławica: On 14 February, Rittmeister Pilot Tadeusz Grochowalski commenced the establishment of the 2nd Greater Poland Air Force Squadron. The staff and aeroplane resources in Ławica looked good, therefore, as early as 2 April, the squadron, commanded by Second Lieutenant Pilot Edmund Norwid-Kudła could begin to participate in front-line operations. The equipment of the unit included German two-seater aeroplanes -Halberstadt Cl.IIs and C.Vs and one fighter plane-an Albatros D.III.

The squadron commanded by Second Lieutenant Pilot E. Norwid-Kudła was sent to the Southern Front of the Uprising. Its first field airport was located in Kleka, near Nowe Miasto nad Wartą. The aviators of the squadron mainly carried out reconnaissance flights. According to the guidelines of Colonel G. Macewicz, Norwid-Kudła's squadron was to check whether the Polish armies were threatened by any serious danger from the direction of Rawicz. It also carried out propaganda flights, flying over the borders of Silesia.

An inspection by the commander of the Polish Armed Forces of the Former Prussian Partition, General Józef Dowbor--Muśnicki at the airport in Ławica (March 1919). With his back to the camera and wearing boots with spurs, there is the Greater Poland Air Force Inspector, Colonel Pilot Gustaw Macewicz, and next to him: General Dowbor-Muśnicki. The officers of the Air Base are standing in a line: from the left - Second Lieutenant Pilot Jerzy Dziembowski, unknown, Second Lieutenant Pilot Wiktor Pniewski, Second Lieutenant Pilot Edmund Norwid-Kudło, Second Lieutenant Pilot Józef Mańczak, unknown, Second Lieutenant Pilot Wojciech Biały and military official Hullej. Photo from the collection of Priest R. Kulczyński SDB



An inspection by the commander of the Polish Armed Forces of the Former Prussian Partition, General Józef Dowbor--Muśnicki at the airport in Ławica (March 1919). With his back to the camera and wearing boots with spurs, there is the Greater Poland Air Force Inspector, Colonel Pilot Gustaw Macewicz, and next to him: General Dowbor-

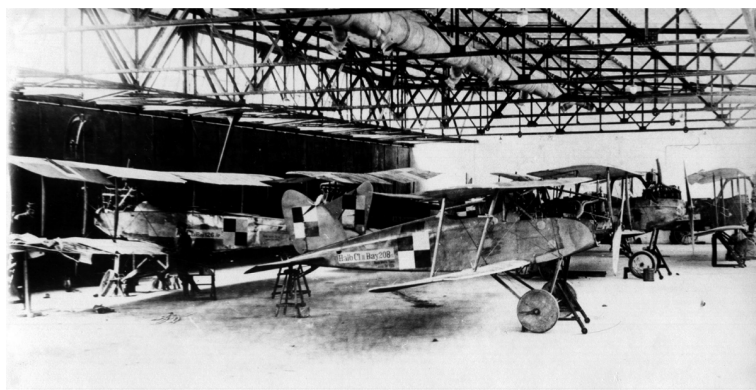
Muśnicki. The officers of the Air Base are standing in a line: from the left - Second Lieutenant Pilot Jerzy Dziembowski, unknown, Second Lieutenant Pilot Wiktor Pniewski, Second Lieutenant Pilot Edmund Norwid-Kudło, Second Lieutenant Pilot Józef Mańczak, unknown, Second Lieutenant Pilot Wojciech Biały and military official Hullej. Photo from the collection of Priest R. Kulczyński SDB

The first flight over the southern edge of Greater Poland and the northern edge of Silesia was carried out by a crew composed of Second Lieutenant Pilot E. Norwid-Kudło and Sergeant Observer Tadeusz Kostro. Using a Halberstadt C.V, they flew over Ostrów Wielkopolski, Kluczbork and Oleśnica. It is also worth mentioning a particular flight dated 23 May 1919, which ended in a crash: at 7:15 p.m. the 2nd Squadron lost one Halberstadt C.V along with its the crew: Sergeant Pilot Łukasz Durka and Sergeant Observer Stanisław Kruszona. The aeroplane crashed during its take-off for a combat flight.

On 6 March, at the airport in Ławica, Rittmeister Pilot T. Grochowalski started to organise the 3rd Greater Poland Air Force Squadron. However, at that stage of the formation of the Greater Poland Air Force, problems with staffing and equipment appeared; the unit only became fully operational as late as on 1 June 1919. Several days before this, Grochowalski transferred the command of the squadron to Lieutenant Colonel Pilot Marek Krzyczkowski. The squadron was provided mainly

with DFW C.V and LVG C.V for intelligence purposes.

In Greater Poland, during the period of autonomy, three reconnaissance squadrons and one fighter unit were established - on 25 May, work on the organisation of the 4th Greater Poland Air Force Squadron was commenced. This task was charged to Lieutenant Pilot J. Dziembowski.



The two-seater escort aircraft - Halberstadt Cl.II- No. SLŁ 208/18 in a hangar in Ławica.

As well as this plane, there are also: an Albatros C.Ia No. SLŁ 126/17 and an Albatros C.VII. Photo from the collection of Priest Robert Kulczyński SDB

The provision of any appropriate aeroplanes to the squadron turned out to be a serious problem - in January 1919, not many fighter planes were captured in Greater Poland. Therefore, the new squadron was provided with used aeroplanes of the following types: Fokker D.VII (2 aeroplanes), E.V (1 aeroplanes) and Albatros D.III (3 aeroplanes). In the summer, the squadron was

rearmed with French Spad S.VIIC1 fighter planes. Finally, however, German Fokkers D.VII started to be used again.

At the beginning of June, the 3rd Greater Poland Air Force Squadron was sent to the airport in Góra near Jarocin. It carried out operations along the Greater Poland-Silesian border and conducted reconnaissance of the movements of the German armies there. The aviators also dropped leaflets addressed to the Poles in the Upper Silesia region. The squadron lost two aeroplanes in this area. Sergeant Pilot Stanisław Wrembela and Sergeant Observer Marian Skórzyński managed to get through to the territory under Polish authorities, while the crew of the second aeroplane: Lieutenant Pilot Wiktor Lang and Sergeant Observer Jan Kasprzak were taken into captivity.

In connection with the arrival of the 3rd Squadron in southern Greater Poland, on 10 June, the 2nd Squadron was moved to Kruszwica. From this airport, the unit was to conduct reconnaissance missions along the Bydgoszcz-Nakło-Piła section. Also on 10 June, the 1st Squadron returned to Poznań. One day later, in recognition of its service during the campaign in Galicia, the Supreme People's Council honoured the squadron with metal eagles with a plaque with the following inscription: For the Defence of the Eastern Territories. The plaques were placed on the engine covers of each aeroplane in the squadron. The unit did not remain in the capital city of Greater Poland, but

left at once for the airport in Wojnowice near Buk.

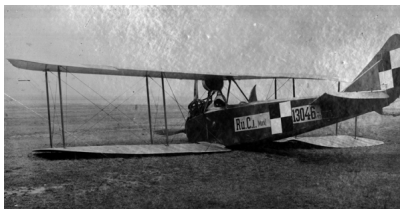


An LVG C.V reconnaissance aircraft with the side number 5 and the proper name "Halka", from the depot of the 1st Greater Poland Air Force Squadron at the time of its railway transportation to the Eastern Front. Photo from the collection of Priest R. Kulczyński SDB

A further enlargement of the air force in Greater Poland took place on 17 June 1919, when Squadron BR66 was moved from Warsaw to the Ławica airport near Poznań. This move was the result of an increase in the tension in the Polish-German relations and the concern that the Germans would not sign the peace treaty imposed on them, but rather resume their war-time operations. The squadron, dominated by Frenchmen, was commanded by the French officer, Captain Gontran de la Perelle.

In the second half of June, the 3rd Greater Poland Air Force Squadron, commanded at this point by Second Lieutenant Pilot J. Mańczak, was sent from Greater Poland to the east and landed in Stryi in Eastern Galician on 25 June.

By signing the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919, the Weimar Republic waived all pretension to Greater Poland which was in the hands of insurgents, and also resigned from Gdańsk Pomerania. However, with regards to this second area, the administration and armed forces of the Weimar Republic were only just about to evacuate. In order to have an insight into the course of events in the Pomerania region, the Poles intended to use the 2nd Greater Poland Squadron. From the airport in Kruszwica, it conducted reconnaissance over the territory of the southern part of Pomerania, furthermore, Polish aeroplanes dropped leaflets for the Poles living in Bydgoszcz and Toruń. During one of these flights with leaflets, Sergeant Pilot Józef Mühlnikiel and Sergeant Observer T. Kostro got lost and found themselves flying over Piła. The Polish Halberstadt C.V was captured by two German Fokker fighter aircrafts, which escorted the Polish crew back to Polish territory. As the threat of a German attack receded, the number of squadrons in Greater Poland was reduced. On 30 July 1919, the 2nd Squadron was moved to Kruszwica to the Lithuanian-Belarussian Front.



Greater Poland's Rumpler C.I No. 13046/17 after an unfortunate landing. Taken over by the Greater Poland insurgents on 6 January 1919, it was in stock at the Air Base in Ławica, at least till the end of August. Photo from the collections of the "Polona" Digital National Library.



The wreckage of a fighter plane–Albatros D.Va No. 7527/17. Until February 1919, it was part of the 2nd Greater Poland Air Force Squadron, later on, it was moved to the Aviation School in Ławica, and then to the Higher School of Pilots; finally decommissioned in April 1921. Photo from the collections of the “Polona” Digital National Library.

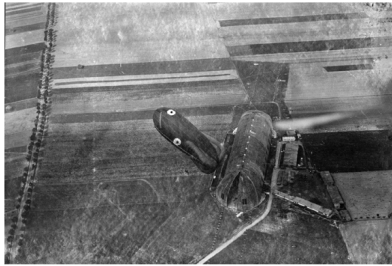


The wreckage of a fighter plane–an Albatros, which belonged to the Greater Poland Air Force. Photo from the collections of the “Polona” Digital National Library.



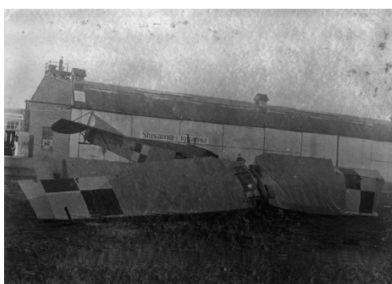
Damaged aeroplanes used by the Aviation School in Ławica:

the reconnaissance aircraft - DFW C.V No. 2019/17 (Ławica Air Base No. 220/17) and the training aircraft Albatros B.IIa No. 1300/17 (No.: SLŁ 53/17). Standing on the left: Jan Jasiewicz - a pilot brought to Greater Poland by Colonel Gustaw Macewicz. Photograph taken in Ławica in 1919, from the collection of R. Kulczyński SDB



The aircraft hangar (i.e. Zeppelin hall) in Winiary near Poznań. Next to it, there is an elevated observation balloon. Photo taken from a height of 120m by Second Lieutenant Observer Stefan Korcz and Lieutenant Pilot Wiktor Lang.

Photo from the collections of the "Polona" Digital National Library



Crashed aeroplane - Aviatik C.III No. 12342/17, in the wreckage of which, Captain Pilot Wiktor Lang died (Ławica, 4 February 1920). The aeroplane was used in Greater Poland for training purposes from the moment of its capture at the Ławica Airport on 6 January 1919.

The end of the military operations in Eastern Galicia in the middle of August made the return of the 3rd Squadron to Greater Poland possible and the unit was deployed in Buk. According to Ordre de Bataille, there were two squadrons representing the Polish Air Force in August 1919 on the Greater Poland Front: The 3rd Greater Poland Air Force Squadron and Squadron BR66, these formed the Air Group of the Greater Poland Front. In the former Poznań Province, there was also the 4th Combat Squadron, which was not fully operational yet, and the 1st Air Force Squadron which was a reserve unit.



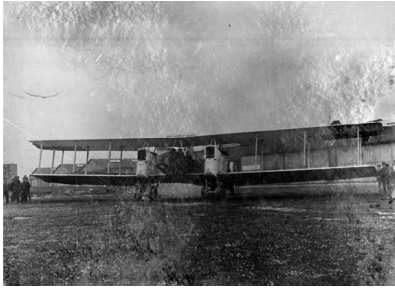
Workshops of the Air Base in Ławica. In the photo there are reconnaissance aircraft – a Rumpler C.Ib No. 124/18 (German No.: 3088/18), a C.I No. 13./... and one other aircraft whose number is not visible, also an Albatros C.Ia

No. 118/17 (German No. 15559/17). Photo from the collection of Priest R. Kulczyński SDB

Pniewski's Squadron set off for the Polish-Bolshevik Front on 3 September. Almost two weeks later, it joined the 2nd Greater Poland Air Force Squadron stationed in Babruysk. The third squadron stayed in Greater Poland for one more month - until the middle of October, where it was based in Buk, and then later, it was sent to the Lithuanian-Belarusian Front.



Accident of the reconnaissance aircraft - Rumpler C.I No. 2743/17 (Ławica Air Base No. 1/17), in which a student, Lance Corporal Bohdan Daszkiewicz was fatally injured. Photo from June 1919 from the collection of the "Polona" Digital National Library.



Two-engine bom

ber - Gotha G.IV from the depot of the 21st Destroyer Squadron.

Photo from the collections of the "Polona" Digital National Library



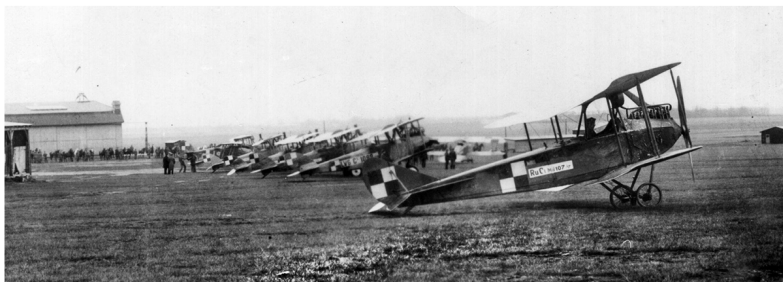
A crashed French reconnaissance aircraft - Bréguet XIVB2
from Squadron BR66.

Photo from the collections of the "Polona" Digital National
Library



Wreckage of a crashed Albatros fighter aircraft, which
belonged to the Greater Poland Air Force.

Photo from the collections of the "Polona" Digital National
Library



Aircraft of the Greater Poland Air Force at the airport in Ławica during the celebrations of the 128th anniversary of the adoption of the 3rd of May Constitution. At the forefront, there is a reconnaissance aircraft - Rumpler C.Ib (Ma) No. 13029 (Ławica Air Base No. 107/17), behind it, there is the reconnaissance aircraft - LVG C.V No. 1099/18, then, there are three other LVG C.Vs, the last one in the row is an Albatros C.XV aircraft. In the background, another two-seater aeroplane is visible between the Rumpler and the first LVG.

Photo from the collection of Priest R. Kulczyński SDB



The centre of Środa Wielkopolska. Photo taken from a height of 200m on 19 July 1919 by Second Lieutenant Observer

Stefan Korcz and Sergeant Pilot Władysław (?) Bartkowiak.

In summer 1919, in order to replenish stocks, the 10th Air Force Squadron was moved to the Airport in Ławica. It was supplied with French reconnaissance aircraft - Bréguet XIVA2s, and in winter, the personnel underwent their flight training in these planes. Because of the approaching date of the taking over of Gdańsk Pomerania by Poland, the squadron, which was subordinated to the Greater Poland Front command, started intensive intelligence and propaganda flights. In January and February 1920, the aviators of the 10th Squadron performed many tasks, flying over Bydgoszcz and Toruń, and on 17 February the unit changed its base to the airport in Bydgoszcz.

The 4th Combat Squadron also spent winter in Greater Poland. From the very beginning of the year 1920, the personnel worked on bringing their piloting skills to perfection. It also underwent training in aerial warfare and group flights. On 17 February 1920, the unit moved from Ławica to the airport in Bydgoszcz. During the training, two pilots died aviators' deaths: in August 1919, Second Lieutenant Pilot Bolesław Szczepański, and in February the following year - Second Lieutenant Pilot Stefan Mierzejewski.

The sending of four strong air units by Greater

Poland would not have been possible without the proper equipment and the appropriate number of well-trained flying and technical staff. Access to the necessary equipment, including aeroplanes, was ensured owing to the capture of the Air Base in Ławica and the aircraft hangar in Winiary.

However, a more serious difficulty was finding the appropriate number of soldiers and aviation officers, especially flight crew. This originated from the German discriminatory personnel policy in aviation. For this reason, there was a noticeable shortage of pilots and observers in Greater Poland at the beginning of the year 1919.

Only a couple of days after capturing the airport in Ławica, it became obvious that the number of aviators from the PMOPP was insufficient for any effective use of the assets collected on the premises of the Air Base. Therefore, Central Command made an appeal in the press in which it called any veterans of the German Air Force to appear at the Central Draft Office. This draft had the desired effect and even on the same day of the capture of Ławica, i.e. 6 January, Sergeant Pilot Wojciech Biały volunteered for active duty. A little later, the following observers were transferred from insurgent units and units of the regular Greater Poland Army to the new air units: Second Lieutenant Zdzisław Bilażewski, Sergeant

Józef Klicze, Second Lieutenant Wiktor Karczewski, Second Lieutenant Józef Banaszak, Sergeant J. Szyfter (these two latter ones were balloon observers); pilots: Second Lieutenant J. Dziembowski, Second Lieutenant Franciszek Jach, Second Lieutenant Józef Hendricks, Second Lieutenant Stefan Łuczak, Sergeant Stanisław Rozmiarek, Sergeant Antoni Katarzyński, Master Corporal Kazimierz Jankowski, Corporal Józef Kukliński, Corporal Ludwik Patalas and two other non-commissioned officers –Czesław Wojtczak and Franciszek Przybylski, and also mechanics: Władysław Bartkowiak, Józef Wrzesiński and Kazimierz Brzeziński. The Greater Poland Air Force was also supplied by veterans of the German army from outside the region. Master Corporal A. Bartkowiak flew from the German airport in Bydgoszcz to the liberated territory using an Albatros D.III. Lieutenant B. Szczepański left Warsaw for Greater Poland.

A particularly pressing problem was the lack of aviation officers. In the middle of January, there were hardly two of them in Greater Poland: Second Lieutenant Observer F. Stempniewicz and Second Lieutenant Pilot J. Dziembowski. The decision was taken to bring senior officers from other partitions, however, the air force was to maintain its regional character, so the most distinguished non-commissioned officers of the Greater Poland Air Forces were promoted. Two experienced pilots - Józef Mańczak and Wiktor Pniewski became second lieutenants on 7 February. On 21 February, Pilots Ludwik Piechowiak and Wojciech Biały, Aviation

Observers Feliks Górnicki and Andrzej Płachta and Balloon Observer Józef Szyfter were promoted to the lowest officer ranks. On 3 March, Kazimierz Mayer was appointed Second Lieutenant. This simplified promotion procedure was applied to a few officers who joined the Greater Poland Air Force from the German army: On 20 March, F. Stempniewicz became a lieutenant, and 10 days later, this privilege was given to J. Dziembowski. On 3 June, Stempniewicz held the rank of captain.

These veteran officers of German aircraft lacked the relevant experience to occupy the most important posts in the Greater Poland Air Force.



A bird's eye view of the castle in Kórnik. Photo taken from a height of 50m on 24 July 1919 by Sergeant Pilot

Władysław (?) Bartkowiak and Second Lieutenant Observer Stefan Korcz. From the collections of the "Polona" Digital

The support for Poles from other partitions became necessary. Because of the commander-in-chief of the Polish armed forces in the former Prussian Partition - General J. Dowbor-Muśnicki - numerous veterans of Russian aircraft were particularly represented in Greater Poland. During the Greater Poland Uprising, in regional air forces, there were, among others: Rittmeister Pilot T. Grochowalski, Second Lieutenant Colonel Jan Jasiewicz and Second Lieutenant Henryk Rybka. Despite the official end of military operations, the Command (Inspectorate) of the Air Forces recruited more and more officers: Second Lieutenant Pilot E. Norwid-Kudło, Artillery Second Lieutenant Feliks Ciechomski, Lieutenant Colonel Pilot M. Krzyczkowski, Captain Observer Leon Raden, Second Lieutenant Pilot Roman Bejm, Lieutenant Włodzimierz Kurganowicz, Infantry Second Lieutenant Ksawery Macewicz, Second Lieutenant Pilot Kazimierz Ziemiński, Major Pilot Jerzy Syrokomla-Syrokowski, Cavalry Lieutenant Bohdan Baczyński, Second Lieutenant Engineer Mieczysław Pietraszek and Second Lieutenant Observer Lucjan Kulikowski.

Also a few former officers of the Imperial and Royal Air Forces appeared in Greater Poland. On 5 June 1919, the Polish Armed Forces of the

Former Prussian Partition were joined by Lieutenant Pilot W. Lang, and on 30 August, Lieutenant Erwin Sarkotić was included in the ordinance of the Air Force Inspectorate.

Despite the help from the other partitions, the number of flying and auxiliary staff in Greater Poland was still not satisfactory. Only the organisation of aviation training could improve this state of affairs. The training was held either from scratch or any training previously started in the German army was finalised. From the middle of January 1919, these tasks were performed in the 1st Aviation Company which, as time passed by, was transformed into an aviation school. At the beginning of June 1919, the existing commander, Second Lieutenant Pilot J. Mańczak together with the 3rd Air Force Squadron went to the front – initially, the Greater Poland Front, and then the Galician Front. The newly appointed commandant was Second Lieutenant Pilot L. Piechowiak.

Above all, there were the veterans of World War I, especially those from aviation units, who could apply to the Aviation School as a priority. By September, 24 first pilots were properly trained and by the end of the year, another 25. The German simplified (wartime) training programme

was adopted. The training was divided into two courses: preliminary flight manoeuvres (about 100 flights with an instructor using a dual control aeroplane with an engine power of 100 hp) and the advanced course (about 50 independent flights), this all ended with an exam. After the preliminary course, the student had performed a number of tasks: tight turns, single and double spirals, an ascent to a height of 2000m and a 60 km long flight. A graduate of the advanced course should be able to fly 4-6 types of aeroplanes, and the final chord of the training was a 450 km flight.

The most important instructor in the Aviation School was Adam Haber-Włyński, who came from the Kielce region and who arrived in Poznań in the middle of March 1919. Future pilots were also trained by: Second Lieutenant Pilot F. Jach, Second Lieutenant Pilot J. Hendricks, Sergeant Pilot Czesław Wawrzyniak and Lieutenant Pilot W. Lang. In addition to good instructors, the wide access to flying equipment had a positive impact on the training level. On average, in the period between March and August 1919, there were about 20-30 aeroplanes on the Aviation School register. These were aeroplanes captured at the airport in Ławica, assembled from the airframes and engines found in the airship hall at the beginning of the Greater Poland Uprising or purchased in Germany. Aeroplanes with dual and single steering wheels for training purposes, reconnaissance aircraft and fighter planes were all at the school's disposal. The following types of aeroplanes were represented: Albatros B.II, C.I i

C.VII, Rumpler C.I, AEG C.IV, Halberstadt Cl.II, Albatros D.III, Fokker D.VII and E.V.

At the end of 1919, the activity of the Aviation School came to an end and it became part of the Higher School of Pilots. By that time it had provided education to 49 aviators. The most well-known graduates of this institution were as follows: A. Katarzyński, W. Bartkowiak and Bolesław Gallus. From June, the pilot candidates were moved to schools in Warsaw and Cracow. Only those students who were able to perform a single ascent on their own were left in Ławica. During the school's activity, only one accident took place: On 4 June 1919, Lance Corporal Bohdan Daszkiewicz was fatally injured.

In late spring 1919, after the arrival of General Józef Haller's Army to Poland, several French instructors and French aeroplanes joined the Air Base. This gave rise to the French Transformation School.

However, it was the training of observers which was a much more serious problem than the training of pilots. In Greater Poland, a significant shortage of aviators with this specialisation was observed. The lack of a greater number of observers made the establishment of an officer school of observers impossible. Thus, instead of training observer officers, the decision was taken in Greater Poland to train aircraft gunners to

perform the work of observers. The School of Observers was established on the basis of the 4th Recruit Company, with Second Lieutenant Observer F. Górnicki appointed as its commandant.

Another serious difficulty was finding competent instructors who would convey the suitable knowledge to the candidates for air force observers. This task was dealt with by Sergeant Pilot Józef Jakubowski and Sergeant Observer J. Klicze. The following courses were taught at the school: photography, map reading, radio operation and shooting from the observer's machine gun. In the period between March and June 1919, 20 observers graduated from the school. Also 20 aircraft gunners were trained in the role of observers. At that time, the candidates for observers carried out a relatively small number of flights, hardly 112, spending only 22 hours in the air. The most well-known graduates of the observers' course in Ławica are as follows: Z. Bilażewski, Kazimierz Szczepański, J. Klicze, Wiktor Czysz and Adam Bińkowski.

Despite quite a large number of highly qualified foremen in Greater Poland, training for mechanics was also organised. As early as in the middle of January, based on the 2nd Workshop Company, a workshop school was organised in Ławica. On 1 May 1920 its name was changed to the Air Personnel School. It was actually at this time that Sergeant F. Gruszkiewicz handed

command over to Second Lieutenant Władysław Popiela. In the year 1920 alone, 132 mechanics were trained by this institution.

The Greater Poland Air Force also needed auxiliary personnel soldiers. Radio-telegraphers (both equipment installers and soldiers who could operate radio stations) were trained in the command of the telegraphic battalion in Winiary near Poznań. Other specialists were sought by the Air Force among the Polish Armed Forces of the Former Prussian Partition.

The Greater Poland Air Force became part of the Polish Air Force at the end of September 1919, and on 24 September, the current supreme commander of the Greater Poland Air Force, General G. Macewicz was nominated by J. Piłsudski for the post of air force inspector of the Ministry of Military Affairs. Macewicz did not form a new staff - the officers from Poznań went with him to Warsaw. One day later, the squadrons which arrived in Poland together with the "Blue" Army of General Józef Haller and the Greater Poland Air Force went under his command.

The contribution of Greater Poland in the building of the Air Force of the Second Republic of Poland turned out to be very considerable. In September 1919, Greater Poland residents could provide the authorities in Warsaw with: an Air Force Inspectorate, command of the 1st Greater Poland Air Group, four well provided air force squadrons

and the Air Base in Ławica. Before this, about 30 aircraft were sent from Greater Poland to Warsaw and Galicia. Despite its submission to the authorities in Warsaw, Greater Poland still had a significant influence on the process of the building of the Polish Air Force and Ławica was still one of the most important airports in the Polish territories.



Bréguet XIVB2 aircraft. Note the markings of two countries: the Polish air force checkerboard on the tail and the French cockades on the upper airfoil. The photo was taken on 14 July 1919 over Greater Poland from another Bréguet aircraft (this was probably a propaganda flight – the day marked the 130th anniversary of the destruction of Bastille and a military parade was organised in Poznań). Photo from the collections of the “Polona” Digital National Library

The air displays which took place on 28 September 1919 in Ławica were a symbolic closure of the period of independence of the

Greater Poland Air Force. These were the first competitions of this type on Polish territory, and their initiator was General G. Macewicz and the editorial staff of "Polska Flota Napowietrzna". The first contest was a spot landing with a still propeller. From among the 10 participants, Second Lieutenant Pilot S. Mierzejewski landed closest to the designated site. To achieve this, he flew an Albatros B.II. Then, an aerobatic show took place. Among the five best Greater Poland pilots, Lieutenant Colonel T. Grochowalski flying a Fokker D.VII was the winner, though A. Haber-Włyński flying an Albatros D.III was the favourite. Seven pilots challenged each other to win first prize in the fighter pilot contest. This contest consisted of shooting down small balloons with machine guns. The contest ended the next day and its winner was Master Corporal Pilot A. Bartkowiak who flew a Spad S.VIIC1.

The Greater Poland Air Force Inspectorate had finished its activities, but the air group command remained in Poznań. Operation-wise, it was subordinated to the Central Command of the Polish Armies of the Former Prussian Partition and in all other respects it was subordinated to the Air Force Inspectorate in Warsaw. The officers from Central Command were aware of the most important problem of the Greater Poland squadron - the shortage of observer officers, therefore, they encouraged officers of other types of units, especially former artillery soldiers, to join the Air Force.

At the beginning of November, an aerial mapping unit was established at the air group command. In order to fill vacancies, specialists (draughtsmen, lithographers and photographers) were sought in other formations located in Greater Poland.

On 15 November 1919, the Central Command of the Polish Armies of the Former Prussian Partition was renamed as the Greater Poland Command. On the same day, the composition of the officer corps of the front command was announced. The Head of Department III (Aviation) was Colonel Lieutenant Pilot T. Grochowalski. He died in December, when he was on holiday in Łuck. Therefore, at the beginning of January next year, the duties of the Head of Department III were assigned to Colonel Lieutenant Pilot Jan Kieżun, however, as early as after a month, Captain Pilot Jan Wierzejski was appointed as the Head of Department III of the Greater Poland Command. On the other hand, in January 1920, Captain Pilot W. Pniewski returned to take the post of commandant of the Air Base in Ławica .

At the end of 1919, the Aviation School was merged with the French Transformation School, thus establishing the Higher School of Pilots. The purpose of its existence was the standardisation of the level of the education of Polish pilots. The personnel of the school consisted of Poles and French. At the beginning of 1920, the commandant of the school was Lieutenant Pilot Ludomił Rayski, and when he left for the front at

the end of April, he was replaced by Lieutenant Pilot L. Piechowiak. After Piechowiak's accident, Second Lieutenant Pilot Antoni Wroniecki was appointed as the next commander. The French personnel were commanded by Major Raymond Pons de Pierre de Bernis, the head of the Polish training team was Second Lieutenant Pilot Cz. Wawrzyniak, and the head of the French team – Captain Marceli Terrasson. Among the most famous instructors, it is possible to mention A. Haber-Włyński and the French flying ace from the period of World War I, Lieutenant Marcel Émile Haegelen.

The trainees were the graduates of lower flight schools who were supposed to undergo training using the largest possible types of aircraft. Flying was commenced using German two-seater aeroplanes. The training was started in an Albatros B.II, then the trainees went to Albatros aeroplanes: C.I, C.III, C.V, C.X, C.XII, then they flew in the Rumpler C.I and C.IV. Finally the pilot candidates underwent training using modern reconnaissance aircraft: LVG C.V and C.VI. They could also fly Aviatiks, AEG C.IV and Halberstadts. After the training with German aircraft was completed, the trainees would then go to the French Bréguets XIV and Morane-Saulnier MS.30E1.

After the preliminary course, the trainees were qualified as reconnaissance pilots, who were immediately sent to a squadron, and then as candidates for fighter pilots they learned

aerobatics and aerial warfare under the supervision of A. Haber-Włyński for another month. The following types of fighter planes were used: the Albatros D.III, D.V and D.Va, Fokker E.V and D. VII and also the Spad S.VIIC1 and S.XIIIC1. The training was completed with a flight to the airport in Toruń. School graduates received the diploma of a pilot, but the pilot's badge was awarded to the aviators only after carrying out 10 front-line flights.

In the critical months of the summer of 1920, the chief aviation authorities treated the Higher School of Pilots as a reservoir of aircraft which could be assigned to squadrons. At the end of the aforementioned year, the school was moved to Grudziądz. By that time 115 pilots had carried out 17300 practice flights and spent 2325 hours in the air. During the training, three fatal accidents took place.

After several months, this group of trained pilots left the Higher School of Pilots and the commander of the institution, Lieutenant Pilot L. Rayski, returned to the previous idea of forming another combat squadron. In spring 1920, he presented his proposal to the central aviation military authorities, which agreed to the formation of the new squadron which was to be called the 21st Destroyer squadron. The unit was led to the front by Lieutenant Rayski, who selected his pilots from the best graduates of the School of Pilots. However, they had no front-line

experience. The equipment of the squadron consisted of one Gotha G.IV bomber and six AEG C.IV. reconnaissance aircraft. On 30 April, the 21st Destroyer Squadron took off from Ławica for Ukraine.

When analysing the contribution of Greater Poland to the building of the Polish Air Force, one should not neglect the activities of the workshops of the Air Base in Ławica. In the year 1920 alone, 215 aircraft were assembled and another 97 were repaired there. The Greater Poland residents delivered, above all, aeroplanes to the Polish Army through purchases made in Germany. In the years 1919-1920 Greater Poland acquired about 20 Fokker D.VII fighter planes, as well as several dozen reconnaissance aircraft of various types (AEG C.IV, DFW C.V, LVG C.V).

During the months in which the final settlements in the Polish-Bolshevik war were made, Greater Poland was often the place where squadrons underwent reorganisation. The order to withdraw to Poznań was received on 10 July by the 14th Reconnaissance Squadron (referred to as the 3rd Greater Poland Air Force Squadron until April 1920). At the end of August, the Toruń Reconnaissance Squadron was sent to the airport in Ławica in order to have new equipment supplied to it.

In October 1920, the armistice which ended the

military operations on the Polish-Soviet Front was signed in Riga. This allowed for more attention to be paid to the western border of the state. On 8 November, the 15th Fighter Squadron (previously the 4th Greater Poland Combat Squadron) was moved to the airport in Ostrów Wielkopolski. From there, the unit was to supervise the situation along the border between Greater Poland and Upper Silesia which were still part of Germany.

Greater Poland turned out to have a significant contribution to the building of the Polish Air Force. In the period of the autonomy of the region, four strong squadrons were prepared. At the same time the organisation of the 21st Destroyer Squadron in Ławica in Spring 1920 was possible owing to the aeroplanes taken over in the aircraft hangar in Winiary (AEG C.IV). Furthermore, the equipment captured in Ławica and Winiary allowed for the provision of supplies to combat units organised in the other partitions of Poland. Additionally, the Greater Poland aviators served in more than just the five above-mentioned squadrons. The graduates of the Aviation School, the Observers School and the Higher School of Pilots and Air Personnel School also joined the ranks of air units in other areas of the country. The Greater Poland Air Force came into existence too late to play a significant role during the Greater Poland Uprising, however, three Greater Poland reconnaissance squadrons flew over the Polish-German demarcation line. The 1st Greater Air Force Squadron played an important role in the impressive history of the

Polish air force during the battles on the Ukrainian Front, and all the units formed at the airport in Ławica displayed their value during the Polish-Bolshevik war. Provided with numerous, and above all, valuable aeroplanes, they were counted among the most outstanding Polish air units. The ground staff and flying staff were characterised by considerable experience and rare skill. In the years 1919-1920, the 1st Greater Poland Air Force Squadron (renamed as the 1st Reconnaissance Squadron) carried out 515 combat flights, spending 756 hours in the air. Even more, i.e. as many as 547 flights, were carried out during 793 hours by the personnel of the 2nd Air Force Squadron (subsequently the 13th Fighter Squadron). The other squadrons from Greater Poland were not involved so much in military efforts. The staff of the 3rd Air Force Squadron (the 14th Reconnaissance Squadron) spent 353 hours over enemy territory during 191 flights, the staff of the 4th Greater Poland Combat Squadron (the 15th Fighter Squadron) - 346 hours in 277 flights, and the staff of the 21st Destroyer Squadron - 270 hours in 117 flights.

After the fighting for the borders of the Second Republic of Poland had come to an end, the connections of the region with the air force were changed. The Greater Poland squadrons were deployed in different parts of Poland. The 12th Squadron reached Warsaw, and the 14th Squadron merged with the 21st Squadron and was moved to Cracow. Only the 13th Squadron and 15th Squadron returned to the airport in Ławica, also the 1st, 5th and 10th

Reconnaissance Units were moved to the airport in Ławica. The airport near Poznań was left by the Higher School of Pilots, and the 3rd air regiment was formed in Ławica instead. This unit, while remaining ready for another war, was supposed to train auxiliary personnel and bring the skills of pilots and observers to perfection.

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Select Pages

1

2

3



The buildings of the Air Base in Ławica. Photo from the year 1919, from the collection of the Digital National Library - "Polona"



The interior of the aircraft hangar in Winiary near Poznań, filled with airframes. Visible are the fuselages of the following aeroplanes: Albatros B.II, AEG C.IV, AEG N.I and LVG C.V. Photo from the collections of the "Polona" Digital National Library



An inspection by the commander of the Polish Armed Forces of the Former Prussian Partition, General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki at the airport in Ławica (March 1919). With his back to the camera and wearing boots with spurs, there is the Greater Poland Air Force Inspector, Colonel Pilot Gustaw Macewicz, and next to him: General Dowbor-Muśnicki. The officers of the Air Base are standing in a line: from the left - Second Lieutenant Pilot Jerzy Dziembowski, unknown, Second Lieutenant Pilot Wiktor Pniews



The two-seater escort aircraft - Halberstadt Cl.II- No. SLŁ 208/18 in a hangar in Ławica. As well as this plane, there are also: an Albatros C.Ia No. SLŁ 126/17 and an Albatros C.VII. Photo from the collection of Priest Robert Kulczyński SDB



An LVG C.V reconnaissance aircraft with the side number 5 and the proper name "Halka", from the depot of the 1st Greater Poland Air Force Squadron at the time of its railway transportation to the Eastern Front. Photo from the collection of Priest R. Kulczyński SDB



Greater Poland's Rumpler C.I No. 13046/17 after an unfortunate landing. Taken over by the Greater Poland insurgents on 6 January 1919, it was in stock at the Air Base in Ławica, at least till the end of August. Photo from the collections of the "Polona" Digital National Library



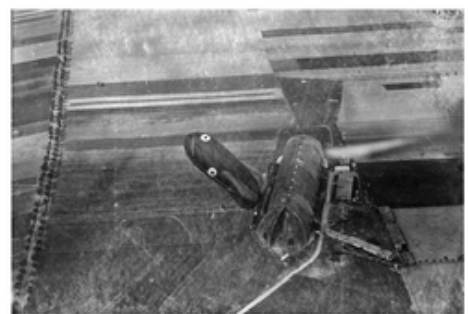
The wreckage of a fighter plane-Albatros D.Va No. 7527/17. Until February 1919, it was part of the 2nd Greater Poland Air Force Squadron, later on, it was moved to the Aviation School in Ławica, and then to the Higher School of Pilots; finally decommissioned in April 1921. Photo from the collections of the "Polona" Digital National Library



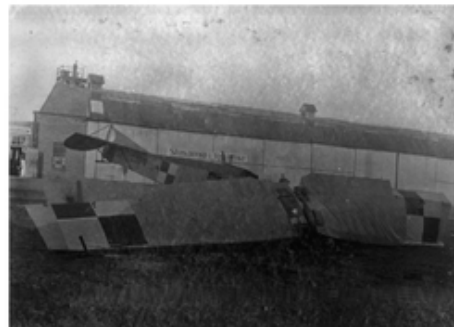
The wreckage of a fighter plane-an Albatros, which belonged to the Greater Poland Air Force. Photo from the collections of the "Polena" Digital National Library



Damaged aeroplanes used by the Aviation School in Ławica: the reconnaissance aircraft - DFW C.V No. 2019/17 (Ławica Air Base No. 220/17) and the training aircraft Albatros B.IIa No. 1300/17 (No.: SLŁ 53/17). Standing on the left: Jan Jasiewicz - a pilot brought to Greater Poland by Colonel Gustaw Macewicz. Photograph taken in Ławica in 1919, from the collection of R. Kulczyński SDB



The aircraft hangar (i.e. Zeppelin hall) in Winiary near Poznań. Next to it, there is an elevated observation balloon. Photo taken from a height of 120m by Second Lieutenant Observer Stefan Korcz and Lieutenant Pilot Wiktor Lang. Photo from the collections of the "Polena" Digital National Library



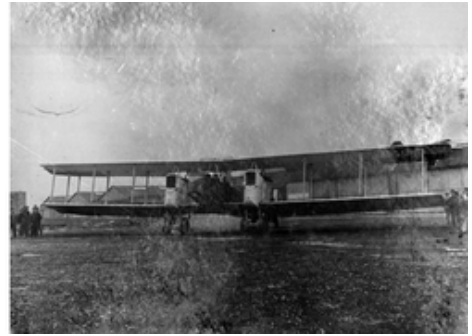
Crashed aeroplane - Aviatik C.III No. 12342/17, in the wreckage of which, Captain Pilot Wiktor Lang died (Ławica, 4 February 1920). The aeroplane was used in Greater Poland for training purposes from the moment of its capture at the Ławica Airport on 6 January 1919. Photo from the collections of the "Polona" Digital National Library



Workshops of the Air Base in Ławica. In the photo there are reconnaissance aircraft - a Rumpler C.Ib No. 124/18 (German No.: 3088/18), a C.I No. 13/... and one other aircraft whose number is not visible, also an Albatros C.Ia No. 118/17 (German No. 15559/17). Photo from the collection of Priest R. Kulczyński SDB



Accident of the reconnaissance aircraft - Rumpler C.I No. 2743/17 (Ławica Air Base No. 1/17), in which a student, Lance Corporal Bohdan Daszkiewicz was fatally injured. Photo from June 1919 from the collection of the "Polona" Digital National Library.



Two-engine bomber - Gotha G.IV from the depot of the 21st Destroyer Squadron. Photo from the collections of the "Polona" Digital National Library



A crashed French reconnaissance aircraft - Bréguet XIVB2 from Squadron BR66. Photo from the collections of the "Polona" Digital National Library



Wreckage of a crashed Albatros fighter aircraft, which belonged to the Greater Poland Air Force. Photo from the collections of the "Polona" Digital National Library



Aircraft of the Greater Poland Air Force at the airport in Ławica during the celebrations of the 128th anniversary of the adoption of the 3rd of May Constitution. At the forefront, there is a reconnaissance aircraft - Rumpler C.Ib (Ma) No. 13029 (Ławica Air Base)

No. 107/17), behind it, there is the reconnaissance aircraft - LVG C.V No. 1099/18, then, there are three other LVG C.Vs, the last one in the row is an Albatros C.XV aircraft. In the background, another two-seater aeroplane is visible b



The centre of Środa Wielkopolska. Photo taken from a height of 200m on 19 July 1919 by Second Lieutenant Observer Stefan Korcz and Sergeant Pilot Władysław (?) Bartkowiak. From the collections of the "Polona" Digital National Library

52

MAJOWE NIEKŁĘBIKI



A bird's eye view of the castle in Kórnik. Photo taken from a height of 50m on 24 July 1919 by Sergeant Pilot Władysław (?) Bartkowiak and Second Lieutenant Observer Stefan Korcz. From the collections of the "Polona" Digital National Library

LOTNICTWO WIELKOPOLSKIE 1919-1920

55



Bréguet XIVB2 aircraft. Note the markings of two countries: the Polish air force checkerboard on the tail and the French cockades on the upper airfoil. The photo was taken on 14 July 1919 over

Greater Poland from another
Breguet aircraft (this was
probably a propaganda flight
- the day marked the 130th
anniversary of the
destruction of Bastille and a
military parade was
organised in Poznań). Photo
from the collections of the
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