

# Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

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## The Air Forces of the Greater Poland Armies in the year 1919

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At the end of 1918, the 4th Air Reserve Unit (Flieger Abteilung Nr. 4), whose main task was to repair aeroplanes and organise pilot training workshops had been stationed in Ławica since 1913. The crew consisted of soldiers of both German and Polish nationalities. On top of this, in Poznań, after the removal of airships from a warehouse located in the Winiary district, a warehouse for other aeronautical equipment was organised there. In the German army, Poles also served in the air forces; some of them like, e.g. Sergeant-Pilot Wiktor Pniewski, had been members of the Polish Military Organisation of the Prussian Partition since 1918. It was also he who started to establish contacts with his countrymen who had served in Ławica during his service in the 4th Air Reserve Unit; by the middle of December five pilots, two observers and over

30 soldiers from the technical support service were already under Pniewski's influence.

After the seizure of Poznań by the Greater Poland insurgents at the end of December 1918, the airport in Ławica represented the only danger to the city. In the morning on 6 January 1919, as the result of an organised action, the base was captured. 30 aeroplanes (some of them ready for immediate flight), many spare parts, engines and air ammunition fell into the hands of the insurgents. Earlier, without any fighting, control was taken over the Zeppelin's warehouse in the Winiary district, where about 200 dismantled aeroplanes were stored; these stocks, which significantly exceeded the needs of the insurgent armies, were used, for the most part, as equipment for the air forces of the Polish state. The machines that were ready for flight were immediately adapted for use - the Polish air symbol appeared on their wings and fuselage: a red and white chessboard which was a remake of the German cross symbol. On 7 January, an aeroplane with such symbols flew over Poznań. Officially, Lieutenant Protazy Kadziłowski became the first Polish commandant of the station (Order No. 2 of Central Command, dated 7 January 1919), in reality however, this function was held by Sergeant Wiktor Pniewski (later second lieutenant). The former "Flieger Ersatz Abteilung Nr.4" was renamed as "Air Base in Ławica". The Aviation Department, managed by Second Lieutenant Observer Jan Stempniewicz, dealt with aviation-related matters in Central Command from 6 January 1919. Finally, the issue of the command of the air forces in the Greater Poland

Army was regulated in January 1919, after the post of the Chief Commander was taken by Gen. Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki: On 18 January, Second Lieutenant Pilot Jerzy Dziembowski was temporarily nominated for the post of commander of the Air Base in Ławica and on 22 January, that post was taken over by Colonel Pilot Gustaw Macewicz, a former officer of the 1st Polish Corps in Russia.

Initially, during the first days after the seizure of the air base in Ławica, the Polish air forces in Poznań comprised 5 pilots, 2 observers and 32 air mechanics. But as early as in February, there were 21 pilots, 19 student-pilots, 1 observer and 20 aircraft gunners. The establishment of the air forces was approved on 31 January 1919. Initially the organisation resembled the structure of the land forces. The commandant of the base (with the status of a battalion) was Sergeant Wiktor Pniewski. The Air Force (as this was the official name adopted in the structure of the Greater Poland Army) consisted of four companies: The 1st Air Company was commanded by Sergeant-Pilot Józef Mańczak, the 2nd Workshop Company (Franciszek Gruszkiewicz), the 3rd Guard Company (Józef Szyfter) and the 4th Recruit Company. With time, the 1st Company took over the function of aviation school, preparing both pilots and observers. In August 1919 in Ławica, the Higher School of Pilots was established; from February 1919, an Observers School began to operate too. The Workshop School was established separately; it was subsequently transformed into the Air Personnel School. Poznań, at that time was one of the most

important training centres for military pilots in Poland. In total, the established units were as follows: the 1st Greater Poland Field Squadron, the 2nd and 3rd Air Squadrons and the 4th Greater Poland Combat Squadron. The 1st Greater Poland Field Squadron was established on 12 February 1919, and its commander was Second Lieutenant Pilot Wiktor Pniewski. From 14 March, the squadron was subordinated to the commander of the Greater Poland Group which operated at that time in the area of Przemyśl. After various changes in assignment, it became part of the II Air Force Group and on 13 April 1920 it was renamed as the 12th Reconnaissance Squadron.

The 1st Air Squadron (subsequently the 1st Field Squadron, the 1st Greater Poland Squadron) consisted of almost two hundred people, the technical support personnel consisted of 3 officers, 25 non-commissioned officers and 115 privates. Workshops, four cars and a motorcycle for the liaison officer were at its disposal. Flights took place with the following aeroplanes: Albatross C V, Albatross C VII, D.F.W and AEG. From March till June 1919, the Squadron operated close to the area of Przemyśl. Then it was stationed on the Wojnowice airstrip near Buk, and its pilots carried out reconnaissance in the area of Chodzież, Piła and Babimost.

The 2nd Greater Poland Air Squadron was established on 14 February 1919 in Poznań, its commander: Rittmeister Pilot Tadeusz Grochowalski. The aeroplanes included: Halbestadt CL II, Halberstadt CL V and Albatross D III. At the beginning of April, the squadron was

sent to the area of Nowe Miasto nad Wartą, with its base in Klęka; during this period, the squadron was commanded by Second Lieutenant Edmund Norwid-Kudło. Both T. Grochowalski and E. Norwid-Kudło came from the 1st Polish Corps, the remaining staff came from the Greater Poland region. Sergeant Pilot Łukasz Durka and Sergeant Observer Kruszona, both of whom died an aviator's death in May 1919 near Nowe Miasto served in the 2nd Greater Poland Squadron - these were the first aviators of the Greater Poland Armies to die in service. In May 1919, the squadron organised propaganda flights over the territory of Upper Silesia. In the following month, the pilots of the Squadron carried out air reconnaissance on the Northern Front from the area of Kruszwica over Bydgoszcz and Toruń. From August 1919, the pilots and observers from the squadron were involved in battles on the Eastern Front, under the command of General Stanisław Szeptycki, as part of the I Air Force Group.

The Greater Poland Field Air Squadron was appointed on 6 March 1919. It was involved in battles in the area of Greater Poland, during the armistice period: till June and from September till October 1919. The Greater Poland air force unit had its base on the Góra airstrip near Jarocin. Pilots undertook propaganda flights over the Upper Silesia region. Two crews: Sergeant-Pilot Władysław Wrembel and Sergeant-Observer Marian Skorzyński as well as Second Lieutenant Pilot Wiktor Lang and Sergeant Observer Jan Kasprzak were shot down and the second one was taken into German captivity. From June till

August 1919, the squadron operated in the Ukraine and then returned to Greater Poland and occupied the airstrip near Buk. Its pilots carried out reconnaissance flights in the area of Nakło and Piła. On 25 May 1919, the 4th Greater Poland Combat Squadron – commanded by Lieutenant Pilot Jerzy Dziembowski was formed. It was stationed in Ławica and remained at the disposal of Central Command, and then the Supreme Command. It was above all, a training unit, flying aircraft such as the Fokker D VII, Fokker E. V and the Albatross D III (Oeffag); in July 1919, Spad aeroplanes were delivered from France. On 20 July 1921, the third Air Regiment, which was stationed in barracks and at the airport of the former 4th reserve unit, was formed in Poznan.

