

AGATA ŻABIAREK*

POLISH PILOTS THAT DIED IN ROMANIA 1939–1940

Glorious notes and letters recorded by Polish pilots during World War II, fighting the genocidal machine of Nazi Germany, were possible in large part due to the behaviour of Romanian officials who did not watch very closely the interned Polish soldiers on Romanian soil. In the group of those who left Poland in 1939, there were pilots who died of wounds and diseases in Romania. Being faithful to Poland, they continued their military path, which ended for them during the period of internment that followed in Romania.

Given the deteriorating situation on the Polish front in 1939, more and more Polish soldiers began to arrive at border towns along the border with Romania. The most numerous and compact group were airmen, constituting about 90% of the pre-September state of the Polish armed forces. 9,276 were to reach Romania¹. Initially, refugees were firmly dispersed throughout Romania. This is evidenced by the numbers: at the beginning of February 1940, Poles (military and civilians) were in 93 centres. The soldiers themselves being in 32 camps. This situation during 1940 decreased due to the ordinances of the Romanian authorities, which decided to evacuate all foreigners from the Ploiești area, due to the necessity of protection of these oil-bearing areas. Therefore, the Poles found themselves mainly in Oltenia – the area between the southern arch of the Carpathians and the Danube².

There is a problem in obtaining an accurate picture of internment as the Romanian authorities carried out organizational changes and modifications. For example, on 15 November 1939, taking into account the division into soldiers' and officers' camps, the picture was as follows: the soldiers' camps were located in Turnu Severin, Târgu Jiu, Krajowa, Calafat, Râmnicu Vâlcea, Caracal, Slatina, Pitești, Câmpulung, Râmnicu Sărat, Urziceni, Strehia, Comișani. There were 802 staff officers, 2,358 NCOs and 15,747 privates in these camps for ordinary soldiers. However, there were 25 generals, 711 senior officers, 1,804 junior officers, but also 323 soldiers and non-commissioned officers in the officers' camps. These camps were located in Băile Herculane, Călimanești, Drăgășani, Balș, Corabia, Ocnele Mari, Roșiori de Vede, Govora, Dragoslavele, Brasov Fortress³.

* Master of Science, Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz.

¹ T. Dubicki, *Żołnierze polscy internowani w Rumunii w latach 1939–1941*, Łódź, 1990, p. 103.

² Idem, *Polscy uchodźcy w Rumunii 1939–1945*, Warszawa, 1995, p. 12.

³ Idem, *Wojsko polskie w Rumunii 1939–1941*, Warszawa, 1994, p. 102.

Among the Polish pilots buried in Romania about whom we were able to obtain information, the largest number was associated with the camp in Babadag. This was because the initial plan has been to locate here as a permanent camp for the aviation units. For this reason, it is worth considering the data provided by the Polish Army Delegation in the Babadag internment district. Based on that, we can learn that in September–November 1939 the number of deceased was: 1 staff officer, 2 non-commissioned officers, 3 privates. In November 1939 one non-commissioned officer and 11 privates died; in December the number was two (an officer and a non-commissioned officer), while in January two privates died⁴.

These numbers, showing mortality among Polish soldiers in internment, covering one area (Babadag), can depict for us the overall mortality and among those Polish soldiers who died in Romania are members of the Polish Air Force personnel.

It is worth noting here that, according to a letter of 23 October 1939 written by the head of the health service of the Babadag area, as a result of medical doctors leaving their positions, he was left with 9 doctors, including two patients, which resulted in medical staff shortages to the tune of 5 people⁵.

The largest group of Polish pilots who died in Romania came from the Aviation Training Centre (hereinafter: CWL-1) in Dęblin. These centres were established in Poland in the years 1928–1931. One of these centres, the one established in Dęblin, dealt with the training of future Polish pilots⁶. During the Polish campaign, Dęblin became the target of German bombing from the first days. The Polish hunting ace Witold Urbanowicz described the raid on Dęblin that took place on 2 September 1939 in his memoirs. He wrote:

German bombers flew this time at a high altitude, probably over 5,000 metres. They dropped bombs, but none of them hit the airstrip, and only one exploded near the training compound. I found out that only one young lieutenant was seriously wounded by shrapnel and that a few mechanics had been hit⁷.

Among these wounded pilots there were three of whom we are certain that then died in Romania. However, before they got there, along with the rest of the CWL-1 personnel, they went through the combat zone during the Polish campaign in 1939. On 7 September, considering the intensification of German air raids on the Dęblin centre,

⁴ https://sikorskimuseum-my.sharepoint.com/personal/admin_sikorskimuseum_onmicrosoft_com/_layouts/15/onedrive.aspx?id=%2Fpersonal%2Fadmin%5Fsikorskimuseum%5Fonmicrosoft%5Fcom%2FDocuments%2Fweb%5Ffiles%2FA%5FIII%2F3%5F12%2Epdf&parent=%2Fpersonal%2Fadmin%5Fsikorskimuseum%5Fonmicrosoft%5Fcom%2FDocuments%2Fweb%5Ffiles%2FA%5FIII&originalPath=aHR0cHM6Ly9zaWtvcnNraW11c2V1bS1teS5zaGFyZXBvaW50LmNvbS86YjovZy9wZXJzb25hbC9hZG1pbl9zaWtvcnNraW11c2V1bV9vbmIpY3Jvc29m dF9jb20vRWFfaHBvOG5sQzVLa2N5Y2ptMGdqeUICcXV1RHpwWDdDS0VvYkIqeDVyc0Z6UT9ydGltZT0zT05aWmdxazEwZw (update 28.01.2020).

⁵ https://sikorskimuseum-my.sharepoint.com/personal/admin_sikorskimuseum_onmicrosoft_com/_layouts/15/onedrive.aspx?id=%2Fpersonal%2Fadmin%5Fsikorskimuseum%5Fonmicrosoft%5Fcom%2FDocuments%2Fweb%5Ffiles%2FA%5FIII%2F3%5F14%2Epdf&parent=%2Fpersonal%2Fadmin%5Fsikorskimuseum%5Fonmicrosoft%5Fcom%2FDocuments%2Fweb%5Ffiles%2FA%5FIII&originalPath=aHR0cHM6Ly9zaWtvcnNraW11c2V1bS1teS5zaGFyZXBvaW50LmNvbS86YjovZy9wZXJzb25hbC9hZG1pbl9zaWtvcnNraW11c2V1bV9vbmIpY3Jvc29m dF9jb20vRvVhMOFBkUjBJOUJHdEt1TkNuMXJwV2NCMWJvQWdOVIF5WHNnN0k5TTRZYU1WUT9ydGltZT04T0RPU0F1azEwZw (update 28.01.2020).

⁶ S. Rutkowski, *Zarys dziejów polskiego szkolnictwa wojskowego*, Warszawa, 1970, p. 100–102.

⁷ W. Urbanowicz, *Początek jutra. Wrzesień 1939 oczami dowódcy Dywizjonu 303*, Kraków, 2008, p. 93.

the airport began evacuating CWL-1. The route to the Romanian border led through the area of the towns of Radziechów, Dubno, Demidówka, and Brzeżany⁸.

The first of the pilots to die was from this training school was Waław Bieńkowski, born in 1909. He was a private reserve. He was mobilized in August 1939 to CWL-1 in Dęblin. He was seriously wounded during an air raid on 2 September 1939. Together with the CWL-1 personnel he was evacuated to Romania. He was interned as a pilot in the Babadag camp. As a result of wounds suffered in September, he died in the camp on 4 February 1940. He was also buried there⁹.

Another flyer from this group is Władysław Lis, born in 1909. He was a professional non-commissioned officer of CWL-1 in Dęblin, as a platoon mechanic of the 3rd school squadron. He was wounded in a raid on 2 September 1939. He was evacuated with his colleagues to Romania. He died of wounds on 3 October 1939. His burial place is unknown¹⁰.

The last of this group, of which we have information, was a victim of a German raid of 2 September 1939; he was undergoing basic military service in CWL-1 Dęblin as a serial mechanic: Feliks Malinowski. At the beginning of his military service he was directed to a mechanics course in Lviv, which after he had completed it was subsequently assigned to the CWL-1 mentioned above. He managed to evacuate with his friends to Romania. There, however, he died in a hospital in Babadag, where he was buried¹¹. We have no information whether this grave still exists¹².

Włodzimierz Kondratiuk was also buried in Romania, who first performed his military service in CWL-1. He died on 23 January 1940. He was buried at the Belu Cemetery in Bucharest. It is not known if the grave exists¹³.

Another aviator buried in Romania is private mechanic Bronisław Stachowski. During the Polish campaign in 1939 he performed military service at base number 3 in Poznań. He left Poland along with the staff of his base, going to Romania. He was interned in the Babadag camp. He died of dysentery (According to military reports, cases of this disease were associated with poor nutrition¹⁴) in the camp hospital in October 1939. He was also buried in a Catholic cemetery there¹⁵.

The last aviator about which we have information is Edward Cisek. He was a private reserve, born on 28 September 1908. He was wounded during war operations during the Polish campaign of 1939. He was evacuated with the other staff to Romania. He died of wounds on 20 January 1940 in a hospital in Urziceni. He was also buried there¹⁶. It is not known whether his grave has survived to this day¹⁷.

⁸ J. Pawlak, *Polskie eskadry w wojnie obronnej*, Warszawa, 1991, p. 463–465.

⁹ O. Cumft, H. K. Kujawa, *Księga lotników polskich. Poległych zmarłych i zaginionych 1939–1946*, Warszawa, 1989, p. 105.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 130.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 132–133.

¹² <http://www.polishairforce.pl/cmentarzewrzesien/nieznanewrzesien.html> (update 28.01.2020).

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ https://sikorskimuseum-my.sharepoint.com/personal/admin_sikorskimuseum_onmicrosoft_com/_layouts/15/onedrive.aspx?id=%2Fpersonal%2Fadmin%2F5sikorskimuseum%2Fonmicrosoft%2Fcom%2FDocuments%2Fweb%2Ffiles%2FA%2FIII%2F3%2F14%2Epdf&parent=%2Fpersonal%2Fadmin%2F5sikorskimuseum%2Fonmicrosoft%2Fcom%2FDocuments%2Fweb%2Ffiles%2FA%2FIII&originalPath=aHR0cHM6Ly9zaWtvcnNraW11c2V1bS1teS5zaGFyZXBvaW50LmNvbS86YjovZy9wZXJzb25hbC9hZG1pb19zaWtvcnNraW11c2V1bV9vbm1pY3Jvc29m dF9jb20vRVhMOFBkUjBJOUJHdEt1TkNuMXJwV2NCMWJvQWdOVIF5WHNnN0k5TTRZYUIWUT9ydGltZ T04TORPU0F1azEwZw update 28.01.2020

¹⁵ O. Cumft, H. K. Kujawa, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 109.

¹⁷ <http://www.polishairforce.pl/cmentarzewrzesien/nieznanewrzesien.html> (update 28.01.2020).

These pilots buried in Romania constitute only a small portion of the deceased Polish soldiers during internment in Romania. However, it should be remembered that not only would the wonderful pages of Polish aviation history not be so wonderful if Romania had strictly adhered to the obligations related to internment, but also the number of deceased Polish soldiers would have been far higher had it not been for the kind assistance provided by the Romanian ally to Poles in their territory.

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IN ROMANIA 1939–1940
(Summary)

Keywords: polish pilots, World War II, refugees, Romanians authorities.

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