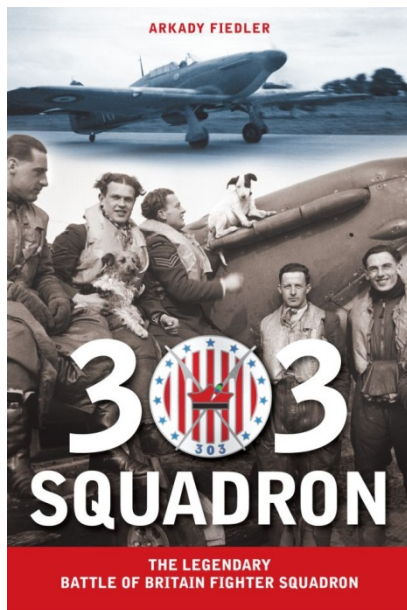


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second world war books

Book Review
July 6, 2014



Fiedler, Arkady. [303 Squadron: The Legendary Battle of Britain Fighter Squadron](#). Los Angeles, CA: Aquila Polonica Publishing, 2010
ISBN 978-1-60772-004-1
xxxvi + 331 pages

Introduction; Note; Translator's Note; Author's Preface; photos
Appendices: Glossary; Equivalent Ranks; 303 Squadron
Personnel; Pilot Biographies; Victory Claims; Brothers in
Arms; Song of 303 Squadron; Against All Odds; Operational
Units of the Polish Air Force in Great Britain during World
War II

Arkady Fiedler, according to the flap of **303 Squadron** was a best-selling travel writer who was in Tahiti when war broke out, reached France and joined the Polish Army forming there, then evacuated to England where he wrote this book in Polish, with the first English translation published in 1942. Although gussied up with a modern additions, crisp photos, and 21st Century appearance, the heart of this book remains very much an artifact of its era.

The publisher provides an Introduction to the new English translation, pointing out that the original Polish version "was parachuted into German-occupied Poland in 1943" with copies secretly distributed by the Polish Underground. "It is mandatory reading for children in grammar school [in Poland], and has gone through numerous Polish editions." Another note from the publisher offers information about names, ranks, victory claims, and a guide to pronunciation of Polish words. Next, the translator, Jarek Garlinski (son of historian Jozef Garlinski), offers a few words about rendering Fiedler's Polish text into modern English.

From there, the author launches into his myth-making story of the men of the RAF's 303 Polish Squadron in the Battle of Britain. Here's a short example of the way Fiedler tells his tale:

Daszewski was really hit. A piece of shrapnel tore great chunks from his thigh, hip and shoulder—the pain was so acute that it paralysed the right side of his body. At the same time, hot glycol spurted from his radiator, scalding his face. Acrid smoke filled the cockpit.

Despite the shock, Daszewski was still thinking clearly: he must get out of the firing line! Get out, but how? His plane was as badly damaged as Daszewski himself. The control cables had been cut, the joystick swung limply.

His Hurricane fell into a spin. With every turn, a mix of blood, oil and glycol splashed inside the cockpit and, even worse, tore the wounded man's brain in a thousand directions. Daszewski needed to act, and quickly. He had only a few seconds. The plane was spiralling down, down, down. The ground was rushing up to meet it.

There was only one way out: jump. Daszewski opened the canopy, but he could not climb out. He was too weak. The pressure of the slipstream pushed him back, pressing the hatch closed. He struggled like a madman. Finally, with a desperate effort from his good left arm, he managed to scramble to the lip. But here another obstacle barred his path: his lines—the radio and oxygen lines attached to his flying suit. They tethered the fighter pilot to the aircraft. Daszewski strained against them like a chained animal. Finally, summoning his last reserves of energy, he succeeded. He broke the lines. He fell into space.

With his background as a best-selling author, Fiedler clearly knew how to write a captivating book, and Garlinski's smooth translation helps the pages slide by quickly and effortlessly.

To what is a fairly short narrative, the publisher has also added a section titled "Historical Horizon" which helps place the Polish airmen of the RAF within the context of the war. More than a hundred pages of modern appendices deal with equivalent ranks, a roster of 303 Squadron personnel, biographies of twenty Polish pilots, a glossary, victory claims, and more, all comprising an excellent accompaniment to the author's original material.

Readers looking for a more academic approach to the Polish Air Force in World War II and Polish air units serving with the RAF can find plenty of scholarly and thoroughly researched works such as **The Polish Air Force at War** by Cynk and **Poles in Defence of Britain: A Day-by-Day Chronology** by Gretzyngier. For a more intimate glimpse of Polish pilots performing above and beyond the call of duty in the sky over England during the dark days of 1940, as recorded on the spot by one of their admiring countrymen, nothing will surpass Fiedler's text in this very attractive book from Aquila Polonica.

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