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Polish Pilots in the Battle of Britain

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Relevance and justification of the topic

My personal interest in the subject began to take shape during my undergraduate studies. In 2013, I graduated from the University of Debrecen with a degree in Slavic Studies – Polish specialization, where I devoted my bachelor's thesis to the history of the 303rd Polish Fighter Squadron. My commitment to aviation and aerial warfare, however, was not confined to academic pursuits: in 2012, I volunteered at the Advanced Aerobatic World Championships in Nyíregyháza, which brought together 83 pilots from 20 countries, including numerous Polish competitors. Conversations with them—especially when they expressed curiosity about my studies and unanimously suggested that I write my thesis on the history of the 303rd Squadron—proved to be a decisive influence on my future research orientation.

During the initial research phase, it quickly became apparent to me that no scholarly literature existed in Hungarian on the 303rd Squadron or, more generally, on the role of Polish pilots in the Battle of Britain. Consequently, even in my undergraduate thesis, I had to rely primarily on Polish and English-language sources. In my master's studies, I broadened the scope of my research to cover the entire Polish Air Force contingents assigned to the Royal Air Force's order of battle, yet I still encountered a lack of comprehensive Hungarian-language analyses on the subject.

The year 2020—the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain—marked a particularly intense period of new publications, studies, and documentaries on the topic. It was then that I noted a paradox: while the quantity of available information had increased, sources often provided contradictory data and interpretations, particularly regarding the combat effectiveness of Polish pilots and their impact on the outcome of the battle. This observation reinforced my resolve, within the framework of my doctoral research, to examine the topic methodically and from multiple perspectives, building upon my earlier studies while significantly expanding the source base and scholarly foundations in line with rigorous academic standards.

My dissertation is structured around three main focal points:

1. **The process of integration** of Polish pilots into the Royal Air Force (RAF), with particular attention to the degree of autonomy granted to them and the efforts made to preserve their national identity.
2. **An evaluation of combat performance**, aiming to determine whether Polish pilots were indeed more effective than their counterparts from other nations, or whether such a narrative is, at least in part, a construct of post-war memory politics.
3. **The analysis of divergent casualty and victory statistics**, focusing on how discrepancies

among sources can be explained by propaganda motives, lack of documentation, or methodological differences.

I regard the topicality of this research as twofold: firstly, the study of strategic and tactical events of the Second World War is of significant historical value; secondly, it offers lessons that may be relevant to the present. The analysis of military cooperation of smaller states within alliance systems is of particular importance in today's geopolitical environment, while the pedagogical potential of historical experiences further justifies the exploration of this subject.

Formulation of the scientific problem

The central scientific problem of my dissertation can be formulated as follows: although the body of literature dealing with the events of the Second World War is remarkably rich and diverse—particularly with regard to the Battle of Britain—the comprehensive, critical, and context-driven examination of the role of Polish pilots, especially in the Hungarian language, remains a largely unexplored field. While numerous works in English and Polish provide detailed accounts of the battlefield events—whether in the form of daily chronologies, technical analyses, command decisions, biographies, or strategic assessments—in Hungarian scholarly discourse, the subject has only been addressed sporadically, typically at a popular-science level or exclusively from the perspective of British military leadership.

With regard to the role of Polish pilots specifically, the only notable work published in Hungarian is Tadeusz H. Rolski's war memoir *Fehér sas kék mezőben* ("White Eagle in a Blue Field"), which, despite its considerable value as a source, cannot be regarded as a scholarly study. Beyond this, only a handful of primarily popular-science blog posts and short articles engage with the subject. While these may contain valuable partial insights, they do not substitute for a methodologically sound, source-critical historical analysis.

One of my research objectives was therefore to partially fill this scholarly gap by producing a comprehensive Hungarian-language work, written with historiographical rigour, that places the role of Polish pilots in its proper historical context and sheds new light on the events of the Battle of Britain. I consider this important not merely for the sake of expanding historical knowledge, but also because the topic touches upon several aspects—strategic thinking, alliance structures, and the military participation of smaller states—that may offer relevant lessons for contemporary security policy and the interpretation of military cooperation.

In particular, I find it noteworthy to examine how a small or medium power such as Poland can effectively integrate into a great-power alliance system while—whether formally or informally—retaining its own military character and securing a degree of autonomy within certain theatres of war. The British-Polish and French-Polish intergovernmental agreements serve as excellent examples of the strategic and diplomatic instruments through which a small state can ensure its participation in a large-scale international military operation, not merely as a passive subject but as an active, sovereign actor.

It is especially important to me that historical and military-historical knowledge should not be confined to research, but should also be applicable in education. The conclusions drawn from

my investigation can be readily integrated into higher-education military history curricula, supporting students in developing a more comprehensive understanding of strategy, military diplomacy, and collective memory. For this reason, my research aims not only to articulate new scientific findings but also to demonstrate their practical—particularly educational—applicability.

Research objectives

The primary aim of my research is to present, from multiple perspectives and with as much depth as possible, the participation of Polish pilots in the Battle of Britain, while identifying lessons that may be applicable in the future. Furthermore, I seek to explore how, as members of a small nation, they contributed to the operational activities of the Allied air forces in combat.

A second direction of my research focuses on investigating the reasons behind the significant numerical discrepancies found in the existing statistical records of the Luftwaffe and the Royal Air Force. In addition, my aim is to produce a comprehensive study that may serve as a valuable resource for those seeking literature in Hungarian on this subject.

To achieve these objectives:

- In the opening chapters of my dissertation, I provide a concise overview of the historical and political context of the period under examination, as well as the theories of influential air power strategists of the era.
- I compare the British and German air forces engaged in the Battle of Britain in terms of organisational structure, operational framework, and technical capabilities.
- As one of the pillars of my research, I analyse the Franco–Polish and British–Polish intergovernmental agreements signed in 1940, which addressed the Polish Air Force and its integration into French and British command structures, and I assess the extent to which these agreements were implemented in practice.
- In the main body of the dissertation, I compare the results achieved by the British and German air forces, including within the British forces those attained by Polish units operating under their command.
- Since my aim is to produce a comprehensive study, I will examine and synthesise the findings in relation to my hypotheses, and in the concluding section I will outline my conclusions and present the scientific contributions of my research.

Research questions

Based on the research objectives outlined above, the following research questions are formulated:

RQ1: Were the Polish pilots indeed more effective than their counterparts in other units?

RQ2: Did the number of enemy aircraft destroyed by the 139 Polish pilots truly have as significant an impact on the outcome of the battle as is often claimed in the literature?

RQ3: Did the Polish pilots genuinely enjoy a greater degree of operational autonomy within the Royal Air Force?

RQ4: What were the underlying reasons for Churchill's post-war refusal to engage in any form of cooperation with the Poles?

Hypotheses

Taking into account the identified scientific problems, the aims of the research, and the research questions—and in line with them—I formulate four hypotheses.

First hypothesis: In the course of examining almost all available Polish sources, I repeatedly encountered the claim that Polish pilots were more effective than their British counterparts. The question arises whether the statistics truly support this assertion, or whether such statements might have been tools of propaganda—or perhaps simply a reflection of the Polish tendency toward a heroic national narrative. Based on this, the first hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H1: Polish pilots were more effective than members of the Royal Air Force, not least because, by the time they arrived in Britain, they had already taken part in their first live combat missions.

Second hypothesis: In examining the Polish literature, I also frequently came across the assertion that, owing to their greater effectiveness, Polish pilots had a decisive influence on the outcome of the Battle of Britain (in some cases, this was even phrased as “the Poles won the Battle of Britain for the British”). The question, therefore, is whether the number of enemy aircraft destroyed by the 139 Polish pilots truly had as great an impact on the battle's outcome as these sources suggest.

H2: Polish pilots had a decisive influence on the outcome of the Battle of Britain.

Third hypothesis: An analysis of the sources revealed that Polish squadrons had not only British but also Polish commanding officers. Photographs show that, on the RAF uniform, the emblem of the Polish Air Force was also present, and Polish squadron badges were in use (though, theoretically, the latter were unofficial). This leads to the third hypothesis:

H3: The Poles were granted a significant degree of autonomy within the Royal Air Force.

Fourth hypothesis: Although Churchill promised the Poles that Britain would never forget their heroism, in 1946—during the victory parade in London before King George VI—representatives of thirty Allied and resistance nations were present, yet the Poles were absent. In most sources, this issue is either omitted or addressed only in passing. On this basis, the fourth hypothesis is as follows:

H4: Taking into account the evolving international situation, and in the hope of potential future cooperation with the Soviet Union, Churchill refrained from any form of post-war cooperation with the Poles.

Methodology

The methodological framework of my dissertation is built upon a comparative historical analysis, relying on a critical examination of both primary and secondary sources. My aim was to integrate archival materials, official statistical records, personal testimonies, and existing historiographical interpretations into a coherent narrative that allows for a balanced evaluation of the Polish pilots' role in the Battle of Britain.

The research was conducted along three principal methodological lines:

1. **Source Criticism and Comparative Analysis:** I systematically compared British and Polish archival materials, with particular attention to official combat reports, squadron records, and post-war statistical summaries. By juxtaposing British and German data with Polish records, I sought to identify discrepancies and to evaluate the credibility of claims regarding effectiveness, autonomy, and contribution.
2. **Quantitative Examination of Combat Results:** Using available numerical data on aircraft losses, mission success rates, and confirmed victories, I conducted a statistical comparison between Polish and other RAF squadrons. This quantitative approach was

essential in testing the validity of the first two hypotheses, namely the supposed greater effectiveness of the Poles and the extent of their influence on the outcome of the battle.

3. **Contextual and Interpretive Approach:** Beyond numbers and statistics, I examined how the political and strategic context shaped the operational autonomy of Polish squadrons, as well as post-war British attitudes toward them. This required the integration of diplomatic history, military theory, and cultural memory studies, ensuring that the analysis went beyond a purely military perspective.

The research also made use of memoirs, diaries, and oral history interviews, which provided invaluable insight into the personal experiences of the pilots themselves. While such sources must be treated with caution due to their subjective nature, they nonetheless offer a human dimension that complements and contextualizes the statistical and archival data.

This multi-perspective methodology allowed me to approach the topic in a way that is both critical and comprehensive, ensuring that the conclusions drawn rest upon a solid empirical and historiographical foundation.

The research objectives, questions, hypotheses, and methods used are summarized in the following figure:

Research Objective 1 Examine the effectiveness of Polish pilots who fought during the Battle of Britain.	Research Question 1 Were Polish pilots actually more effective than their British counterparts?	Hypothesis 1 Polish pilots were more effective than the British, since by the time they arrived in England, they already had significant combat experience.	Methods Applied Content analysis, databases, statistic
Reserch Objective 2 Demonstrate or refute whether the performance of Polish pilots decisively influenced the outcome of the Battle of Britain.	Research Question 2 Out of 2,878 pilots, can the performance of 139 Polish pilots truly be considered decisive in influencing the outcome of the battle?	Hypothesis 2. Polish pilots had a decisive impact on the outcome of the Battle of Britain.	Methods Applied Content Analysis, Literature, Intergovernmental Agreements, Squadron Diaries, Databases, Combat reports
Research Objective 3 An Examination of the Extent to Which the Poles Serving in the Royal Air Force Were Able to Preserve Their Own Identity	Research Question 3. How Was the Integration of the Poles into the Royal Air Force Implemented? To What Extent Did They Enjoy Autonomy?	Hypothesis 3 The Poles Were Granted a High Degree of Autonomy within the Royal Air Force.	Methods Applied Content Analysis, Literature, Intergovernmental Agreements, Squadron Diaries, Databases
Research Objective 4 Examining the Extent to Which the Political Context Influenced Post-War Cooperation Between the British and the Poles.	Research Question 4 Why Were the Poles Not Invited to the Victory Parade After the Second World War, and Why Were They Not Represented on Any Memorials?	Hypothesis 4. Churchill, Taking into Account the Emerging International Situation and the Prospect of Future Cooperation with the Soviet Union, Refrained from Any Form of Collaboration with the Poles.	Methods Applied Content Analysis, Literature, Interviews

1. figure: Summary of research objectives, questions, hypotheses, and methods. (Source: own compilation)

Summary of the thesis

At the beginning of my thesis, I outline the motivation behind my choice of topic and the scientific problem on which I base my hypotheses and research objectives. I also describe the research methods I used and provide an overview of the literature I consulted during my research.

I have divided the rest of my thesis into three main chapters.

In the first chapter, I outline the historical background of the topic by describing the outbreak of World War II, narrowing it down to the Polish theater of war. In the meantime, I examine Poland's situation in light of the events, and I also describe the formation of the Polish government-in-exile and its members. I devote a subchapter to presenting the Luftwaffe and the Royal Air Force. I describe the aircraft and technical equipment used during the Battle of Britain, and also discuss the Royal Air Force commands that coordinated these techniques. In addition, I compare the leadership concepts, strategic ideas, and personalities of Adolf Hitler and Winston Churchill, as well as Herman Göring and Sir Hugh Dowding.

In the second major chapter, I describe the process of integrating Polish pilots in light of the 1940 British-Polish agreement. I examine how the provisions of the agreement were implemented, what training the pilots received, and describe the formation of Polish squadrons within the Royal Air Force. As an overview, I also devote a short chapter to the Polish Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

In the third major chapter, I examine the role of Polish pilots in the Battle of Britain. I begin by describing the stages of the battle itself, before moving on to examine the larger-scale operations. I review the missions carried out by Polish pilots, comparing them with the results achieved by other units of the Royal Air Force. I also analyze the available statistical data in order to answer my hypothesis that Polish pilots had a decisive influence on the outcome of the Battle of Britain. A more nuanced presentation of the topic is provided by a personal interview with two Polish pilots, Kazimierz Wünsche and Tadeusz Roman, who recount their life stories and the main stages of their military service. I also look at the later missions of the air squadrons that were formed.

Finally, I summarize my research, review and evaluate my specific objectives. I confirm or refute my hypotheses and formulate the research results of my dissertation. To conclude my thesis, I outline its possible future applications.

Consolidated Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a clear, chapter-by-chapter summary of the conclusions drawn throughout the dissertation.

I. The Historical Background and Overview of the Battle of Britain

The Battle of Britain and the events leading up to it reflect the interplay of numerous strategic and political factors that shaped the course of the Second World War.

- 1. Germany and the Outbreak of the Second World War:** Germany's expansionist policies and aggressive military build-up prior to the war led to the invasion of Poland in 1939, which marked the beginning of the Second World War. Following Poland's rapid collapse and the exile of its government, the reconstruction of Polish military units and their integration into the Royal Air Force (RAF) played a significant role in the continuation of the war.
- 2. Luftwaffe Strategy and Tactics:** The German Luftwaffe's Blitzkrieg tactics provided substantial advantages for Germany. Luftwaffe superiority was decisive in the campaign in France, and in the early stages of the war, air dominance was a crucial factor in shaping outcomes.
- 3. Development and Role of the Royal Air Force:** The RAF, which had continued to develop since the First World War, entered the Battle of Britain with a substantial fleet and growing operational experience. Its innovative defensive strategies, such as the Dowding system and the radar network, played a fundamental role in Britain's successful resistance.
- 4. Breaking the Enigma Codes and Technological Advancements:** The decryption of the Enigma codes and the establishment of radar technology provided the British intelligence services and the RAF with a major strategic advantage, enabling the more effective countering of Luftwaffe attacks.
- 5. Political and Military Leadership:** The contrasting leadership styles of Churchill and Hitler significantly influenced the course of the war. Churchill's determined and inspirational leadership contributed to British resilience and RAF successes, while Hitler and Göring's strategic decisions—most notably the shift to bombing London—proved to be critical mistakes.
- 6. The Role of Female Pilots and Support Organizations:** Female pilots and support organizations, such as the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) and the Women's Auxiliary Air

Force (WAAF), played a crucial role in the functioning of the RAF and in ensuring the efficient use of wartime resources.

7. **The Historical Background and Contribution of the Polish Air Force:** The interwar development of the Polish Air Force was closely linked to the nation's struggle for independence and its modernization efforts. Although technologically behind at the outbreak of the Second World War, its personnel were highly trained and combat-experienced, delivering outstanding performance within the Allied forces. Polish pilots, particularly during the Battle of Britain, demonstrated exceptional dedication and professional skill, significantly contributing to the RAF's resistance and shaping the course of the early stages of the war.

In sum, the Battle of Britain and the early phase of the war were complex and had far-reaching consequences for subsequent military developments, ultimately influencing the overall outcome of the Second World War.

II. The Process of Integrating Polish Pilots

Based on the international composition of the RAF during the Battle of Britain, as well as the role of the Polish pilots and the Polish Women's Auxiliary Air Force, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. **International Cooperation:** The Battle of Britain reflected the RAF's significant international dimension, with 2,878 pilots arriving from various countries to fight against the Luftwaffe. This international participation highlights the broad-based cooperation among the Allies and their collective commitment to a common cause.
2. **Outstanding Role of the Polish Pilots:** The contribution of Polish pilots was particularly remarkable, both in terms of numbers and performance. They represented a significant proportion of RAF personnel, and their achievements in aerial combat played a vital role in the defeat of the Luftwaffe. Their air victories directly contributed to Britain's success.
3. **Integration of Polish Units:** The agreement of 5 August 1940 enabled the reorganization of the Polish Air Force in Britain. This process entailed not only military, but also cultural and organizational challenges. Ensuring a degree of autonomy and addressing linguistic barriers were crucial to the successful integration of Polish units into the RAF.
4. **Role of Polish Women Pilots:** The establishment and functioning of the Polish Women's Auxiliary Air Force (PLSK) underscored the importance of women's contributions to the war effort. Its members carried out a variety of essential tasks, and by the end of the war,

they served in significant numbers, thereby supporting the RAF's operations and contributing to the broader allocation of wartime resources.

5. **Training and Adaptation:** Training Polish pilots and addressing differences in organizational structure and language were key to ensuring their effective cooperation with the RAF. Joint training, communication exercises, and operational adaptation fostered effective collaboration between Polish and British pilots, ultimately enhancing combat efficiency.
6. **Preservation of Traditions:** The traditions and insignia of the Polish squadrons and the Women's Auxiliary Air Force played a vital role in maintaining their distinct identity while simultaneously contributing to the broader Allied war effort. The participation of Polish pilots and female personnel not only strengthened RAF operations but also deepened international solidarity and the pursuit of shared objectives.

In sum, the international composition of the RAF, the outstanding performance of the Polish pilots, and the role of female personnel during the Battle of Britain all contributed significantly to the success of the Allied war effort and to the strengthening of Allied cooperation.

III. The Role of Polish Squadrons in the Battle of Britain

Based on the analysis of the phases of the Battle of Britain, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Phases and Timelines:

- **First Phase:** This period was characterized by air battles and attacks on radar stations, with the Luftwaffe focusing primarily on the coast of Kent. Churchill repeatedly emphasized the importance of British air defense and the necessity of maintaining resistance.
- **Second Phase:** The Luftwaffe escalated its operations to large-scale attacks targeting radar installations, airfields, and other strategic sites. August 18 became the most challenging day, as both sides suffered heavy losses.
- **Third and Fourth Phases:** Although the Luftwaffe continued to seek Britain's capitulation, increasing losses and the resilience of British resistance gradually weakened its offensive capacity. By late October, the intensity of the attacks diminished significantly, though operations did not cease entirely.

2. Performance of Polish Pilots:

- **August:** During the initial phase, Polish pilots' performance was limited. Many of the newly established units were still undergoing training, and confirmed kills in August remained relatively low.
- **September:** By September, the performance of the Polish pilots had markedly improved. They accounted for approximately 61% of RAF victories during this period, with a substantial number of confirmed kills, demonstrating their critical contribution to the battle's outcome.

3. Loss Reports:

Discrepancies between British and German loss reports reveal that both sides tended to exaggerate figures. The BBC reported British casualty rates inflated by an average of 51–67%, while the German broadcaster *Deutschlandsender* overstated Luftwaffe successes by approximately 41–42%.

4. Need for Further Research:

When evaluating statistical data, caution is required due to inconsistencies and inaccuracies in reporting. Further research and source analysis are essential for drawing objective conclusions and for fully understanding the role of Polish pilots in determining the outcome of the Battle of Britain.

5. After the Battle of Britain:

Following the battle, Polish fighter pilots went on to form three tactical units, which continued to play a significant role within the RAF. The establishment of the Polish First Fighter Wing in April 1941 marked the beginning of their participation in a wide range of aerial operations. By 1943, the RAF had also formed the Second Tactical Air Force to support the Allied invasion forces in northern France, in which Polish units played an active role.

Despite Churchill's wartime promise that Polish heroism would never be forgotten, the role of Polish forces was gradually marginalized in postwar British historical memory. Britain's increasing alignment with the Soviet Union became evident in symbolic exclusions, such as the absence of a Polish delegation at the 1946 London Victory Parade and the omission of Polish squadron insignia from the Dover memorial. These developments reflect the fading public recognition of Polish sacrifice and struggle for justice.

Churchill's diplomatic strategy, even during the early stages of the war, clearly prioritized consolidating Soviet influence, particularly in relation to Poland. Although the Poles had hoped for sustained Western support, Churchill's political objectives aligned with the consolidation of the Soviet sphere of influence. The decisions made at the Yalta Conference reinforced the loss of Poland's eastern territories and the establishment of Soviet dominance, which ultimately undermined Polish sovereignty. Although free elections were promised, Poland fell under Stalin's control, delivering a profound disappointment to both the Polish government-in-exile and the Polish nation.

Results of the examination of the hypotheses

Based on the analyses and investigations carried out as part of my research, my hypotheses relating to the chosen topic have been confirmed as follows:

H1: Polish pilots were more effective than members of the Royal Air Force, not least because by the time they arrived in Britain, they had already taken part in their first real combat missions.

In attempting to verify this hypothesis, I believe that the evidence gathered has confirmed the validity of my assumption. After overcoming the initial linguistic and technical barriers, the pilots participated in the series of combat operations with confidence and effectiveness. Numerous pilots' memoirs reveal that their earlier years of combat experience fundamentally shaped their behavior during the aerial battles over Britain. This is further supported by the interview I conducted regarding two Polish pilots—Kazimierz Wünsche and Tadeusz Roman—from which it became clear that, even before joining the RAF, they had actively participated in air engagements, carried out multiple missions, and gained direct combat experience against German and other occupying forces.

These pilots consistently sought opportunities to effectively destroy enemy aircraft, demonstrating not only their technical proficiency but also their unwavering commitment to the struggle. In combat, they fought with such determination as if they were defending their homeland itself. This attitude was significant not only from a military perspective but also in terms of sustaining the morale and preserving the identity of the Polish pilots, who, in battle, fought not merely as part of the RAF but also as defenders of their own nation. Their accumulated experience and dedication proved crucial to the successful resistance against the Luftwaffe, ultimately contributing to the overall victory of the Royal Air Force.

H2: The Polish pilots had a decisive influence on the outcome of the Battle of Britain.

During the Battle of Britain, pilots from sixteen nations served in the Royal Air Force (RAF), with the largest contingents coming from Poland, New Zealand, Canada, and Czechoslovakia. Although the Polish pilots played a significant role in the battle and, owing to their prior combat experience,

fought effectively against the Luftwaffe, I do not consider it justified to claim that the contribution of 139 individuals out of a total of 2,878 pilots was the decisive factor in achieving victory.

It is true that the combat experience of the Polish pilots contributed to British successes; however, the attainment of victory relied primarily on the RAF's integrated air defense system, its organizational structure, and its capacity for rapid response. During the battle, the RAF depended not only on the fighting skills of the Polish pilots but also on the carefully designed and executed defensive strategies that enabled effective responses to Luftwaffe offensives. It was this combination of factors that ultimately secured British victory in the aerial campaign.

H3: The Poles were granted a considerable degree of autonomy within the Royal Air Force.

This hypothesis can be substantiated through specific provisions of the 1940 Anglo-Polish Agreement, which clearly indicate the autonomy of the Polish pilots and their distinct status within the RAF. The most significant provisions include:

1. **Oath of Allegiance:** The personnel of the Polish Air Force serving in the Royal Air Force were required to swear an oath of allegiance to the Republic of Poland. This provision demonstrates that Polish pilots did not serve merely within the framework of the RAF, but also formally pledged loyalty to their homeland, symbolizing their autonomy.
2. **Uniforms and Insignia:** The RAF uniform was officially recognized as the uniform of the Polish Air Force, while Polish pilots were allowed to display distinctive Polish symbols or insignia. This not only reinforced their military identity but also contributed to the preservation of Polish cultural and national traditions. For security reasons, however, RAF-style rank insignia corresponding to positions within the RAF were also mandatory.
3. **Aircraft Markings:** The aircraft operated by the Polish Air Force within the RAF carried standard British military markings, but distinctive Polish emblems were also displayed on the fuselage. This further emphasized the autonomy of the Polish pilots and the preservation of their identity within the British military structure.
4. **Command Structure:** Alongside British commanders, the Polish fighter squadrons were also led by Polish officers. This dual command arrangement enabled Polish pilots to operate under their own leadership while continuing their combat activities within the RAF framework.

Taken together, these provisions reinforce the hypothesis that Polish pilots enjoyed significant autonomy within the Royal Air Force. This autonomy enabled them to preserve their identity and military traditions while making a decisive contribution to the success of the RAF.

H4: Churchill, considering the emerging international situation and the prospect of future cooperation with the Soviet Union, refrained from any form of closer collaboration with the Poles.

During the Second World War, particularly in the aftermath of the Battle of Britain, Churchill became increasingly aware of the complexities of international politics and the importance of shaping future alliances. While the contribution of Polish pilots to the RAF was indisputable, British political strategies and the broader international context led Churchill to handle the integration of the Polish government-in-exile and Polish forces into the British war effort with caution.

As the war progressed, Churchill recognized that Britain's political interests and alliance structures were becoming more complicated, especially in relation to cooperation with the Soviet Union and other Allies. In light of the growing tensions with Moscow and the shifting geopolitical balance, Churchill sought to preserve the possibility of future collaboration with the Soviet Union by avoiding closer engagement with the Poles.

This decision was partly rooted in the British government's concern that tensions between the Polish government-in-exile and the Soviet Union might further complicate Britain's diplomatic position, and that pressing Polish interests could jeopardize vital British–Soviet relations. Thus, Churchill's reluctance to strengthen cooperation with the Poles reflected a pragmatic calculation, prioritizing the stabilization of future alliance structures over the recognition of Polish national aspirations.

New Scientific Contributions of the Dissertation

1. One of the fundamental new scientific contributions of my dissertation lies in the fact that I have examined a chapter of the Second World War that has so far received little attention within Hungarian military history research. Although extensive literature on the Second World War is readily available, this study constitutes the first comprehensive and source-based Hungarian-language analysis of the Battle of Britain from a Polish perspective.
2. Based on archival research and the available secondary literature, I reconstructed the path of Polish pilots through France to Great Britain, as well as their operational activities during the Battle of Britain. I explored the circumstances of the establishment of Polish fighter squadrons and their integration into the Royal Air Force (RAF). My analytical examination of their wartime role demonstrated that Polish pilots contributed not only numerically, but also through their experience, fighting morale, and tactical adaptability, which were decisive in maintaining the RAF's combat capability during the most critical stages of the battle.
3. Through the critical evaluation of statistical sources, I confirmed a frequently cited but rarely substantiated claim in military historiography: that surviving reports and datasets can only be interpreted with historical validity when subjected to strict source criticism and placed within the context of memory politics. The often contradictory figures relating to Polish pilots' losses and aerial victories—especially those found in the works of Alfred Price, Robert Gretzyngier and Wojtek Matusiak, Olaf Groehler, as well as Richard Hough and Dennis Richards, alongside the Central Military Archives in Warsaw (IX.5.20.45)—revealed that discrepancies arose not only from recording anomalies but also from deliberate distortions, propagandistic over- or under-reporting, and the subsequent construction of national narratives. My analysis thus not only confirmed the relevance of a source-critical approach in quantitative military history but also contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the Polish pilots' role in the Battle of Britain.
4. Based on the available evidence, I demonstrated that Polish pilots enjoyed significant autonomy within the RAF, despite operating under its formal regulations. This finding was substantiated by examining the practical implementation of the Anglo-Polish intergovernmental agreement of 5 August 1940.
5. Another key conclusion of the dissertation is that although Polish pilots—thanks to their prior combat experience and exceptional performance—indeed played a decisive role in the

success of the Battle of Britain, the simplified narrative found in parts of the literature, which claims that out of the 2,878 multinational pilots it was solely the 139 Poles who “won” the aerial battle, cannot be maintained historically. My analysis demonstrated that such a perspective neglects the multi-layered (operational, organizational, and diplomatic) dynamics of warfare and underestimates the substantial contributions made by other Allied pilots, including those from Britain, Canada, New Zealand, Czechoslovakia, and elsewhere.

6. Finally, the dissertation establishes that during the Second World War—particularly from 1941 onwards—Winston Churchill increasingly subordinated Polish interests in his foreign policy decisions, primarily in light of the perceived priority of sustaining the alliance with the Soviet Union. The evidence suggests that a key principle of British wartime diplomacy was to maintain great-power balance and secure Soviet support, which led to the marginalization and political isolation of the Polish government-in-exile. Despite acknowledging Polish military contributions—especially in the air force—Churchill’s sense of political realism ultimately overrode expectations of moral or allied solidarity, rendering Anglo-Polish relations subordinate to geopolitical rationality.

Recommendations – Practical Applications of the Research Findings – Directions for Future Research

1.Support for Military History Education

The historical events, statistical analyses, and operational contexts revealed in this dissertation can be effectively integrated into higher education curricula in Hungary, particularly in courses on military history, security studies, and military strategy. The presentation of Polish involvement in the Battle of Britain enriches teaching materials from a novel perspective, with special emphasis on multinational military cooperation and its organizational challenges. The case-study analysis of the integration and effectiveness of Polish pilots can contribute to shaping a more comprehensive mindset among students.

2.Expansion of Scientific and Historical Outreach

One of the major contributions of this dissertation is that it provides, for the first time in Hungarian, a comprehensive and academically rigorous account of the role of Polish pilots in the Battle of Britain. This has particular significance for a wider audience interested in military history, for secondary school teachers, professionals engaged in historical outreach, and museum or exhibition curators. The research findings can contribute to shaping the memory of these events in Hungary and to fostering a more nuanced understanding of Polish–Hungarian historical relations.

3.Military Training and the Analysis of Allied Warfare

The operation, autonomy, and combat performance of Polish pilots within the RAF shed light on questions that remain relevant for contemporary international military cooperation. The results of this research may be useful for advanced military training, NATO partnership simulations, and leadership development programs, especially with regard to command structures, the management of linguistic and cultural barriers, and the effective integration of multinational units.

4. Identification of Future Research Directions

Although the dissertation focuses on a clearly delineated period—July to October 1940—it raises a number of questions that hold significance for future military-historical and interdisciplinary research. Such questions include a comparative analysis of the performance of Polish squadrons established after 1941, the role of political decision-makers in shaping military memory, and an examination of post-war recognition policies.

5. Social and Strategic Lessons of Historical Examples

The study of small-state participation in great-power military alliances—particularly in the context of Anglo-Polish relations and the agreements of 1940—offers relevant lessons for today’s international security policy. These historical examples demonstrate how the armed forces of a nation can function as active and recognized participants within an integrated system, while also serving as a reminder of how political circumstances can shape, limit, or even deny the recognition of such contributions.

The author's publications related to the topic

- Kovács, Petra: Polish Air Forces in the Royal Air Force (1940-1945), HADTUDOMÁNYI SZEMLE 10: 1 pp. 73-83., 11 p. (2017)
- Kovács, Petra: The opposing sides of the Battle of Britain, HADTUDOMÁNYI SZEMLE 11: 3 pp. 109-117., 9 p. (2018)
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- Stier, Petra: The journey of Polish Air Force personnel from Poland to Great Britain between 1939 and 1940, HADTUDOMÁNYI SZEMLE 17: 2 pp. 65-71., 7 p. (2024)

The author's professional biography

The author studied Slavic Studies and Polish at the University of Debrecen and later at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE). During her studies, she spent a total of one year at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. After completing her university education, she joined the Ministry of Defense, where she worked for three years in the field of military grave maintenance. In this role, she was responsible for the supervision of Hungarian military graves in Slovakia, Poland, and Bulgaria.

She subsequently worked as an administrator at the Military Technical Doctoral School, as well as in the back-office support systems of various multinational companies, where her responsibilities were carried out primarily in English and Polish.

At present, she has 11 entries listed in the Hungarian Scientific Works Repository (MTMT), including three editorial contributions. Her publications in both English and Hungarian have appeared in domestic academic journals.

As a member and secretary of the Doctoral Student Council of the Ludovika University of Public Service, and later as a member and president of the Military Science Department within the National Association of Doctoral Students, she has played an active role in academic community life. In these capacities, she has organized several conferences, such as *In the Service of the Homeland*, the NATO Simulation Competition, and *Military Science and the 21st Century*.

