

Article 8

Dr Andrzej Suchcitz, The Air Force Department at Home Army GHQ

The idea of an air force branch as part of a clandestine resistance army operating underground on territory occupied by a strong enemy may seem strange to many people. Yet even in such conditions, where the resistance army is operating as part of a wider operational scheme, various – at first glance – extraordinary facets take on a concrete meaning and specific aim. And so it was with the Air Force Department of the Operations Bureau of the Polish Home Army General Headquarters.

The Air Section was created in March 1940 (codename 'Bociany', later 'Parasol'). Initially part of the V Communications Bureau of Home Army GHQ, in 1942 it was upgraded into the Air Force Department and moved to the III Operations Bureau of Home Army GHQ. For most period of the occupation its chief was Air Force Colonel Bernard Adamecki who during the Polish 1939 Campaign had been Deputy Officer Commanding Army 'Modlin's' Air Force.

The initial task of the Air Section, which was formed from air officers who had remained in occupied Poland following the September 1939 debacle, was to evacuate as many airmen as possible to the west via the Balkans. This soon gave way to long term planning and preparations for the general uprising, which was planned to coincide with the imminent defeat of Germany and the breakdown of her organs of occupation in Poland.

The Air Section was divided into the Organisational, Intelligence and Communication Sub-sections.

The Organisational Sub-section organised the evacuation of air force personnel and was responsible for arranging safe covers for those who remained in Poland. All evacuations were halted following the collapse of France in June 1940.

The Intelligence Sub-section was the most important part of the Department. It arranged for continuous observation of enemy airfields, preparing their detailed plans and photographs. These were sent to GHQ in Warsaw and subsequently to Polish GHQ in London where it was passed on to the Allies.

The Communication Sub-section's task was to prepare for direct air communications between France later Britain and occupied Poland whereby single aircraft would land at prearranged clandestine airstrips. This idea proved difficult to implement and studies turned to the feasibility of airdrops. This entailed the preparation of drop zones, reception parties, signaling etc. The idea of aircraft landing in Poland was not abandoned altogether and further planning led to the 'Most' (Air Bridge) operations in 1944. In 1943 the Polish authorities in London managed to obtain support for the creation of Special Duties Flight 1586 for airdrop operations to Poland. With the reorganization of the Air Section into the Air Department of Operations Bureau GHQ Home Army, the erstwhile Communications Sub-section was upgraded into an independent department and taken out of Air Department's responsibility.

Essentially the Air Department's task remained the same, with ever-increasing importance being attached to intelligence gathering about the Luftwaffe. The planning for the general rising also began to take on increasing importance, as these preparations had to be methodical and long term. This entailed taking control and making operational airfields in enemy hands. The new opened Air Department was reorganised to consist of: its directorate, directorate of 'Luzyce' (Warsaw Okęcie) Air Base, Anti-Aircraft Defences, Meteorological, Organisational, Operations and Two-way Communication sections. There were also Air Sections at Lublin, Cracow and Radom-Kielce Home Army Districts. These were directly responsible for organising airdrop reception parties, sabotage of enemy airfields, organising the landing operations of Dakota aircraft. Three such operations took place in 1944.

Returning to the preparations for the capture of enemy held airfields it was accepted that many tactical objectives would be difficult to capture when the rising would begin. It was the Air Department's responsibility to prepare detailed plans of those objectives to be passed on to the Allies so as their air forces could bomb those targets. Plans and photographs were passed on to London in form of microfilms by special couriers.

The local Home Army detachments were responsible for stockpiling fuel near the airfields targeted for capture and cement to repair runways. It was foreseen that some of enemy captured aircraft would be put into allied service, whilst runways were made good for allied aircraft coming in. From 1943 the Operational Section of the Air Department took on an increasing role in the preparation for planned rising. That some year the department was expanded through the creation of a Technical-Vehicle and Medical sections.

Ultimately the general rising never took place due to the political developments outside of Poland's control. The Air Department transformed into Air Headquarters took part in the Warsaw Rising including the failed attempt to gain control of Okęcie airport. In the remainder of the country the air platoons prepared for use to capture airfields were used to safeguard airdrop reception points, as well as the landing strips for the incoming Air Bridge operations. Subsequently these units were attached to the local Home Army formations for general purpose fighting.

The Home Army's Air Department carried out an important service throughout the years of German occupation, providing the Allies with useful information about the state of the Luftwaffe in occupied Poland whilst at the same time preparing its long term aim of taking air installations during the rising and making them operational as soon as possible for Allied needs as well as for the immediate needs of the reborn Polish Air Force once it arrived on Polish Soil. This service was carried out under extreme conditions and at a high cost of those killed and captured by the Gestapo.

Further reading

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- 3. *Antoni Kurowski, Lotnicy Podziemia, „Skrzydłata Polska Nr. 30 1981*
- 4. *Antoni Kunert (oprac.), Lotnictwa Armii Krajowej. Raport pułkownika Bernarda Adameckiego, „Kierunki”: Nr. 24-26, 1988*

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