Towards the Rising Sun
Warsaw–Tokyo–Warsaw Flight 1926



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1926–2026

Towards the Rising Sun
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Polish military aviation in the first years after regaining independence in 1918

The idea to form a Polish military air service dates back to World War I, when Poles were still split among various air units of the powers that occupied Poland: Russia, Prussia (Germany), and Austria. Already at the end of 1917, the first Polish aeronautical units were formed spontaneously at the I and II Polish Corps' (particularly the latter), in Belarus and Ukraine, taking advantage of the situation in Russia, which was engulfed in revolution, and using equipment assembled at airfields.

Airfields belonging to the occupying powers started to be taken over by force at the turn of 1918, first in Kraków and Eastern Galicia, even before Poland regained independence officially, then also near Poznań, among others. Significant numbers of aeroplanes and workshop equipment were acquired, though their value varied and they were often in poor technical condition, and these provided the assets used to form regular air units.

The Polish air authorities, established upon regaining independence in November 1918, faced enormous difficulties right from the outset. These resulted from a shortage of skilled staff, insufficient numbers of aeroplanes, worn out during the recently ended war, and the absence of an aircraft industry, which prevented production of new machines. The difficult situation was further complicated by the urgent need to form air units, essential for fighting in defence of the borders of the reborn Polish Republic, threatened by the neighbours on three sides.

The shortage of trained staff prompted urgent establishment of air service schools. Just a month after Poland regained independence, the first flying training school was established in Warsaw, followed by subsequent specialised schools for pilots and observers. There were attempts to compensate for the shortage of production facilities by importing aeroplanes: the air units were equipped primarily with aeroplanes purchased abroad, mostly in France, Italy, Britain, Austria, and even Germany. However, this solution to the shortage of aeroplanes resulted in the introduction of several dozen different aeroplane types into service, significantly complicating their operation, maintenance, and repairs.

After the 1920 war between Bolshevik Russia and Poland ended, a process of re-arranging the military aviation began, including the construction of appropriate facilities (airfields, workshops, staff living quarters), the further development of air training, and the upgrading and standardisation of the aeroplane fleet, based on the Polish aircraft industry that was being established from scratch.

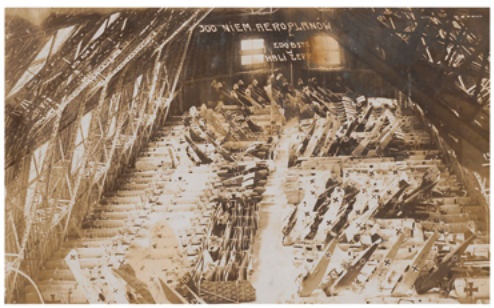
Intensive publicity and propaganda supported the development of the Polish air service in the 1920s, promoting aviation among the people and facilitating the recruitment of new candidates for the service. The participation of Polish military aviators in air shows and rallies, both in Poland and abroad, provided important contribution here. The first competition in Poland, known as the 'Air Tour Around Poland', won by Capt. Stefan Pawlikowski, took place in September 1922. At the same time, Lt Col. Ludomił Rayski took part in the 1st International Air Meeting (Internationales Flugmeeting) in Zurich, winning distinction and a special award in the Circuit of the Alpes (Alpenrundflug). He achieved an even bigger success in 1925, when he flew around the Mediterranean, covering a total distance of 7,850 km. It was the 1926 flight by Lt Bolesław Orliński (pilot) and Sgt Leonard Kubiak from Warsaw to Tokyo and back, covering an impressive distance of almost 20,000 km, that was Poland's and world aviation record of that period.



Spad VII, and Nieuport 21 and 23 biplanes of the 1st Polish Aviation Unit, formed in July 1917, photographed in March 1918 at Kuzmina Grebla (now in Ukraine).



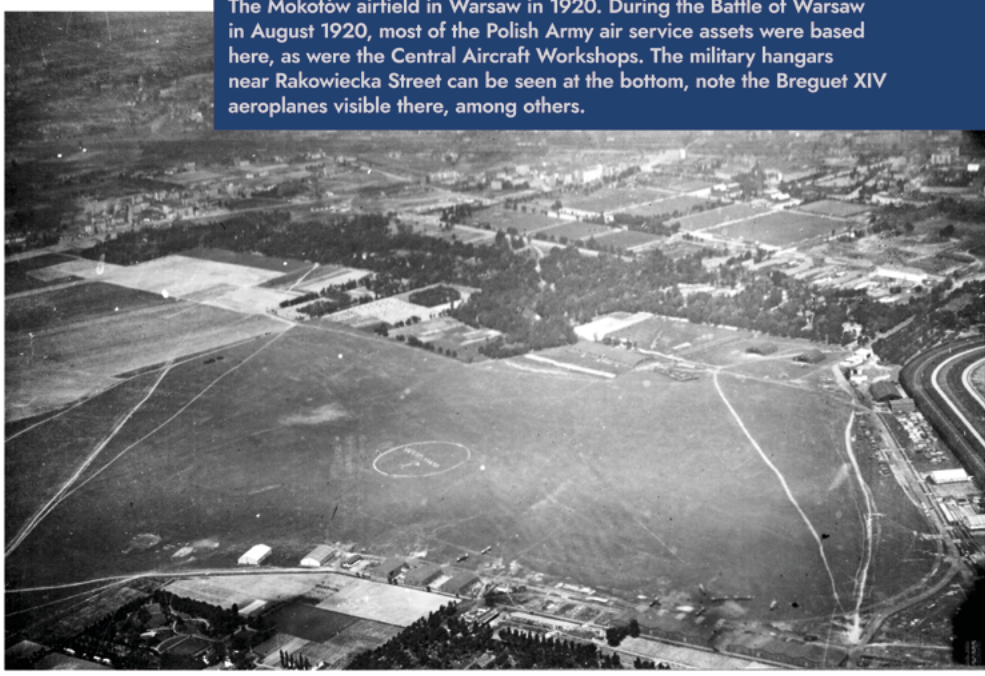
The pilot Col. Ludomił Rayski (right) and mechanic Sgt Leonard Kubiak with the Breguet XIX biplane, upon return from their flight around the Mediterranean, 1925.



German aeroplanes captured by Poles at the air base at the village of Ławica near Poznań.



Commanders, officers, and pilots of the Observers' Officer School in Warsaw. Typically for the period, their uniforms come from the three parts of Poland formerly occupied by different powers. French instructors wear their typical kepis.



The Mokotów airfield in Warsaw in 1920. During the Battle of Warsaw in August 1920, most of the Polish Army air service assets were based here, as were the Central Aircraft Workshops. The military hangars near Rakowiecka Street can be seen at the bottom, note the Breguet XIV aeroplanes visible there, among others.

Towards the Rising Sun
Warsaw–Tokyo–Warsaw Flight 1926

Origins of the flight

The 'Francopol' Polish-French Automotive and Aeroplane Plant Joint-Stock Company was established in May 1921. Its main goal was to set up an aeroplane and aero engine factory in Poland, but for organisational and financial reasons it was only able to import aeroplanes from France. Among these, two-seat reconnaissance bombers had a good reputation, including the modern series-built Breguet XIX. The long-distance version had enlarged oil and fuel tanks, the supply of which was sufficient for twelve hours of flying.

In September 1925, the type was used by Col. Ludomil Rayski to fly around the Mediterranean on the 7,850 km route: Paris-Madrid-Casablanca-Tunis-Constantinople-Warsaw. It was considered a huge success In Poland, and was also noted by the aeroplane factory of Louis Charles Breguet. With permission of the Polish authorities, Col. Rayski prepared a plan of another pioneering flight: Warsaw-Tokyo-Warsaw. In March 1926, Col. Rayski was appointed the head of Department IV, Air Navigation, of the Ministry of Military Affairs, by the Minister, Lt Gen. Lucjan Żeligowski. Therefore, in early May 1926, Col. Rayski appointed Lt Bolesław Orliński to fly the planned mission. Sgt Leonard Kubiak, Rayski's regular mechanic, was to assist Orliński.

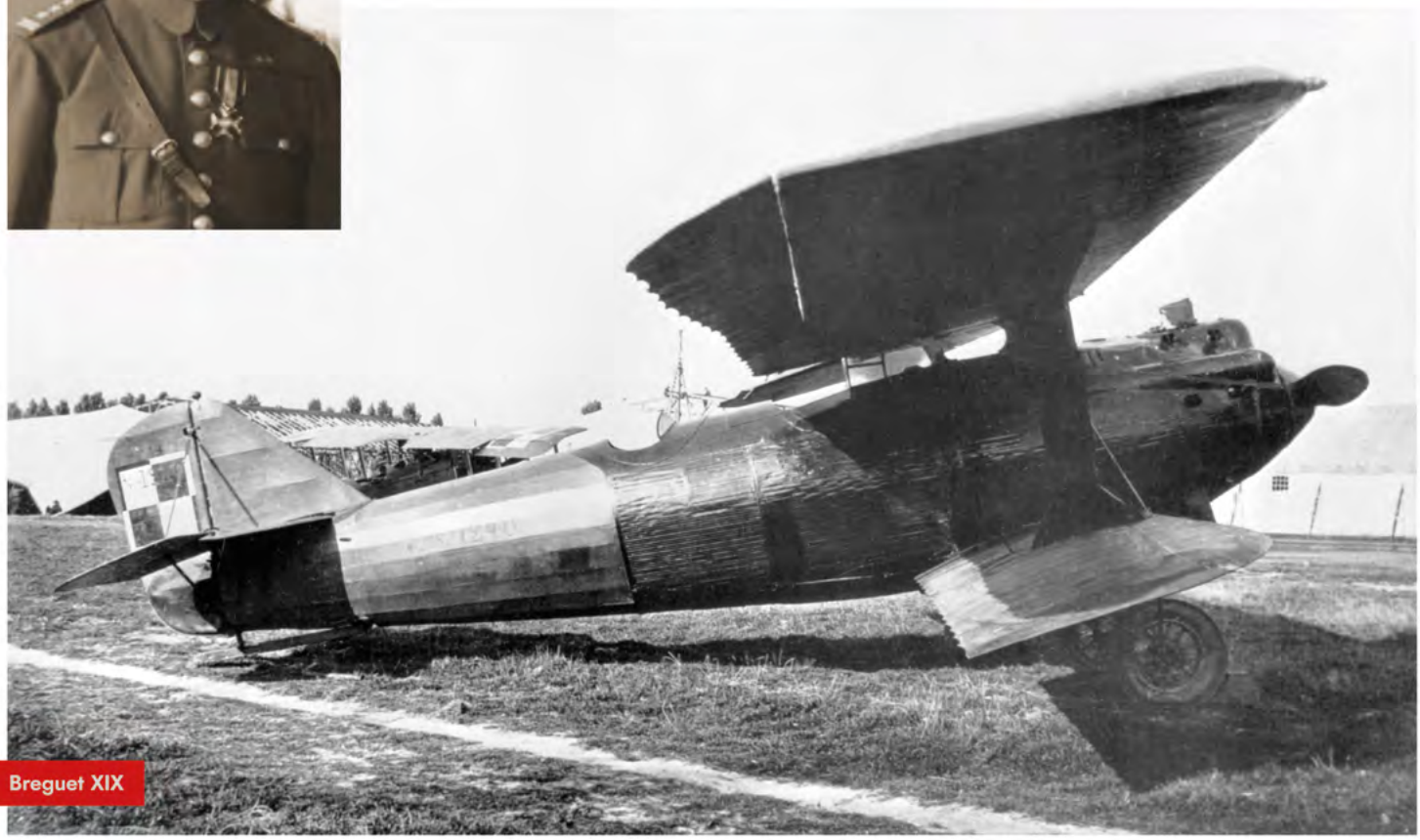
Bolesław Orliński had extensive flying experience (serving as an instructor since 1923) and a reputation as a good, if eccentric, pilot. He recalled himself that his 'acrobatic performance in the air was often of a very experimental nature'. He was a candidate who, in addition to his flying skills, also had the charisma and exceptional courage necessary to complete a pioneering flight from Europe to Japan.



Lt Bolesław Orliński and Sgt Leonard Kubiak.



Col. Ludomił Rayski,
Head of the Department IV,
Air Navigation, of the Ministry
of Military Affairs.



Breguet XIX

Towards the Rising Sun
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Preparations for the flight

The flight from Warsaw to Tokyo and back as planned by Col. Ludomił Rayski was to cover 20,600 km, going through the Soviet Union (Moscow, Kazan, Omsk, Krasnoyarsk, and Chita) and then through the Republic of China (Harbin in Manchuria). The next stop was planned in Heijō, and from there the crew was to fly the final leg of the first part of the expedition to the airfield at Tokorozawa. The departure for Tokyo was preceded by a preparatory trip from the test airfield at Vélizy–Villacoublay near Paris via Strasbourg, Nuremberg, Prague, Breslau (now Wrocław), and Łódź to the Mokotów airfield in Warsaw.

Thanks to the efforts of the Polish Military Purchasing Mission in France, the aeroplane manufacturing company SA des Aeroplanes H. Potez provided a Potez XXV A-2, in which Lt Bolesław Orliński and his mechanic, Sgt Leonard Kubiak, started their flight from Paris to Warsaw on 24 May 1926. Unexpected engine problems were encountered en route, forcing the crew to make an emergency landing at Cheb in Czechoslovakia, which resulted in serious damage to the aeroplane. The accident delayed the ultimate flight for two months, as the Potez XXV became unserviceable. Therefore, Col. Ludomił Rayski ordered the loan of a Breguet XIX from the Central Aircraft Workshops at Mokotów. As part of his training, Lt Orliński flew a test cross-country trip: Warsaw–Kraków–Poznań–Grudziądz–Warsaw on 19 August 1926.

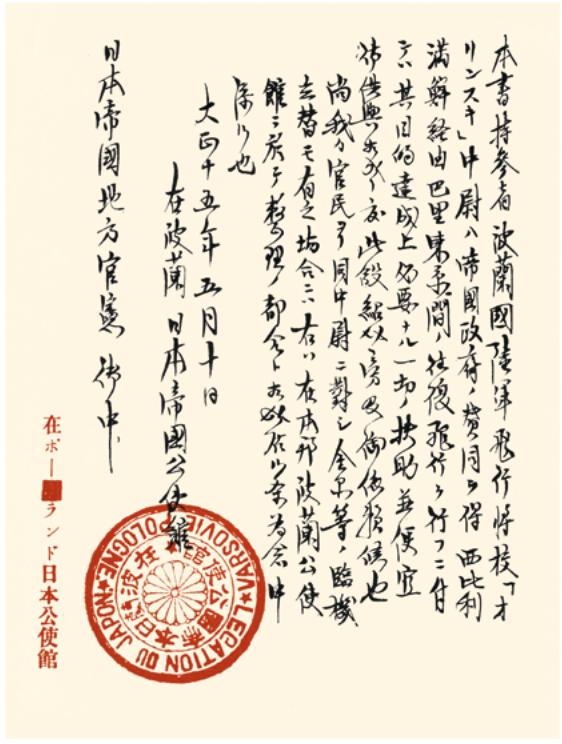
After the successful test flight, Lt Zygfryd Piątkowski notified representatives of the Empire of Japan of the readiness to attempt the flight. The Japanese advised the flight to start the following week, due to the danger of tropical typhoons in the Far East. A joint decision was made to take off from Mokotów airfield at 6:00 a.m. on 27 August 1926. The start of the flight was watched by representatives of Polish, French, Japanese, and Soviet authorities, among others. The originator of the flight, Col. Ludomił Rayski, saw Lt Orliński off with the words, 'Poland is watching you'.



The planned flight from Paris to Tokyo (according to the initial plan, from Villacoublay airfield). The caption in Japanese under the map reads: 'route from Japan to Poland'.
Wacław Jędrzejewicz, the military attaché at the Polish Legation in Tokyo, is shown in the photograph. He held the post from 1 April 1926.

The bearer of this document, a Polish Army aviation officer, Lt Orliński, intends, with the consent of the Japanese government, to fly there and back from Paris to Tokyo via Siberia, Manchuria, and Korea. While introducing him herewith, we request at the same time that you provide him with any assistance needed to facilitate the completion of his task. We also kindly note that any expenses incurred by our offices in this connection, whether in cash or goods, will be settled by the Polish Legation in Japan.
10 May 15, Taisho.

Imperial Japanese Legation in Poland
To the Provincial Authorities of the Japanese Empire



Letter of recommendation from the Japanese Legation in Warsaw.



Planned route of the Warsaw-Tokyo flight.

Towards the Rising Sun
Warsaw–Tokyo–Warsaw Flight 1926

Bolesław Orliński

He was born on 13 April 1899, in Kamieniec Podolski (under Russian occupation, now Kamianets-Podilskyi in Ukraine) and died on 28 February 1992, in Toronto, Canada. His parents were Włodzimierz Orliński and Eufemia Orlińska née Krzysztofowicz. While taught to respect Polish patriotic values, he learned foreign languages during his childhood: French, German, Ukrainian, and Russian. He graduated from a seven-year private commercial high school in Kamieniec Podolski.

During World War I, he served as a volunteer with the Russian army from 1916. He graduated from an ensign school in Zhytomyr. Subsequently deserting from the Russian army, he joined the 1st Polish Corps under Gen. Józef Dowbor Muśnicki. During the 1920 Polish-Russian War, he was a member of the Polish Army, first as a lancer (between January 1919 and March 1920) and then with the air service as a corporal, assistant vehicle mechanic in the 162nd Spad Flight, then renamed the 19th Fighter Flight.

He trained at the Pilots School in Bydgoszcz (1920-1921) and at the Advanced Pilots School in Grudziądz (1921-1922) in Poland. He underwent additional training in 1921 at Rakowice airfield in Kraków. He joined the 1st Air Regiment in Warsaw on 1 January 1922, while subsequent promotions and postings saw him back at the Advanced Pilots School in Grudziądz, this time as an aerobatics instructor at the rank of lieutenant.



Bolesław Orliński with his wife Stanisława in 1930. Backdrop is provided by a PZL t-2 liaison aeroplane displayed at a flying competition in Bucharest.

In 1924, Lt Orliński was a pilot of the 4th Air Regiment in Toruń for just a month. In July of that year he was discharged at is own request. He then worked as an airline pilot with the Campagne Franco-Roumaine and then the 'Aerolot' Polish Air Line, before resuming military service in the autumn of 1925. He was then a pilot of the 11th Fighter Regiment in Lida (now in Belarus).

In 1926, Col. Ludomił Rayski, the head of the Department IV, Air Navigation, of the Ministry of Military Affairs, selected Lt Orliński alongside Sgt Leonard Kubiak for the planned Tokyo-Warsaw-Tokyo flight, due to his flying skills and excellent command of the Russian language. The success of this undertaking made Orliński famous and gave him a well-deserved place among the heroes of Polish aviation.

He was employed as a civilian test pilot by the Państwowe Zakłady Lotnicze (PZL; National Aircraft Works) since 1928. Subsequently, he achieved success in numerous flying competitions of the 1930s. He resumed his military service upon the outbreak of World War II. He was sent to Romania on 8 September 1939, to collect aeroplanes ordered from Britain, which failed to arrive, however. He then travelled from Romania to France and then to Britain, where he served as an instructor in Polish flying training schools. In 1943, S/Ldr Orliński was posted to No. 305 Squadron, flew Mosquito fighter-bombers. He commanded the squadron between August 1944 and February 1945. After demobilisation at the end of 1948, he moved to South Africa and then to Canada, where he found employment in the aircraft industry.

During many years of his career with the air force and aircraft industry, Bolesław Orliński piloted 92 aircraft types, totalling nine thousand flying hours. He spent the final period of his life at a Polish veterans' home in Toronto. He was visited by a representative of the Japanese Embassy on each anniversary of his landing in Tokyo. He was nearly 93 when he died. Bolesław Orliński married Stanisława née Gomółka (1908–1987), a Warsaw theatre dancer, in 1929. They were together for almost 60 years, but had no children. They were buried at the Holy Family Parish Cemetery in Wrocław, Poland.



LOT POLSKI Nr 11

KPT. ORLIŃSKI PRZEMAWIA PRZEZ RADIO DO NARODU JAPOŃSKIEGO

A page from the 'Lot Polski' ('Polish Flight') magazine, issue no. 11/1926. The headline reads 'Capt. Orliński speaks to the Japanese people on the radio'.

A Mosquito fighter bomber is shown in the background photo.

Towards the Rising Sun
Warsaw–Tokyo–Warsaw Flight 1926

Leonard Kubiak

He was born on 12 October 1900, at Szamotuły, in the part of Poland under Prussian occupation, and died on 20 August 1942, in Warsaw. He came from a middle-class family from the Wielkopolska region, his parents being Michał and Michalina Kubiak.

He worked in a machine factory in Saxony during World War I, to avoid being conscripted into the Prussian army. After Poland regained independence, he was posted as a soldier to the Poznań-Ławica Air Station in March 1919, training there under the supervision of Sgt Franciszek Gruszkiewicz at the Workshop School. He was also a driver, 3rd class.



Sgt Leonard Kubiak, 1920s



S/Sgt Leonard Kubiak (second left) with other members of Polish Air Force staff, by a Potez XV, Warsaw, 1920s.



ŻOŁNIERZ POLSKI

Rok VIII — WARSZAWA, 17 PAŹDZIERNIKA 1926 — Nr 42

LOT DO JAPONJI

(OPOWIADANIE ST. SIERŻ. KUBIAKA)

St. sierżant *Leonard Kubiak*, urodził się w Szamotułach (Wielkopolska), w 1900 roku. W czasie wojny światowej pracował w fabryce maszyn w Saksonji, co zwolniło go od służby w zaborczem wojsku. W marcu 1919 roku wstąpił do wojska, zostaje wcielony do formacji lotniczych i przebywa w Ławicy (pod Poznaniem), gdzie kształci go oficer techniczny, por. Gruszkiewicz. W 1920 roku przebywa na froncie w IX eskadrze (Łuck), po wojnie zaś w Krakowie, a ostatnio pełni obowiązki

Dosyć niespodziewanie wybrałem się na tę wycieczkę. Miał jechać sierżant Kobus, bodaj że lepszy mechanik odemnie, ale ma „lotnisko", obeszli się i bez niego nie puścili. Czasu było niewiele, w kieszeni tylko 75 groszy. Na daleką drogę zaopatrzyłem się w żywność (krujanki i czekoladę). Trzeba coś gryźć, bo skręcić się można w samolocie, siedząc bezczynnie kilkanaście nieraz godzin. Moja bowiem praca zaczyna się właściwie po wylądowaniu. Wtedy badam i czyszczę motor i przygotowuje aparat do dalszego lotu.

Z Warszawy wyleciełiśmy o 4-ej zrana. Na lotnisku nikt nas, prócz moich kolegów-mechaników, nie żegnał. Wyjeżdżałem pełen najlepszej myśli, powiem motoru, z którym zaprzyjaźniłem się już podczas raidu p. płk. Rayskiego. Założyłem do cylindrów moje własne doskonałe świece J. A. M., które mi podarował w Paryżu pewien znajomy inżynier. Po 5½ godzinach lotu byliśmy już w Mińsku. Rozpalone na lotnisku ogniska wskazywały nam drogę, a ich dym kierunek wiatru. Tegoż dnia ruszyliśmy dalej do Kazania. W drodze chmury opuściły się tak nisko, że lecieliśmy już nad wodą, korytem rzeki Wołgi, której wysokie brzegi były nad nami. Zapadła noc i z trudem znaleźliśmy lotnisko, dzięki ogniskom. W Kazaniu zatrzymaliśmy się dzień, z powodu wiatru i niskich chmur. Zwiedzałem miasto.

St. sierż. Kubiak i kpt. Orliński, odznaczeni za lot do Tokjo krzyżem zasługi, japońskim orderem „Wschodniego Słońca" i japońską odznaką lotniczą.

Następnego dnia pojechaliśmy dalej. Do pasma gór Uralskich pogoda była niemożliwa: chmury, boczny wiatr, który zbijał nas z drogi, bo lecieliśmy nad chmurami. W pewnej chwili okienko między chmurami pozwoliło nam zorjentować się. Dojrzeliśmy linję kolejową, która miała nas prowadzić poprzez Azję. Nocowaliśmy w Omsku, Krasnojarsku i w Czycie — na terytorjum rosyjskiem. W Czycie spotkałem mechanika Polaka, który zajął się aparatem, a mnie gościnnie podejmowano. Wogóle nie pójam, ale wtedy musiałem pare kieliszków wychylić.

Następny postój wypadł w Charbinie, na terytorjum Chin. Jest tam liczna kolonja polska, która nas wzruszająco serdecznie przyjmowała. Zasypany kwiatami nie mogłem wydostać się z samolotu. Dzielni harcerze doskonale mi pomagali. Między byt drugą stacją naszą na ziemiach chińskich. Potem nad poszarpaną, górzystą Koreą, ponad burzliwem morzem poleciełiśmy do Tokjo, zatrzymując się w Heidżio, gdzie poraz pierwszy spotkani Japończycy przyjęli nas bardzo serdecznie. Już w Japonji lecieliśmy na wysokości 5000 metrów, nad wygasłym wulkanem Fudżi-

Following his return from Japan, S/Sgt Leonard Kubiak described his impressions of the trip to Japan in the military press. The headline reads 'Flight to Japan (Story by S/Sgt Kubiak)'. 'Żołnierz Polski' ('Polish Soldier') magazine issue no. 42/1926.

He then saw combat while serving with the 9th Reconnaissance Flight at Łuck (now Lutsk, Ukraine). After this unit merged with the 10th Reconnaissance Flight, he was re-posted to the Rakowice airfield near Kraków. Between 1921 and 1923, he was a mechanic with the Aero-Photogrammetric Platoon, which took photographs the Polish-Soviet border for the Border Commission. He then served as a mechanic-instructor with the 14th Bomber Flight of the 1st Air Regiment.

Leonard Kubiak spoke fluent German and he also learned Russian during his military service. In September 1925, he flew around the Mediterranean with Col. Ludomił Rayski, and he then flew the daring Warsaw-Tokyo-Warsaw trip with Lt Bolesław Orliński in 1926. Upon return to Poland, he was promoted to the rank of staff sergeant.

Shortly after returning from Tokyo, Leonard Kubiak retired from the military service. In his civilian life he then owned a bus line and ran a car repair garage. In 1934, he married Irena Gromek, née Tugeman, the widow of pilot Rudolf Gromek. The Kubiak couple had two children: a son, Piotr (1934–1979), and a daughter, Gabriela (1939-1977). Leonard Kubiak was killed during a Soviet air raid, when he came from Pruszków to his Warsaw apartment to collect necessary items. He is buried at the Bródno Cemetery in Warsaw.



Bird's eye view of the Ławica airfield near Poznań on 10 May 1921, is shown in the background photo.

Breguet XIX reconnaissance bomber

The Breguet XIX was designed in 1921 as a successor to the highly successful Breguet XIV developed during World War I, of which thousands were used. Unlike the latter, which had a mixed structure of wood and metal, the new aeroplane was designed in an innovative way for its time, with all-metal construction.

Used by many different countries all over the world, the Breguet XIX proved a successful and valued design, capable of breaking records, but also difficult to build and operate, and relatively expensive due to the innovative technology.

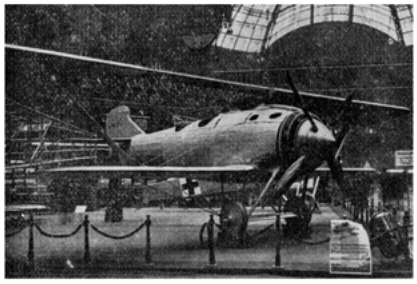
Use by the Polish air service

Breguet XIXs were purchased for the Polish air service by the Polish Military Mission in Paris. The contract for 250 was signed in 1925, and the first machines arrived in Poland by air during the so-called Pyrenean-Alpine Rally, led by Gen. Włodzimierz Zagórski.

The aeroplanes were introduced into line (i.e. reconnaissance bomber) units of the Polish air service in 1926. A total of 230 Breguet XIXs were imported in the A (reconnaissance) and B (bomber) versions, plus 20 in the special GR (long-range) version. The aeroplanes were used extensively in several air regiments, as well as in training units. By early 1936, approximately 90 machines still equipped nine flights.



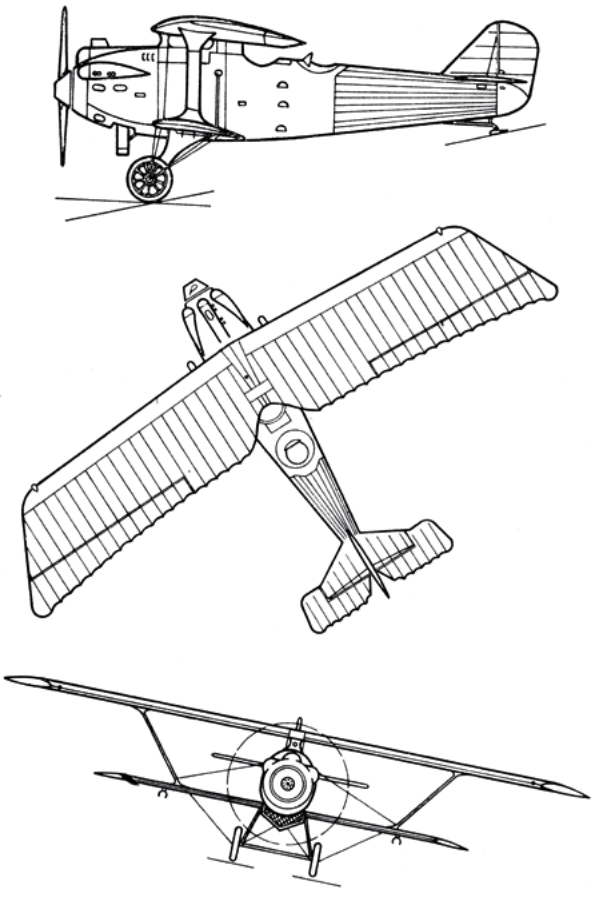
Breguet XIX in a maker's brochure, 1924.



Breguet XIX prototype on display at the 7th International Air Show in Paris, 1921.



Breguet XIX reconnaissance bombers purchased in France in 1926 were used for 10 years in Poland.



Three-view drawings of the Breguet XIX B2.

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION

Single-engine, two-seat reconnaissance or light bomber aeroplane in sesquiplane layout (with the lower wing much narrower and shorter than the upper one) with conventional tail surfaces. The structure was metal, partly with aluminium skin (nose and central fuselage) and partly fabric-covered (rear fuselage, wings, and tail). The undercarriage had fixed main wheel legs of metal construction, and a metal tail skid. The tandem cockpits were open.

Power plant: Lorraine-Dietrich W-12 liquid-cooled engine, with a nominal rating of 450 hp and take-off rating of 478 hp, driving the Bre-44 fixed-pitch tractor propeller. A 365-litre fuel tank was fitted in the forward fuselage aft of the engine. The GR version featured an additional tank in the fuselage under the pilot's cockpit (in place of the bomb bays).

Armament: one pilot-operated fixed forward firing synchronised 7.92 mm Vickers machine gun with 500 rounds, twin observer-operated moving 7.92 mm Lewis or Vickers machine guns in a rotating mount on top of the rear fuselage, and one observer-operated moving 7.92 mm Lewis or Vickers machine gun firing through a port in the bottom of the fuselage, with a total of 1,164 rounds of ammunition. The bomb load was 135 kg in the A version (on under-wing carriers) or 354 kg in the B version (on carriers in the fuselage and under the wings).



Camouflage and markings of the Breguet XIX during the flight from Warsaw to Tokyo and back.

Towards the Rising Sun
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Sgt Leonard Kubiak and Lt Bolesław Orliński before their departure from Warsaw for Tokyo, in front of their Breuget XIX.

Warsaw–Tokyo flight (27 August – 5 September)

The flight by Lt Bolesław Orliński and Sgt Leonard Kubiak from Warsaw to Tokyo was one of the most important long-distance air trips between WWI and WWII. The Polish crew took off from the Mokotów airfield in Warsaw on 27 August 1926, with low cloud cover and in heavy rain.

Their route led through vast expanses of Europe and Asia. The total length of the route was approximately 10,300 km, and the flight was conducted in one-day sections, which depended on weather conditions and the technical condition of the aeroplane. The Polish crew received warm welcome by local authorities and civilians at the consecutive stages of the flight. At many airfields, the arrival of Orliński and Kubiak was an event of international significance, attracting the attention of the authorities and press. The crew were provided with organisational, technical, and logistics support, which included assistance with aeroplane maintenance and repairs, as well as refuelling and replenishing oil. Most repairs concerned components that wore out quickly during the strenuous flight, such as damage to main wheel tyres, or engine lubrication system malfunctions. Due to a limited availability of consumables these had to be shipped by rail over considerable distances, which extended the downtime. Sgt Leonard Kubiak, the mechanic, played an important role in maintaining the aeroplane's serviceability by performing routine repairs and monitoring its technical condition. He was usually the one who remained at the airfield after landing to repair any faults and prepare the aeroplane for further flight.



An aerial photograph taken from an altitude of 1,200 m in limited visibility by a military photographer before 1926.

The most spectacular achievement of the Polish crew was to fly non-stop from Heijō to Tokyo (1,600 km) for the first time in the history of aviation. To fly safely past Mount Fuji, Japan's highest volcano, Lt Bolesław Orliński had to climb his aeroplane to an altitude of ca. 5,000 meters.

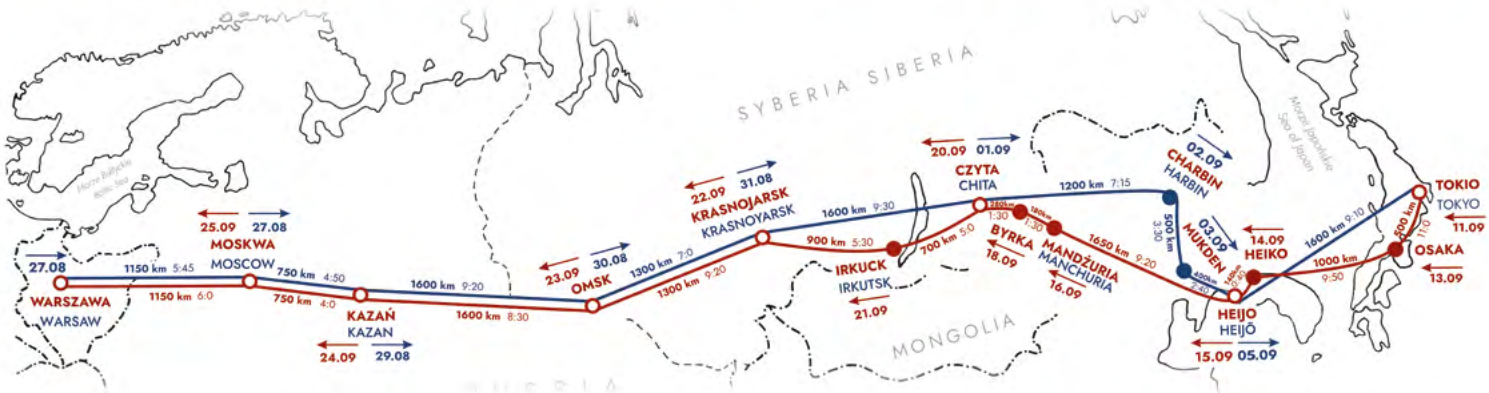
Upon arrival at Tokorozawa, a military airfield near Tokyo, the Polish aviators were officially welcomed by members of the authorities and the military, by diplomats and press, watched by a large crowd of public. They were then taken to Tokyo, where they attended numerous banquets and diplomatic meetings. The ceremonial reception of the Poles in Japan testified to the prestige and huge significance of their achievement for Polish-Japanese relations.







At the Tokyo airfield, Lt Bolesław Orliński and Sgt Leonard Kubiak were met by Lt Col. Wacław Jędrzejewicz, the military attaché at the Polish Legation in Tokyo (in uniform), and by Gen. Nagaoka Gaishi, former Chief of the Japanese General Staff (raising his top hat) on behalf of the hosts. The Polish aviators were presented with chrysanthemums, which are a national symbol of Japan.



Towards the Rising Sun
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In Tokyo

Lt Bolesław Orliński and Sgt Leonard Kubiak landed at the Tokorozawa airfield near Tokyo on 5 September 1926. The arrival of the Polish crew aroused great interest among the Japanese military and administrative authorities, members of the Imperial Aeronautical Society, Polish diplomats, and large numbers of the public.

The welcome was ceremonial, school children greeted the pilots with little Polish flags and shouts of 'Banzai!' (equivalent of 'Hurray!'). The arrival of the Polish aeroplane was seen as an event of international significance. The crew's stay in Tokyo was one of the most talked-about aviation events in Japan in 1926.

The presence of the Polish aviators in Tokyo had a significant diplomatic and propaganda aspect. Orliński and Kubiak participated in official meetings organised by Japanese authorities, the Imperial Aeronautical Society, and the Polish embassy. They were entertained at ceremonial banquets and meetings with members of the Japanese aviation, industry, and press.

Lt Bolesław Orliński was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun, 6th Class, with Silver Rays, and the Gold Medal of the Imperial Aeronautical Society. Sgt Leonard Kubiak received the Order of the Rising Sun, 7th Class. Reports of their stay were published in the Japanese press as an example of the expanding international aviation relations and Polish-Japanese cooperation.



Gen. Hongo presents medals of merit to the Polish aviators on behalf of Prince Kuni, the President of the Imperial Aeronautical Society of Japan.



Sgt Leonard Kubiak, Lt Col. Wacław Jędrzejewicz, and Lt Bolesław Orliński among officers of the Japanese Ministry of Military Affairs.



Participants in a gala dinner organised by the Japanese Minister of Military Affairs, and attended by members of the authorities, industry, army, and diplomatic service, in addition to the Poles.



The Polish aviators in front of the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo. The hosts placed a large sign on the front of the hotel, which read 'Long live the two Polish aviators', with Polish and Japanese flags hung next to the sign.



Lt Bolesław Orliński and Lt Col. Wacław Jędrzejewicz in front of the imperial mausoleum.

Towards the Rising Sun
Warsaw–Tokyo–Warsaw Flight 1926

Tokyo–Warsaw Flight (11 – 25 September)

The return flight of Lt Bolesław Orliński and Sgt Leonard Kubiak from Tokyo began on 11 September 1926. The journey to Warsaw proved even more demanding than the one to Japan. The crew faced difficult weather conditions from the very beginning: storms were approaching, and meteorologists additionally warned of typhoons over the Sea of Japan. Despite the risks, the Polish crew decided to go ahead. Although their route led through the same vast areas of Asia and Europe, the flight home took longer and cost them a lot of emotions. Due to a raging storm, the Polish crew flew only 500 km in 11 hours on the first day. Each kilometre flown in extremely difficult conditions affected the aeroplane's condition increasingly, and further stages brought more failures. Repeated damage to the engine oil system was among the most serious problems, forcing them to land at Manchouli (China) and later at Byrka (Russia), among others. During the latter stop, after the extremely arduous sealing of the piping (seven hours' work by the mechanic), the Breguet, not yet secured to the ground, was blown away by a sudden gale. The aeroplane suffered serious structural damage (a broken main plane and a damaged propeller). It was only thanks to the mechanics' ingenuity and resourcefulness (using wire and carpenter's adhesive, among other things) that the aeroplane could be repaired and flown again.







The Breguet XIX after returning to Warsaw with damage to its lower wings and engine cowling clearly visible.



Bird's eye view of Heiko, the place where the Poles made a forced landing on 14 September 1926.



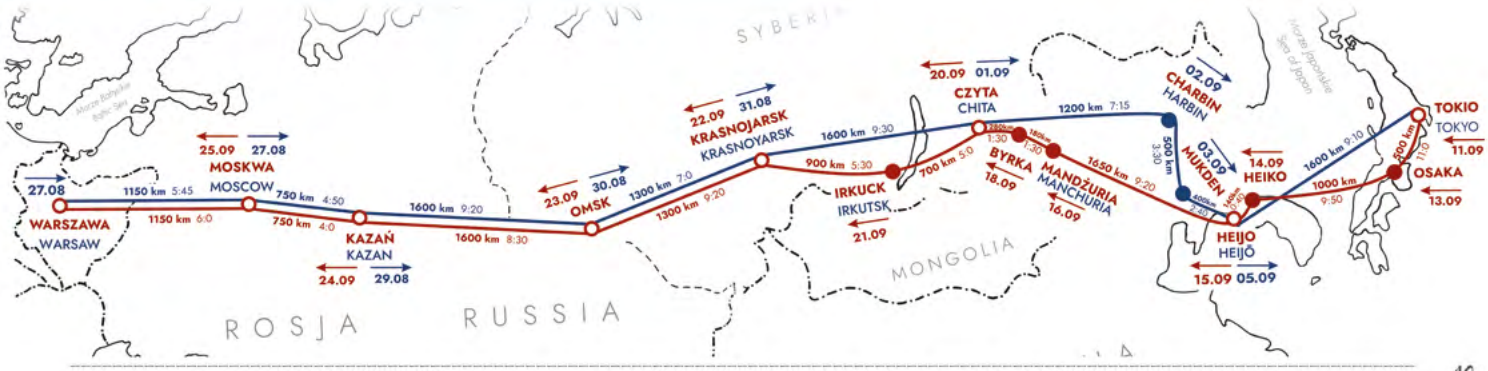
Their arrival back in Warsaw was a major event, the crew receiving a heroes' welcome. Their achievement resonated widely in Poland and around the world, becoming a symbol of the courage and skill of Polish aviators.



S/Sgt Leonard Kubiak and Capt. Bolesław Orliński at the Mokotów airfield by their Breuget XIX upon return from Japan.



Lt Bolesław Orliński and Sgt Leonard Kubiak were met by Polish Prime Minister Kazimierz Bartel, Gen. Daniel Konarzewski, and crowds of Poles at the Mokotów airfield in Warsaw.



Towards the Rising Sun
Warsaw-Tokyo-Warsaw Flight 1926

Significance of the flight

The Warsaw-Tokyo-Warsaw flight by Lt Bolesław Orliński and Sgt Leonard Kubiak in August–September 1926 was reported enthusiastically in the Polish and Japanese media, which emphasised its importance in shaping the political and economic relations between the two countries.

The Tokyo flight was also a form of thanks to Japan for supporting the Poles in their struggle for independence against Russia in the early 20th century and for recognising the Polish state after the end of World War I, and also for the care given to Polish children rescued from the ravages of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia.

Col. Ludomił Rayski, the originator of the flight, also remembered the respect and friendship for Japan of the Polish leader, Marshal Józef Piłsudski, which had led him to award the highest Polish military decoration, the Cross of the Virtuti Militari Order, to 51 Japanese officers, including two field marshals, who fought against Russia in 1904–1905. Even before official relations between Poland and Japan were established on 22 March 1919, military cooperation focused on the common threat to both Japan and Poland posed by Russia, initially Tsarist and then Bolshevik.

Japan was also an important trade partner for Poland. A Polish-Japanese trade and navigation treaty was signed in December 1922. Poland exported sheet metal and wool products, and also pharmaceuticals, to Japan, while importing mainly tea and rice. The flying achievement of Lt Orliński and Sgt Kubiak has also affected the implementation of the treaty, which entered force soon after the arrival of the Polish aviators in the capital city of Japan. The treaty significantly expanded the economic and cultural cooperation, thus bringing the countries and their peoples closer together. Trade began to develop dynamically: the Polish Ferrum steelworks from Upper Silesia won a tender for the supply of pipelines and railway rails, for example.



TRIUMF POLSKIEGO LOTNICTWA

Serce każdego Polaka zabiło żywiej z radości na wieść o udanym wspaniałym locie kapitana Orlińskiego z 11 pułku lotniczego, któremu towarzyszył mechanik st. sierżant Kubiak, werkmistrz XIV eskadry niszczycielskiej w 1-ym pułku lotniczym. Przebyli oni w ciągu 30 dni powietrznym szlakiem prawie 23 tysiące kilometrów, z Warszawy do stolicy Japonji Tokjo i z powrotem do Warszawy.

Takich, co kusili się o wykonanie tego zadania, było już wielu. Żaden z nich nie zdołał tego dokonać w tak krótkim czasie i w tak trudnych okolicznościach. Ani Duńczyk Botwed, któremu podróż zabrała 77 dni, ani Francuz Pelletier d'Oisy, który nie zdołał dotrzeć do Tokjo i zmuszony był wracać koleją, ani czwórka Japończyków Humochaka, Abe, Kawatchi i Kataghiri, którzy lecieli kilka miesięcy, ani powietrzna podróż słynnego Włocha, płk. de Pinedo, który przez Persję, Indje i Australję leciał do Tokjo miesiące całe.

Wszystkich bije kapitan Orliński swemi 30 dniami podróży, przyczem ośm dni tylko trwał lot Warszawa-Tokjo, przy 56 godzinach i 57 minutach lotu (nie wliczając w ten czas odpoczynków) i przewyższa też innych kpt. Orliński niezwykłą szybkością dla długich rajdów — 200 km na godzinę. Jego lot powietrzny obfituje w szczegóły wprost zdumiewające, wywołując podziw wśród najbardziej obeznanych z lotnictwem ludzi. Dnia 11 startuje z lotniska Tokjosawa w Tokjo. Huragan trzyma go 11 godzin w powietrzu, aż ląduje w Osaka, odległym o 650 km. Dnia 12-go startuje w Osaka i po pięciogodzinnem błąkaniu się we mgle nad morzem Japońskiem, ląduje w pobliżu Heiko. Dnia 14 leci Heiddio — Mukden—600 km, 15-go Mukden — Charbin — 700 km, 16-go Charbin—Byrki—1000 km. Tutaj znów huragan zgina maskę śmigła, łamie dolne lewe skrzydło i uszkadza motor. Lecz nawet to nie jest w stanie powstrzymać zawziętych lotników. Na uszkodzonym aparacie dolatuje do Czyty—283 km, aby po gruntownej naprawie i dwudniowym odpoczynku lecieć dalej do Irkucka.

Kapitan Orliński i st. sierżant Kubiak przy aparacie, na którym odbyli lot do Tokjo.

Dnia 21 przelatuje bez wypadku dystans Irkuck — Krasnojarsk — 800 km, 22-go Krasnojarsk—Omsk—1500 km. 23-go Omsk—Kazań—1800 km, 24-go Kazań — Moskwa — 1500 km, 25-go Moskwa — Warszawa — 1700 km. Dnia 25-go po południu kpt. Orliński i st. sierżant Kubiak lądują w Warszawie, witani owacyjnie przez przedstawicieli sfer oficjalnych oraz swoich przyjaciół.

An article about the flight of Lt Bolesław Orliński and Sgt Leonard Kubiak to Japan. 'Żołnierz Polski' ('Polish Soldier') magazine, 10 October 1926 (each of them was promoted one rank up upon completion of the trip).



Józef Piłsudski, Polish pro-independence activist, before leaving for Japan in 1904. Second left is Tarō Utsunomiya, a representative of Japan, Józef Piłsudski is second right. Bern, 1904.



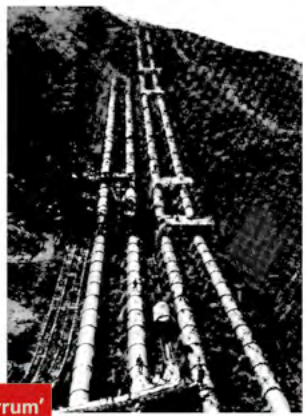
A pre-1930 photo of Japanese Field Marshal Yasukata Oku (1847–1930) decorated with the Commander's Cross of the War Order of Virtuti Militari (No. 14) by the President of the Republic of Poland Stanisław Wojciechowski on 13 March 1925, pursuant to a resolution of the Order Chapter chaired by Marshal Józef Piłsudski.



Ceremonial decoration of distinguished Japanese officers with crosses of the War Order of Virtuti Militari, awarded by the Chapter chaired by Marshal Józef Piłsudski. In the foreground, left to right, Giichi Tanaka (Prime Minister of Japan), Lt Col. Wacław Jędrzejewicz (Polish Military Attaché in Tokyo), and Admiral Keisuke Okada, May 1928.



Polish industry exhibition in Harbin. Dr Edward Skowroński, the Polish Consul is second left. Manchukuo, July 1931.



Pipelines delivered by 'Ferrum' Steelworks to Japan.



Michał Mościcki, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Poland to Japan (middle) surrounded by officers of the Polish merchant navy on board the Maritime Academy's tall ship 'Dar Pomorza' in the Japanese port of Yokohama during a voyage around the world, 5 March 1935.

Towards the Rising Sun
Warsaw–Tokyo–Warsaw Flight 1926

Significance of the flight

The flight of Lt Orliński and Sgt Kubiak led to more dynamic relations in the intelligence, scientific, and cultural cooperation. The Polish-Japanese and Japanese-Polish Societies, and the Japanese Society of Student Friends of Poland developed. Japanese-language publications were published that promoted Poland and Poland's achievements. Social gatherings also helped in the relations.

Diplomatic contacts also revived, especially after the occupation of Manchuria in 1932 by the Empire of Japan and Tokyo's efforts to legalise the Manchukuo state established there. Poland recognised Manchukuo, due to an interest in providing consular protection to Polish residents there.



The cover of the book 'Pōrando jijō' ('The Situation in Poland'), published in 1929 in Tokyo by the Japanese-Polish Society, and a map it included. The book was a translation of a brochure by Stefan Karski entitled 'Poland – past and present' (published in Warsaw in 1927) with a foreword by Zdzisław Okęcki, the Polish Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Tokyo. Further translations of Polish authors' books were soon published in Japan, including 'Pōrando-no gaiko seisaku' ('Poland's Foreign Policy', 1933), Ignacy Jan Paderewski's article 'Iwayuru Porando kairo mondai' ('The Problem of the So-Called Polish Corridor', 1933), and Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski's 'Pōrando-no Baruchikku seisaku' ('Poland's Baltic Policy', 1933). Capt. Antoni Ślósarczyk, the Military Attaché at the Tokyo Legation between 1932 and 1935, published 'Pōrando shōshi' ('A Short History of Poland') in Japanese in 1938, accompanied by a comparative text 'Nihon tamashii-to Porando tamashii' ('The Spirit of Japan and the Spirit of Poland').



Visit to Poland of Yasushi Tōgō, a Japanese senator and the President of the Polish-Japanese Society. Seated, right to left: Hajime Matsushima, the Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Japan to Poland, with his wife, Ignacy Mościcki, the President of the Republic of Poland, with his wife, and Yasushi Tōgō, a Japanese senator and the President of the Polish-Japanese Society in Tokyo. Warsaw, September 1929.



The Polish-Japanese Society Ball in Warsaw, 30 April 1938. Irena Sobczyńska, the Secretary of the Polish-Japanese Society is third left. Maj. Antoni Ślósarczyk, a former Military Attaché of the Polish Legation in Tokyo is wearing his uniform.

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the exiled Polish Government in London declared war on Japan, the enemy of Poland's allies. Japanese Prime Minister Hideki Tōjō rejected this decision, believing it to be a gesture forced by the British and American authorities onto Poland in her fight for independence. Despite the severance of diplomatic relations, unofficial military cooperation continued after the end of the war in Europe by clandestine Polish intelligence structures, prepared by the Polish government in the event of a future war between Soviet Russia and Western countries.



Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese Vice-Consul in Kaunas, Lithuania, with his family on the steps of the Consulate General of Japan in Königsberg (Germany at the time), 1941.
In 1940, Chiune Sugihara issued several thousand exit visas for Polish citizens, including Jews, enabling them to escape the Germans to Japan. He collaborated with Polish intelligence service. In 1985, he was awarded the medal and title of the 'Righteous Among the Nations' by the Yad Vashem Institute in Israel.



The building of the Polish Embassy in Tokyo, which operated until October 1941.



A reception at the Japanese Legation in Warsaw. Tadeusz Romer, the Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Poland to Japan, and from 1 October 1937 the Ambassador of the Republic of Poland (left) and Nobumi Itō, the Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Japan to Poland. March 1937.

Impact on Polish Aviation



Aeroplanes of the Polish Air Force Officer Cadet School in front of hangars at Dęblin.

Aviation publicity and expansion of the air force training system in Poland

The success of Lt Bolesław Orliński and Sgt Leonard Kubiak contributed to the widespread publicity of aviation, particularly the air force. The Polish Air Force Officer Cadet School, established in Grudziądz in 1925 and relocated to Dęblin in 1927, accepted significantly more officer candidates in its first few years of operation than originally planned.

Despite the fact that only observers were trained between 1929 and 1933, and pilot training did not resume until 1934, the turmoil of the late 1920s and early 1930s did not reduce popular interest in air force service in Poland. Much credit for this goes to Orliński and Kubiak's successors, Lt Franciszek Żwirko and Mr Stanisław Wigura, Col. Jerzy Bajan, and Col. Stanisław Skarżyński. Increasing its annual intake, the Polish Air Force Officer Cadet School produced 973 graduates before the outbreak of World War II, of whom 707 were observers and 266 pilots. They formed the backbone of the Polish Air Force in the 1939 campaign, when they were the first to resist the German onslaught. For them, this was only the beginning of a long road to freedom across the skies of France, Britain, the North Sea, the Atlantic, North Africa, and even the Far East. Wherever they were, they displayed the highest standards, continuing Polish aviation traditions.

Technological progress in Polish military aviation

The positive experience with the Breguet XIX contributed to the development of Polish military aeroplanes of metal construction. The breakthrough came with the P.7a fighter in 1931, designed by Zygmunt Puławski and produced at the PZL factory. It was the first all-metal aeroplane in the Polish Armed Forces and arguably world's best fighter at the time. Thanks to its introduction into service, Polish fighter force became a global technological leader, operating exclusively latest all-metal aeroplanes.

Bolesław Orliński, by then a test pilot at PZL, also contributed to the development of the P.7a fighter. During trials of the PZL P.7 he had to bail out on 1 September 1932, due to a failure of the aeroplane (as a result of flutter oscillations).

The experience gained while developing the P.7 fighter led to the development of subsequent aeroplane designs, including the modern PZL-37 Łoś bomber. They were also used in the design of civil aeroplanes, such as the all-metal PZL-44 Wicher airliner.



PZL.44 Wicher prototype



PZL P-7/I fighter prototype

Towards the Rising Sun

Warsaw-Tokyo-Warsaw Flight 1926



Exhibition created by Marshal Joseph Piłsudski Central Military Library

Scenario of the exhibition: dr Jan Tarczyński, gen. broni rez. pil. dr Tadeusz Mikutel, Maciej Biernat, Beata Dymczyk, Igor Niewiadomski, Rafał Szabała-Chełmiński, Anna Szacoń
Cooperation: dr Stefan Artymowski, Paweł Mozgawa, Arkadiusz Wingert
Expert consultation and translation: Wojtek Matusiak
Graphic design and layout: Beata Dymczyk, Agata Frelik, Alicja Głombińska, Anna Szacoń
Image processing: Izabela Ajdacka, Daniel Czarnecki, Hanna Rewers
Images on the title and editorial pages by: Robert Firszt

The exhibition draws on the collections of the Marshal Joseph Piłsudski Central Military Library, family of Leonard Kubiak, Polish Air Force Museum at Dęblin, Polish National Digital Archives, Robert Gretzyngier, Wojtek Matusiak, Bibliothèque Nationale de France Gallica.

Commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Warsaw-Tokyo-Warsaw flight by Bolesław Orliński and Leonard Kubiak

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