



## DEBATE PACK

CDP-0168 (2019) | 27 June 2019

# Polish contribution to the UK war effort in World War Two

Westminster Hall

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2.30pm to 4.00pm

Debate initiated by Daniel Kawczynski MP

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The proceedings of this debate can be viewed on [Parliamentlive.tv](https://www.parliamentlive.tv)

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

# 1. Background

After Poland was invaded by Nazi Germany, thousands of Polish military personnel escaped to France, and later the UK, where they made an invaluable contribution to the Allied war effort.

In June 1940, the Polish Government in exile in the UK signed an agreement with the British Government to form an independent Polish Army, Air Force and Navy in the UK, although they remained under British operational command.

Polish ground forces fought in the North Africa campaign, the Italian campaign, the Normandy campaign following on from D Day and in the Battle for Berlin.

Polish personnel served in all RAF commands and across all operational theatres and were some of the most experienced Allied pilots, having already fought in the 1939 campaign in Poland and the 1940 Battle of France. Their contribution to the Battle of Britain was considered invaluable. 5% of the pilots involved in the Battle were Polish (145 in total), but were responsible for 12% of total victories, with 303 (Polish) Fighter Squadron recognised as the most successful of any Allied squadron. Twenty nine Polish pilots lost their lives during the Battle of Britain. Four Polish officers were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Of the Polish contribution to the Battle of Britain, then Commander in Chief of Fighter Command, Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, went on to comment later:

Had it not been for the magnificent work of the Polish squadrons and their unsurpassed gallantry, I hesitate to say that the outcome of battle would have been the same.

After the Battle of Britain, the Polish Air Force continued to serve alongside the RAF in the air campaign until the last day of the war. By the end of the war approximately 19,400 Poles were serving in the RAF, across Fighter, Bomber and Coastal commands. 2,408 Polish airmen were killed during the war. 300 (Polish) Squadron, serving with Bomber Command, suffered the highest number of deaths of any Bomber Command unit.

Polish Navy vessels, which had escaped to the UK on the eve of war, also fought alongside the Royal Navy throughout the entirety of the war, supplemented by a number of British ships and submarines crewed by Polish personnel. They were heavily involved in the escort of convoys, in operations against *The Bismarck* and took part in D-Day. Of the 4,000 Polish personnel who served with the Polish Navy during the war, 450 lost their lives in action.

By 1944 the Polish Armed Forces in the West numbered 195,000 personnel.

Three Polish mathematicians, Jerzy Rozycki, Henryk Zygalski and Marian Rejewski also pioneered early decryption work that led to the Allies eventually cracking the 'Enigma' code, which is considered to have shortened the war by two years. Polish intelligence also operated one of the largest intelligence networks in Europe and Nazi Germany as part of the Allied war effort.

## 2. Press Articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

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### [The unsurpassed gallantry of 302 and 303 Squadron](#)

RAF Benevolent Fund  
4 September 2018

### [Poland, First to Fight](#)

The Warsaw Institute Review  
Bogusław Kopka and Paweł Kosiński  
12 March 2018

### [The Polish Pilots Who Flew In The Battle Of Britain](#)

Imperial War Museums  
Mariusz Gasior  
9 January 2018

### [Never seen before WW2 photos reveal Polish army on the eve of Hitler's invasion](#)

Express Online  
Sebastian Kettley  
26 September 2017

### [Polish Pilots and the Battle of Britain](#)

Historic UK  
Joss Meakins

### [Why did we humiliate the Polish aces after their Battle of Britain heroics? How an ungrateful nation wanted to deport the men our women fell for and Hitler feared](#)

Mail Online  
Tony Rennell  
29 October 2016

### [Amid post-Brexit hatred, remember the Polish soldiers who fought alongside UK soldiers in the Second World War](#)

The Independent  
Jess Staufenberg  
30 June 2016

### [Honouring 'silent and unseen' fighters who led Polish resistance](#)

The Guardian  
Julian Borger  
10 June 2016

### [The Hacker Who Saved Thirty Million Lives](#)

Culture.PL  
Wojciech Oleksiak  
3 July 2014

## 3. Ministry of Defence

### Minister for the Reserves gifts WW2 records to Polish Government

**Ministry of Defence**

**25 March 2015**

During a meeting at the Polish embassy, the Minister for Reserves, Julian Brazier, presented Robert Kupiecki, the Under Secretary of State in the Polish Ministry of National Defence, with a sample of the records. This gift is symbolic of the United Kingdom's strong and growing relationship with Poland, and recognises the enormous contribution and sacrifice of the Poles during the Second World War.

Minister for Reserves Julian Brazier said:

It's an honour to be able to present Minister Kupiecki with these records today. Poland is a close ally of the United Kingdom, with a proud tradition of the British and Polish militaries working side by side. We will always be grateful for the contribution that the Polish people made to fighting against Nazism during the Second World War, and hold dear our strong relationship now.

We have worked together throughout 2014, including Exercise BLACKEAGLE, our biggest in Europe for many years. We want to build on this excellent co-operation in Exercise DRAGON in September 2015.

Mr Robert Kupiecki, the Under Secretary of State in the Polish Ministry of National Defence said:

I wish to thank Her Majesty's Government for handing over these precious archives to Poland. Seventy years after the end of World War II the shadows of Polish soldiers fighting alongside their British brothers-in-arms return where they belong - their home in Poland.

Around 180,000 Polish service personnel escaped Poland during the Second World War and served with the Polish Free Forces and Royal Air Force fighting the Axis powers. At the end of the war the communist government in Warsaw refused to acknowledge responsibility for these fighters along with Polish displaced persons in British-held areas of Western Europe. In light of this, the UK government arranged for both groups to become British citizens, accepting the liability for pay and pensions for Polish Free Forces and forming the Polish Resettlement Corps, into which many of the Polish Free Forces transferred along with displaced Poles.

As a result, the MOD holds the service records of Free Polish personnel, around 119,000 Polish Resettlement Corps personnel and small collections of medical cards and correspondence about personnel effects of deceased servicemen. In many cases the next of kin of these personnel live in the UK.

As awareness of Polish forces fighting in the West has grown since 1989, there has been an increasing desire from the Polish authorities to

have access to these service records. They have a heritage value for the Polish people beyond their content as they symbolise a significant episode of Polish sacrifice.

As these service personnel records will not be made available to the public until the mid-2020s, the MOD will transfer around 10,000 records covering correspondence initiated by the service ministries after the war, telling of their efforts to repatriate the personal effects of Polish personnel killed during the war.

The records will be held at the Central Military Archive in Rembertów (near Warsaw).

## 4. PQs

### [Education: Polish A-level](#)

18 Jan 2016 | 768 c509

#### **Asked by: Lord Wallace of Saltaire**

My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Lexden, spoke of the deep historic ties between Britain and Poland. I recall that the Poles produced the largest non-British contingent of pilots in the Battle of Britain, and several squadrons in the RAF and at least two armoured divisions in the Second World War. Britain seems almost entirely to have forgotten about that. I understand that the Prime Minister was unaware of it when he visited Warsaw last time. Could we not do something to symbolise the contribution that Poland made to the British victory in the Second World War, for example by encouraging a visible Polish presence at the next Remembrance Sunday commemorations?

#### **Answered by: Lord Nash**

The noble Lord makes a very good point about the deep debt we owe all the pilots in the Second World War, particularly the Polish pilots who fought so ably, especially in the Battle of Britain. I will take back the point that he makes.

### [Veteran's Badge](#)

23 Jan 2006 | 441 c1150

#### **Asked by: Jamie Reed**

I am sure that the Minister is aware of the badge's importance as a symbol of the gratitude of the state for the sacrifice of the individual in the service of the nation. However, there is uncertainty among veterans in my constituency and their families about eligibility. Will he confirm precisely who is eligible for the badge?

#### **Answered by: Don Touhig | Ministry of Defence**

The veteran's badge is available to all those who served in the British armed forces in the first and second world wars, between the wars and up until 1954. That includes the Home Guard, those who served in Polish forces under UK command and the widows and widowers who are in receipt of a war pension. Merchant navy seamen who took part in military operations are also included and they will shortly be able to apply for their own version of the badge.

### [Veteran's Badge](#)

23 Jan 2006 | 441 c1151

#### **Asked by: Daniel Kawczynski**

The Minister is aware—he mentioned it in a previous answer—of the role that Polish forces, one of whom was my own grandfather, played in the second world war. Will he please give me an assurance that the Polish forces will be recognised properly? There are still some Polish veterans living in this country who feel that they are neglected, sadly.

**Answered by: Don Touhig | Ministry of Defence**

I am sorry if there is a feeling of neglect. There is certainly no lack of respect and appreciation for the huge contribution made by Polish forces to our efforts in the last war. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was the first Minister to attend a service at the Polish memorial. We will continue to recognise the huge contribution. If there is anything we could or should do to improve that recognition, I shall be interested if the hon. Gentleman has any proposals to put before me.

**Second World War**

**04 Jul 2005 | 436 c2-3**

**Asked by: Daniel Kawczynski**

I hope that when we do commemorate the many veterans who sacrificed so much, the Secretary of State will remember the many Poles who came to this country. According to some estimates, one in five of the pilots who fought in the battle of Britain were Polish. My own grandfather was among the Poles who came over during the war, and I hope that we can remember them as well.

**Answered by: John Reid | Ministry of Defence**

Absolutely. The hon. Gentleman may be pleased to know that I was the first Defence Minister ever to attend the Polish memorial ceremony at Northolt, on Remembrance day 1997. So I do remember the Poles, along with the Czechs and the many other nationalities who came here. But as the hon. Gentleman says, none were more prominent than the Poles, particularly those who served in the Royal Air Force.

## 5. Other Parliamentary material

### 5.1 Debates

#### [UK and Polish War Reparations](#)

**20 June 2018 | 643 cc360-167WH**

Motion that this House has considered UK and Polish war reparations from Germany.

#### [Anglo-Polish Relations](#)

**18 July 2017 | 627 cc217-239WH**

Motion that this House has considered Anglo-Polish relations.

### 5.2 Early Day Motions

#### [Mr Tadeusz Sawicz](#)

**EDM 2303 (session 2010-2)**

**Karl McCartney**

**25 October 2011**

That this House expresses its condolences to the family of Mr Tadeusz Sawicz, one of the last surviving Polish pilots to take part in the Battle of Britain, who passed away on 19 October 2011, in Toronto, Canada; further expresses its profound appreciation for his commitment to the defence of the UK; and pays tribute to all pilots and aircrew from Poland and other nations who were prepared to fight for a free Europe during World War Two.

#### [Widows of Polish ex-servicemen](#)

**EDM 1749 (session 1997-8)**

**Hilton Dawson**

**10 November 1998**

That this House expresses profound gratitude for the immense contribution made by members of the Polish armed forces to the defence of the United Kingdom and eventual victory in the Second World War; notes that the unique circumstances of Polish ex-servicemen and their families have been recognised through the Pensions Polish Forces Scheme but that the widows of Polish ex-servicemen are required to meet a higher standard of proof than the widows of British ex-servicemen in order to be awarded war pensions; and therefore calls upon the Government to redress a historic injustice by amending regulations to ensure that applicants under the Polish scheme are also afforded the benefit of reasonable doubt in pursuing claims that the sad deaths of their husbands were due to, or substantially hastened by, service in the armed forces.

## 6. Further reading

[Poland in Exile](#) (Website)

[Federation of Poles in Britain](#) (Website)

[Polish forces in Britain \(with a focus on Scotland\)](#) (Website)

[All-Party Parliamentary Group on Poland](#) (Website)

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