

To the Land of the Rising Sun



Bolesław Orliński

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Introduction

At one level “To the Land of the Rising Sun” is a straight forward account of a unique flight undertaken by two heroic air men, Bolesław Orliński and Leonard Kubiak, as they flew from Warsaw to Tokyo and back. The story is presented in simple language, the type one might expect from a military man with a good sense of humour. During the flight they overcame many obstacles, such as the weather, mechanical difficulties and many different political jurisdictions.

It is also the story of a “Cinderella” plane – the Breguet 19. Orliński provides considerable detail on what it was like to fly, its strengths and its idiosyncrasies. The Breguet 19 was designed by the French Breguet Company as a light bomber and reconnaissance aircraft. It was also used for long-distance flights.



A Breguet 19

We follow the plane as it flies along the route from Warsaw to Tokyo and back and we see how it slowly breaks down and wears out and how with its almost human stubbornness it somehow makes it back to Warsaw. It assumes an almost human personality, fighting against all odds, knowing that when it lands this last time, it has just made its last flight.

This Breguet had already made a historic flight when Colonel-Pilot Ludomił Rayski flew it around the Mediterranean the year before. The engine in the plane, a “Lorraine-Dietrich 450 HP” had not only been used for the Mediterranean flight but it had also seen ongoing service with the air force, so it was not a new engine, but a tried and true one. This was a special plane, and as Leonard Kubiak proclaimed just before the start of the flight – “this plane is an ‘Omega’ not a machine.”

There is considerable technical detail in Orliński’s account, describing the adjustments made to the plane for the long flight. The most fascinating detail being that many additional fuel tanks had to be added in order to give the plane the capacity for the long flying times required on this voyage. The extra tanks were placed under and alongside the seat that Orliński would occupy during the long flight. Orliński literally sat on his fuel supply. There was little room for error on this journey.

Most importantly perhaps, this tale of adventure presents a social commentary on a world and its people that has since vanished. The time of military gentlemen, remote Siberian outposts, communities of exiles, enthusiastic and bombastic functionaries of a new Soviet Utopia, all seem to belong in the past.

Wherever he lands Orliński, being an airman, feels that he is part of the universal brotherhood of airmen, a band of brothers, united, no matter what their cultural, national or political background. This feeling of unity, allows Orliński to overcome incredible political and national differences. Our two air men make themselves totally dependent on the other as they enter the many worlds of the many others.

It is also clear that Orliński approaches the other with an open and charitable attitude, which exemplifies the honest and natural relationships that can exist between different people, thus opening the door to the fragile possibility of friendship even when substantial differences exist. Orliński follows the basic directive to love your neighbour with the expectation that the response will be "How can we help?" rather than "What are you doing here?" which demonstrates the reality of the universal and ancient virtue of hospitality and the welcoming of strangers.

Along the way, he meets many members of this brotherhood of airmen. One of the most striking is air force sergeant, Sergei Iłarjonowicz Pastuszkow. Pastuszkow is the manager of the air field in Kazan. Pastuszkow has bonfires lit to help Orliński land at night, not to mention ready supplies of fuel and oil. He also extends a warm hospitable hand to Orliński and Kubiak and looks after them in a grand manner. This is all the more surprising, not just because Pastuszkow is a Russian, but more so because Pastuszkow was in Budienny's cavalry in 1920 and he remembers being bombed by Polish air craft, all with the red and white checkerboard insignia, which is also on the undercarriage of Orliński's Breguet. There exists between them the shared bond of the warrior, built on respect for the basic virtues of the warrior, even an enemy warrior. On the return trip to Warsaw it is Pastuszkow's wife, Natalia Vasilievna, who presents them with an unforgettable meal, again outlining the incredible hospitality offered by this wonderful couple.

One of the more moving encounters takes place at the airfield in Omsk, when a small man emerges from the crowd and is very anxious to meet Orliński. This man, speaking in Russian, explains that he is a Pole, an Austrian prisoner of war, who like so many hundreds of thousands of Poles, has been exiled to this extreme land known generically as Siberia. Later in Chita, a mechanic steps forward and also proclaims himself to be a Pole, the grandson of an insurgent from Podlasie, who was exiled to Siberia. His grandson, Zygmunt or "*Żygmund*" in Russian, was most enthusiastic about being able to help and meet his fellow Poles, even though he had been separated from Poland, for generations. It was Zygmunt who arrived from Chita with a group of mechanics and some essential oil and fuel, and who helped repair the plane on the return voyage, so that they could continue their flight, after the terrible accident in Byrka.

Later on, at Harbin, Orliński and Kubiak are greeted by Polish colours fluttering all over the air field and it appears that the whole Polish colony in Harbin has come out

to greet them. Presumably this Polish colony was also peopled by Polish exiles, and by Poles that had worked on the Trans-Siberian railway and who had come to help develop Harbin. The story of the Poles of Harbin is a story unto itself. However, we must all remember that Siberia and many other parts of the world are populated by Poles who found themselves there in eternal exile.

Another misplaced Pole appeared in Byrka and that was Abraham Goldfarb, the very welcoming descendant of a Białystok Jew, who was born in Siberia. Goldfarb's father had been exiled to Siberia for beating up a sergeant in the army and with whom he had had a major disagreement. Goldfarb traded cattle, hunted and sold leather and furs. In the winter, Goldfarb transported escaping exiles from the eastern to the western shore of Lake Baikal using specially trained horses and sleighs with very long runners. Goldfarb asked no questions of those wanting to make this trip, or on how they found the money to pay for it. Like many of their hosts along their route, Goldfarb offered excellent hospitality and wonderful meals to our two travellers.

Keeping with this multicultural theme, it is appropriate to say a few words about the Buryats who also welcomed and assisted them after their disaster in Byrka. The Buryats, numbering approximately 500,000 are the largest indigenous group in Siberia. They are the major northern subgroup of the Mongols. Buryats share many customs with other Mongols, including nomadic herding, and erecting gers (yurts) for shelter. Since all Buryats are also horse people, Orliński was very pleased to be offered the opportunity to ride one of their horses. They ride small but very strong horses. The Buryat saddle which is similar to that of the Cossack, was soft and comfortable.

Orliński was also very impressed with the Buryat women, who having ridden in on their Siberian horses, took thread and needles from their saddle bags and sewed up the torn canvas on the wings of the plane and on the rest of the hull. It was these women who managed to make the plane flyable after the accident in Byrka. As Orliński himself exclaimed - "All praise to the Mongolian women!"

If Orliński had any negative feelings to anyone he met along their flight path, it seems to have been reserved for Soviet officials, who were busy trying to turn Russia into a communist heaven on earth. Sometimes he also had little patience for bureaucrats, but that may be a necessary characteristic of a true soldier and air man.

As he nears Poland, you can feel the excitement growing in his writing. He is very enthusiastic when he passes over Minsk Litewski, Niegorieloje and Stołpce, which at the time were part of Poland, but today are part of Belarus. You can well imagine the pain and disappointment that a person like Orliński must have felt, when following World War II, these areas, Orliński's home country, were handed over to the Soviet Union.

When he finally enters Polish territory, he exclaims - "Here's Poland!" Yet, following World War II, he was not able to return to his native Poland. He was no doubt grateful that he was able to build a new life in Canada, and surely, he felt blessed with the opportunities offered in his new home. Nonetheless, we can also feel some of the anguish and loss he must have felt, knowing that his homeland fell under a communist dictatorship following World War II. He shared this anguish and sense of

loss with many other Polish Veterans who made Canada their home. It was this continued camaraderie, this feeling of belonging to a unique band of brothers, that allowed them to continue to thrive in Canada.

Most of the members of this Polish Band of Brothers are no longer with us, but thanks to their memoirs, those of us who continue to treasure their accomplishments and what they stood for, can continue to yell out as Orliński's did at the end of his story ... "Long live the Polish Air Force! Long live the Polish Air Force! Jeszcze Polska Nie Zginęła!



Orliński and Kubiak 1926

Boleśław Orliński – Biography¹

Boleśław Orliński was born on April 13, 1899 on the family estate in Niwerka, near Kamieniec Podolski in Podolia, Poland, which is now part of the Ukraine. His ancestors were awarded the village of Orlińce Małe for military service by King August II the Strong in 1615. Franciszek Orliński, was in the horse artillery and was awarded the Virtuti Militari Cross in 1792. His great grandfather, Napoleon Krzysztofowicz took part in the November Uprising of 1830-1831.

In 1910 the Russian pilot, Sergiusz Utoczkin visited Kamieniec Podolski and left a lasting impression on the young Orliński. In 1916, just seventeen years old, he decided to join the war effort and volunteered to serve in the Russian army where he was assigned to the infantry. His auxiliary guard unit was sent to defend the air field in Winnica. Here he met the famous Russian air craft designer, Igor Sikorsky.

While with the Russian army he received NCO training and was then sent to fight the Germans on the north-west front. He took part in the major offensive on Vilnius in December 1917. In 1918 he joined a newly formed Polish 1st Corp in Minsk, Belarus under General Dowbor-Muśnicki and he saw action with this unit. In May 1918, this unit was disarmed by the Germans, but he managed to make it to the Ukraine and for a short while he served in the Ukrainian Army (URL) under Symon Petlura where he was assigned to the cavalry.

After Poland regained her independence and was fighting to establish her borders, Orliński joined the newly formed Polish army and served in the cavalry during the Polish-Bolshevik War. Going through the cavalry was the quickest way to end up in the air force. Later he was transferred to the air force serving in the 162 Spad Squadron which became the 11th Fighter Squadron. This was his first opportunity to fly in a combat situation. In 1920 during the Soviet offensive, he came down with typhus, but managed to recover. He completed pilot training in Bydgoszcz.

Here he advanced to the rank of lieutenant and became an instructor in aerial acrobatics at the pilot training school in Grudziądz. He was particularly interested in aerial acrobatics and during one of his flights, he completed two 242 loops, one after the other in a Morane-Saulnier MS.30.

In October 1925 he joined the 11th Fighter Regiment in Lida under Jerzy Kossowski.

From August 27 to September 25, 1926, flying in a Breguet 19 A2, Orliński, along with mechanic Leonard Kubiak, completed a return flight from Warsaw to Tokyo, covering 10,300 km each way, in spite of a damaged propeller and under-carriage, and with an engine which was completely worn out when they landed back in Warsaw. In Japan, Orliński and Kubiak were greeted with great enthusiasm. For completing this flight Orliński was awarded the Emperor's Order of the Rising Sun VI Class, as well as

¹ Much of this biography is taken from the Polish Wikipedia article found at: https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolesław_Orliński and from "Bolesław Orliński i Jego Czasy" by Stanisław Błasiak and Stanisław Babiarczyk, in *80 Lat Lotnictwa Polskiego – Historia i Współczesność*. Tom 2, Warszawa, Dowództwo Wojsk Lotniczych i Obrony Powietrznej, 1998.

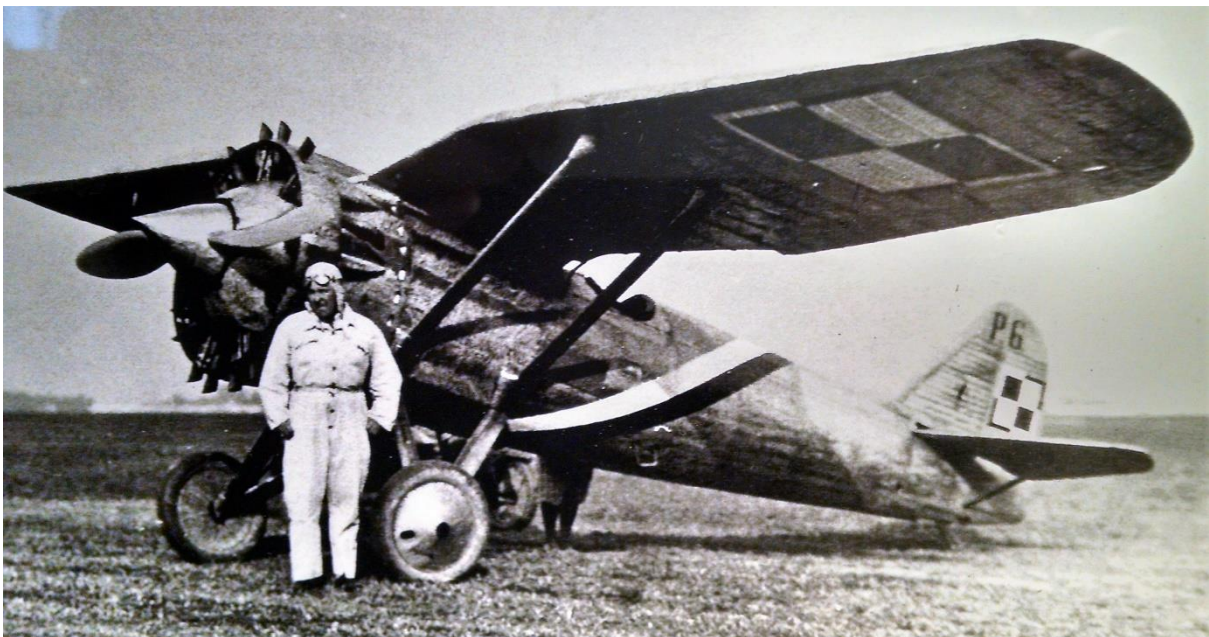
a Gold Medal from the Royal Air Society. He was also promoted to Captain by the Polish air authorities. He received a building lot from the City of Warsaw on which he built his new home in Warsaw in 1936. The house is still standing at 94 Raclawice Street.

In 1927 he appeared in the silent film, *Orle* (Eaglet), in which he played Janek Kuklinski, an air force pilot. The same year he took part in a flying competition in Zurich

In 1928, Orliński fell in love with a beautiful dancer – Stanisława Gomółka and in order to marry her he left the Polish military service and joined the Polish Aviation Works (PZL) as an experienced pilot. Near the end of 1928 he carried out the first flight in a Polish fighter prototype, the PZL P.1 and even though the wing was damaged during the flight, instead of bailing out on a parachute, he was able to land the plane, thus saving the machine. He also flew trials on the following fighters: PZL P.6, P.7 (an entirely metal fighter plane), P.8, P.11, P.24, PZL-37 Łoś (a new bomber and generally regarded as the best in its class in 1939) and the PZL.50 Jastrząb (a fighter plane) in 1939, as well as several civilian and sport air craft including PZL.19, PZL.26 and passenger planes, PZL.4, PZL.44 Wicher (a twin engine Wright Cyclone GR-1820 G2) as well as the liaison plane PZL Ł.2.

Orliński married Stanisława on August 13, 1929 at St. Andrew Bobola church in Warsaw and they celebrated their honeymoon in Prague in Czechoslovakia.

Orliński took part in air meets and in several international demonstrations of Polish air craft, and in air competitions in many different countries. From August 29 to September 7, 1931 he was invited to take part in the National Air Races in Cleveland, as part of “The International Team” of excellent flyers. The team was invited to the United States by President Herbert Hoover and was welcomed at the White House. Orliński flying a PZL P.6 won a great deal of praise both for the plane and for his flying abilities.



Orliński in Cleveland

On June 28, 1934 flying in a PZL P.24 (Super P-24) he set a world speed record for a fighter aircraft with a radial engine at 414 km per hour.

With the outbreak of World War II Orliński, on September 5, 1939, in a group of three planes flew towards Lwów. Here he asked to be accepted back into the Polish Air Force. On September 8, 1939 he was ordered to Romania to take possession of British fighter aircraft intended for Poland. As he left Poland, he did not know that he would never see Poland again. These planes were not available. In October 1939 he escaped through Romania, Yugoslavia, Italy arriving in France on October 7th. He was assigned to the Polish Air Force units in France with the rank of captain. A decision was made to evacuate much of the air force to Britain. In Britain Orliński served in Polish units within the RAF.

Because of his age, and despite his expressed wishes, he was not assigned to a fighter squadron, but was assigned as an instructor to an air training school. During the Battle of Britain, he trained 66 pilots.

In Britain, he served at several air training bases. In June 1941, he was assigned to the 18th Operational Training Unit in Bramcote, a bomber training facility. He trained to fly Wellingtons and became an instructor. In October 1943, he was assigned to the 305 Bomber Division as squadron leader. He trained to fly the B-25 Mitchell Mk-II bomber and later the twin-engine, fighter-bomber De Havilland Mosquito. He completed several missions in this air craft, and he also trained pilots to fly this plane. From August 1, 1944 to January 31, 1945, he was Wing Commander, in charge of the 305 Bomber Division, which undertook nighttime bombing runs over enemy territory in Mosquitos. In total Orliński flew 49 missions covering 246 flying hours. On February 1st 1945, he retired from active bombing runs. In 1948 he was demobilized.

After the war, Bolesław and Stanisława moved to South Africa where he worked as a driver for a car rental service from 1948 to 1953. Because of worsening economic conditions in South Africa, they decided to move to Canada. On September 17th 1953 they arrived in Montreal and from there they went on to Toronto. He worked for the De Havilland Aircraft Company until April 1967. His last flights were in 1965 when he flew with friends in a Piper Cub and a D.H.C. Chipmunk.

In Toronto he was very active in the Polish community, especially Warsaw Wing No. 430. After four years of retirement he joined the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires and worked with them until he finally retired in 1980, at 82 years of age.

During his flying career he flew on 106 different types of air craft and clocked 7,000 hours in the air.

His wife, Stanisława was quite ill during her last years and he spent a lot of his time looking after her. She died on October 2, 1987 in Toronto.

His last years were spent at the Wawel Villa Retirement Residences in Mississauga, Ontario. Orliński died in Mississauga on February 28, 1992. An urn with his ashes was taken to Poland and buried in a family plot in the Holy Family cemetery in Wrocław. The funeral in Wrocław was conducted with great ceremony. There are streets named after him in Wrocław and in Kraków. The 11th Fighter Regiment is named

in his honour. A Polish military museum named in his honour still functions in the Wawel Villa Retirement Residences.

He received many medals and awards for his service including Virtuti Militari Silver Cross, Krzyż Walecznych (Cross of Valour - 3 times), Chevalier of the Legion of Honour (France), Distinguished Flying Cross (Great Britain), the Emperor's Order of the Rising Sun VI Class, and the Gold Medal from the Royal Air Society (Japan).



Bomber Squadron 305

To the Land of the Rising Sun

By: Bolesław Orliński

Translated into English and Edited by Stan Skrzyszewski

Dedication:

I dedicate this book to brighten the memory of my beloved nephew, Tola Kudrewicz, who gave his young life in the fight for a free homeland - Author

Acknowledgements

The original, Polish edition of the book "Do Krainy Wschodzącego Słońca" by Colonel Pilot B. Orliński, appeared thanks to the financial support of former Polish airmen from the Second World War living in the United States and Canada.

Gathered together in the Association of Émigré Polish Airmen and represented by individual "Wings" located in the places where these airmen had settled, they wanted to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the famous flight of Lieutenant-Pilot B. Orliński and Sgt. L. Kubiak on the route "Warsaw - Tokyo - Warsaw" in 1926, in the best way possible in order to honour this great man.

The publication of a "memoire" from the years in which the fame of Polish aviation developed becomes yet one more way to preserve the history of the Second Polish Republic.

- Publisher's Committee



Orliński and Kubiak before flying to Japan

DISASTER

They asked me (oh those friends of mine) if I would, since the 50th anniversary of the flight had just past, write about my flight (27.VIII – 25. IX 1926) with Leonard Kubiak and how it went. Therefore, I am writing what I remember.

At the beginning of May 1926, with beautiful spring weather, I taxied my "Spad" into the hangar of the Training Squadron at the Mokotów airport near Warsaw.

It was eight o'clock in the morning. The wind was blowing from the west so that the flight from Lida² took almost 2 hours.



Polish Air Base in Lida

I was met by the usual, warm greeting of Captain-Pilot Bolesław Stachoń³, squadron commander, and my old friend.

"Where did you come from at this early hour?" he asked.

I explained that I was here at the express call of the Chief of the Department of the Airforce, Air Force Colonel-Pilot Engineer Ludomił Rayski⁴. Why exactly did he call? I didn't know.

² Lida is a city in western Belarus in Hrodna Voblast, situated 160 kilometres west of Minsk. In 1926 it was located in Poland.

³ Bolesław Feliks Stachoń, born May 18, 1897 in Wola Wadowskiej, died during an air strike on the night of July 3-4 in 1941 over Holland. Colonel Pilot in the Polish Air Force, recipient of the Order of Virtuti Militari

⁴ Ludomił Antoni Rayski (December 29, 1892 – April 11, 1977) was a Polish engineer, pilot, military officer and aviator. He served as the commander of the Polish Air Force between 1926 and 1939, and was responsible for modernizing Polish military aviation



A Young Ludomił Rayski

"Well, go with God and may the Eye of Providence have you in its care," said Bolek, with playful compassion. "You probably got into some trouble and you will get a personal dressing-down from the Chief."

I should explain that in this period of my career in aviation, among colleagues (and superiors) rightfully or not, I was considered to be a good pilot, but also an "eccentric" pilot, whose feats of acrobatics executed in the air were of an experimental nature, and once even in Grudziądz, these acrobatics led to the left aileron being snapped off. (In a Fokker D-VII).

Actually, I did manage to land with one aileron. However, this was not enough to save this 'eccentric' acrobat from two weeks of strict house arrest in the "guardhouse." But now back to the matter at hand.

I reported my arrival in the office of the Chief, punctually at eight thirty. The adjutant immediately led me into the colonel's office. There our unforgettable "Effendi"⁵ stood in front of his desk.

With a characteristic tilting of his head and a friendly smile he offered me his hand, asked if I had had a pleasant flight and looking me straight in the eye, said: "I want you to take my place in a long-distance flight, which I have planned and developed, but at the last moment it turned out that the Minister of Military Affairs will not allow me to fly, due to my appointment as the Head of the Department of the Air Force. Do you agree to this undertaking? "

⁵ During the First World War Rayski served for some time in the Turkish air force as an officer-pilot, which was the reason for the nickname given him by friends, and later by the entire air force - "Effendi."

Without a second thought I answered: - "Yes, Colonel Sir, I will undertake the flight."

The Colonel turned towards the conference table by the window. We moved closer. On the table lay a pile of carefully organized aeronautical charts. Glancing at them I could see that they were "million to one scale" world aeronautical charts, that is, they were to a scale of 1: 1,000,000.

I was also intrigued by two large "Mauser" type pistols in wooden holsters along with a few cardboard boxes of ammunition.

"These are important requisitions needed for this kind of travel," said the Colonel noting my interest. "Sit down, please, have a seat" he added, and spreading out one of the charts on the table, he began quietly go over his instructions.

I could see from the route plotted on the first map that I was to start my flight from Villacoublay, the training airport, near Paris, and to end the first stage in Warsaw, at Mokotów airport.

From the next stages on the maps and the routes outlined on them, I saw that the flight path led through Moscow, Kazan, Omsk, Krasnoyarsk, Chita, Harbin (in Manchuria), Seoul (Korea) to Tokyo (Tokorozawa Airport).

"Well, what do you think?" - Asked the Colonel.

"It's a long way" - I replied.

The further instructions were: On May 12, I was to leave for Paris. There I was to report to Major-Observer Engineer Czesław Filipowicz,⁶ who represented our Air Force Department Head at the Military Aviation Purchasing Mission in Paris, and who would give me further instructions regarding my new flight attendant. Mechanic Sergeant Leonard Kubiak, a native son of the Province of Poznań, who had already completed an impressive flight in 1925 with Colonel Rayski around the Mediterranean, was already in Albert, near Paris, France, where he was becoming acquainted with the equipment in the factory which produced the sophisticated Henri Potez aircraft, in preparation for our flight.

The Potez XXV plane was to be outfitted with a Renault 480 HP, type "V" engine. The machine was to be tested and delivered to the Villacoublay airport by the factory. French Military Control would accept the plane, which would be thoroughly tested in the air by a factory pilot, and then it would be formally received by a pilot of Military Control, Captain-Pilot de Marnier.

The task regarding the preparation of (and possible receipt of) the required documents and letters, the "iron-clad guarantees" from the representatives of the Governments of the Soviet Union, China and Japan, was assigned to Lieutenant Siegfried Piątkowski, and he was to remain in regular contact with me.

"Now you should get well rested and study the flight plan. In a few days you will be going to Paris. I wish you every success," said the Chief. I got a strong, hearty handshake from the Chief.

⁶ Czesław Filipowicz (born April 23, 1892 in Ucianej, died September 9, 1967 in London) – Colonel and Engineer with the Polish Armed Forces. Served with the Polish Air Force in England during WWII. Received the Silver Virtuti Militari Cross.

I folded the maps, placed the Mausers and ammunition into a large canvas bag and took my leave. I admit that I was in a state of severe shock. My overwhelming thought was: "My God! Why me?"

They quartered me in the apartment of one of the officers in the Department of the Air Force building. I was to be on call to the Chief at any time. I spent most of my time there. I studied maps and I did some reading. I also tried to mentally "acclimatize" to a situation that I had often found myself in, a completely new phase of my life. I woke up at night and for hours on end I thought over the matter of my humble self being chosen for such a major project. I was tormented by anxiety. Would I be able to live up to the assignment entrusted to me? After all, as a result of decision of the Chief, I had suddenly become a competitor for international primacy in the air. I had the task of carrying high the banner of the white and red checkerboard⁷, and maybe surpassing such aces as De Pinedo, Pelletier d'Oisy, Ferrarin, Coste, Gromov, Arrachard and others. Well, we will see...

Two days later, I was summoned by the Chief.

The adjutant who telephoned warned me: "Full-service uniform." It was to be a visit to the Soviet Legation, together with the Chief, of course.

The then Soviet envoy Wojkow presented us with a sumptuous dinner, and as we were leaving, he handed me the required "iron-clad" letter and a permit for the possession of arms and ammunition. At our farewell he wished me a successful trip, using the traditional greeting of Russian pilots "*ni pucha, ni piera*".⁸

The next day, we enjoyed a beautifully formal tea at the Japanese embassy.

The reception included ladies in kimonos and the centuries old tea service in the Samurai tradition.

It was an unforgettable spectacle.

The service took place in a large hall, with the floor covered with a beautifully patterned mat, woven intricately by hand by masters of the craft, lit up with light cream-coloured, wax-paper lanterns, with lovely pillows decorated with patterns from Japanese folklore laid out on the mat. Short lacquered tables, with intricate drawings in gold were placed in front of, or actually between the pillows, so that there were three pillows for each table. We sat so that there were two men on one side of the table, with one woman serving them, on the other. Charming, petite ladies brought in trays, also with gold lacquer, and on them was a set of beautiful porcelain cups and saucers and other utensils for tea. The ladies were the wives of the legation personnel and having these lovely dolls, each one at a different table to serve and to help entertain with conversation, created an extremely romantic and beautiful setting.

I remember that on our drive home, Colonel Rayski (he also lived at the airport), jokingly remarked that we with our little ceremonial daggers would not have done well against the terrifying swords of the Japanese Samurai, which we had seen hanging on the walls of the legation, and which made the blood in our veins run cold.

⁷ A red and white checkerboard is the insignia of the Polish Air Force.

⁸ A traditional Russian greeting used by hunters and pilots. It translates as "Neither fur, nor feather" or Good Luck.

Here too, as in the Soviet Embassy, documents and letters had been prepared and were handed to me before our departure.

May 12 arrived.

Taking a night run, via Poznan, Berlin, Cologne and Antwerp, I found myself at eight o'clock in the morning in the then "Capital of the World." The morning newspapers, in huge letters across their front pages along with sale ads, brayed about the "Revolution Polonoise."⁹ Well, what could I do about it? I was not in Warsaw. So, I went to my hotel near the Place de l' Etoile and worried about what was happening in my country.

After freshening up and shaving, I went to the Military Purchasing Mission to report to Major-Observed Engineer Czesław Filipowicz.

"Filip" was glad to see me.

We knew one another in Warsaw from the 1st Air Force Regiment, where I served as a subaltern in the 16th Reconnaissance Squadron under Captain-Pilot Tadeusz Prause, and later in the 18th Fighter Squadron under Captain-Pilot Józef Krzyczkowski - "Krzyczem" or "screaming."

This was during the "puppyhood" of my flying life in 1922-23.

Czesław was also bothered by the shocking news from Warsaw.

The next morning, we took an early morning train to Albert, to the Potez factory. "Potez" was then producing a series of airplanes - the Potez XXVA2 aircraft outfitted with a 450 HP, "Lorraine-Dietrich" engine, with "W" arranged cylinders, on order to the Polish Air Force.



A Potez XXV

⁹ On 12–14 May 1926, Jozef Piłsudski returned to power in Poland through a *coup d'état* and essentially took control of the Polish government. On 31 May the Sejm elected Piłsudski president of the Republic. Piłsudski, aware of the presidency's limited powers, refused the office. Another of his old friends, Ignacy Mościcki, was elected in his stead. Mościcki then appointed Piłsudski as Minister of Military Affairs (defence minister) a post he would hold for the rest of his life in 11 successive governments, two of which he headed himself from 1926 to 1928 and for a brief period in 1930.

I learned from Major Filipowicz, that the plane assigned to me had been specially modified for long-distance flights through the addition of a whole system of additional fuel tanks and (I don't know why) it had been equipped with the "Renault" 480 HP engine, with a "V" cylinder layout. It was a relatively new engine, with limited actual flying time, unlike the "Lorraine" 450HP, which had gone through several trials in the Pelletier d'Oisy, Arrachard and other rallies.

Our Rayski, in his magnificent flight around the Mediterranean, had also flown with a 450 HP "Lorraine."

All these flights had proven categorically that the engine in question was best suited for my planned flight to Tokyo.

The resident-controller at Potez, representing the Department of the Polish Air Force, was Captain-Pilot Stanisław Nazarkiewicz.¹⁰ He was very committed to us, showed us around and gave us many valuable and professional tips about the planes being produced for Poland. Unfortunately, neither he nor Major Filipowicz could explain to me why the plane assigned to our flight was equipped with a Renault engine and not with the Lorraine-Dietrich engine, as were all the other planes ordered by Poland.

At the end of this informative introduction, Staś Nazarkiewicz took us to the machine that was to be used for my upcoming flight.

Here for the first time I met Sergeant Leonard Kubiak,¹¹ my faithful companion in my upcoming travels. I'd heard of him before as being a very experienced mechanic, energetic and very conscientious.

He was of medium height, dark blond with a sincere, calm look in his blue eyes. He spoke quietly in a soft voice. At times it was as if his voice was still breaking as in the transitions of youth. He made a very good impression on me. I felt in him a kindred spirit. It was the type of feeling that you can only share with a comrade in arms with whom you have to go out on a night patrol.

He told me about a few minor problems that were still to be solved and he hoped that in three days, at most, the machine would be ready for a test flight by the factory pilot. He thought that in ten days we could take her on the first stage, from Paris to Warsaw. At the end of our conversation, Kubiak, seeing that we were alone, asked me if I knew why we are not using the Lorraine-Dietrich 450HP engine, which he knew was one of the most powerful engines then on the market.

"It is a pity, Lieutenant, that for such a long flight we have to do it with a motor which has not been tested anywhere, and which has not yet accomplished anything."

"What can we do - we will have to give it a try" - I replied.

¹⁰ Stanisław Nazarkiewicz (1896-1994), was a Colonel-Pilot in the Polish Air Force. He served in the air force during WWI, the 1920 Polish-Soviet War, the 1939 campaign and finally with the Polish Air Force in England during WWII. He was awarded the Krzyż Walecznych (Cross of Valour) three times.

¹¹ Kubiak first served in the German Air Force. He took part in the Greater Poland uprising and later served in the 1st Air Squadron of the Polish Air Force. After his flight to Tokyo he was transferred to the reserves and opened a car garage in Warsaw. He was killed during a bombing raid on Warsaw in September 1939.

I said good bye to Kubiak with the proviso that in a few days we would meet in Villacoublay for the final delivery of the plane by the French authorities.

After breakfast (déjeuner) I returned to the capital with Mr. Henry Potez, the owner of the airplane manufacturing company and with Major Filipowicz.

My friend, Major-pilot Ludwik Idzikowski¹², nicknamed "Lulas", was in Paris at the time awaiting the construction of a plane being manufactured by Amiot for a trans-Atlantic flight. Because he was staying in the same hotel as I was and had a small company car at his disposal, we spent the next few days together on nice trips outside the city, to Versailles, the Bois de Boulogne etc. and spending time in pleasant chats and remembering our times past in Grudziądz and Warsaw. We settled into cozy Parisian bistros, slowly slipping "aperitifs" and enjoying the charming sight of the shapely legs and slim figures, congenial in their simplicity and the "accessorized" elegance of Parisian women.

Those days at the end of May in Paris in the Year of our Lord, 1926, seemed very pleasant. And yet, it was somehow difficult to shake off the hidden concern settled deep in our hearts and thoughts. The unconscious weight of responsibility, in anticipation of irrevocably important moments when a person knows that no one can help him, that he is totally alone and that he alone will have to make tough decisions. It is like waiting for something like a sentence being handed down which is impossible to change or to postpone for any length of time, something, that no matter what the outcome will have a decisive effect on the rest of your life. I watched Ludwik. An external expression of calm and mild cynicism characterized his behavior as it had before. And yet, knowing him well, I sensed his inner state of constant excitement and anxiety. He was going to have to give everything of himself to accomplish what he had committed himself to do.

Four days after our visit to Potez I was informed that the next morning I was to report to Villacoublay to pick up my rally rider, which had been delivered there by Captain de Marnier.

At eight in the morning, together with Idzikowski and his tiny car, we were in front of the experimental, flight-testing hangar, at Villacoublay. Shining with a coat of dark green lacquer, in the light of the morning sun, was our machine. We were greeted by Captain De Marnier, who, on behalf of the French military had tested the plane the day before and flown it to Villacoublay.

Beside the machine stood several French officers and non-commissioned officers and some civilian mechanics.

The Polish authorities were represented by the Head of the Purchasing Mission, Colonel Łojko, Major-Observer Engineer Filipowicz, Major-Observer Engineer Ludwik Zejfert and several subalterns from the Military Purchasing Mission.

Sergeant Kubiak was already out checking the machine.

¹² Ludwik Idzikowski (August 24, 1891 – July 13, 1929) was a Polish military aviator. He died during a transatlantic flight trial. In 1919 he joined the Polish Air Force and during the Polish-Soviet War, initially flew with the 7th fighter squadron ("Kościuszko Squadron"), crewed mostly by American volunteers, then the 6th reconnaissance squadron. He was awarded the Silver Cross of the Virtuti Militari, Cross of Valour (Krzyż Walecznych) (three times), Gold Cross of Merit, and (posthumously) the Officer's Cross of the Polonia Restituta.

Without further delay Captain De Marnier ran through the entire "cockpit drill"¹³ with me as well as explaining the workings of the additional fuel tanks. He informed me at the same time that he had done several trial flights in Albert, and that the last one had lasted three hours. He had reached a height of five thousand feet and found everything in perfect order.

At that time, only the regular tanks had fuel and if I wanted to, I could immediately start out on the first test flight.

I put on my patched-up flying 'balaclava', put a little cotton wool in my ears and belted myself into my seat. Kubiak settled in his cabin right behind me.

A short test of the ignition and we started our take off.

The plane lifted off easily from the ground, and in a few minutes, we had reached a height of one thousand metres. After a few turns I noticed that the stress on the ailerons was quite significant and that it increased at higher speeds. I did not like this, but I decided not to mention it, because there was no time for aerodynamic repairs to the plane. I wanted to fly to Warsaw as soon as possible because I knew they were waiting for us there. Besides, I did not want to miss the good weather in eastern Siberia and Manchuria.

After an hour we landed. I signed the contract accepting the machine and issued the order to fill all the tanks.

The next flight took place in the afternoon.

The takeoff on the runway was quite long but normal under these conditions. After almost five hours of flight and trying all the possible fuel use combinations, I landed at dusk and let it be known that we would start for Warsaw at 6 am the next day.

The Chief in charge of the hangar was not very happy with my decision because of the night work it required but he had no choice but to do it. Kubiak told me that after eating something in the town he would return to the hangar and stay there as long as necessary and that the machine would be ready to take off. "Lieutenant, I will always be able to sleep while you are flying," he said.

It turned out later that he went to town to his hotel, ate dinner there, settled his bill and returned with his suitcase to the hangar. After filling the gas tanks and inspecting the engine, he climbed into his seat and slept there until morning.

That was Leonard Kubiak.

At six o'clock in the morning, with beautiful weather and a light west wind, we arrived with Idzikowski, Filipowicz and Zeffert in a taxi at the airport. It was the second day of Pentecost (Zielone Świątki), 1926.

After a quick farewell and after securing our modest luggage (two small suitcases), we jumped into our seats in the machine. As we belted ourselves in, I glanced at Ludwik. He had tears in his eyes. I didn't realize at the time, that that would be the last time I would see him in this life. I slowly opened the throttle. The engine 'sang' impeccably. I hit the gas and gave the signal to remove the wheel blocks. The

¹³ The systematic review of all the instruments in the pilot's cabin

airplane rolled smoothly along the grassy airport runway. Take-off took a little longer than yesterday. Gaining altitude slowly but steadily, I set a course to the east - Strasbourg, Nuremberg, Prague, Wrocław and Łódź. Those were our 'points' (roughly) on the way to Warsaw.

The weather was good.

Crossing the Rhine to the north of Strasbourg, I noticed that the south-west wind had moved us a bit to the left. I made a slight correction and continued on. The altitude was about fifteen hundred metres. The motor ran smoothly, at about 75 percent capacity.

About 15 minutes after we crossed the Rhine, I looked at the rate of engine revolutions on the tachometer and felt something in the way the engine was running that suggested that the number of engine revolutions was starting to fall. I checked the throttle to ensure there was no slack and that it was not closing on its own. I found everything to be in order. I increased the number of revolutions, which, despite my opening the throttle even further, continued to fall further. I decided to turn back to Strasbourg to get some help if possible. Slowly losing altitude, I pulled through and landed at the airport in Strasbourg.

We taxied to the hangar of the 34th Fighter Regiment. Several Nieuport aircraft, Delage model, lined up in straight rows were being warmed by the June sun. A few young men in blue coveralls, with a sergeant in charge, ran up and offered to help. We asked for wheel blocks under the plane which were immediately supplied. I started to test the engine. It worked flawlessly. I tried the dynamos. They were fine. I turned off the engine.

Kubiak, not wasting even a moment, removed the engine cover and began, with the help of the French sergeant, to check all the parts that might have caused the loss of power in our Renault. During his inspection of the carburetor Kubiak found some water. Besides that, everything seemed to be just fine.

We came to the conclusion that the water, not knowing how it got into the carburetor, was the cause of our difficulties. But ... how did it get there? Was it a process of normal condensation due to lower temperatures, or...? Well, lets return to our ongoing adventures on that memorable day.

We were back in the air a few minutes after putting the engine cover back on. I set a course for Nuremberg and passing it on our right-hand side I kept on course to the city of Cheb, in the northern part of the Czech Republic. We were flying at a height of two thousand meters. The weather was good. Visibility was about 20 kilometers.

At some point, the number of engine revolutions started to fall again. I gradually lost altitude and decided to fly as far as I could with the intention of landing at the military airport in Cheb. Unfortunately, we were short by about twelve kilometers. While trying to land the machine in a small meadow, it was seriously damaged.

We came out of this crash with only slight abrasions.

After an hour - and after a telephone call placed by a local police officer, some military mechanics arrived from Cheb, with whom we discussed how to dismantle and transfer our poor plane, actually only its tattered remains, to the nearest railway station,

which was only two kilometers away. Kubiak remained at the crash site to oversee the dismantling, while I was taken by car by captain-pilot Sławomir Kal, an old friend of the Poles, to the regimental headquarters to formally report to the Commanding Officer. I met our dear Kal once again in London in 1944. After the war, as a colonel, he returned to his beloved "Złotej Prahy" (Golden Prague). In the early nineteen fifties he died from the wounds he received during the war.

Having spent a pleasant evening with my Czech colleagues, who did their best to cheer me up by pouring an incredible amount of great "Pilsner" into me at the officer's canteen, I went to get a well-deserved rest in quarters assigned to me next to the canteen. Kubiak was also extremely hospitably received by the sergeants of the regiment.

The next day, after a generous breakfast, I went with Kal and Kubiak to the wrecked airplane. It had been covered with canvas by the Czech mechanics and was sitting on a railway flatbed. According to the station masters, the flatbed with the Potez was going to be attached to the next fast train to Prague and then sent on via Pardubice and Cieszyn to the Polish border and on to Warsaw. I signed the necessary papers after which we returned to the airport.

After being cordially sent off by the Czech airmen, Kubiak and I, on a night express, set off on a sad and disgraceful trip back to Warsaw. So, this was how my great flight into fame was to end. The "eagle dreams" were completely gone. "You were a worm, you are a worm, and so you will remain until the end of your days," I thought.

We never did find out how the water got into the carburetor of the famous Renault 480HP engine, model "V".

It was a sad trip in the near empty, second class coach on the night express through Cheb, Prague, Berlin. The steady clickety-clack of the rails could not put me to sleep that night. I thought about the past few weeks. I analyzed my feelings, emotions, plans and hopes that were so abruptly derailed by Destiny.

At some point, as if conjured up by a sorcerer, a bright feeling of optimism unexpectedly changed my line of thought. Yes, from out of nowhere, without any prior consideration, the thought popped into my head that after all, somewhere in one of the hangers in Mokotów, there was a forgotten "Cinderella" – a Breguet, the "Nineteenth" from Rayski's flight across the Mediterranean last year. I was well aware that she had been equipped with enough fuel tanks to last twelve hours in the air. It was true that the engine, after all only a machine, could be fatigued. The engine (Lorraine-Dietrich 450HP) had already put in hundreds of hours of honest work (in the squadron), even before Rayski's flight. After all, his exploit was still talked about in the hallways by our air force. It would still be possible, with the help of our brilliant mechanical specialists, to remedy the problem. After all, "it is not saints who make pots."¹⁴ We just had to find another engine somewhere and mount it in our forgotten "Cinderella" – the "Nineteenth".

¹⁴ This popular saying can be understood as 'you don't have to be exceptional to get something done.'

I didn't close my eyes all night. Thinking of the start of a new flight from Warsaw to Tokyo, brightened up my thoughts, just like the most beautiful rainbow after a storm.

I decided to keep my thoughts a complete secret, not even sharing them with Kubiak. Everything depended on how Colonel Rayski would react to my failure and the destruction of the Potez. He, as an aviator with real flight successes under his belt - would decide.

Immediately after arriving in Warsaw, I changed into my uniform and reported to the chief's adjutant.

A few minutes later I was in his office. He met me at the door and with a sad, sympathetic smile he shook my hand. He sat me on a chair by the wall and sitting next to me he asked me to tell him the full story of our flight from Paris that ended in the unfortunate crash near Cheb.

When I finished my story, the colonel stood up, stood before me, and said, "I see that you are taking this way too seriously. It is difficult to say anything now, but we will try to find out how the water got into the carburetor. It may also come out that there was a structural flaw in the carburetor that caused the condensation. I will order a careful investigation of this matter as soon as the damaged machine arrives in Warsaw. This is not your fault. You and Kubiak did all you could. It is good that you are alive and well. Please hand in your maps, letters, pistols and ammunition to the adjutant," he added.

I decided that this was a good time to tell the Colonel about my plans to start trials for a new flight from Warsaw using 'his' Breguet.

After listening to my arguments on this subject, the Chief with apparent satisfaction, agreed to my project.

That same afternoon, covered with cobwebs and dust, the "Nineteenth" of Colonel Rayski was pulled out into the light of day from one of the hangars where it had been left and was placed in the care of a group of technical staff of Central Aircraft Works (Centralnych Warsztatów Lotniczych) in Mokotów (later Państwowe Zakłady Lotnicze / State Aviation Works).

The instructions from the Head of the Military Aviation Department read: "Complete inspection and necessary repairs to the entire aircraft. The engine is to be removed and taken apart by a specialized engine team, examined carefully in detail, and where needed old parts are to be replaced with new ones. Sergeant Leonard Kubiak remains on temporary assignment to the machine with the official title of Military Controller."

Due to the typhoon season in the Far East and based on the advice of the representative of the Japanese Consulate, the end of August had been set for the beginning of the flight with the final date yet to be determined.

I, with the approval of the Chief, returned to my 11th Fighter Regiment in Lida (now in Belarus), with the understanding that I was to be in Warsaw on August 15th to have at least ten days for the trial flights and for a detailed test of the machine during a longer flight.

And so, in this way, for me and Kubiak, our first attempt to fly to the "Land of the Rising Sun", came to an end. I allowed myself to write this modest saga, about our failed first attempt, because without it the full picture of the effort associated with the whole project would be incomplete and there would be no contrast between "disaster" and "triumph".

Triumph

As I have already explained in the first part of my memoirs about the first leg of the proposed Paris-Tokyo flight, it didn't quite work out.

Because of a defect in the gas-line system, I was forced to land on rough terrain in the north-west corner of the Czech Republic, severely damaging the machine.

After returning to Warsaw by train, I decided to ask the Head of the Military Aviation Department Col.-Pilot Engineer Ludomił Rayski for permission to try a different flight, this time not from Paris, but from Warsaw to Tokyo, and to use the modified Breguet XIX with coupled gas tanks and with the Lorraine-Dietrich 450HP engine for this attempt. I had in mind the plane on which Colonel Rayski along with Sergeant-mechanic Leonard Kubiak (back in 1925) had completed a long-distance flight around the Mediterranean. This machine was specially made for this purpose and had additional fuel tanks installed and when coupled made it possible to fly for more than 12 hours before landing.

With the approval of the Head of the Department, we decided to start from the Mokotów airport in Warsaw at the end of August 1926.

In the middle of August, after receiving the Chief's telegraphed orders, I reported to him at the Department, dressed as a "civilian" carrying a small suitcase, with one change of clothes and my shaving kit.

"I summoned you, because I was informed by the Central Aviation Workshops (C.A.W.) that your Breguet is ready to fly. The machine is in the assembly hangar. Please report there, they're waiting for you. Kubiak is at the machine."

"As per your orders, Colonel, Sir!"

"With one jump" I was at the C.A.W. The plane stood in front of the assembly hangar. It looked very unassuming. It didn't dazzle me with the luster of fresh varnish as did the Potez in Villacoublay.

Next to the machine, I found Kubiak bustling about along with a couple of civilian mechanics from the C.A.W., totally immersed in their new undertaking.

Kubiak and I greeted one another, as if we had known each other since boyhood, and had not seen each other for at least the past ten years. After saying hello, we proceeded without delay to the task at hand. Kubiak, in his matter-of-fact and methodical way, started to introduce me to all the "behind-the-scenes" operations

related to the work involved with the inspection and renovation of our Breguet Nineteen.

When I asked about the state of the engine, I got the following reply: "We have dismantled the whole 'works' looking at even the smallest part, Lieutenant, Sir. Every component was inspected and checked, so that everything was spotlessly clean. Not many parts had to be replaced with new ones. It is as if the two hundred hours, that were on this machine, had never happened. With the brakes on, we ran the engine for ten hours. Lieutenant, Sir, this is an 'OMEGA, not an engine,'" my friend Kubiak concluded.

After climbing in and settling into my seat in the fuselage, I was carefully introduced to the mysteries of opening the valves to the extra tanks, as well as being instructed into the what and how of using them in the event of an emergency.

As for the additional tanks, the admirable construction of the duralumin (a type of aluminum-copper alloy) tank shaped like a seat in the pilot's cockpit deserves special commendation. A thin metal sheet covered the whole surface of the cockpit in which I would sit, including the arm rests, which was all that separated me from the gas tanks, which were reinforced with special ribs on the inside. I would be surrounded by gasoline. I would be sitting on it, with my back against it, as well as my arms and legs. Intricately crafted leather cushions, stuffed with horsehair and kapok, a masterpiece of upholstery from the C. W. L., would make the "throne" on which I was supposed to sit "idly" for almost ten hours a day, much more comfortable.

Our plane was an olive-green "military" colour. The undersides of the wings were painted a light blue and marked clearly and proudly with the red and white chessboard of the Polish Air Force. On the sides of the fuselage, I instructed the painters to put the insignia of my 113th Fighter Squadron based in Lida.

This insignia, featuring the "*Winged Arrow*" - a design, made and placed on Spad 61 fuselages belonging to the 113th Fighter Squadron in Lida, part of the 11th Fighter Regiment, was the original art work of then Lieutenant-pilot Kazimierz Kuzian¹⁵ (currently a Lieutenant-colonel, residing in Nottingham, England), which in July 1926 was presented as the draft insignia for approval by the Squadron Commander, Captain-Pilot Ignacy Prawdzic-Sękowski. This emblem, once approved by the Regiment Commander, Col.-Pilot Jerzy Kossowski¹⁶, was placed on the fuselages of the aircraft of the 13th Squadron at the end of July 1926. Before the war, that is from 1928 to 1939, this insignia was assigned to the 121st Fighter Squadron in Kraków. During World War II, the "*Winged Arrow*," insignia, following the course of historical designations was placed on the machines of the 308th "*City of Kraków*" Squadron in England.

¹⁵ From November 19, 1943 he was the commander of the 300 Masovia Bomber Division in England. He died in Dorthford, England and is buried at the Gunnersbury Cemetery in London.

¹⁶ Jerzy Kossowski (born August 12, 1892 in Grodno; Died August 6, 1939 in Krakow. A Colonel-Pilot in the Polish Air Force. He committed suicide after his application to return to active military service was rejected.



**Winged Arrow Insignia
308 Polish Fighter Squadron**

A few smaller details still remained to be "smoothed out" on our rally driver. I objected to covering the entire machine with a fresh coat of varnish. I did not want to add anything to the basic weight, which the poor Breguet would have to lift during every takeoff. I agreed only to the most essential painting improvements.

On the third day after my arrival from Lida, Kubiak and I flew around in our "new" Rally Racer. The load was normal, as was to be "expected." It was more a matter of me getting used to the *Breguet XIX*, which I had never flown before.

When the machine lifted off the ground, right after takeoff, I was able to identify the many great advantages that the "*Nineteen*" had during those early years of aviation. I also noticed after several minutes of flying that the response of the ailerons, at increased speed, especially during a right turn and with a slight dive, was rather "lazy" and it required quite a lot of effort to bring the *Nineteen* out of a turn. This observation was helpful later, when the ceiling was low and the visibility poor, as it was best to approach at a "low angle" to land on "primitive" landing fields.

I am afraid that many pilots had the opportunity to personally experience the aerodynamical shortcomings of the *Breguet XIX* and I fear that many crews paid with their lives for this lack of advance warnings.

After an hour we landed happy with the engine and with the general behavior of the machine. I scheduled a flight with a full load for 6 am the following morning.

With a slight westerly wind and good weather, we took off for a 12-hour test flight. We crossed the Grójecki road (It was not an "*autostrada*" - highway at that time) at a quite low, but safe altitude. I decided to fly the route twice: Warsaw, Kraków, Poznań, Grudziądz, Warsaw. It was a bit boring, but just in case a forced landing was required, I didn't want to be over the Białowieża Forest or somewhere around Słonim, but preferred to be west of Warsaw, where assistance would be easier to find. So, I set a course for Kraków.

During the flight - nothing worth noting happened. Everything worked at "one hundred and two" percent. The weather gave us a bit of a scare over Pomorze, but nowhere was the ceiling less than 200 meters. Everything went as planned and after a

little more than twelve hours, we landed on the turf of Mokotów airport on route to the hangar.

Colonel Rayski was standing in front of the hangar in the company of several officers and the Commander of the C. A.W. Also present was the technical staff headed by Engineer Borejsza, who was responsible for the whole operation, as well as the upgrades to our machine, and Bolesław Skraba, head of the Test Hangar at C.A.W.

"Congratulations on a good test" - said the Chief, extending his hand to me. "How was the seat?" He asked equivocally. "Comfortable, Colonel Sir," I replied, "pretending to be a Stoic."

After a brief, on the spot, consultation, it was decided that tomorrow, Lt. Zygfryd Piątkowski, who was responsible for our public relations, would communicate with the Japanese Consulate informing them that we were ready to start and to ask them for their advice.

It was the twentieth of August, when on the evening of that same day, the Japanese after communicating with Tokyo, advised us to start in a week, basing their advice on the meteorological forecasts, which arrived by telegraph from Japan. Nastier than normal weather was forecast for the Japanese islands and Korea over the following two weeks.

As a result of these diplomatic exchanges a mutual decision was made that we would start the flight on August 27th at 6:00 in the morning.

I had to work hard to control myself so as not to show my impatience in waiting for the start. I would go to the cinema in the evenings, and during the day I took the Grójecki "samovark" (a narrow-track suburban train based in Grójec near Warsaw) to Jeziorna, to visit my mother and sister who lived there, and to see and play with my beloved, just a few months old, nephew. At that time, I did not know that in eighteen years, in the forests of Jabłonna, a bullet would smash his beloved head with his golden locks. He died serving as a soldier in the Polish Underground in August 1944.

But enough sentimentality. Let's return to Mokotów, to the Breguet, on which the mechanics of the C.A.W. under the watchful eye of my sorely missed friend Henryk Kotoński, were working away, filling the tanks with fuel. Kubiak calm, composed, walked around the machine, focused on the work at hand.

At five in the morning of August 27th it was still gray, almost dark and it was raining. The low dark gray clouds covered the towers of the Church of the Savior. There was one hundred percent cloud-cover and there was no hope that visibility would improve or of a higher ceiling over the next few hours. The decision as to whether to postpone the start was left to me. I decided not to postpone the start.

Slowly, our friends and fellow pilots started to arrive and gather around.

Colonel Rayski had an animated conversation with the Japanese Colonel - the Attaché Militaire in uniform. There were representatives of the Soviet Legation. Spirits were low because of the dismal weather.

The motor of our Breguet and our open cockpits were covered with a canvas tarpaulin. Nobody came up to us. After conducting a short check of the blocks under the wheels of the undercarriage, I approached the Chief and reported that we were

starting for Tokyo. He offered me his hand and said: "Poland is watching you. God be with you." The Chief's face was focused and very serious.

The tarps were removed. We took our places and belted ourselves in.

"Contact!"

The engine roared to life with the first crank of the starter.

It was five to six. The temperature was sufficiently warm to test the ignition. I increased the revolutions, I reset the switches. Everything was in order. I reduced the flow of gas. I signaled to the mechanics to remove the blocks from underneath the wheels of the plane. The Head of Mechanics signaled "ALL CLEAR." (I don't remember our actual technical terminology in Polish for those two excellent English words). I only knew that when I increased the revolutions in order to move the loaded machine forward - I glanced at my watch. It was six o'clock.

I taxied forward "for form's sake" for several dozen meters and then initiated take-off. It was normal and not long. We reached the base of the clouds almost immediately, and so making the proper adjustment to the right, very carefully, taking into account the heavy load, the low ceiling and strong, gusty wind, I turned a hundred and eighty degrees to fly over the large group of people who had gathered to bid us farewell.

The wind carried us quickly over the airport and to the East, almost on a perfect course from Warsaw to Moscow. I looked to the left. The crosses on the "Savior" were slightly higher than us. We were no further than 150 meters from them. Gradually, the uniform gray leaden mass above our heads began to thicken up, decreasing our visibility every few minutes. The rain water flooded our goggles. The wind carried us with unusual speed across the Vistula River to the East, over the immense spaces of Russia, Siberia, Manchuria ... It was carrying us on a long, unknown journey.

As we approached the Russian border, the ceiling rose gradually. The rain stopped, so that we crossed the border north of the railway station in Stołpce already at an altitude of three hundred meters.

Being under a relatively low and complete cloud cover, I could see far to the East a clear band of good weather. Suddenly, on the way to Mińsk Litewski (now Minsk in Belarus) we were lit up by the splendor of the morning sun.

Two hours and forty minutes had passed since the start. Not bad timing. We passed over Żodzin (Žodino) and Borysów on the Berezina River. I was stationed with the 162nd Spad XIII Fighter Flight, during the 1920 war at the airfield in Żodzin. It was from this airfield that 2nd Lieutenant Stefan Pawlikowski¹⁷ had his successful hunt for Soviet artillery observation balloons during the 1920 war.

I can still see still him today, getting into the Spad with the sides of his forage cap hanging down over his ears. Sometimes I had the great privilege of helping him to

¹⁷ Stefan Pawlikowski (Born October 11, 1896 w Kozłow; Died May 1943 in France) – a Colonel Pilot in the Polish Air Force; he was promoted to Brigadier-General posthumously. He took part in several fighter flights including one in support of the Dieppe Raid, as a member of Squadron 302, flying a Spitfire. He was killed on May 15, 1943 while taking part in a flight by Squadron 315 over France in a Spitfire covering a bomber attack (Circus 297).

fasten his seat belts. I was a corporal then - a chauffeur in the flight squadron. But let's continue our flight towards Moscow.

We soon came to the Dnieper River and followed along its upper reaches to Smolensk, which remained a bit to the right. I kept our altitude at about 600 meters. The sky was dotted with towering cumulous clouds the bases of which were relatively low in the sky.

We passed Wiaźma, and after some time, the exquisite city of Możejask, similar to our Toruń with its gingerbread architecture. The weather was beautiful. We flew with a strong tail wind, at an altitude of 2,000 metres. The visibility was "unlimited." Now below us we had vast battlefields, and one in particular, the Battle of Borodino. Here in a deadly battle the attacking army of Bonaparte engaged the defensive bastions of Kutuzov's regiments.

We passed Borodino. Five hours and thirty minutes of flying time had passed from the moment of our departure from Warsaw, when the Byzantine outlines of the old orthodox churches of Moscow appeared on the horizon.

I looked at Kubiak in the mirror. Because we could only communicate by signaling to one another, I pointed with my finger to the rapidly approaching capital of the Soviets. The face of my companion came alive. This brave Poznanian, for the first time in his life, was about to stand on Russian soil.

I started to reduce our altitude over Borodino, so that we crossed the Moskva River at a relatively low altitude, when the old "Khodynka Field" and its two adjoining race tracks appeared before us. The expanded airport was now called the "Trotsky Aerodrome."

In a short while, we rolled along the perfectly maintained turf.

We taxied up to a large hangar beside which a large group of people was standing. After switching off the engine, and climbing out of my "nest," I caught the pilot's mirror with my foot, smashing it into small pieces. In those times I was still an optimist, so cursing loudly, I carried on with the business at hand.

Among the group of people there to meet us was Consul R. P. Kętrzyński and the Deputy Military Attaché, Captain Grudzień. The Soviet authorities were represented by the president of the Moscow "Awiachim" (something similar to our former Air Defense League). The dignitary greeted us with a rather stiff but friendly, short speech, expressing his satisfaction at being able to welcome the first airmen from Poland to the Moscow airport.

After these preliminary ceremonies, we were invited to the aviator's mess "*na pieriekusku*" (for a snack). Unfortunately, Kubiak had already rolled up his sleeves and was doing something with the machine but promised that he would join everyone as soon as he finished preparing the machine for the next stage of the journey. Meanwhile, he gave instructions to the mechanics who were helping him with refueling, using hand signals rather than words. The work must have gone smoothly, because in about thirty or forty minutes, Kubiak joined me in the mess.

The Soviet airmen excelled in hospitality, asking us about the details of the flight from Warsaw. I was introduced to Michał Gromow, whom I already knew through the

world's flying community, a friendly giant with a pleasant demeanor. (Gromov in the early 1930s made a wonderful pioneering flight from Russia to the United States N.A. - via the North Pole.) He told me that he would soon be heading out on a flight around Europe, on a new huge four-engine machine and that he would most likely be paying a visit to Warsaw. He expressed hope that if I caught a return train from Tokyo in time, we would probably see each other in Warsaw. I mention the trip from Tokyo to Warsaw "by train", because at that time nobody thought that we would be returning by air.

After a tasty and substantial meal, and escorted by a whole group of airmen, we returned to the plane in order to make it in time for dinner in Kazan, "only" 750 kilometers away.

I was in a hurry, because the party put on by the Moscow flyers, dragged on a bit.

The meteorologist ran up to me at the last moment and gave me a chart indicating fair weather along our route, together with favorable westerly winds.

While fastening the seat belts I noticed with a pleasant surprise that I had a new mirror. The chief of the Russian mechanics looked at me from down below, questioningly, as if expecting a sign letting him know that I had noticed his unexpected gift.

I gave him a friendly nod and shouted: "*spasibo!*"

"Contact!" ... we moved away slowly, waving goodbye to our new friends.

After takeoff, we took a wide turn to the right to avoid downtown Moscow and set a course for Murom.¹⁸

For the first two hours we had a normal flight taking advantage of a rather high ceiling and relatively good visibility, with full cloud cover. In the third hour of the flight, the ceiling began to gradually lower and suddenly we entered a mass of heavy, rain clouds. I eased up on the gas and made a gentle 180-degree turn (on the "Ball" and "Finger" - the Badin navigational instrument used in those times) and descended, dropping below the clouds. We found ourselves at an altitude of a few hundred meters above a very hilly and densely forested area. We took a second 180-degree turn and were once again on course, but now below the clouds. The rain was pouring down, like "an ox to a carriage" (in other words a very poor fit, and something we didn't need at that time), as one of my friends would have said, who did not have a good memory for proverbs but who liked to quote them.

Darkness was coming on quickly. The turbulence was unbelievable.

We passed Murom. Now, sliding my rain-covered goggles onto my neck, I began to look for the Volga River, which, one way or another, we had to eventually cross. It was completely dark. We could see lights on the ground. The bad weather didn't stop, though it seemed to me that the rain had lightened up a bit. Suddenly, barely visible,

¹⁸ Murom is a historical city in Vladimir Oblast, Russia, which sprawls along the left bank of the Oka River

was a flash of water. The Volga! I looked to the right. About five kilometers away the lights of the city blinked at us. Kazan!¹⁹

The phosphorus markings on the dial indicated an altitude of 500 meters. These indications can be very misleading, given the fact that when we reached the Volga, we were passing over tar-plant fires in the forests, some being at the same height as us, and some being a little higher than us.

According to the map and description, the small Kazan airport should have been south of the city and just at its periphery. I started looking for it there. The wind was strong and gusty. Westerly. The ceiling was not more than 200 meters.

Rain and the tattered remnants of low "stratus" clouds limited visibility to a minimum. I started to make large circles to the right to counteract the pull to the east.

I was looking for, or rather, waiting for a signal from the ground, some kind of rocket or bonfire. In vain. I circled around stubbornly. We were being tossed about. On several occasions, I had experienced difficulties in guiding the Breguet out of a right turn. I immediately cut back on the flow of gas, and reduced speed. The experience gained from the trial flight in Warsaw was proving useful. I kept circling.

At one point, a few kilometers to the south, I noticed an orange-red glow reflecting off the lower edges of the rain clouds. At a very level angle, because we were not higher than from a hundred to a hundred and fifty feet up, it looked like a fire from three stacks of hay or straw. Right away, naturally, I headed for the fires. They were about three or four kilometers away from us. As we approached, we saw three huge fires and people running around them. The fires burst with high flames every now and then, indicating that these people were constantly adding more fuel.

We found ourselves above an elongated triangle of fire, running in a westerly direction. We were above the Kazan landing strip. Now all that was needed was to make our approach from the windward side and to land, calmly, coolly, in this terrible weather. With the help of good spirits, we succeeded and soon the machine was rolling on the soaking, very wet turf. The bonfires - our "guiding stars" - slowly began to go out.

We taxied toward a few flashing electric lights which illuminated the area where we were to "moor." We came to a stop beside a large canvas hangar, dimly lit by a few bulbs. A small group of military pilots stood in front of the hangar. I turned the engine off. We jumped down off the machine. A few soldiers ran up with tarpaulins, which they threw over our open cockpits.

As we approached the group of people at the hangar, a short, slim, blond-haired man wearing the uniform of an air force sergeant, stepped out from the group, and came towards me.

"*Razrieszitie predstavitsia?*" (May I introduce myself?).

The sergeant extended his hand to me and then to Kubiak. "I am Sergei Iľarjonowicz Pastuszkow. I am the *zawiedujuszczim* (manager) of this airfield, which is

¹⁹ Kazan is a city in southwest Russia, on the banks of the Volga and Kazanka rivers. The capital of the Republic of Tatarstan, a semi-autonomous region, it's known for the centuries-old Kazan Kremlin, a fortified citadel containing museums and sacred sites.

rarely visited by military planes passing this way. I was notified of your arrival from Moscow by phone, although for several weeks I have been advised about the possible arrival of a Polish plane that will land here on its way to Omsk. Gasoline and oil are ready for you. I welcome you on behalf of the Soviet Air Force."

All this, and especially the words of welcome, were said with a great sense of solemnity for this unusual occasion.

In the meantime, Comrade Pastuszkow's staff put the tail of the plane on a two-wheeled cart and began pulling it into the hangar. Kubiak personally supervised this, leaving me with our new host.

Along with the officially-polite sergeant we entered a huge canvas hut, held rigid from the inside with massive wooden ribbing. After pulling in the machine, the soldiers closed and tied down the hangar's front flap. Everything became quiet and pleasant.

The interior was relatively brightly lit by large bulbs. Under one of the "walls," I noticed several large steel barrels and 10-liter "jugs". "It's your petrol and oil which has been waiting for you now for a week. Everything according to instructions," said the sergeant firmly. "It came from Moscow by rail from the central warehouses."

He stepped closer to our machine and looked at the chessboard on the wings.

"*Proklatyje kwadraty*" (cursed squares) - he declared seriously but without anger. I looked at him inquiringly.

"I was in Budienny's cavalry, in 1920, in the summer. We were in Galicia, near the city of Lwów. Then, one morning, while we were still sleeping by a forest, three or four devils flew over, on small machines, with the same squares as these, and they gave us such a lesson, so that we had no chance to round up the horses so we took cover, wherever we could."

From there, I went into captivity and sat there for six months. No harm came to me there, but I had an extreme "*toska*" (longing) for my young wife which would not let me sleep. After they signed the peace treaty I returned home, to Novgorod. But I am not angry ... why did we go there ... since it was not ours?"

From further conversation, I understood that he was a cavalryman, and today a zealous airman under the sign of the red star. He waited for us with his team for almost two weeks, looking for us every day.

He was skeptical about the telephone service from Moscow. He believed that on the very day we were to arrive, the phone connection to the capital might "screw up."

So, he put out his special listening sentinels, and looked for us from morning to night. Today, due to the weather and the oncoming darkness, he did not think that we would come and he was going to let his men go and sleep, when unexpectedly, he heard the approaching, then the retreating, sound of the motor. That would have been me circling over the suburbs of Kazan. Having come to the conclusion that he was sure he heard the whir of an airplane engine, the sergeant ordered the lighting of three specially prepared bonfires, further fueled from time to time with a mixture of petrol and kerosene and arranged in the shape of a triangle pointed towards the wind.

"You are very brave fellows, to arrive in such weather and in the dark," remarked Sergeant Pastuszkow at one point.

Thanking him for his words of praise - I replied that we had no choice but to push forward and that he and his staff are the true "fine fellows," because they persisted in waiting for us and they guided us in to the landing strip with their fires.

This atmosphere of goodwill and trust was felt throughout the canvas hut at the Kazan air field - the ancient town of the Tartars.²⁰

Meanwhile, the terrible weather continued to rage outside with evil intent.

The takeoff for Omsk was scheduled for six o'clock the next morning. Now, we had to think about washing up, getting something to eat and getting a few hours of good sleep.

Kubiak decided to stay at the air field. This he did for two reasons: first, he wanted to be present while the machine was fueled up, during which time he could also inspect the engine, and secondly, our host asked Kubiak to visit his home after finishing work, to have supper with him and stay overnight. I had no objections.

At eight o'clock an old Mercedes arrived to take me to the hotel.

The driver, a gloomy dullard, did not say one word the whole way.

We arrived at the local "Ritz," which was called "*Gostinnica Metropol*." I got out of the cab in front of the main entrance to the hotel. I thanked the driver and asked if I owed him anything, to which he gave a clear response - nothing was owed, and that he (the dullard) was the deputy chairman of the local branch of the "Awiachim" and that he would return tomorrow morning at 5 o'clock to take me to the airport. These were his instructions from headquarters in Moscow.

From that moment on, the hotel manager took me under his protective wing, a pleasant brown-headed fellow with Caucasian features. He took me to the floor where my designated room was waiting, politely informing me that dinner was ready downstairs, in the restaurant, and as soon as I could get settled, that I should come down.

I looked around the room. It was not big, but neat. Furniture: wooden, a large antique bed with two carved angels on the decorative headboard. Also - a chest of drawers, a wardrobe, a table, two chairs, a wash stand with a stone basin, a jug, a bucket and a chamber pot. The ceramic pottery was all in "Renaissance" style. A large oil painting was hung on the wall, titled "Zaporozhians," a reproduction of the immortal work by the Russian painter, Riepin. In addition, several small pictures adorned the walls of the room.

I washed up and went down to the restaurant.

The dining room was empty. The host appeared immediately, followed by a waiter in a white coat.

In answer to my questions as to why no one was eating dinner, the hotelier explained that it was still too early (it was after nine) and that the guests would arrive, "*czto by wypit i zakusit*" (to drink and have a bite), at around ten, after the closing of the

²⁰ As various nomadic groups became part of Genghis Khan's army in the early 13th century, a fusion of Mongol and Turkic elements took place, and the invaders of Rus and the Pannonian Basin became known to Europeans as Tatars.

cinemas of which there were four in Kazan. In addition, there was a theater and a circus that didn't finish their (two) performances a week until eleven.

The waiter handed me the menu. I ordered a carafe of vodka, caviar, borscht, and a slice of meat with buckwheat groats. For dessert, I ate an excellent melon. I was young, strong and could put away quite a bit of drink and food. Everything was very tasty and fresh.

After an hour, having paid an exorbitant bill and slipping the frightened waiter (worried that he was committing an unforgivable crime against world socialism), a few rubles into his paw, I went to bed.

On the stairs I met the hotelier who wished me a good night - and asked - at what time he should have breakfast ready. I asked for tea with lemon, rolls with butter and a couple of eggs for five in the morning to be brought to my room. The next day, the pre-ordered breakfast was delivered punctually, to my room. The rolls were crusty, with fresh butter and eggs.

I locked myself in the room, undressed, and threw myself on the bed. I now realized what Kubiak and I had lived through that day. We could have missed the Volga in the darkness and the squalls. We could also have ended our flight to Tokyo sadly here in Kazan, if our new friend, having let his soldiers go home, had collected his belongings and went off to sleep beside his young wife.

- After all, today we had flown - I thought, almost two thousand kilometers. The time spent in the air, totalled eleven hours and thirty-five minutes.

- Is this the great, wonderful Archangel Gabriel with his fiery sword and with his goodness and terrible justice," thought I "or is it wicked Lucifer, who breathing fire, was eager to have our young, unspoiled souls, or perhaps, the good and the bad angel by mutual agreement, have joined forces? It was enough that some extraordinary power had carried us to the East, into the unknown. - I fell asleep.

On the second day, August 28, I woke up at four o'clock.

After quickly eating breakfast, I was driven to the air field in the same Mercedes that brought me to the city the day before. Someone else was driving me today, though judging from the badge on his cap, he was also a member of the "Awiachim." This one was talkative and by the time we arrived at the hangar, we were already on friendly terms.

At the hangar, I met Kubiak and Sergeant Pastuszkow. The weather was foggy, but the visibility was still within acceptable limits for our takeoff.

The weather reports, which Kubiak had received just before my arrival at the air field, were not good.

According to the weather experts, the fog coming in from the east from the Ural Mountains, with a projected visibility of "zero" covered a very large area and there was no hope that the weather was going to improve over the next few hours. Although the forecast mentioned a possible improvement in the weather for tomorrow, this might also be temporary, for in the morning, in the area around Kazan, the whole region stretching up to the Urals, would be covered with a low-lying, uniform "stratus cloud formation."

The visibility at the air field meanwhile - dropped to zero.

I decided to wait a few hours and be prepared for an immediate take-off, should the weather at the air field somewhat brighten up. What if our comrades-meteorologists were mistaken and the fog did "clear" for a moment?

Our latest possible start time was eight-thirty, which left us no time to spare, and risked a landing at Omsk, 1,600 kilometers away, at dusk.

The machine was parked outside. So, we decided together with my two bosses to "turn on" and warm up the engine. I got into the cockpit, the motor started immediately and after a moment of warming up, I opened the throttle. Our "Omega" "played" without complaint. I throttled down the gas and checked the pressure and the magnetos. Everything was fine.

I turned off the motor and jumped down from the cockpit. It was six o'clock. We began to wait with slight hope for a brief lightening up with the weather in order to be able to take off.

Our host, meanwhile, "*zasujetitsia*" (busied himself), and prepared a "*stakanczik czaju*" (a glass of tea), on the spot in the hangar.

He invited us into a corner, separated off with asbestos sheets, where his "office" was located. There, on an electric hot plate, which he had rigged together from thick, copper wires, sat a large tin, noisy, hot "kettle."

After ten minutes we were treating ourselves to good, strong tea, drunk with "refined" sugar, "*w prikusku*" which meant that you took a piece of sugar in your fingers, nipped off a pinch and sipped the hot tea through it, smacking loudly as this was supposed to add a certain "zest" to the tea. An economical and quite pleasant way to drink tea, both acoustically and socially.

Eight o'clock came and went. It was still gray and very damp. Visibility still - "zero." I ordered the machine pulled back into the hangar. We were going to fly tomorrow. Takeoff at 6 o'clock in the morning.

The car was waiting, so we rode with our host and Kubiak to the city, stopping at the Pastuszkow home for a moment, since he decided to put on a new uniform and he wanted to introduce me to his family.

At the door of a small house we were met by a handsome young woman, with a nice smile, and at her side - two children, a boy and a girl. The toddlers holding onto their mother's skirt, looked at me with doubtful eyes. They already knew Kubiak. I greeted them cordially, but I did not take advantage of the invitation to come in, as I did not want to test the patience of our driver, who told me earlier that he had a lot of work to do preparing some time-sensitive lists for headquarters in Moscow.

Our Sergei Ilararovich said that "*w dwa miga*" (in a minute), he will be back and disappeared inside his cottage. His wife and I had a short conversation about the unfavorable weather. At the same time, I befriended two nice little farts. I have always loved children, especially children whose behaviour show the love, care and smart discipline of everyday life and manners instilled by their parents.

Pastuszkow was indeed back in a flash, so saying goodbye to the lady of the house and patting the heads of the toddlers I went with my companions in the "Great Aviation Adventure" to the car.

"*Nie pijej mnogo wodki, Sierioża*" (don't drink too much vodka, *Sierioz*), were the last words of farewell (and warning) from Mrs. Pasztuszkow.

It was almost twelve o'clock by the time we made it into the city.

Now I felt obliged to take on the role of a hospitable host, so I invited everyone to the hotel for a pint of beer. The representative of "Awiachim," after finishing off a goblet of brandy and washing it down with a mug of beer, said goodbye to us, justifying his departure because of his incredible workload, and promising at the same time, that he would come to the hotel for me at five o'clock in the morning just like today. After drinking a few beers each, with Sergei and imbibing a few glasses of vodka neat, on invitation by the hotelier we enjoyed a pre-set dinner.

It was already one o'clock, and our hunger, accentuated by drinking a few tall ones, was very obvious. The dinner was not complicated, but tasty, complemented by a Kachetyn "Burgundy," and finished with a wonderful cool watermelon.

Kubiak tasted this delicacy for the first time in his life. "Neither taste nor smell, just sweet, pink water" - he opined with a slight disappointment. It was almost four.

It popped into my head, to play the tourist and see the city - the ancient capital of the current Tatar Republic.

Because my friends were somewhat drowsy and preferred a comfortable couch and a pillow somewhere in a quiet place rather than historical excursions, I advised Kubiak and Sergei to go to my room to sleep. The bed was quite wide. I promised that I would wake them when I returned from the city. In those days I had an exceptionally strong constitution, so while the number of strong drinks made my companions sleepy, it gave me an increased desire to go out and further "explore" that which was around me.

I went into the city.

Nothing in the city caught my special attention. The numerous mosques did not communicate any particular connection to the exotic East. The Orthodox churches, or rather their external architecture, were boring with their monotonous style. Their "*Moskowszczina*" (Moscowness) struck me at every step. On one of the former churches there was a laconic sign „*KLUB 28-go SAPIORNAGO BATALIONA*" (28th Sapper Battalion Club).

The walls of the churches were covered with posters calling on citizens to combat "religious superstitions" and to read "*Bezbożnik*" (an anti-religious periodical). Several times on the street I passed old priests, in tattered and threadbare "*riasia*" (cassocks). These poor characters were quite pathetic.

Against the gray background of the old town, the Kazan "Kremlin" made a beautiful contrast, a lofty and proud stronghold, its walls bearing the traces of the wars of independence against Ivan the Terrible, a fight of the semi-wild Tatar tribe against pseudo-Russian civilization.

It was almost evening, when I found myself under the walls of the castle. Below there was the city, and further out lay the endless fields of black fertile earth. Just like our "Wild Fields".²¹ The weather had cleared up.

The broad reaches of the Volga, bathed in the beams of the western sun, shimmered with the colors of purple and blue. I heard from down below in the far-reaching echo in the quiet evening air, the sounds of bells flowing from the city, calling the faithful to "*wieczerniu*" (vespers).

It brought back my childhood years. Just like now, in the evening, I often scrambled over the steep slopes of the castle hill in the ancient town of Kamieniec Podolski. I thought to myself then, looking at the last rays of the setting sun: "There, about thirty versts (a Russian unit of distance equal to 0.6629 miles or 1.067 kilometers) from here to the west, on the family estate of Niverka over by the River Zbruch, Mama was also probably looking at this setting sun with thoughts about me." I felt deeply and painfully the tragedy of my separation from my mother and sisters, when I was brought to the schools in Kamieniec and "mercilessly" left to the "kindness" of strangers. Again, I now felt very lonely. Now, not thirty versts, but two thousand kilometers separated me from my country. With the words of the unforgettable Dora Kalinówna²² of the famous Warsaw cabaret "Morskie Oko", my spiritual state could be described by her lament: - "What is this emptiness, what is this longing" ...



Dora Kalinówna

²¹ The Wild Fields is a historical term used in old Polish–Lithuanian documents from the 16th to 18th centuries referring to the Pontic steppe of Ukraine, located north of the Black Sea and Azov Sea.

²² Dora Kalinówna, known also as Dora Klingbeil-Ratner (December 15, 1900 in Lodz - 1986 in Rio de Janeiro), a Polish actress of Jewish descent, who joined the Morskie Oko (Eye of the Sea) cabaret.

AUGUST 29, KAZAN - OMSK, 1,600 KM - 9 HOURS, 20 MINUTES

I returned to the hotel very late. Kubiak and Sergei were already gone. They had taken, as the host informed me, a rented horse-drawn carriage to the airport. I went upstairs to bed, after having drunk a liter of excellent cold milk, which I had ordered up to my room.

At five o'clock in the morning, I was sitting in "our" Mercedes having already been wished a fond farewell by the hotelier. The clouds were low and scattered. The rising sun pierced through them here and there. A pure blue azure sky - shining through the mists of the sky - made life rather pleasant.

The machine was parked in front of the hangar. Everyone was there "in the flesh" (present). The fog was still hanging on to the airfield lawns, but the visibility, considering the breaks in the fog cover, seemed good enough to take a chance on our takeoff. We said goodbye to our friend Sergei and to a few of his assistants and took our seats in the machine. Following successful ignition and engine revolutions tests, I taxied to the farthest corner of the field to begin the takeoff.

The direction of our takeoff was from east to west. After quite a long takeoff run and a troublesome liftoff, we immediately found ourselves in dense fog. Under some stress, I tried to keep the machine under control with the help of the speedometer and the "ball" and "finger" of my "Badin" system (a French navigational device, in use before the invention of systems based on independent gyroscopes). We had a full load of fuel and the slightest mistake in maintaining the right angle of ascent, speed or transverse balance could be fatal.

At long last I breathed a sigh of relief. The gray, damp mass of fog began to lift. "Hold on, brother, be patient! Don't pull"- I thought to myself quietly. How many pilots, finding themselves in the same situation as I was in now, had not waited patiently and seeing the thinning fog tried to get out of it prematurely. Usually these poor folks died in the wreckage of their "over-stressed" machine. Another minute and we were above the fog in the full glow of the morning sun.

At a "safe" speed, I made a 180-degree turn setting a course to the east.

Above us was a magnificent blue sky. Below us - an endless sea of white fog.

The meteorologists said there would be wind out of the south-west, stronger above and weaker below one thousand meters. So, if they were right, I had to make a slight adjustment to the right and not climb too high. That is what I did. After an hour of flying, and still not seeing land, I noticed that the fog was beginning to change into dark and high-rising "nimbostratus" clouds.

I concluded that we were approaching the western slopes of the Ural Mountains. I decided to get under the clouds at all costs to get a "fix" on our location. So, I changed course by 90 degrees to the south with the wind direction in mind and I started looking for some break in the cover to get under the clouds. Luck favored me.

After about half an hour of flying I saw a dark spot, and approaching it I saw that it was a wooded area. We spiralled down slowly. The ceiling was approximately 150 meters, with poor visibility allowing me to see only a few kilometers ahead.

From the map I was able to determine along with my previous course adjustment and taking into consideration the wind, that we had only deviated from our course by 30 kilometers. Before us, barely visible, the foothills of the Ural Mountains appeared through the mist. They were steep, forested but not at all hostile. The cloud ceiling rose a bit, but a strong wind from the south-west threw us about roughly. We ran into dense, heavy rain. I pushed forward along a railway line through a valley, surrounded by mountains topped with clouds on either side. I thought jokingly: "What would happen if I came to a railway tunnel." We were crossing the Urals. This is where Europe comes to an end.

The weather did not give us much of a chance to admire the beauty of the Ural Mountains. We flew over them without seeing them. I remember that after landing in Omsk, Kubiak asked me: "And when will we be flying over the Urals?"

Now the terrain below slowly began to level off.

I can't quite quote Frank Rutkowski, a flyer from Biała Podlaska, who said to me how in bad weather he had wandered off course over the Świętokrzyskie Mountains on the way from Biała to Kraków: "Flying for half an hour, flying for an hour, I look at the altimeter, the instruments read one thousand meters, and yet here I can see spruce trees just below the plane." (Franio was a pilot in the German army. He came from Inowrocław.)

After passing over Świerdłowsk (Ekaterinburg), the weather started to clear, and while flying over the small, at that time, town of Kurgan, we had a ceiling of 1,500 meters and the air was as smooth as butter.

Suddenly I sensed the sharp smell of smoke. Terrified - I started looking for the source of this potential fire. Kubiak, noting that I was shifting restlessly in my seat, handed me a piece of paper between the wall of the fuselage and the backrest of my gas tank/seat with a laconic bit of information: "I lit up a cigarette in order to cheer myself up a bit." A draft from his cockpit had carried his "cigarette smoke" into my cabin, giving me quite a fright.

After a while, my companion slipped me a cheese sandwich. I ate it with great gusto. It was a snack prepared back in Warsaw.

From Kurgan we had a pleasant flight to Omsk with very good weather and a strong favourable wind.²³

Dusk fell as we approached our landing spot. Several wooden hangars indicated that there must be some other airplanes here.

Next to the hangar, towards which we had been signalled by a green rocket, we were met by about three hundred people. When we got out of the machine, a few photographers and journalists with notebooks closed in around us.

The manager of the air field interrupted the questioning by the journalists who were especially interested in the Kazan - Omsk stage of our flight. After a short while, the commander of the local garrison joined him. Tall, broad-shouldered, with a fair,

²³ Omsk is a city and the administrative center of Omsk Oblast, Russia, located in southwestern Siberia 2,236 kilometers from Moscow. With a population of 1,154,116, it is Russia's second-largest city east of the Ural Mountains after Novosibirsk, and seventh by size nationally.

honest face, he immediately gave me a welcome kiss and declared that he was a former sergeant in the Tsar's guard, and now was in command of an infantry division. The old soldier won me over with his simple and very friendly attitude towards us. He took me by the arm and pushing through the crowd, led me to his car.

While we were getting in the car, a small, haggard man emerged from the crowd. He moved closer to the car. "Please sir, have you been away from Poland for a long time?" - I answered him with a question "Are you Polish?". "Yes, sir. I am from Lwów, *a wstyjskij wojennoplennyj*" (an Austrian prisoner of war). Only the weakest links still connected him with his homeland. I was for him, I think, rather an oddity, inducing vague reminiscences. Or maybe? ... somewhere in some corner recess of his mind, something remained in some tiny corner of this man's heart, something sacred. I gave this small man a hardy handshake.

The General told us to get a move on. We set off for the city.

Admittedly, after traveling 1,600 kilometers, I felt a bit tired. My ears were humming and I would have gladly gone to bed after having had something to eat.

However, the jovial division commander did not give me a moment's rest. He decided to show me the city and from its most revolutionary side. He took me, having sent his car back to the garage, to all the places which, in his opinion, thanks to the revolution, as well as through his efforts, had been lifted onto a pedestal of greatness and fame. "Here, for example - in the past, was a *kabak* (pub), and now you can see it says: HOUSE OF THE PROLETARIAT. The city is very clean and the streets are smooth and paved "*chot jajcom pokati*" (Try rolling an egg down them). "There used to be a lot of drunks in the streets, and now ..." At that moment, a drunken bum almost knocked me off my feet. The General swore. "Let's go for a drink of beer," he said, having abandoned any further attempts to indoctrinate this hardened son of capitalism. After the beer, at the invitation of the commander, we ate dinner in a restaurant.

We were hungry, so we put back a large carafe of vodka with a large bowl of Astrakhan caviar and a huge sirloin, sautéed with good Caucasian wine.

When I was paying the bill, I asked the waiter if he would accept a tip. "*Błagodarstwuju*" (Thank you) - he said quietly, giving the general a look, who just at that moment became very interested in a fanciful lamp shade on the ceiling. An Aesthete - with a comb over. Despite everything, I remember the general as a good fellow. He was the type that the Russians call a "man with spirit."

The next day at five in the morning I woke up Kubiak, who, as always, had stayed with the machine the previous evening in order to inspect the motor and to keep an eye on the local mechanics who were filling the tanks. After finishing his work, he was taken to a hotel where he was served a tasty and filling dinner.

AUGUST 30, OMSK - KRASNOYARSK, 1,300 KM - 7 HOURS

A beautiful, clear sky led us to believe we would have a nice flight to Krasnoyarsk²⁴. Judging from the weather bulletin, we were supposed to have a tail wind.

After a good, easy take-off, I started to gain altitude right away, setting a course for Krasnoyarsk. After 20 minutes, we were at over 1,500 meters and already a fair distance from Omsk. Below us was an endless and treeless plain, dotted with lakes and their surrounding swamps. Flocks of cranes, swans, geese and ducks flew over the swamps, frightened by the sight of an unknown, large bird, which also gave off an unknown, steady drone. In the drier areas, we noticed large herds of cattle and a lot of sheep.

We were approaching Novosibirsk (formerly Novonikolajewsk). Ahead a dark-blue band appeared on the horizon. We were approaching the Siberian taiga. We passed Novosibirsk a few kilometers off to the right. At first there were just small forested areas, but after several minutes, a boundless sea of forest filled our whole field of vision. The undergrowth of this virgin forest had to be very thick, because together it appeared as a uniform, green-blue carpet. This blue colour was probably the reflection of a perfectly blue sky. From time to time, we could see human settlements. However, I could not see the roads that connected them. I think that the crowns of the forest trees hid them jealously with their natural "camouflage." After a few hours of flying, the forest began to thin out and the area became much hillier.

Our third stage was coming to an end. We saw a small city, lying on the great Yenisei River, one of the largest in Siberia. The river separated the air field, which was located on its eastern shore, from the city which was on the west side. The runway, on which we were about to land, was long and narrow, with a hangar halfway down its length. We landed smoothly, although somewhat sideways, because the easterly winds created conditions for "landing with a side wind."

Getting to the city required a rather complicated journey across the Yenisei River. The car assigned for our use by the local military authorities, picked me up at the air field (Kubiak - understandably - remained temporarily with the machine), and took me to the ferry, about a kilometer away. Here we crowded onto a shaky pier along with the carts of local farmers who had brought their goods from the kolkhoz for tomorrow's market. We sailed across to a large island, over which we drove our vehicle in order to drive onto another ferry, which finally dropped us off at the dock in Krasnoyarsk.

I noticed at the outset that few streets were paved and had curbs, and that our car was often up to its axles in sand.

Please do not forget Dear Reader, that this took place fifty "plus" years ago and that my beloved niece, who teaches young people at the University in Wroclaw, wrote to me two years ago to tell me that she had traveled our 1926 route to Irkutsk. on the

²⁴ Krasnoyarsk is a city and the administrative center of Krasnoyarsk Krai, Russia, located on the Yenisei River. It is the third largest city in Siberia after Novosibirsk and Omsk, with a population of 1,035,528 as of the 2010 Census.

Polish jet plane "Chopin" and that the streets of all Siberian cities are now paved with asphalt. But let us now return to what and how it was 51 years ago.

The attentive secretary of the *Awiachim* invited me to dinner in a restaurant in the city park. Caviar, vodka, etc. - all fresh and tasty.

AUGUST 31, KRASNOYARSK - CHITA, 1,620 KM., 9 HOURS, 30 MIN.

Seeing a car in Krasnoyarsk created a great deal of interest at that time. We were not surprised, when leaving the hotel with Kubiak, that a large crowd of onlookers had gathered and were curiously watching the old clunker that was waiting for us, about half an hour late, and whose old-world parts were shaking all over.

We scrambled into the car and slowly made our way to the airport. Driving down to the ferry, we were startled by a loud noise coming from the rear followed by a sudden shift of the rear end of our grand old car to the right, which indicated that the right rear tire had "gone flat." The chauffeur officially informed the secretary of the "*Awiachim*" who was riding with us, about the flat tire. It's good that he got on it right away because our nerves would not have been able to handle it otherwise. Immediately he received an order to get onto the ferry, where there would be enough time to change the tire.

We made it to the island successfully and drove to the other side on the sandy road without any further incidents. Ferry number two was waiting for us at the eastern end of the road. The wind was quite strong and gusty. I saw how much effort and skill our "captain" had to put into getting our flat boat successfully to the safety of the other shore. Immediately after driving out onto hard ground, a second tire blew with a bang. This time it was the front left wheel!

This time we didn't wait for a formal report from the chauffeur. We grabbed our suitcases and ran to the plane. We were over an hour late and the next stage was not going to be a short one.

The machine was ready to go. A few soldiers with an NCO in charge, stood by, waiting for instructions. Because the wind was strong and gusty, I suggested - in Russian of course - that two men walk the plane to the start, holding it by its lower plates.

After taking our seats and belting in, we started the engine to warm it up a bit before takeoff. After a short test, we taxied slowly to the end of the long run way.

I set up the machine for take off, with a slight correction towards the left, to counteract the pressure from the easterly wind, while waving my hand at our "helpers" to let go of the wings.

Opening the throttle very slowly, we started off.

The first and main objective in this delicate process, with such a heavily loaded machine, was to maintain the takeoff direction until reaching the required speed, so that the pressure on the rudder would enable the "tail" of the machine to rise. Those critical seconds passed successfully, and slowly pushing the stick forward, I lifted the tail of the

plane off the ground. Everything went well and we were in the air by the time we reached the end of the field. With a gentle turn to the right, I set a course for Chita.

Once again, the taiga under us gave way to the forest of which had no end. In those days when flying over such rough terrain, one tried not to think about what would happen, if the engine suddenly quit.

In order to shorten our route, I quite often left the Trans-Siberian railway line. This is what I did now, and as a result we passed by Irkutsk, being almost two hundred kilometers to the north, while we flew over the terrifying yet beautiful, wild and mountainous forests.

We were approaching Baikal. The Baikal canyon cut across our path. Commonly called a lake, it was 600 km long and in places up to 60 km wide, with a depth of up to 3,500 meters. Lying amidst very mountainous and wild terrain, the surface of its water around 1,000 meters above sea level. This colossal reservoir sends its outflow to the south, beginning with the unusually useful and navigable Angara River, with the city of Irkutsk settled above it, which is well-known to us Poles, thanks to our history of resistance and the struggle of our nation against the tsar.

Irkutsk²⁵ has a special place in my memory: on the return trip from Japan, due to unfavorable weather conditions, I had to land in Irkutsk and spend the night there. After returning to Warsaw, I was summoned in the company of Colonel Ludomił Rayski to the Belvedere Palace to face the imposing and at the same time friendly face of Marshal Józef Piłsudski, since I had to deliver a letter to him from his friend in Japan. While saying goodbye, the Marshal addressed me in these words:

"I read the reports from your flight. It turns out that you stayed overnight in Irkutsk. How are things there now, is there pavement now? When I was there, I was wading up to my ankles in the mud." And giving me a farewell handshake, he added: "Thank you, my son."

We flew across Lake Baikal relatively close to the water, although the altimeter, set before the takeoff from Krasnoyarsk at "zero," now indicated 1,300 meters. So that the actual height above the water was only 300 meters. But taking into account the depth of the canyon, in the place where we crossed it, it amounted to about 3,000 meters, while our actual height, in relation to the mainland (in this case the bottom of the lake), was 3,300 meters. Not bad for a poor "canyon," filled with water.

We reached the east bank of Lake Baikal at the mouth of the Uda River. Below us were very wild forests, rocks and cliffs. It was amazing. I decided to get out of this dangerous area, as soon as possible and leaving the train track for a while, I set a cross-country course for Verkhneudinsk, which was a little over 200 km away.

We completed this flight in just over an hour, ending up right over our target.

Seen from above, the town was not very impressive. We flew over it quickly and once again there was a wild forest below us. Next, we found ourselves over a large fire on the taiga. The smell of the burning pine was quite intense, and although we were at

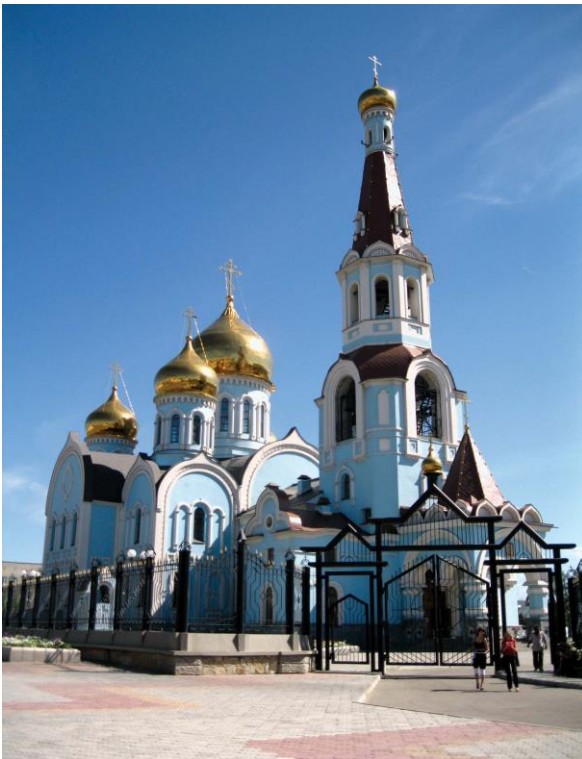
²⁵ Irkutsk is a city and the administrative center of Irkutsk Oblast, Russia, and one of the largest cities in Siberia. Population: 587,891 (2010 Census).

an altitude of about a thousand meters, it was hot and there was some turbulence. I was glad when this vision of hell, seen from on high, was behind us.

A few hundred kilometers before Chita, we reconnected with the railway track.

Having the railway track "under your belt," in those days, could be compared to having a good homing signal in today's systems of air navigation. I followed the track all the way to Chita.

Chita was a city bathed in the rays of the setting sun, full of parks and gardens, with a majestic old "Orthodox Church" at the centre. This was Chita, or the "Kiev of Siberia" as referred to by some.²⁶



The "Orthodox Church" in Chita

At the air field they were anxiously waiting for us. A large group of aviators from the local air force unit ("*Aviacionnyj Otriad*"), surrounded us immediately and in a very cordial and sincerely friendly manner, expressed their surprise and admiration for us for having flown such a long stage without landing. At that time, a 500-kilometer flight without landing was considered to be very long.

One of the mechanics in the unit immediately declared, loud and clear, that he was a Pole by descent. His grandfather (apparently) was an insurgent from Podlasie and came from the Biała area. He died here in Siberia as an exile. The name of the sergeant-mechanic was Zygmunt. Surnames - I don't always remember. Anyway, we'll meet him again on our way back from Tokyo.

²⁶ Chita is a city and the administrative center of Zabaykalsky Krai, Russia, located at the confluence of the Chita and Ingoda Rivers and on the Trans-Siberian Railway, 900 kilometers (560 mi) east of Irkutsk. Population: 324,444 (2010 Census).

A few of the pilots, headed by the leader of their unit, drove me in an old but decent Packard, to the city, to the hotel. Kubiak was taken care of by a specially assigned officer from a technical unit. He promised that after servicing the machine and filling the tanks, he would bring him to the hotel.

As I was leaving, I noticed that "Żygmond" (as his Russian colleagues called him) and a few other mechanics, went to work with great enthusiasm to help Kubiak.

I asked my fellow pilots to stop at the Chinese consulate on our way to the hotel. It was essential that I immediately obtain, for the sake of tomorrow's early departure to Harbin, permission to enter and leave, as well as to fly over Manchuria. I couldn't get this document in Warsaw because the Chinese did not have a diplomatic post in our capital. I explained it all to my hosts - the pilots.

The commander made an immediate decision: we would drive to the hotel, where they would all stay, and wait for my return from the Chinese consulate. The chauffeur was going to drive me there right away.

I was very kindly received at the consulate. The consul, to whom I apologized right away for my "working" and informal appearance, invited me into his office, where in Russian, I explained the situation to him. He dictated a letter of recommendation to his secretary for Harbin and one as a permit for the possession of weapons and ammunition. He also promised that he would telegraph the authorities in Harbin, asking them to prepare a similar document which would permit us to fly over the southern border to Korea. I thanked the consul very much and after drinking a glass of excellent, cool tea with lemon ... I said goodbye to him. 10 minutes later I was at the door of my hotel "Zabaikalie."

In a fairly large and decently furnished lobby, a few pilot-officers were sitting, drinking beer.

„Nu czto... poruczyk... żywy wy i cety?" (Well, Lieutenant, are you still alive and in one piece?)

„Kitajec was nie ukusił? (Did the Chinaman not bite you?) The squad leader asked, laughing.

„Oni nas nie lubiat," (They don't like us), he added in a more serious tone.

And indeed, relations between Russia and China were, as indeed they are today, tense.

„Komandir Otriada" (unit commander), whose name was Nikolai Poszechonov and with whom we had to agree and unquestionably confirm that in 1920, near Borisov, he had engaged in air combat with second lieutenant Stefan Pawlikowski²⁷, and later he stated in a tone of voice that would not broach any discussion that a hot bath had been prepared for me upstairs and that if I needed a clean shirt, he would get me one in a flash.

I thanked him for the shirt. I still had one more in reserve.

But the hot bath was received „s blagodarstwijem" (with thanks).

²⁷ Colonel-Pilot Stefan Pawlikowski, a fighter pilot, died in a combat flight, shot down over France during World War II.

I promised that I would be back in half an hour and ran upstairs for the much-needed bath. In the meantime, Kubiak, after finishing his "rituals" with the machine, arrived at the hotel and was also put in a bathtub.

Well after eight o'clock, we were invited into a spacious hall, in which about twenty young men, with blue stripes and wings on their collars (There were no shoulder chevrons "*pagonow*" at that time in soviet aviation) were waiting for us, and showed us their admiration with enthusiastic applause.

A long table was filled with carafes of vodka and with all sorts of appetizers.

"*Milosti prosim (Welcome guests)*," said Poszechonow to the gathering and with a broad wave, he showed me to a seat in the middle of the table, while he took the place on my left and on his left, he seated Kubiak.

After we were seated, the rest of the Cossacks of the Air Force took their seats at the table.

I will not dwell here on the hospitality of our hosts and the number of gifts of God which we ate and drank. However, I must say that when we had to "get away" from the hospitality of these airmen, so as to get at least a few hours of sleep before tomorrow's flight, I was rather sorry that the Chinese Consul had not found a reason to detain us here until tomorrow.

It was only, I have to admit, a momentary weakness of an "Old Pole" brought about by the drinks and the good company.²⁸

SEPTEMBER 1, CHITA-HARBIN, 1,200 KM. 7 HOURS, 15 MIN.

At seven in the morning, after five hours of sleep, we left from the airport in Chita for Harbin in Manchuria. We were wished a fond farewell by a handful of Russian pilots. "*Komandir Otriada*", Nikolai Poszechonov, was there in person. He complained about having a hangover. Apparently, after we left, they continued to toast our health until three in the morning. He slept for two hours and now was seeking a cure with aspirin and the broth from pickled cucumbers. He did not have to tell me that, since he smelled terribly of garlic, that ever so-popular and irreplaceable root - an additive in pickling cucumbers all across the East. In this atmosphere of "garlic aroma" and friendly collegial feelings, we parted from the aviators at the airport in Chita.

Contact! A short test and we were gone.

The never-ending taiga spread out before us again. After an hour and a bit, the taiga suddenly came to an end, just as suddenly as it had begun yesterday around Novosibirsk.

Only a few, isolated islands of forest remained, and then as far as the eye could see the treeless steppes took their place. After the enormous wild forests, we had just crossed, we now had endless steppes.

Shortly, after "breaking off" from the taiga, we flew over a small railway station, near a village called Byrka.

²⁸ The "Old Pole" represents the traditional image of a Pole as romantic, messianic and Sarmatian, someone who likes his drinks amid good company.

At that time, I didn't think that I would remember the word "Byrka" forever. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

Every now and again, on the endless yellow carpet of the steppe, there were the yurts of the local nomads. Paddocks with large numbers of horses and relatively small herds of cattle and sheep grazed around these temporary settlements. Having heard, somewhere-sometime, about the roaming bands of Chinese brigands, known as the Honghuzi, I at first assumed that these were those brigands and pointing them out to Kubiak with my finger, I unmistakably dragged my hand across my throat. My friend smiled bitterly. Probably because of my little, not-so-funny, joke.

It was only later that through an "accident" that I had the opportunity to learn that these were the temporary settlements of peaceful nomads, of Mongolian people, known as the Buryats.

A little further along, we saw a fairly long caravan of Buryats moving with baskets filled with their belongings to new, not yet over-grazed pastures. All of their belongings were carried by small, very strong ponies. The caravan was crossing the steppe in single file. A few riders galloped from one end of the caravan to the other. Apparently, they were in charge of organizing this long serpentine, made up of people, horses and cattle.

The steppe was as smooth as a table top. We passed a large settlement, or rather a town, called Manchuria or "*Manczuli*" as known by the Manchu. It was on the border of Russia and this area, over which in those days absolute power was exercised by the wise and warlike Chinese Marshal Chang Tso Lin (Zhang Zuolin).

After crossing the Manchurian border, the steppes stretched out for about another five hundred kilometers.

Gradually, the level and flat steppe became a little more rolling and then hilly. We flew to the ridge near the Hinggan Mountains (Khinggan Mountains). The ridge stretched out along, a thinly wooded, rather gloomy mountain range, running from north to south. I couldn't see any cliffs or rocky outcroppings. The hills had a gradual and gentle incline. Yellowing, straw-like grass covered the slopes. The mountains seemed to be lifeless. Not entirely "dead." It was here that the wild Honghuzi actually lived. From here those bloody brigands made their raids on settlements, farms and towns, sometimes travelling as far as 200 kilometers.

After flying over the Hinggan Mountains, we found ourselves above lands that gradually leveled out and as we moved out onto these flat areas, they were more densely populated, as indicated by numerous larger and smaller farms, settlements, villages and towns. Almost all of the buildings were surrounded by ramparts or clay walls. From what we could see, it looked like we were flying over the Manchurians who liked the peaceful life that agriculture gave them.

And then, we started to follow the Trans-Siberian railway track again.

On the right, we left behind the town of Qiqihar - a small, treeless walled town.

The population density continued to increase. There were more villages, but not more fields. The color of the land indicated that they had low precipitation in these parts and the lack of vegetation suggested that it was not just seasonal. Compared to

what we saw in Russia and Manchuria, people here had poorer and harder lives. The land looked like grey ash, which did not suggest a high level of fertility.

The lights of Harbin flashed suddenly in the distant haze, and in a dozen or so minutes later we were at the airport.²⁹

After landing, I steered the machine towards the large crowd gathered at the hangar. Polish colors fluttered all over the area which was filled with shouting people.

Almost the whole Polish colony in Harbin was here to greet us.

I turned off the engine. "Long life to them! Long life to them!" The entire Polish Consulate with the Consul of Poland and his wife up front, welcomed us extremely cordially on behalf of the Polish community of Harbin.

Two Chinese generals and a local police chief were also trying to welcome us.

However – our dear compatriots - did not let them get a word in. They treated us, our beloved Poles and their grey-beards, as something exclusively and uniquely theirs, something of their very "own."

The consul and his wife took me to the city in the consulate's Chrysler.

Kubiak, as usual well-rested, stayed behind with the machine accompanied by a few Polish mechanics.

The Chinese mechanics didn't have much to do, because the Poles, although they were only amateurs, were professionally employed by several Polish garages in Harbin, and they did not let the "yellow-skins" touch anything. Gasoline and lubricants were delivered from the city by a representative of an English company.

You are probably wondering Dear Reader, how it came to pass, that we were expected everywhere that we landed, and that people were waiting there, on time, at the airport to greet us. Well our system, our communication with the world, depended on the fact that I invariably sent a telegram to our legation in Moscow upon arrival at the end of each stage. Our contacts in Russia immediately telegraphed from each of our takeoff locations, using a "*srocznym sistiemom*" (end stage system), notifying the next destination as to our likely time of arrival. In addition, the press agencies gave "routine" releases to their newspapers around the world. Of course, since we were neither French nor English, the reports were concise, very short and ended up on some back page of the papers. But whoever wanted to, could read about our whereabouts.

Now let's go back to the festivities in Harbin.

In describing our landing and the enthusiasm of the Poles – the residents of Harbin, I forgot to mention that in one of the hangars a reception had been prepared "à la fourchette" at tables, laden with wonderful snacks and cakes, and all served with French champagne and home-made liquors, made by the local Polish ladies. A goose baked in clay was especially memorable. It was very good and very original.

On the way to the city, I asked the consul to put in an application as soon as possible to the local authorities for the documents that would be required for us to cross

²⁹ Harbin is the capital of Heilongjiang, China's northernmost province. The city grew in the late 19th century with the influx of Russian engineers constructing the eastern leg of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. The city's Russian architecture includes its green-domed Saint Sophia Cathedral.

the Manchurian-Korean border. The Polish Consul (I don't remember his name) promised that as soon as he returned to the consulate, he would look after it.

At the consulate's polite invitation, I stayed at the Polish Consulate. Kubiak was the guest of a successful local footwear manufacturer. It seems to me that he was called Mr. Adamski, although I'm not 100 percent sure. He also undertook to go and pick up Kubiak at the airport, bring him to his suburban villa, and in the evening, to bring my companion to the "Polish Home" for a formal reception.

And that is what happened. About 200 people from the local "cream of society" came out to the reception.

Despite being very tired, I had to talk about Poland for an hour and a half: how things are and how we live and work there.

The patriotism of these people and their children, despite the fact that they were eight thousand kilometers away from the land of their ancestors, was worthy of the highest praise. I was very proud of these unforgettable moments of national expression.

The reception (banquet) and dances, began with a traditional polonaise, and stretched out until after midnight. I actually only saw Harbin from the air as we arrived at the airport from Chita. I devoted almost all my time, except for sleeping, to visiting with the local Poles.

Oh, and I had forgotten that the document, authorizing me and Kubiak to leave Manchuria and cross its southern border, on the way to Korea, was delivered to the hall by a special messenger, during our noisy party.

I scheduled our takeoff for eleven in the morning of the following day.

After all, at some point I had to get a little sleep. I left the nice "English-style" party by one o'clock in the morning. I was in a comfortable "French" bed in the hospitable home of the representative of the Republic and his charming lady.

As I was falling asleep, I thought about the beauty of the many nice, shapely and pretty Polish women whom I had met at the party. It's no wonder that I didn't dream about airplanes that night. When I left the hall, Kubiak stayed behind. I saw him enthusiastically demonstrating the proper way to dance the "under arm Poznan" to a charming golden-haired lady. Kubiak, this tough man from Poznan, needed very little sleep at our stops along the way. He was almost always well-rested when he got out of the machine after each landing.

At eight in the morning, a nimble and beautiful maid, in a black dress, a white apron and an elaborate cap on her shapely head, brought me a sumptuous breakfast to bed, and whispered that: "The consul's wife is still asleep, and the consul took his horse for a morning gallop and won't be back for an hour."

Oh, where are you today, my wonderful lady, are you still alive? And if so, how many grandchildren and great grandchildren do you have, o passionate patriot? ...

SEPTEMBER 2, HARBIN - MUKDEN, 500 KM, 3 HOURS, 30 MIN.

It's ten-thirty. I arrived at the airport. The crowd appeared to be larger than yesterday. There were probably over a thousand people.

Everyone wanted to exchange even a few words with us or just to shake our hands. Sadly, we had to throw most of the flowers off of the plane as there were just too many.

We witnessed an unusual thing here. There was a certain elderly lady, known to all of Polonia in Harbin for her energy combined with her goodness and humanity, and who had resided in Harbin for over 40 years. She noticed that a twelve-year old boy standing near our plane had been brutally pushed away with the butt of a gun by a Chinese soldier. Showing no fear, the Polish lady went up to the Chinese soldier and, spoke to him briefly, and slapped him across his cheek. Justice had been done. The "Chinaman's" mouth was still hanging open with a sheepish look on his face as we began our takeoff.

I flew around the airport after taking off and set a southern course, flying low over the onlookers. I wanted the silhouette of a Polish aircraft to remain in their memories for a long time.

A few years ago, I met a gentleman here in Toronto who, as a twelve-year-old boy, was with his parents at the airport in Harbin on September 2, 1926. He told me honestly and with emotion that even now, after nearly fifty years, he can still see me, Kubiak and our Breguet as if it were yesterday. Time flies by so quickly...

Our route south was covered with the "*fanzi*" (houses) of the Chinese. It was monotonous and quite gloomy. Mukden was off to our right. We were fast approaching the Korean border. As we approached the mountains, the weather began to deteriorate. Heavy, navy-gray clouds piled up threateningly. After quickly assessing our situation and since it was about a three hundred kilometers flight to Seoul (Yeouido Airport), I didn't want to risk going above the clouds in case I missed Seoul and ended up somewhere over the Chinese or Japanese sea. I didn't know the directions of the upper winds. Missing Seoul could be a serious problem and I had to see some landmarks.

So, I started to descend, to try and reach Seoul through the valleys. Suddenly, it became very dark.

The mountains here did not exceed a height of 1,500 metres. They were heavily forested and were cut by deep valleys and ravines. Now, the tops of the mountains were hidden in clouds, so I hoped to get lucky and find a way to get to their other side by going through the valleys.

After a few attempts, however, and after one near miss in which a fairly narrow valley suddenly "ended," so that I had to make a 180-degree turn and almost hit the tops of the trees, I decided to turn back to Mukden and wait for better weather there.

It was nice to see the sun after getting out of the dark and gloomy labyrinths. It was not very far to Mukden, so after an hour and a bit we were circling the dry grass of the Mukden airport.³⁰

We were given a friendly, albeit astonished, welcome at the airport, because no one was expecting a Polish military plane to land. It turned out, however, that planes

³⁰ Shenyang, formerly known by its Manchu name Mukden or Fengtian is the provincial capital and the largest city of Liaoning Province, People's Republic of China, as well as the largest city in Northeast China by urban population.

from Europe were nothing new. As the local "White" Russians, whom I met at the airport wearing Chinese military uniforms, told me, in the next hangar was a very special Breguet XIX TR "Bidon" belonging to French Aviation Captain Pelletier D'Oisy,³¹ who had landed in Mukden two weeks earlier, and was unable to continue on to Tokyo due to the bad weather conditions. They had left their "Special Plane" with Engineer Carroll and taken the Trans-Siberian railway back to Paris. Engineer Carroll was one of the developers of the Lorraine-Dietrich engine.

Kubiak, without wasting any time, set about checking the engine. After a few minutes, he climbed down the ladder and came up to me and showed me some water in his scooped "hand". "It's from the carburetor, from the filter," he said. Aha, now we know why our "Omega" had coughed ominously several times as we blundered through the North Korean ravines.

Kubiak did not want to risk it. He asked our Chinese hosts for iron "drums" into which he emptied all the tanks on our machine.

In about an hour, the tanks were filled with the same fuel, which had been carefully passed through a double chamois filter.

Mukden, as seen very briefly while traveling from the airport to the hotel, did not impress me with either its architecture or its neatness. After reporting to the local garrison, where a sweaty, fat colonel, the commander of the garrison (or perhaps the city commander) let me have it (luckily in Chinese). He was very angry that we had landed in his territory, not having obtained his permission in advance. He calmed down a bit, only when, with the help of an interpreter, a "White" Russian officer, I explained to him that I would not have committed this offense if the weather conditions had allowed me to cross the Yalu River.

In a quieter tone, a further (translated) conversation took place, ending with him promising to give me the required permission for tomorrow's flight to Seoul and a good night's rest at a designated hotel.

It was a German hotel, with good beer, "*sauerkraftern, lieberwurstern*" and other specialties, which reminded the rather rotund owner of his distant "*Vaterland*."

Here, Kubiak, with his fluent German, felt right at home.

SEPTEMBER 3, MUKDEN - SEOUL (YEOUIDO), 400 KM. 2 HOURS, 40 MIN.

After less than two hours, flying over the same territory that we had flown yesterday, we crossed the Manchurian-Korean border for the second time in 24 hours. The weather was good. A light wind from the west carried us somewhat in the direction of the Sea of Japan. The visibility was good, so that my humble navigational skills corrected this wind effect without much difficulty.

The Korean mountains looked much friendlier than those yesterday. Korean villages nestled on the steep slopes. On the shores of the Chinese Sea (Yellow),

³¹ Capitaine Georges Pelletier d'Oisy (1892–1953) was a French aviator and World War I ace. He attempted a circumnavigation of the world in 1924. Pelletier d'Oisy began his aviation career as a World War I flying ace credited with five aerial victories.

mountains - in several places - had risen steeply, leaving small islands among the foamy sea, inhabited only by birds. It was difficult to see any roads. On the other hand, between the mostly stunted vegetation, a whole system of paths arranged in serpentine on the slopes of the mountains, were clearly visible.

I suddenly realized that we had actually already reached the Pacific Ocean. A great story. Two Polish "sputniks" had traveled all this way.

In Yeouido (next to the hangars) a large, white tent had been set up, visible from a distance, as we approached our destination. Two large banners, Polish and Japanese, were flying over the tent.

After landing, a green rocket let us know the direction in which we were to taxi.

We stopped in front of the white tent. I turned the engine off.

An air force honor guard, standing in a double row and a large group of civilians, awaited our arrival. We jumped down from our machine. At the head of the small group of local dignitaries who came to greet us was a general, the commander of the local military district.

The general spoke to us in Japanese. When he finished, a young officer, apparently his adjutant, because he had "epaulettes" on his uniform, repeated the speech, greeting us in French. We stood at attention. Fortunately, the speech was short and concise. Photographers from the press surrounded us, performing their professional impieties and immortalizing our incredible selves for posterity and history. We were tired and totally worn out.

They took us to the officers' casino at the airport. Before entering the casino, one of the officers turned to me and in French asked us to take off our shoes. Bearing in mind that I might lose the only pair of shoes that I had with me, I did so reluctantly. Noticing, however, that even the Japanese officers were taking off their high, military boots, I winked at Kubiak with the words: "I guess that we can take off our slippers." We were under the watchful eyes of the very polite and hospitable sons of Nippon, who had a very precise and traditional approach to life. We had to stick to their etiquette and customs.

I thought that they would return my "*meszty*" (shoes) as we were leaving. It turned out somewhat differently. After lunch, in the officers' mess, one of the young officers came up to me with my polished boots and kneeling next to me, offered through gestures to put on my shoes and lace them up, if I wanted them back on my feet. This gesture by the young officer was not a manifestation of servility, rather it was a demonstration of extraordinary courtesy towards a guest. After finishing the meal, they took me (in my shoes) to the city and to the hotel.

Kubiak, as usual, stayed behind to get our Nineteen ready for the last stage, Seoul - Tokyo.

We drove to the hotel with an air force major in a military car. The road from Yeouido ran through downtown Seoul. What a difference in comparison to the streets of Mukden. Wide, clean streets, large neat houses, rich shops with large displays. Full electrification, including for public transit.

In the evening there was a banquet given in our honor by the Mayor of Seoul. Ladies gave us flowers. The mood was very good and exceedingly cordial.

The reader no doubt wonders, how Kubiak and I, not having brought "tuxedos," and shirts with starched collars managed to comply with the locally accepted social dress etiquette.

As it was, in cases when the official reception required from mere mortals proper evening attire, that is what in the English world is referred to as "black tie" we were quietly informed by our hospitable and understanding hosts that by special dispensation we were exempted from this social requirement.

On our part, in order to look as presentable as possible, we immediately handed our crumpled clothes to the hotel for a quick cleaning and ironing, shoes for cleaning and polishing, and of course we always tried to have one clean shirt in reserve.

For example, in Harbin, those lovely ladies - Polish women, washed and dried two shirts overnight, drying them with irons normally used for ironing (electric driers were not yet available). We had given the shirts to them that evening hoping that they could wash them for us.

Returning now, after that brief digression, to the reception organized for us by the Mayor of Seoul, I have to admit with regret that a lovely evening was somewhat spoiled for us by the news about tomorrow's weather, which was provided to me regularly every two hours by the local meteorologists.

When we returned to the hotel from the reception, I received another message that was completely distressing: a wide front was heading towards the Japanese Islands from off the ocean, including heavy rainfall and winds exceeding 100 km per hour. In other words - a "typhoon."

At 5 in the morning, the head of the meteorological station himself arrived at my hotel. Three flight officers accompanied him.

I was in bed when the *Maitre d'Hotel* brought these sad-looking gentlemen to my room.

At first, coming out of a deep sleep, I thought that I was in trouble and that I was being arrested.

The head of meteorology gave his report: it was impossible to fly to Tokyo today. The typhoon was raging over Japan.

I was angry and disappointed. I was mentally very ready for this last stage. However, there was no way to change this reality.

After my sad guests left, I rolled over on my other side and fell asleep asking that I not be disturbed until nine o'clock.

After a good shower and shave, I went down at nine thirty.

In the vestibule sat two stiff men with sabres and high boots with spurs. They rose when I entered and introduced themselves. The senior man was a major from the garrison headquarters. The younger was a lieutenant, an assistant to the major. Both had the great pleasure of being assigned to my disposal, for the full day and evening.

A military car with a chauffeur at the wheel stood in front of the hotel. Before we got into the car, the major told me in Russian that my companion at his request had

been taken by representatives of the air force to the airport in Yeouido, where he would be looked after by air force sergeants all day, and in the evening he would be returned to the hotel. "*Pieron*" wanted to be close to his "Omega."

The weather was nice and sunny. It was warm but not hot, with a slight south-west wind. And to think that at that very moment, a few hundred kilometers away to the south-west a storm was raging in which no plane could fly.

We got into the car. I gave myself completely over to my handlers. They, on their part, trying to get me out of my bad mood, decided to show me everything that they thought was worth seeing in the famous city of Seoul.

At first, taking into account my current mental state and wanting to save me from any other shocks, the Major/Psychologist decided that we should visit a 1,000-year-old Korean cemetery. The ancient tombs that I saw there were hidden in the shadow of stunted trees. The knowledge and work of the patient gardeners provided some very interesting, original and wonderful results. There were dwarf trees the like of which I had never seen before.

After visiting a Korean village, where I witnessed the "everyday" life of Koreans," I was taken for something very different and intended to lift my spirits, to the Korean "Geisha" Academy, which are here called "*Kisaeng*."

These ladies turned out to be lovely, young and mostly pretty beings. The lady in charge of this academy knew in advance of our visit, forewarned by our hosts over the phone. Traditional tea with biscuits was waiting for us, served on very tasteful and impeccably clean, short lacquered tables.

We sat on pillows, on a floor covered with a lovely carpet of plaited sea grass, each of us at a separate table and each, very ceremoniously, following the strictest rules of tradition, were served and entertained through conversation by our specially assigned "*Kisaeng*."

After completing the rite of the tea service and tasting the lovely cakes that looked like marzipan but were made from broad beans (the taste did not appeal to me, unfortunately), we said goodbye to our charming hostesses, using today's ever-so-popular word "sayonara", and we returned to the hotel.

We spent the evening at the local theater, which was filled to capacity by the local public, who took a lively interest in the proceedings. I must say that my companions, the major and the lieutenant, were dressed for the occasion in dark silk kimonos, and that we rode in four "rickshaws" from the hotel to the theater and back.³²

After returning from the theater, I received the weather forecast for the route for our flight to Tokyo. The typhoon with the entire low system which accompanied it, was moving quickly to the northwest, over the Chinese Sea and good weather was expected for tomorrow along our entire route, with high ceilings, no precipitation and weak winds.

³² A rickshaw is a light two-wheeled hooded vehicle, with two short drawbars, drawn by one man.

I scheduled our takeoff for seven in the morning. The officers who had accompanied me went for a well-deserved rest, after telephoning to ensure transport and support for us for tomorrow, which was to be provided by the air force.

Kubiak, who had been brought by the non-commissioned officer-pilots to the hotel earlier, was already sleeping like a baby in his room. I asked for a five o'clock wake-up call.

It was very humid. I slid under the mosquito net surrounding my bed. It was hard to sleep. There had been too many new experiences and emotions. Tomorrow - the last "hop" to Tokyo and the end of our Great Journey. I fell asleep.

**SEPTEMBER 5, SEOUL (YEOUIDO) - TOKYO (TOKOROZAWA)
1,600 KM. 9 HOURS, 10 MIN.**

A small man in a white coat, was standing over me with an out-stretched hand and grinning.

I guessed it was five and time to get up.

I jumped into the cold shower, which instantly revived my spirits and my wish to continue to fight against the hardships of life. I have to admit that I was already a bit tired. It was not so much the flight itself, as it was those nice, friendly obligations on land.

Two officers from the air force were waiting for us in the hall, when, Kubiak and I, like two prima-donnas came down at 6 o'clock.

Everything was ready at the airport. Several military men escorted us and wished us farewell. Yesterday's guardians from the army, the major and the lieutenant said goodbye to me as if we had known each other all our lives. Kubiak was seen off by a whole group of aviation sergeants.

We started off at six fifty. For the first 500 kilometers we flew over the mountainous land of the Korean peninsula. The weather was sunny with minimal cloud cover and a quite strong westerly wind. The sea glistened. We did not have much water to fly over. About 230 km. We flew at an altitude of a thousand meters.

When we left the Korean shoreline, I looked at the foaming, celadon-blue, rough waves and I thought to myself that the beauty and the terrible power of nature can not be matched. To the right we had the island of Tsushima.

Here in 1905, the Russian fleet under Admiral Zinovy Rozhdestvensky, who came here from the far away Baltic, was completely destroyed and sunk by the Japanese. This proud, "Lord of the Sea" of the Tsar, brought his fleet around the Cape of Good Hope and through the Indian Ocean, to meet its fate.

We reached the shores of Japan as planned. Forty kilometers north of Hiroshima. We flew over the sea for an hour and forty minutes.

I looked at the land of the Rising Sun. It did not look particularly fertile, or at least not this place which we first reach land. We saw ranges of low hills covered with dense vegetation in every direction. At least that's the way it was 51 years ago.

We could see the great sacred Mount Fuji Jama (or as they often call it there) - "Mount Fuji," or rather its snowy peak, protruding above the earthly mists, from a distance of 350 km.

This snow-covered peak appeared, famous all over the world - a symbol of ancient beliefs, powerful spirits and the swords of the samurai - majestically showing itself to us above the clouds against an unblemished blue sky. We were at an altitude of 4,500 meters when we made our first lap around it and more than two hours had elapsed. The three laps which I made were our tribute to the land and nation where we would be guests for the next few days.

There were still 160 kilometers to go to Tokyo.

We were now flying over a completely industrialized area. I started to descend from Fuji. Now, flying over the 2,000 metres high Hakone hills, we met two "Salmson" type, French military planes. As we later learned, this flight was sponsored by a large cash donation to the air force, by Japan's largest newspaper concern, "Osaka Asahi Shimbun."

Here we ran into a small misunderstanding. Not knowing exactly, or actually, having confused the names, I chose the wrong airport for the landing, which also happened to be on our route. It was Tachikawa Airfield.

I was surprised that while circling the airport, one of the airmen flying along side, came up close to us, and waved his hand at us. I took this as a friendly greeting, after which both machines flew north.

We were also surprised by the complete emptiness at the airport. Did they not expect us today? After our landing, a few people in coveralls ran up to us from the hangar. They were in military caps. One of them caught our left wing and struggling with it with great effort, tried to turn us around. I stopped the Breguet. The soldier ran up to the plane and waving his arms, began to point north in the direction in which the two accompanying "press" airplanes had flown. I began to realize, through the slow processes of my inquisitive brain, which was never a big help, that I had landed at the wrong airport. Turning around, I started on a "360" degree course change. In about ten minutes, we landed in Tokorozawa - the final destination of our one-way journey from Warsaw to Tokyo.

It's difficult for me to describe all the details of the reception we had in Tokyo. I will provide only the program of our stay, meticulously developed long before our arrival by the appropriately named "Reception Committee for Polish Aviators."

Our tireless "Nineteen" remained under the careful care of Japanese mechanics at the airport, looked over with all the care and respect required for a well-deserved rest in a giant cement hangar, while awaiting dismantling and the return journey by rail to the Homeland.

What a humiliation and disgrace for our faithful machine!

Kubiak and I, during the few days of our stay in the capital of Japan, took upon ourselves the proud duties of representing, not only aviation, but also the Polish nation.

We represented the splendor of the Polish Commonwealth.

After landing at Tokorozawa airport on the afternoon of September 5, 1926, we stood in front of the friendly descendants of a tribe of brave samurai, beautiful and feminine Japanese women with blooming cherry blossoms, irises and chrysanthemums.

Artillery Colonel, Waclaw Jędrzejewicz, later the Minister of Education in the Polish Government, met us first, dressed in his service uniform. At that time, he fulfilled the duties and responsibilities of Attaché Militaire at the Polish Legation in Tokyo. We were also met by the Mayor of Tokorozawa, a large group of aviation officers, a few hundred civilians and a group of children from Tokorozawa and neighboring towns, not counting a train full of little aviation enthusiasts who came from Tokyo. (Tokorozawa was quite far from the city proper – Tokyo, which was about 25 km away. Do not forget dear reader, that it was 52 years ago.) The group of children, as we were informed, had been gathering here since noon. Children, lined up with Polish flags, fluttering with distinct Polish colors, were yelling at the top of their voices: "Banzai, Banzai!" We marched in front of this forest of black, all "square" cut" shaved heads, with huge bouquets in our hands.³³

But let's get back to the first moments after landing.

After getting out of our cockpits and jumping down onto the Japanese grass, we stretched out our stiffened limbs. After all, sitting still for more than nine hours with great mental intensity, can cause fatigue, even in young and resilient physical bodies.

The monotonous noise of the engine, which despite the cotton wool in our ears and our "balaclavas", also has a major effect when you fly in an open cockpit airplane.

After we removed our coveralls, a presentation ceremony took place. Apart from the Mayor of Tokorozawa, the children, and the civilian crowd which I mentioned previously, there were, of course, representatives of the Polish colony at the airport, mostly people belonging to the members and families of the staff of the Polish Legation and Consulate. The Royal Air Society³⁴ was represented by several gentlemen, and the city of Tokyo, or rather the city council was represented by two or three "city fathers."

At the officers' casino, where we had our belated breakfast, we were presented with beautiful gifts: from the city of Tokorozawa - beautifully made dolls, and silk art of the highest quality from the province of Saitama Prefecture in which Tokorozawa is found.

After breakfast, Colonel Jędrzejewicz took us to Tokyo. The entire 25-kilometer road was even then partially populated and built-up. You could not tell where Tokorozawa ended and where the metropolis of Tokyo began.

Even though only three years had passed, the city did not show any visible scars of the recent, devastating earthquake and subsequent terrible fires. The disaster came unexpectedly in 1923.³⁵ The fire swept through almost the entire city. People, to save

³³ For battle, samurai warriors shaved the tops of their heads, which reduced the heat under their heavy helmets, and wore their hair straight on the sides. When not wearing helmets, they pulled the side and back hair into a topknot.

³⁴ Teikoku Hiko Kyokwai

³⁵ The date was September 1, 1923, and the event was the Great Kanto Earthquake, at the time considered the worst natural disaster ever to strike quake-prone Japan. The initial jolt was followed a few minutes later by a 40-

themselves from the fire, jumped into the canals, which cut through much of the city at that time. The victims were cooked in the steam created by the hot temperature from the surrounding fire-heated air. During our visit, greater Tokyo already had 3 million inhabitants. Three times that of our Warsaw.

The roads had excellent surfaces and abundant electric lighting. There was a lot of street traffic. A car, a huge black limousine, a "Mercedes," driven by a chauffeur in livery, was made available to us for our exclusive use by the city authorities during our visit.

Large flags, both Polish and Japanese, decorated the main entrance to the hotel. Inside, in the main hall, a huge banner proclaimed: "Long live the two Polish aviators."

I handed the letters that we had brought from Warsaw to Colonel Jędrzejewicz. I sent a telegram to Warsaw, which read: "Arrivé Tokio."

We got settled in the hotel. It was called the "Imperial."³⁶ For that time, it was very modern, having being built after the earthquake and it was strengthened so that it could withstand any possible cataclysms in the future. We had a two-room apartment, self-contained and luxurious.



Imperial Hotel, Tokyo

After an hour's rest, a colonel from the Japanese general staff and a recipient of the Knight's Cross, *Virtuti Militari*, who had been decorated with this order in 1920 in Poland, drove me to the Japanese radio station. (It was Colonel Jamawaki's responsibility to take care of my modest person during my official stay in Tokyo.)³⁷

foot-high tsunami. A series of towering waves swept away thousands of people. Then came fires, roaring through the wooden houses of Yokohama and Tokyo burning everything—and everyone—in their path. The death toll would be about 140,000, including 44,000 who had sought refuge near Tokyo's Sumida River in the first few hours, only to be immolated by a freak pillar of fire known as a "dragon twist." [Information from the Smithsonian]

³⁶ The Imperial Hotel was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and the 2nd generation hotel opened on September 1, 1923, the day of the Great Kanto earthquake. The hotel included Hopi Indian inspired carpets and Prairie-style furniture.

³⁷ General Masataka Jamawaki was awarded the *Virtuti Militari* Cross, 5th Class for taking part in battles against the Soviets during the 1920 War. At the time he was a member of the Japanese Consulate in Warsaw.



General Masataka Jamawaki

The radio announcer introduced me to Japanese listeners in their native language, followed by my short speech - in Polish. Most likely those who listened to my words did not understand them. But I am sure that in the tone of my speech they sensed my intentions. The radio station director gave me a beautiful silver cup, small but intricately designed. It was lost during the war in Warsaw, along with all my other, priceless for me, collections.

The first evening in the capital of Nippon was spent with our reception committee at the Imperial.

The next day was set aside for resting. We used it to visit the city. Not many Europeans were seen on the streets of Tokyo at that time. We were a sensation everywhere we went. The press with their pencils and notepads did not give us any peace. They kept at us the whole time, at our heels, those persistent seekers of news.

For example, I bought a hat, just like the "canotier" or "boater" à la Maurice Chevalier. And the sensational news on the front page was "Polish aviator in search of a hat had a lot of difficulties because of his big head." This was accompanied by my photograph with a stiff straw hat on my head.

In several newspapers, there were quite long articles about Poland with photographs of President Ignacy Mościcki and Marshal Piłsudski, who was quite well-known and popular in Japan at the time.

In the afternoon, Kubiak went with his "cicerone" (guide), a major aviation engineer at the airport, to carry out a thorough inspection of our machine. I waited for a response from Warsaw from Colonel Rayski to my telegram request for permission to return to Poland, not on the Trans-Siberian courier, but on our old "Nineteen."

I was sure he would leave this matter up to me.

And that is what happened. On the third day of our stay in Tokyo, there was a message from the Chief which read as follows: "Seriously consider the possibility of returning by plane. Do not take any unnecessary risks. I'm authorizing the return flight." I was very pleased.

We were officially informed through our delegation that we were awarded gold medals by the Imperial Aviation Society for the first flight ever from Seoul to Tokyo.

The presentation would take place at a special audience in the palace of Prince Kuni, the patron of this organization.³⁸

Taking advantage of the few free hours which I had and accompanied by Colonel Jędrzejewicz and Colonel Jamawaki, I visited the temple of Meiji (the Shinto shrine Meiji jingū), paying tribute to the remains of the late Emperor Meiji (Mutsuhito), at his stark, massive mausoleum. The chief priest of the temple, named Ichinoe, a former general and heroic participant in the siege of the Port Arthur fortress in 1905, acting as our guide and interpreter.

We spent the evening of that day privately in the hospitable home of Waclaw Jędrzejewicz.³⁹

We devoted September 7th (from early morning) to official visits. The first audience was held with the Minister of War, General Kazushige Ugaki.⁴⁰



General Kazushige Ugaki

After half an hour of conversation in his elegant but modestly furnished office, the minister handed us the medals of the "Order of the Rising Sun." I used the word "handed" because as we were dressed in civilian clothes, the formal ceremony of "being decorated" in the literal sense could not take place.

It was a great distinction for us to receive the VI and VII class of this order respectively. First, as a mere lieutenant, I received a medal class reserved for the ranks from major up in the Japanese army. While, Kubiak as a sergeant, received a medal class normally reserved for officers from lieutenant up in the Japanese army. That was how it was then. How is it today - I don't know?

³⁸ Prince Kuni Kuniyoshi (23 June 1873 – 29 June 1929) was a member of the Japanese imperial family and a Field Marshal in the Imperial Japanese Army during the Meiji and Taishō periods. He was the father of Empress Kōjun (who in turn was the consort of the Emperor Shōwa), and therefore, the maternal grandfather of the present emperor of Japan, Akihito.

³⁹ General Waclaw Jędrzejewicz was a Polish Army officer, diplomat, politician and historian, and subsequently an American college professor. He was co-founder, president, and long-time executive director of the Józef Piłsudski Institute of America.

⁴⁰ Kazushige Ugaki was a Japanese general in the Imperial Japanese Army, the 5th principal of Takushoku University, and twice Governor-General of Korea.



Orlinski's Order of the Rising Sun

The next visits were with the Minister of the Navy and with the Mayor of Tokyo.

Later that day, in the evening, and only from the outside as we were not allowed inside, we saw the house of General Nogi Maresuke, the national hero of Japan.

His tiny wooden "cottage" is worshiped by the Japanese people as a temple. The story goes as follows: after a triumphant welcome by the inhabitants of the capital, the heroic victor over the Russian army in 1905, at an audience with Emperor Mutsuhito, announced his intentions that now having fulfilled his duty as commander, he intended to commit "harakiri,"⁴¹ so that he could join his soldiers who died as a result of his orders. He could not die with them, for to command them he had to live, thus he was left behind. He now asked the monarch for his approval to commit "harakiri".

The Mikado, having listened to this humble request and its justification, gave permission to General Nogi to commit "harikiri" under one condition: he could do so only after his own (the emperor's) death. "*Befehl ist befehl* (an order is an order)," as our neighbors across the Nysa River say. Obedient to the will of the monarch, the heroic commander decided to wait.

General Nogi waited more than two years for the death of the Emperor, and after the end of the period of official mourning for his beloved Emperor, he took his own life the next day. His wife did the same – right after him and with the same knife.

⁴¹ Harikiri (happy departure) - a way of committing suicide by cutting in a horizontal line into your own abdominal cavity, which usually causes disembowelment. The above operation is usually performed with a very sharp dagger, stored as a family treasure. Such a knife is stored and wrapped in the most expensive thin silk, usually the most expensive the owner can afford. A close friend usually assists with this ceremonial suicide who at a critical moment ends the torment of the dying man, by cutting off his head with one strong, swift stroke.

I don't know if this heritage site exists today and if it is still worshiped and loved as it was then. From a balcony built specially around the house I looked through the wide windows into the interior of the room in which the tragedy was played out. On a mat of seagrass that covered the floor, two large dark spots were still clearly visible - traces of the blood of this venerable couple. I don't know who witnessed their death and who it was that offered them any friendly and final assistance.

I asked Colonel Jamawaki what he thought about this historical event. He replied in Russian: "*oni dla nas świątyje*" (They are saints for us). A laconic, short and simple answer - worthy of a man of honor.

The banquet at the Imperial Hotel, sponsored by the Minister of War, was simple and soldierly. The General was present, along with representatives of our legation, the air force and the general staff. Count Toczido, the Emperor's cousin, was a special guest. General Ugaki spoke in French. I also answered him in French, thanking him for the friendly relations with my nation and country and for the warm welcome. The military orchestra played quietly in the background performing classical music, in which the music of Chopin and Paderewski were prominent.

A reception was held at the Polish-Japanese Association, at which the letters brought by us from Warsaw were read. Here, we were presented with beautifully engraved, silver cigarette cases, ruby-rimmed, unique specimens of precision work and artistic ability.

I will not mention the other receptions, banquets and ceremonial teas at which we were feted. Also, in order to describe and enumerate the beautiful and valuable gifts that were given to us, would require several more pages to be added to my already long story.

These gifts were later sent to Warsaw in special thick crates and delivered (by the Japanese Delegation) later to Kubiak and myself. Everything I received was destroyed by the war. What fate met the gifts received by my faithful companion - I don't know.

Our plane was generally in good shape. The propeller, which had a dent in it which we had noticed in Moscow, was replaced by a new one by the Japanese.

I did not mention it earlier because I did not want to complain too much, but after landing in Moscow, we noticed a slight longitudinal crack between two layers of laminated wood on the propeller. Since there was no such propeller available along our route, and I did not want to have return home or to wait for it in Moscow, I decided to forget about it, and ordered Kubiak to check it at each stop to see whether the crack was widening. We risked it and we made it. The gap had not increased on our way to Tokyo. Now, having decided to return by flight and being able to swap the propeller for a new one, it would be foolish not to take advantage of this opportunity.

Gasoline and oil were provided by Japanese aviation. The one thing they could not deliver to us was good weather. The engine was in such good shape that Kubiak, after pressurized testing, decided it was not even necessary to change the old set of sparkplugs for new ones.

I set the start time for the return flight to Poland, for six in the morning on Wednesday, September 11th.

On Tuesday morning, i.e., the day before the start, we moved from the luxurious "Imperial" to the airport at Tokorozawa, where I lived in the officers' mess for the next several hours, while Kubiak was in the sergeant's mess.

The weather was hot and steamy in a low-pressure system. We wandered around the machine, watched our Japanese colleagues on training flights and we went out to get something to eat and then went to bed early for a good rest.

The meteorologists sent bulletins to me every few hours. It did not look good for tomorrow. The experienced Japanese pilots, when asked for advice, shook their heads, and without looking into my eyes, as if it was their fault, said that during this season, flights to Korea were generally suspended. Under similar atmospheric conditions there had been several accidents and crews had gone missing on the peninsula without a trace. But if I still was determined to go, I should not delay, because it was likely to get worse.

I ate dinner in the mess with the Japanese airmen and at nine o'clock I was in bed.

**SEPTEMBER 11, TOKYO - OSAKA, 500 KM.
(AND THANKS TO THE WEATHER), 11 HOURS**

Woken up at four, I realized that it was still completely dark.

Walking out of the Mess and looking towards the airport, I saw our plane.

It was lit up from all sides by small reflectors. It looked fantastic. It was as if it was going straight to heaven. I don't think it would go there without me. My good, faithful Breguet. Could it guess today, just how much more, terribly hard work waited ahead. There were so much distance yet to cover, just to arrive at a location only 500 kilometers away by the evening of that same day.

By 5 am, General Hori, Deputy Minister of Military Affairs, the General - Commander of the Tokyo Air Division, the Commander of the flight school, and the Mayor of the City of Tokorozawa, the same one who greeted us here less than a week ago, had arrived at the airport to say goodbye to us. There were not many of the public at the airport except for the dignitaries. However, there were several familiar faces whom I had the opportunity to meet during our memorable and pleasant visit.

The photographers mercilessly blinded us with their flashes of magnesium, as they bounced and squatted around us and the machine, at times in very peculiar ways.

Breakfast was arranged for us right next to the plane. With a glass of champagne in hand, the Deputy Minister said goodbye to us, wishing that Polish pilots would visit Japan more often in the future, where they would always be welcomed and cordially received.

Just a few dozen more, hearty handshakes, after which - we had a view of friendly faces nodding farewell from the height of our cockpits.

The engine was running well. I gave a hand signal to the ground crew - "remove the blocks from under the wheels" ... We taxied through the misty darkness of the waking day. "Sayonara!" ... "Arigato!" (Goodbye, thank you!).

After quite a long takeoff, I immediately set a course to the west. The city of Tokorozawa was still sleeping, criss-crossed with bright, illuminated streets. The gray, dark clouds and very poor visibility did not look good for the next few hours of flying. I made a correction of five degrees to the left in order to avoid the slopes of Fuji, still 150 km away and completely covered by thick clouds.

After 45 minutes in the air, I decided to try my luck and broke through the clouds. We passed through three layers of relatively thin clouds, flying out of this earthly shell, to a height of 2,500 meters.

Above us, and particularly to the right in the direction of the Sea of Japan, high, black clouds swirled in an ominous mass.

The peak of the "holy mountain" covered with eternal snow appeared for a minute in a gap between the high "stratus-nimbus clouds." A week ago, on route to Tokyo in a pure blue sky, we had circled around it. Now we had only a moment to glance at it from below and from the side. We passed by the mountain and were suddenly caught up in rapacious, navy-gray whirlpools of mist.

Beneath us silos of ground fog rose up in chimney-shaped funnels, heading up to the stratosphere. This mixture of every possible cloud formation was terrifying, yet extremely beautiful at the same time. These masses of clouds were occasionally pierced through by the intense rays of the morning sun, like fiery rapiers, creating a whole system of rainbows, indescribable in their uniqueness and beauty.

Unfortunately, we did not have much time to admire the view. We had been flying for about three hours, when north of Osaka, we encountered a huge storm, which I had to go around by shifting our course to the right.

We caught a glimpse of land only occasionally. Only through the dark and small breaks between the clouds, which did not appear very often.

These breaks in the clouds were threatening. It was dark down there, wet and very gloomy. And yet, at one point I decided to descend in order to "get a fix," as modern navigators might say.

Slowly, I began to descend and saw a break in the clouds, so very carefully I was able to get down below the clouds. On the right side we had a rocky shore. Following the contours of the shoreline, I was able to find exactly where we are on the map. I decided it was time to change the course to the north-west so that we would avoid the Isthmus of Korea (Czuszima), which was a strictly forbidden fly zone, and we would reach the coast of Korea from the south-east, that is, from the direction of the Sea of Japan.

Having set off from the shores of Japan, I was momentarily relieved at being able to fly low over the water without worrying about hitting some rocky obstacle of which there had been many on the island.

Soon, however, I was forced to forgo these idyllic-angelic meditations. At one point I saw a dark wall before us. We flew directly into the maw of a great storm. I calculated that we were already a hundred kilometers away off Japan. I decided to carry on, as we were surely almost halfway across the 240-kilometer long "isthmus" of Korea.

There was no place to escape from that which was in front of us. Perhaps we could go back. I did not want to do this. "I have to break through" - I thought.

Gray, jagged clouds, almost touching the white crests of the horribly rough sea, were moving quickly in a direction perpendicular to our course. Suddenly, we hit a wall of water. The rain was so heavy that it was impossible to distinguish the individual streams of water. With a sharp turn to the left I escaped the deluge and flying alongside it, I tried to find a "window" to the north. Several times, I thought that we would manage to break through. But every time, clouds with heavy rain forced us down towards the sea - so, taking great care not to catch a wave with a wing I retreated from this watery hell.

Three hours had passed since leaving the shores of Japan. The situation seemed hopeless. At least for today. I turned back. We were again off the coast of Japan. I started by trying to figure out where we were. After successfully determining our position, I set a course for the city of Kobe, expecting to find a place to land somewhere nearby.

"Having reconnoitred" very carefully a small patch of level terrain on the outskirts of the city, which was surrounded by trees and high-tension wires - I landed. I taxied towards a road that ran alongside the landing strip. I turned off the engine. A few people ran up to us. One of them, who spoke in German, informed me that there was no airport here in Kobe and that I would have difficulties getting fuel supplies. However, in Osaka, a distance of 50 kilometers to the west, there was a good and large military airport, as well as assistance in servicing and fuel, which we could get from the air force pilots. I thanked him. The engine started up with a touch of the starter crank and we taxied to the end of the narrow, wet field - I took off.

I have to admit that since our fuel tanks were almost empty, I flew very low over the high-tension wires. There would be no possibility of taking off from this field if our fuel tanks had been fully loaded.

After a thirty-minute flight, we landed in Osaka "the Japanese Łódź" as it was known in Poland. After taxiing to the wooden hangar and jumping down from our cockpits, we were surrounded by a group of air force men. I was surprised to see someone whom I had met in Tokyo. "Don't be so surprised to see me here, Lieutenant," he said in French. "Because of the weather conditions, the regiment commander sent me here to help you in case of a forced landing." This was a wonderful gesture from the commander of the Tokyo Air Force. "Don't worry, Osaka is a very interesting city," added Captain Omawa, since that was the name of this helpful, and experienced old-hand, "a knight of the air" (he had been a pilot for 15 years, and for six years, he carried the mail between Tokyo and Osaka).

That evening, the Polish honorary consul - Japanese, came to the hotel where we were staying. We had dinner with him, and then he suggested that we go and visit the city, asking in advance if I was a bachelor. Unfortunately, I had to say no. I was just too tired. Being in the air for at least 11 hours in those conditions leaves you with a steady hum in your head. I slept solidly that night.

The weather update for the next day which I had received just before going to bed was quite hopeless. Today's deep low would continue along the entire front. We spent September 12 in Osaka.

We spent the whole morning at the machine. After lunch - we went to the cinema. The weather forecast for the next day: over land it would be better, over the sea - it would still be bad. The low front was moving slowly to the northwest, that is, in the direction in which we were supposed to fly. I set our take-off time for the next day at 6 o'clock in the morning. At nine that evening, we were in bed.

The playful consul of the Polish Republic "Honoris Causa," did not get much satisfaction out of me as a visiting companion to the night-life of the city. Actually, the man was young and free and there would be no sin in letting loose a bit. However, I was so focused on my mission that it didn't even enter my head to have some night fun with some beautiful geishas.

**SEPTEMBER 13, OSAKA - HEIKO (GANGWON-DO, KOREA)
1,000 KM. 9 HOURS, 50 MIN.**

It was still dark when we got into the machine. Reporters and photographers with their magnesium flashes angered me, blinding us and asking us poorly-informed questions.

After carefully testing the engine, and waving goodbye to those present, we taxied to the farthest corner of the airport. The wind was coming at us from the side, from the west. The takeoff was normal, although a long one. We passed within a few meters of the top of the trees. It was 5:50. It was just turning gray.

At the same time, or rather right behind us, a military air plane took off. Its navigation lights were on. It caught up and accompanied us, flying beside us for about 20 minutes, after which the pilot waved good-bye and with a sharp bank to the right, he disappeared into the dark gray mist and rain.

We still had 220 km to go to get to the sea. Similar to the distance from Warsaw to Krakow.

Again, we had poor visibility and heavy rain. Around us the hills were covered with trees and cut across by high tension electrical lines. The clouds brushed against the tops of the trees. Rows of clouds coming in from the north west were getting thicker by the minute. We flew over the sea shore just at the right place.

I made a slight route correction to deal with the wind, which blew straight at us, with a slight deviation to the left and then we flew across the rocky ridges of the coast, out onto the foaming crests of the angry sea. The ceiling was about one hundred meters. In some places, the heavy clouds merged together with the high cresting waves.

What I saw gave the impression of a gigantic colonnade of water in which a tribe of chimera from hell and all the bereaved sons of Beelzebub were playing hide-and-seek, engaged in a devilish game.

I was frightened as to what might become of us. I didn't want to go back at any price. In order to continue to push on, we had to stay very focused, so as not to plunge

into the sea. The ceiling was almost at sea level. I could taste the salt in my mouth. I decided to climb up as high as possible in order to get above the clouds. I increased our revolutions to 90% of power and keeping to our earlier course I decided to keep climbing until I could see the sky. Besides, there was no other alternative.

We were being thrown about in the clouds to such a degree that several times I could feel the seat belts firmly cutting into my body. If I had not been belted in at those times, if there were no seat belts, I could have been blown out of my cockpit, like a young siskin who had not yet learned to fly. We didn't use parachutes, nor the inflated "dingy" or the "Mae-Wests" during times like these. Anyway, under these circumstances, this rescue equipment would have been useless. At times, the rising air currents were very powerful. At one point, I was crushed into my seat. In less than a minute, we had gained nearly 500 meters on the altimeter.

The needle on my compass had finally settled down after the incredible "dancing dervishes" routine it had performed while we broke through the clouds. It was very cold. Oxygen masks (and of course, oxygen tanks) which we didn't yet have, would have been very useful.

"Why the hell did I let them give me a haircut in Osaka," I thought, feeling the extreme cold through my old, patched leather "balaclava."

After more than an hour of uncertainty as to where we were, although I did have a general idea of where we were heading, the clouds began to clear. We saw water. Dashing between the clouds, I slowly began to descend towards the sea, until we found ourselves very close to its foaming surface. It was important for us to learn - albeit roughly - where we were in relation to Cuszimy (Isthmus of Korea) and also to the south-eastern headland of the Korean peninsula. Here, above the water, although it was warm, we again ran into waves of heavy rain. Walls of water began again to obstruct our route.

At one point I saw a large fishing boat. It had three sails. Fighting with the waves, it was changing position every few minutes. It seemed to be sailing in a zigzag pattern. This meeting was interesting, although it did not offer any real help. However, it gave me hope. Our shared danger brought us together as if by an invisible thread. I lost sight of the poor fishermen in one of the upcoming waves. Kubiak told me in the evening that he also saw a warship. I did not see it, although it was quite probable, since, as we later learned, six smaller warships of the Imperial Navy had sailed from the base in Tsushima that morning to help us if necessary.

Now we were flying at an altitude of about a hundred meters above sea level. Every now and again we ran into strands of low clouds.

Gradually, it started to get brighter. In the end, the rain stopped all together. After ten minutes, the hell, or rather the purgatory, through which we had passed, was behind us. We found ourselves between two shades of azure: the blue of the sky above us and its reflection in the sea. Now I began to wonder where we were. We were surrounded by the sea. There was no land anywhere in our sight lines. After several hours of flying in the clouds, under and over them, through vortices and winds, and having no opportunity to get a "fix" for a long time, we might have drifted far from our

route. We were now flying at a height of 1,000 meters. Visibility was about 20 km. I kept the same course as I had before: "300."

After some time, contours of land appeared on the horizon in front of us. I saw Kubiak's smiling face in the mirror. Our boy enjoyed mouthing "Korea" over and over again.

I was very disappointed when I got closer and discovered that our so-called land was an archipelago of several rocky outcroppings, with a larger one in the middle. I reached for the map. On my "million scale map" (map 1: 1,000,000) there was no such archipelago.

Disoriented - I began to fly large circles around the islands as I wondered what to do next.

After a few laps I felt Kubiak's hand touching my right shoulder, his hand reaching through a space between the fuselage wall and my fuel-tank chair, a space already known to the Reader, and through which he tried to give me a piece of folded, thick paper. After unfolding it, I saw that it was a page with a map torn out of an atlas or some other geographical publication. After a closer look, I saw that it was a map of the east coast of Korea and having oriented it with my compass, I found that in the vast space of the Sea of Japan, the Ulleungdo Islands around which we had been circling, were noted by a few dots and that they were the only land within a few hundred thousand square miles of sea.

So, while fighting with the weather for many hours, we had been blown off course by more than a hundred kilometers to the east, by the strong winds from the west. Changing our course by a 90 degree turn to the left and certain that this time we were heading for the shores of Korea - I breathed a sigh of relief.

Kubiak admitted to me later that he had this map (the only one) in his suitcase. He had ripped it out of some English or American magazine in a hotel in Tokyo. Why he did and why he took the map with him - he didn't know. He apparently did it without thinking. On my flight map, especially prepared for this journey, the Ulleungdo Islands had been cut out because the route map had been cut out with an "allowance" of only 50 kilometers, on either side of a straight line, i.e. that is our flight route, from start to the point of landing. All this happened on Friday, September 13th (an unlucky day?).

Dear Reader, please do not jump to any false conclusions based on what you have just read. What is good for one can be harmful to another. I was born on Friday, the 13th day of the month. When we later reviewed the whole situation again, we came to the conclusion that if we had not come across this archipelago or if we had overlooked it in bad weather, and if Kubiak had not torn a piece of map, not knowing why from the journal and taking it with him, and then flying with only the vague hope of seeing the southern tip of Korea for another hour, we would have become fish food for the Japanese fishes - we would have passed the so-called "point of no return."

After flying for an hour to the west, we had reached the coast of Korea. Orientating myself to where we were, I calculated that we did not have enough fuel to make it to today's destination - Seoul (Hejdzio). Since there were no airports on the way

I decided to fly as close as possible to Seoul and to land somewhere in a field. We were 120 km from Hejdzio with just fuel for 20 more minutes, when below us I saw a large, level area by a railway station. Given the good terrain and means of communication (at the station), I decided to land on the field next to the station. It turned out later that this field was used by spotting aircraft in support of artillery, which conducted their annual firing exercises about three kilometers from here.

A small crowd of gawkers from a nearby village gathered to have a closer look at us.

After an hour, three men on horseback arrived: a captain and two non-commissioned officers. They belonged to the 26th field artillery regiment. The captain spoke French. Without hesitating, and after briefly explaining our presence here, the officer decided that the non-commissioned officers would stay with the machine until a special guard arrived for the night. Kubiak and I were to mount the two horses ridden by the non-commissioned officers and ride with him to the regimental headquarters, where the colonel, the regiment commander, was already waiting for us. A message was sent from headquarters, immediately upon our arrival at the camp (the regiment was on maneuvers and was quartered in tents) to the Hejdzio airport to send a drum of fuel and a mechanic.

I agreed enthusiastically to ride the horse to the "camp". Kubiak, on the other hand, said that he would rather walk the three kilometers on foot than get on this shaggy beast on which he had never ridden before in his life. The captain, with the "wisdom of Solomon" came up with a solution immediately. The head of the railway station would lend him his bicycle, on which, once expertly seated, Kubiak joined us on the road to the regimental camp. The place in which we landed was called Heiko.

The regiment commander was waiting for us in his office in a wooden, very primitive barrack, impeccably clean and surrounded by flowerbeds.

After a brief introduction and hearing about our flight from Osaka through an interpreter, the Colonel handed us over to one of his Majors, who spoke fluent Russian and a little German.

I was taken to the officers' quarters, and Kubiak to the senior non-commissioned officer's area. The batman assigned to me brought me to a large tent, which was made available to me, along with a fresh kimono made of a light fabric, wooden sandals and white socks with separate "slots" for my big toes. My rumpled clothes disappeared along with my shoes. The batman (using gestures) led me out of the tent, where stood a huge wooden barrel filled with very warm water on a special wooden stand. Climbing up a small ladder, I scrambled into the tub and had a wonderfully refreshing bath, and then rinsed myself with a few buckets of cold water, thanks to my helpful artilleryman.

I felt great.

Soon after, our host-major, the one who spoke Russian, came over to let me know that tomorrow morning the mechanic, along with some fuel would come over from Hejdzio.

In the evening an improvised banquet took place at the officers' field mess. Kubiak, along with the president of the NCO's mess, were invited as guests.

We were all dressed in kimonos. Kubiak and I each laughed at one another, seeing how we looked.

We were all sitting on cushions - about 25 of us boys - on a wooden floor covered with a mat of seagrass. The food, and the way it was eaten, was all very Japanese. I have to brag that we were already quite well trained in using chopsticks, and that this way of eating did not cause any difficulties for Kubiak or me. I drank quite a lot of sake (rice vodka) that evening.

After all, hadn't we earned it?

By this time, the Japanese fish would have probably finished chewing on our bones. Many various toasts were made. The "*bruderszafts*" (comradeship/fraternity) flowed just like from the cornucopia of abundance. I and our Major-Host pledged lifelong friendship. A very "unsteady" company dispersed late that night. The Major accompanied me to my tent. I slept on a soldier's hard bed that night, on a mat with a hard, wooden pillow under my head. But - I slept very well!

The next day - on September 14, Kubiak rode the bicycle to the machine, while I found my clothes and shoes as well-cleaned and neat as possible. After enjoying a refreshing and sobering cold bath delivered by buckets of ice water showered on me, by my little soldier "butler", I dressed and after eating a little raw salmon with a special sour sauce, and rinsing it all down with tea, I rode on horseback, at the invitation of one of the battery commanders, to the training ground to witness the firing capabilities of their "field guns." It can't be said that their firing was very accurate or efficient.

Around noon we saw a "Salmson" (a type of French-made spotter aircraft) from Heidzio landing in the field next to our machine.

I should mention here that our "Nineteen" was anchored and guarded by a specially-chosen guard detail with two guardsmen and a sergeant in charge. A large drum of fuel petrol was brought around noon by a special train from Seoul.

SEPTEMBER 14, HEIKO - SEOUL (HEIDZIO), 120 KM. 40 MIN.

After a hearty dinner and being wished a fond farewell by the officers and senior NCOs, we were driven in a vehicle with the regiment commander to the plane. Everything was ready. The machine was no longer anchored down. There was fuel in the tanks.

Kubiak expressed great satisfaction for the help of the mechanic brought by plane from Heidzio.

"Good and fast, like a fly," he said.

„*Sayanara*“ and „*Arigato*“ for everything.

We headed out, leaving a piece of our hearts with the artillery gunners in Heiko.

In less than an hour we were taxiing to the familiar hangar in Heidzio. The regiment commander and a group of officers and non-coms met us at the hangar.

News about the weather in Manchuria was good! The winds were generally cooperative.

Taking the above conditions into account, as well as the fact that we wanted to return to Warsaw as soon as possible, I decided to head from here without landing along the way, directly to Chita in Siberia.

The distance was indeed very long - 2,200 km. But having relatively good, non-opposing winds, we should be able to do it without much difficulty.

The Poles in Harbin would forgive us for bypassing them and in this way speeding up our return to Poland.

Kubiak stayed at the airport. He wanted to perform one more special engine inspection before taking this gigantic leap forward. It had to do with checking the oil system, because tomorrow we were going to fly straight across eastern Mongolia with our next landing being in Chita in Siberia.

I drove along with a few pilots to a hotel in Seoul. I was a bit tired from the previous night, so having eaten something I laid down to sleep.

Our takeoff was scheduled for six in the morning. I fell asleep with the sleep of an innocent child.

Around midnight, Kubiak woke me up. He looked very tired and upset. I asked him what happened. A non-com officer who had been assisting him in checking the engine, had been tightening one of the oil lines, which was very difficult to get at and which he could reach only with one hand, and while tightening the connector between the grease lines, he had stripped it. Kubiak had to spend several hours improvising a temporary connection.

There was no chance of getting a replacement part as there were no such suppliers in Heidzio. Kubiak had secured the critical connection, as best he could, using some insulation material. I asked him right then and there if he thought that what he had done would hold for the next twelve hours of uninterrupted flight. He answered yes! I decided not to change my flight plan.

That was a mistake on my part.

Kubiak still had a few hours to rest up. I was not too concerned knowing that he could sleep perfectly well during the flight, which of course, I couldn't do.

They woke us up at four o'clock. By five o'clock we were already on our way in an air force car accompanied by two air force officers to the airport in Heidzio.

As soon as we arrived at the airport, Kubiak went to look at the plane, paying special attention to the engine. I bid farewell to our Japanese friends! The General, the commander of the garrison in Seoul, said goodbye to us with a short speech. In response, I promised to take the acts of kindness which we had received on our very hospitable visit to Japan and his words of friendship and to share them with my fellow countrymen.

**SEPTEMBER 15, SEOUL (HEJDZIO) - STATION MANCHURIA (SIBERIA).
1,650 KM. 9 HOURS, 20 MIN.**

In fine weather and with most of the winds blowing from behind (from the right), and after quite a long take-off, I set a course to the northwest in the general

direction of Mukden (now Shenyang). "Before evening, we'll be in Chita" - I thought. "Tomorrow - Krasnoyarsk, the next day, Omsk ..." etc. Warsaw didn't seem to be too far away.

And, what can you do with an incurable optimist? I could already see Warsaw from Korea.

After flying over the Yalu River, we left behind the city of Andong (now known as Dandong) on the right, so as to pass not far to the west of Mukden. That's just what we did. We saw Mukden about 30 kilometers to the east from a height of about two thousand meters. Human settlements gradually thinned out until we saw almost none on our route. I did not actually have any points for orientation.

I kept following the compass in the hope that I wouldn't miss the Trans-Siberian railway track between Harbin and Chita. On the right, I could still pick out, way in the distance, Chinese settlements on the horizon. To the left, towards the west, lay a boundless, ash-gray plain. It was the eastern edge of the Gobi Desert, known as the "Hunger Steppe."

We had this hopelessly sad landscape underneath us for the next six hundred kilometers.

After more than four hours of flying over the desert, I spotted the railway line from Harbin to Chita just ahead of me. We were 50 kilometers west of the city of Qiqihar. I changed course to a westerly direction and soon we saw the low but still dreary ridge of the Hinggan Mountains (Khingan Range).

We were already over the western part of the Hinggan Mountains, and we could see the quickly approaching plain of the Siberian steppes, when I looked at the engine dials in horror, I noticed that the needle on the oil pressure gauge had started to slowly vibrate. This meant that there was a loss of oil pressure throughout the whole lubrication system.

The nearest point of civilization was the railway station and the city next to it on the Manchurian-Siberian border, Manchuria in Russian, and known as "Manczuli" (Mǎnzhōu) in Chinese.

We still had about forty kilometers to go to reach this far-eastern oasis of civilization. Despite the high risk that I could "screw up" the motor, I decided, while slowly descending, to get as close as possible to Manczuli. I reduced engine power to one-third. I reduced the height from two thousand meters, the height at which we had been flying before I noticed the problem, slowly but surely. We had quite a strong tail wind which helped to move us quickly towards our destination in spite of the reduction in revolutions. I looked at the needle on the manometer. It was already solidly on "0."

Now would have been the time to shut the engine down completely. I didn't do it because I was afraid that I would land too far out from our destination. Our height was down to a few dozen or so meters. I disengaged the engine. We were already rolling, like on a table, across the dry, sun-burnt Siberian grass.

We were still three kilometers away from the city (and the station). So, we were still on territory legally belonging to the Chinese government, which was then headed

up by the great Marshal Zhang Zuolin.⁴² It was still 380 km to Chita, which was our next planned stop, which we could have easily made if not for our engine troubles.

Our landing had been noticed in the city. A crowd of chatty Chinese began to slowly gather. After an hour a Chinese Captain drove up in a carriage, introduced himself in Russian as the commander of the garrison, looked over our papers suspiciously and then put them in his pocket.

"When will we get our documents back? We want to keep flying today" - I asked.

"Today? - that's out of the question. You landed just four kilometers from the border ... This has to be clarified. I must have further directions from Mukden. Now you can go to the city, and a military guard will be placed by your air plane."

After a few minutes, a red-haired, freckled English sergeant appeared (yes, Reader - he was English) in the company of several Chinese soldiers with rifles. A redhead with a bamboo blade under his arm was in the summer uniform of the British merchant navy. It turned out that he was a British Customs official. This was known as "imperial politics." On the basis of some kind of Victorian agreement with the rulers of China, which had not yet run into the reality on the ground, the English had control over tariffs and border duties, in the distant lands of Siberia and Manchuria.

Greedily, but without rushing, the redhead began to check out our plane in detail, as if he was looking at a valuable prize and wondering what he might do with it.

Kubiak, who had been working on the plane, stopped and came over to me. "Lieutenant, I can't deal with these bastards - Chinamen. They are climbing all over the machine, like monkeys. They are going to break something else!"

I went over to the Englishman and in a rather sharp way I told him that immediately upon returning to Warsaw, I would report on his behavior and that of his subordinates to the British legation. Over Manchurian territory, legally or not, I was subject to the Chinese government, and he had no basis or right to confiscate my plane. If he wanted, he could seal off our plane until we were ready to depart.

The golden-haired "empire builder" listened to my protest, then called off his soldiers, gave them orders in Chinese and they stopped climbing all over our machine.

I like the cool, realistic and business-like approach of the English to everyday problems. They weigh the situation calmly, and if it is practical, they put their prestige back in their pockets and life goes on.

A military guard was posted by the machine and things went back to normal.

I asked Kubiak what he had found out about the oil pressure system. It turned out that the insulating seal, which he had so arduously and brilliantly improvised in Hejdzio, was in place and appeared to be undamaged. However, it was completely saturated with grease and oil. We came to the conclusion that we had lost a lot of oil, because the temporary cover could not hold up against the oil pressure which increased when the engine was running. Kubiak figured that the Japanese assistant, whom he had entrusted with adding oil, had not followed the instructions properly when tightening

⁴² Zhang Zuolin was the warlord of Manchuria from 1916–28, during the Warlord Era in China. He successfully invaded China proper in October 1924 in the Second Zhili-Fengtian War.

the gasket. He blamed himself, accusing himself of being a bit careless in checking the work done by the Japanese mechanic at Hejdzio.

Well, what can you do - it happened. Thank God that the machine was still in one piece.

And yet this short flight, even though at a very reduced speed with the oil pressure gauge reading "0," had left its mark.

Kubiak handed me some bits of a so-called "composite" made of special white metal - components of the ball-bearings located in the main drive shaft. He had found these bits in the engine's oil filter. This discovery worried me a lot. What next: would the engine last?

The Chinese captain, our master and commander for the day, took me back to the city. Kubiak stayed with the plane. He dropped me off at a carriage stand, (there were three horse-drawn carriages there) in the main square of the city, which was a typical eastern Siberian hole-in-the-wall. I reminded him to get a move on in settling the question of continuing our journey with the authorities in Mukden, for which I would be "especially" grateful to him. That good-for-nothing understood me. That much was evident from his mischievous smile. He said that he was very sorry about what had happened and that he would do everything so that we could fly to Chita tomorrow.

There was still one very important thing to do - find and buy oil.

The cabman who I had hired at the carriage stop, where the captain had dropped me off, informed me that there were two pharmacies in the city. I asked him to take me to the larger one first. It turned out that the pharmacist - a Jew from Kiev, had 20 liters of castor oil in stock. I bought all of his stock without a second thought and paid him the price he asked for. The owner of the other pharmacy - an educated Chinese - sold me 5 liters of this vital product in exchange for my American dollars. In an "iron" shop, I bought another five liters of "machine oil".

I was very happy with these oil treasures. There was enough for us to finish our trip to Chita.

Now I asked the cabman who had served me so well, to take me to the captain's office.

The dignitary's office was in a large building with a veranda, on the main square. He was sitting on the porch on a wooden bench, wiping sweat from his forehead, since it was still hot and I think he was sipping tea. He was resting after a hard day's work and all his official responsibilities, because his uniform was unbuttoned, and on his feet, instead of high boots, he had felt slippers.

I apologized for bothering him, but after our parting in the city, I realized that there would be some costs in connection with his communications with Mukden. Since I had a special fund provided by my authorities for such matters, and since I did not want the Chinese government to have to cover any expenses associated with my stay, I wanted to provide him with some funds with which to look after the request that I had put to him. Saying this, I handed an envelope to the captain with a twenty-dollar bill, which I had prepared in advance and which I had ready in the pocket of my jacket. The dignitary checked the envelope, smiled pleasantly, and put the envelope in his pocket.

"I am sure that tomorrow everything will be taken care of," he said. I thanked him and bade him a fond farewell. As I was leaving, he told me that he had ordered a room for us in the best hotel, and he gave my cabman the name of the hotel and added something else in Chinese. I asked him to drive me to the plane, since I was happy with my purchases and with my handling of the diplomatic conversation with the "powers that be." Kubiak, seeing me and the supply of oil, was beside himself with joy.

We poured all of the castor oil together with the engine oil into the tank.

Two guards were posted, beside the machine, apparently for the night. The guard post, located nearby, was located in a newly set up, large tent. I warned the corporal, who spoke Russian, of the dangers of burning a bonfire near the plane. We anchored the machine and drove in my cab into the city. To the east, stars shone against a navy-blue sky.

This Siberian community was rather uninteresting although there had to be significant commercial activity given its proximity to the Russian border.

After washing up, we ate dinner and then went to bed. Siberian bedbugs are no different from European ones. They get around and have a good appetite. Me, having had shitty experiences in the trenches of the First World War, knew these bugs and other insects – frequent companions of a soldier's woes. But my poor Kubiak saw the bugs and felt the bites for the first time in his life. The poor guy suffered a lot.

At ten o'clock in the morning, the captain arrived at the hotel with the documents, duly sealed along with a special permit to cross the border. I thanked him for efficiently settling the matter and slipped another five dollars into his paw.

After breakfast, the captain took us to the "airport" in his "phaeton" (carriage).

The weather was clear. A light wind blew in from the southeast. Several vultures flew over the steppe.

SEPTEMBER 16, MANCHURIA (MANCZULI) – BYRKA. 180 KM. 1 HOUR, 30 MIN.

We started out at twelve noon.

We flew over the Manchurian-Russian border without anything happening. I was prepared for surprises. German Lufthansa pilots, who had examined the flight conditions in these parts, complained that they were allegedly fired on at the border with handguns.

The engine was running smoothly. The oil pressure gauge read - normal. But after forty minutes of flight, the needle on the pressure gauge began to vibrate again. After a few minutes of this vibration, the oil pressure went into a slow but steady drop. We were flying at 2,500 meters. I reduced rotations to a minimum and began to descend slowly, trying to get as far as possible and land somewhere close to the Trans-Siberian railway track.

In the end, when the gauge showed a complete drop in oil pressure, I switched off the engine and hoped for a level landing beside one of the stations along with a small community with a few houses.

This was "BYRKA" officially immortalized in the geography almanac as: "*posiłek i stacja (razjazd) transsibirskiej żelaznej drogi*" (settlement and station on the Trans-Siberian railway). There were no difficulties with the landing. The level plain was a natural landing field.

The owner of the first homestead on the edge of the community, from which we were separated by no more than 75 feet, was a tall, broad-shouldered bearded man who came out onto the porch of his house and stared at us in disbelief. After a while, he began to walk towards us, after calming down two huge dogs tied up with chains to a wooden storehouse.

He walked up to us and asked: - "*Kto wy takije i odkuda?*" (Who are you and where are you from?)

Jumping down off the plane, I went closer to the giant and explained who we were, where we had come from, where we were going, and why we had landed here. He held out his huge hand to me and introduced himself. His name was Abraham Goldfarb. He was born in Siberia, in Irkutsk. His father came from the area around Białystok. "*Ja Jewrej*" (I am a Jew) - he added.

"I saw you first ... you are my guests ...Don't forget," he said quickly, as several other men were began approaching us.

This descendant of a Białystok Jew was pleasant and welcoming. I would describe him as being about fifty, he had a short, closely cropped graying beard, a mustache and very black, thick hair.

Heading the "comrades" approaching us were two men in caps with a red stripe. They approached us as welcoming "officials." They were members of the Soviet political police, the famous GPU (*Gosudarstwiennoje Politiczeskoje Uprawlenije*). When it was originally founded this murderous organization was called "CZEKA" (*Czrezwyczajnaja Komisja dla Borby s Kontrrewolucyj*). The founder and first head of this organization was a communist, a Pole by origin, Feliks Dzierżyński.

The two men in red striped caps reviewed our documents and our "iron-clad" letters and questioned me in detail about the reasons for our landing. A guard was immediately posted by the plane.

All of a sudden, out of nowhere, a bearded, gloomy-looking man appeared. He seemed to be a little "out of it."

"What is this airplane, comrades?" He bellowed loudly at the policemen.

"Polaks?! ... Well then, we have to subject these "gentlemen" to a detailed search, and also thoroughly inspect their aircraft. There is something not right here. These guys fly, fly, and then later, we have to answer for them."

This heroic defender of the revolutionary progress of the Russian people was immediately escorted to the side by one of the policemen, who apparently instructed him on how to behave toward guests, because we didn't see him again.

Having learned twice through his own previous experiences, Kubiak undertook to secure the oil line as well as possible. He took a piece of rubber "hose" from his storage compartment and laboriously slid it over the damaged wiring system, and then

wound a fresh insulating sleeve over it. Well so what, the oil system was still empty. I sent a telegram to Chita from the railway station requesting some oil and grease.

The train did not run very often on this line. So, I prepared myself for a long wait. However, in the evening, there was a message that mechanics with a barrel of oil were on their way. They were driving on a motorized train trolley.

Now to travel for 280 kilometers on such a "motorboat" was going to be no easy task. Nevertheless, I settled down in Goldfarb's hospitable house to sleep, reassured by the thought that tomorrow we would be able to take off and fly to Chita.

However, the angry fates determined that our flight to Chita was going to be a bit more complicated than I had hoped.

I spent all next day being bored and "kicking around" the plane and around Byrka. I watched the Buryats who, riding on their small but unusually strong and consistently shaggy "Buryat horses" - Asian horses, which are probably unrivalled for their usefulness anywhere in the world. The Buryats came here for the day to look at an airplane from a far country. There were women and children among them. They were also on horseback, riding by themselves or behind their mother's back on an extra seat.

Up until now, they had seen planes flying somewhere, high above and far away. They came to admire this modern creation of technology and Western civilization up close. They nodded their heads noting "how tiny it looked up in the air, and how big it was here on land." One of those phlegmatic sons of the East Siberian steppes, seeing me admiring his horse, suggested by gesturing, that I could get on him and take him for a ride. I was glad to take advantage of his offer. After twenty minutes I came back, amazed with this strong little horse. It had a very light and short trot so that there could be no question of any "anglicizing" of the saddle. The Buryat saddle - similar to that of the Cossack, was soft and comfortable.⁴³

After a good, beef dinner and a few glasses of very strong "Jewish-style" plum brandy, we sat with our host on his porch and drank some good Chinese tea. Goldfarb told me about his life and the history of his family. His father settled in Irkutsk after "serving" five years of hard labour for seriously beating up a sergeant in the army with whom he had a serious disagreement. He traded cattle, hunted and sold leather and furs. In the winter, old Goldfarb transported escaping exiles from the eastern to the western shore of Lake Baikal. It was done using horses and sleighs with very long runners. These horses, from the time they were foals, were specially trained to make long, level jumps across ditches filled with water. Because the ice on the lake was often cracked with deep crevices, sometimes three meters across, these heroic creatures in an all-out gallop, deer-like, jumped across the crevices, pulling behind them elongated sleighs along with two or sometimes three people "on board." For this special work, the horse was shod with sharp-edged shoes by a skilled blacksmith who, for a good price, served as part of the smuggling conspiracy. For such a forty-kilometer-long trip, the

⁴³ The Buryats, numbering approximately 500,000, are the largest indigenous group in Siberia, mainly concentrated in their homeland, the Buryat Republic, a federal district of Russia. They are the major northern subgroup of the Mongols. Buryats share many customs with other Mongols, including nomadic herding, and erecting gers for shelter.

"passenger" would pay in skins, gold or cash, depending on what he could offer. Only in this dangerous way, could the escaping exile travel to the western shore of Lake Baikal, and in that way by-pass Irkutsk, where he could have been caught by the police or tsarist gendarmes. Old Goldfarb did not ask those who could afford to pay for this escapade, where they got the money or the gold.

Our host also dealt in buying cow hides from the nomadic Mongol tribes, mostly the Buryats. He would then send shipments of leather to the state tannery in Chita.

There was no sight or sound of the train trolley with the oil and the mechanics. They should have been here by now.

In order to help kill the time, I decided to go for a walk on the steppe. I chose to walk west along the railway track towards Chita. It was quiet and desert-like all around. The sun-burnt grass of the steppe shone in the afternoon rays of the Siberian sun. Quite large steppe gophers, similar to small kangaroos, amused themselves by jumping around their numerous burrows which led to the underground labyrinths in which they nested. I learned later that the locals shoot them and eat them and that they are quite tasty and nutritious.

After about an hour or so and after a short rest, I began to walk back to Byrka. The sun had already gone long past its highest point for the day, which at this time of year was already setting, quite low on the northern horizon. Now, walking east, I had the sun behind me, playing with my strange, elongated shadow.

I was very near our village, when I saw Kubiak coming to meet me. He looked pale and very worried.

"Lieutenant, Sir! A disaster! Our plane is wrecked! The wing is broken!"

The chaos of thoughts that passed through my brain at that moment would be difficult to describe today.

"Tokorozawa, chrysanthemums, a fishing boat in the hell of the Japanese Sea ..." popped into my head all at once. And right after that - total hopelessness...

I didn't hurry back to Byrka. We walked slowly. Kubiak explained how it all happened to me.

While it was nice and peaceful on the steppe, Byrka was hit by a strong sudden downdraft. Something like a whirlwind. The plane had not yet been anchored for the night. Kubiak was just screwing in one of the duralumin "corkscrews" that we had with us to tie down the tail of the plane. All of a sudden, an abrupt and unexpected blast lifted the Breguet's tail up off the ground, and at the same time it dug the propeller into the ground, after which the plane still propped up on the engine and the left wheel and the lower left end of the fuselage, was sent flying some thirty metres and tossed with all the might of the whirlwind against the solid wall bordering the Goldfarb's compound. When we arrived at the scene of the disaster, the plane was standing normally on its wheels and on the rear skid and it was tied down with ropes to the ground-bolts that Kubiak had screwed into the ground.

After a cursory look at the damage, I went straight to the railway station and sent a telegram to the legation in Moscow stating that due to the damage to the plane in Byrka - I was returning by train.

Returning to my quarters, I went to sleep. I was resigned and felt numb all over. The next train to Chita was scheduled for tomorrow evening. I was going to Moscow. Kubiak would stay with the machine and wait for instructions via Moscow, from Warsaw.

Wondering what would happen to the machine and what instructions might come from the Department of Aviation in Warsaw, I overheard a loud conversation during the night, the barking of dogs and the flashes of electric flashlights. Goldfarb had chased off the disturbed hounds.

It was hard for my stunned brain to grasp that the mechanics from Chita had arrived with the oil. Well, better late than never, as one optimist said when he missed his train. I pulled on my pants and ran out onto the porch. In the group of men, I saw my old friend from Chita - Zygmunt. Among his colleagues and superiors, he was known as - "Zygmunt."

As the head of a team consisting of two helpers, with barrels of oil and packs of tools, this crazy descendant of a Polish exile came to the aid of some unfortunate travelers from the "old" country. They had been delayed by a few hours, because they had run over (unfortunately fatally) a very deaf Chinese, who was walking on the track and didn't get out of their way in time. They had to take care of the formalities with the local authorities, and it took them a few hours.

We finally had a barrel of oil. What to do with it? ... Use it, I thought.

"Zygmunt" and Kubiak, using large carbide lamps that had come from Chita, went to look at the machine. Zygmunt wandered around the whole plane and, like a dwarfish-surgeon, he checked all the parts of the Breguet's body. I stood nearby with the mechanics, the men from CHEKA and Goldfarb, and waited for them to come back and report on the results of their check-up.

In a little less than half an hour, our two "surgeons" approached us. "*Gospodin poruczik*" (Lieutenant), Zygmunt said interrupting my dull reverie. "I would advise you, that tomorrow morning, you should start figuring out how to repair the damage." "What do you think Leonard?" He asked Kubiak. "I think that the lieutenant in his impatience sent his telegram to Moscow a little too soon. Maybe something can yet be done." I looked at those two crazy guys, like "a sheep on water" (an old Podolian saying), but I nodded in agreement.

It was cold. Almost freezing. Before going to bed we drank a bottle of vodka and ate a wonderful sausage they had brought from Chita. The guests, along with Kubiak, went to sleep covered with furs on the hay in a barn. The sentry in the long sheepskin stayed at the machine. I slipped back under the eiderdown in our hospitable host's house. Whether it was the vodka or the sausage, or some inexplicable mental emanation of unjustifiable hope, which the good-hearted Zygmunt had sown with his suggestion, it took a long time for me to fall asleep that night.

In the morning, as soon as it had brightened up, we were all down at the plane. The Russian mechanics, advised us to fix the broken brace running from the left, lower wing right beside the landing gear, by stringing wires from the upper wing to the

chassis. I did not agree to this for aerodynamic reasons. I decided to completely remove the part that had broken off.

To maintain the transverse balance, we decided that we would tear the canvas off the metal frame on the other side, in order to balance the weight bearing capacity of the lower wings. That would remove about four square meters of uplifting surface. We could handle that. The crushed propeller cone was removed and scrapped. The propeller itself, with one blade broken in several places, was going to be bound up by three pieces of soft, copper wire. Three pieces of the same wire, weighing the same amount within a gram, was going to be wrapped around the nearest blade within a level of accuracy of one millimeter, in order to ensure proper balance. The cracks in the wood were to be filled in with a carpenter's glue - known as "karuk". We did not take as much care in balancing the amount of "karuk" for fear that they would start to call us "pharmacists" out here. The engine cover was removed and hammered out on a butcher's block using a wooden mallet provided by our host. The torn metal sheets were re-enforced using rivets from Kubiak's "arsenal".

After an external examination, we came to the mutual conclusion that since nothing on the inside of the fuselage or the wing structures (which we could not really examine without an X-ray) appeared to be cracked or dangerously strained, the machine would probably be able to takeoff. Beyond that there was nothing to do but to continue our flight.

Only one "small" detail was left to be examined: and that was whether after such a brutal "setting on its nose" and after scrapping along the hard ground for thirty meters, the under-carriage of the engine and the main drive shaft had not been damaged. Well, these concerns could only be verified by testing the engine while it was still on the ground.

I have to underline here with great gratitude, the invaluable contribution to the repairs made by the Buryat women, who jumped down from their Siberian mustangs, and pulled out some thick threads and needles from their "*olstrów*" (saddle bags) and in the blink of an eye they sewed up the torn canvas on the wings and on the rest of the hull.

All praise to the Mongolian women! After all, some of these Amazons rode at least over a hundred kilometers just to see the plane up close, which had landed here and about which they had learned in some mysterious way known only to themselves.

We tested the engine while still on the ground. It worked quite well, although at full throttle it was about one hundred revolutions short. The oil pressure stayed at "3." In Warsaw, I would not have set off in a plane in such condition. Here in Byrka - there was no choice.

I decided to go on to Chita on my own. At least in this way Kubiak would have a comfortable ride in the trolley and on a padded seat. I told him this after we had tested the engine.

For the first time since we had known one another, I saw that he was very angry with me. Looking me straight in the eye, he stated clearly and firmly: "I have played my part in this god-damned flight, during which you and I have lived through a great deal.

If you want to kick me out now, at least do so in Chita, and I then I can also go back to Warsaw by train. That would certainly be safer for me."

Poznan's "lightening" flashed in his eyes ominously as he spoke. I grabbed him by both shoulders, gave him a hard shake and hugged him to my heart. "We head out in an hour" - I said.

Our host had a wonderful dinner ready for all of us, after which we bade him a very fond farewell and a cordial farewell to the representatives of authority, and then taking our seats in the machine, and having received a "blessing" for our flight from Zygmunt using the traditional greeting of Russian pilots - "Ni pucha, ni piera." (Neither fur, nor feather = Good Luck)

Contact!

I taxied out a bit, turned into the wind and slowly opened the throttle. Despite the lack of power and the missing four meters of uplifting surface, the plane lifted normally off the ground. Keeping it close to the ground, I reduced the speed to three-quarters power, and carefully tested the control stick and its steering, and then, being (almost) sure that I could continue the flight, set a course along the Trans-Siberian railway and headed at a low altitude for Chita.

SEPTEMBER 18, BYRKA - CHITA, 280 KM. 1 HOUR, 50 MIN.

The flight from Byrka went off without a hitch in very good weather. We flew at an altitude of between 100 and 200 meters. After landing at the airport in Chita and taxiing to the hangar, we saw a lot of laughing, friendly faces known to us from the earlier visit.

After welcoming us, they started to check out the machine and expressed great admiration for our resourcefulness. They were especially interested in how we had removed one of the plates and the way we had maintained a surface balance by removing the canvas from the right wing. They also shook their heads at our propeller and the wires holding it together. I told them right away that it wasn't just our good work but that much of the recognition should go to "Zygmunt" and his helpers that had been sent to Byrka, and who had contributed to the results in the same measure as we did, and to that excellent work done by the Mongolian women which was simply invaluable.

"Komandir otriada" - Poszechonov was beside himself with happiness to see us again, and he gave us huge kisses on each cheek.

The first thing I did was to go to the post office and send a telegram to the legation in Moscow to the hands of Capt. Grudzien with the following content: - "*Pribył w Czitu stop aparat poprawili stop prodłużaju polot w Warszawu stop*" (We made it to Chita. The plane has been repaired. I am continuing the flight to Warsaw.)

The Warsaw newspapers, as I later learned, had already provided a laconic and very sad report: "Orliński has wrecked the plane. He will return by train."

The local airmen received us with no less hospitably, or rather with more than the first time. We spent the night there planning to conduct a thorough inspection of the

whole machine, the next day. Kubiak found more of the very worrying signs in the engine which showed that the bearings were wearing out. There was a significant number of filings in the oil filter - a sign that the bearings, once stressed, would continue to wear, which could lead to a complete loss of power or something worse, such as a break in the "main drive shaft" or the breaking off of the connecting rod.

Towards the evening of September 19, I made a test flight with a half load in the tanks. The engine was not running that well, as it had a tendency to flood the spark plugs. "Probably the rings were leaking oil" - I thought. After landing (without mentioning my concerns) I announced that takeoff would be tomorrow at seven o'clock in the morning. We were going to fly at all costs. There was no way that we were going to end this flight before the engine completely gave out.

Later that evening we received a telegram from Moscow from Cpt. Grudzien advising us of our promotions: me to captain, Kubiak to staff sergeant. It was not so much that the received message was about our promotions, as it was that it had come from Warsaw, albeit indirectly, that is "From WARSAW" and from those waiting for our return, that affected me very much.

The Soviet airmen decided to celebrate our promotions.

They invited us to a dinner at a restaurant in the city park. General Poszechonov, who, after proposing a toast to our health, praised us and our flying abilities to the heavens in a speech, and pointed out that he considered it a personal honor that during the war in 1920 he was able to take part in a dog-fight over Borysew against the Polish fighter ace - Stefan Pawlikowski. I answered him with thanks in the name of Stefan, who was an older colleague and one of my closest friends. I also expressed my gratitude for the very quick assistance and the help we received in Byrka, emphasizing the resourcefulness and the great professional skills brought by "Zygmunt" and his crew. Besides that, of course - I expressed my collegial gratitude for the hospitality of the Russian airmen, both during the first and our present, second visit to Chita.

After supper, at the invitation of our hosts, we spent time in the local circus, watching wrestling, where "Kiev Student," "Giant from the Harz Mountains," "Black Mask," "Rubber-Man" and others, moaning and groaning or roaring like Siberian tigers as they demonstrated different holds, moves and pins while they (sort of) fought their opponents using their incredible strength to the delight and satisfaction of the drooling audience. We went to sleep around midnight, after exchanging warm and friendly hugs with our hosts.

SEPTEMBER 20, CHITA - IRKUTSK, 700 KM.

SEPTEMBER 21, IRKUTSK - KRASNOYARSK, 900 KM.

SEPTEMBER 22, KRASNOYARSK - OMSK, 1,300 KM.

At seven in the morning we took off with a full load of fuel for Krasnoyarsk.

I had an angel on my shoulder, because it was our first takeoff with a full load since the accident in Byrka. It was a long start, since we had a long runway, and I kept the plane on the ground longer in order to build up speed for takeoff. It went well.

Cloud cover - complete. A ceiling of about 1,000 meters. Wind - the beast - was blowing straight in my eyes!

I decided to fly low to take advantage of the lower winds nearer the ground. It was difficult in the mountains near Lake Baikal. We had to fly through valleys with high peaks on both sides covered in clouds. A lot of heavy turbulence. I checked the wings from time to time. They were OK.

After a few hours of struggling with nature, and having checked and calculating our fuel supplies, I decided to land in Irkutsk. Now the clouds around us merged with the forested, wild mountains. I increased power carefully and started to break through the cloud ceiling. We went through several thick layers. We found ourselves at an altitude of 1,500 meters between two cloud layers. The visibility before us was almost "zero." It was raining. I decided to get out of this soup as soon as possible, especially, since I needed to get a "fix" at all costs. I must say that the guardian angels were with us. At some point, I saw a large gap in the cloud cover below us. At the bottom of this "well" one could clearly see wavy, dark-navy water.

Having reduced the rotations to a minimum, I spiralled down. We found ourselves in the middle of Lake Baikal. Ceiling - two hundred meters. Visibility - good. I changed course to the south towards the valley, from which the Angara River flows from Lake Baikal. Flying very low above the lake and along the Angara we made it to Irkutsk.

We had a hundred-meter ceiling, but the visibility was still good. I found the airport without difficulty, although it was quite far from the city. After landing, we learned just how bumpy and how small a landing field it was. We taxied to a rather large, wooden hangar next to which stood several "civilians". They told me after introductions that they had a phone call from Chita about our flight, but they did not expect us to stop here.

After an hour a civilian gentleman with a goatee, a la Trotsky (a close associate of Lenin and the Minister of War during the attack on Poland in 1920) arrived from the city. This Irkutsk dignitary's name was Mieczow. He greeted us on behalf of several institutions, and he was in charge of all of them.

It turned out, judging from his words and tone, showing no signs of humility, that as well as being the president of the local branch of "Awiachim" (Air Association), Comrade Mieczow held almost all of the most important positions in Irkutsk.

"I am the highest authority here," he said with a face like that of rutting "goat". I know, I know, dear reader, but this "goat" was bragging like a grouse. - I am the head of Awiachim. I am the commander of the GPU (Czerezwyczejki). I'm even the Pope here. I conduct weddings and divorces. „*Wsio czto ugodno*” (everything that anybody needs) - he added.

The city of Irkutsk itself made a good impression compared to the other Siberian cities that I had seen. The streets were paved and clean. I know that there are skyscrapers there today and that the streets are covered with asphalt. I also know that there is a monument to the exiles of Poland (tsarist - of course).

The hotel to which our "little beard" brought us was over-booked; the hospitable host gave us his apartment. In return for dollars, was understood. Our stay here was rather "private," so we took advantage of it to sleep well. And yet we could still feel the strong nervous tension of the last few days.

After a good breakfast and a refreshing shower, we were driven to the airport by Comrade Mieczow in person.

The machine was standing in front of the hangar. Without adding fuel, we started and tested the motor on the ground. It was still running a hundred rotations short! We set out, having already "checked out" with the almighty "Commissar" - Comrade Mieczow.

At eight-thirty in the morning, on September 21, we "set sail" eagerly from Irkutsk to Krasnoyarsk. We "only" had 900 kilometers to go - a fairly short stage - but in our current condition it was quite exhausting. After five hours and a bit, we flew over a primeval forest, not yet touched by human hands. I flew the whole time at a bit of an angle in order to fight against the strong opposing winds. In order to look around and catch sight of some landmark, every so often I would jump up by one to two hundred meters, and after getting a "fix" I would again dive down towards the forest. At one point, we saw a powerful boar out in the open, who, like a rabbit, fled towards the nearest bushes.

I tried not to think about or worry any more than necessary about flying so close to the ground in a damaged machine, with a questionable engine. This spirit of an incorrigible (and possibly reckless) fanatic, an "unquestioning believer," accompanied me throughout my entire flying life, providing a rosy tint to, at times, a very gray and grim struggle with cruel fates. Forward at all costs! Nothing can stop us now! Nothing has the right to screw up! Warsaw is getting closer!

Kubiak was sitting "quietly." He showed no signs of life. He was probably dreaming sweetly about the experiences over the last few days. We landed in Krasnoyarsk without incident.

Familiar faces. Expressions of surprise and admiration that we were still alive, that we were still flying - flying on a crippled machine with a very rough sounding engine. After all, only twenty days earlier, they had seen the same machine whole and "healthy."

We left another piece of our Breguet in Krasnoyarsk. The engine cover had been falling apart for some time. It had been badly crushed and having been flattened out on a butcher's block, it was weak in spots, so it was giving out. Kubiak had torn a large metal sheet off the right side of the cover and secured it with rivets. When he asked me if I agreed, I replied that I would have no objections if he removed the remaining bit of cover and threw it away.

We made Krasnoyarsk to Omsk in nine and a half hours. Shows you what a difference the wind makes. When flying east, we made this stage in seven hours.

Here, in Omsk, I was met by my old friend, the general, a tsar's guardsman. "Obłobyzat!" (he slobbered) all over me. Now, as I write these words, I remembered his name. His name was Masłow - this jovial servant of the "people" under the red

standard. Together we drank "*diuzinu piwa*," (a dozen bottles of beer) - his favorite drink.

Kubiak, as he had earlier in the stages after Byrka, took a dozen or so small pieces of metal, worn bearings from the main drive shaft, out of the filter. We had gotten so used to Kubiak finding these filings, that if suddenly there had been no more filings, we would have probably fallen into a state of psychological depression. You can get used to anything, or as the English say: "Get accustomed to anything."

**SEPTEMBER 23, OMSK - KAZAN. 1,600 KM. 8 HOURS, 30 MIN.
SEPTEMBER 24, KAZAN - MOSCOW. 750 KM. 4 HOURS**

We started out from Omsk in beautiful weather. The engine, just as we were taking off, roughly in the middle of the runway, made some ominous noises, but the engine caught immediately, obviously embarrassed. Just like an ambitious, good horse who had stumbled inadvertently. Fate determined, that we would get out of this in one piece, taking into account that we were heavily loaded up to the maximum, and given the length of this stage. I lifted the plane up at the very end of the runway, just clearing the snow fence, by a meter or two.

The oil pressure somehow held up, though the motor grumbled angrily. I reduced the number of rotations as soon as I could, having reached a safe flying speed. The wind was "on our tail" - so I took the plane up to 800 meters and we floated in the cool calm air, listening to and feeling the whole mechanical system, which was less and less in sync, and to which our fate and our lives were so closely linked.

The Ural Mountains loomed ahead quivering in the jellied air. We were soon over them. In the mirror I could see the face of my traveling companion, who was looking, with great interest, at the panorama of beautiful and wild nature below us. The bad weather had prevented him from enjoying the view when we were on the same road going east. It was a long time ago. A year or two ago? ... No! ... Wait! ... It was only 28 days ago ... less than a month ... My God, how much we went through in those 28 days ... And a few times we could have been "kaput." God knows it could have been so. And especially on September the Thirteenth ... on a Friday ...!

We crossed the Urals at an altitude of 1,500 meters. There was a bit of turbulence. Asia was behind us. We were in Europe.

„Wolga, Wolga, Mat' Rodnaja, Na! Krasawicu Prijmi" (Volga, Volga, Birth Mother, here you are! Accept this Beauty) cried Stieńka Razin, as the song and legend states - a Highwayman, leader of the rebellion against the tsar, hero of the Volga people, who threw his Persian princess out of his boat and into the Volga currents right after marrying her.

The water of the Volga shined at us again. However, we saw it differently this time. Differently than we saw it 28 days ago. In Kazan, our friend Sergei was eagerly awaiting our arrival at the airport. He met us and grabbed us in his arms, after we had taxied to the hangar and jumped down from our cockpits. The old soldier was glad to see us in one piece and greeted us truly, honestly and fraternally. At that moment, we

didn't think of the political and ideological differences that divided us. We were just aviators, and ... human beings!

There was no question of any trip into the city for a room for the night. We were spending the night with Sergei in his house. Everything was ready. Nothing could be changed now. We were to sleep in their bedroom. I was in their bed, and Kubiak on the couch.

"And where will you sleep?" - I asked. "*W dietskoj, no potu*" (like children, on the floor) he answered without hesitation.

I protested, but to no avail.

"Comrade", the local president of Awiachim, the one who was talkative and sociable and who came specially to meet us at the airport, invited me to ride with him in his new car, freshly sent from headquarters in Moscow, to the city for a beer. Kubiak, as usual, stayed with the machine in order to do any servicing and to fill the tanks with fuel. He was helped in this by a few helpers appointed by Sergei. I agreed to the trip to the city - as long as I was back by seven o'clock in the evening at the Pastuszkow home, where Sergei's wife was waiting for us with supper.

The "Awiachim" did not disappoint. At 7 o'clock I was already on the porch of the Pastuszkow house. Here I found Kubiak washed and refreshed with a glass of foaming beer. The lady of the house was busy inside, preparing the meal.

I asked about the children. "*O, eti biesieniata, pojechali noczewat' k tiotie, w gorod. Zawtra utrom prijedut obratno*" (Oh, these little devils went to sleep at my aunt's place in the city. They will come back tomorrow morning) the lady of the house said, stepping out onto the porch and hearing my question. We greeted each other like old friends.

Meanwhile, our "Awiachim" apologized to everyone and promising that he would come the next day to say goodbye to us, he left. He was proud and very pleased with his new "Renault."

Kubiak and Pastuszkow filled me in on what they had seen during their inspection of the machine and the engine. Again, there were filings in the oil filter.

Sergei simply declared that he would not release machines in this state for flight, if it was up to him. He added that although he was not one hundred percent sure, he thought that as being in charge of the airport, according to the regulations of the Soviet Air Force, he had the right to stop a flight if he thought that there was any danger to the crew.

I felt that it was time to draw an end to the discussion on this topic. "We head out tomorrow at eight o'clock in the morning" - I said pointedly, while glaring straight at Sergei. Nothing more was said on this subject.

Since I had already washed and freshened up at the barber's in the city, we sat down at the table, not wasting any more time. Good food, all homemade, embellished this small table, enhancing both our sight and smell.

On the table, at least from what I can remember were: mushrooms, both marinated and salted, Caspian caviar and smoked sturgeon, stuffed and marinated peppers and aubergines. Roasted venison, since the host was an avid hunter as well as a wonderful Baltic crab, fat and shameless in its nakedness, slightly covered with slices of

onion. There was also Swedish herring basking in honey, not to mention a whole range of extremely appetizing meats, well marinated and smoked with juniper wood. In the middle, in all its Byzantine majesty, there was a crystal carafe, filled with redcurrant brandy, set "only" three years ago, as we were informed with downcast eyes, by our modest and charming hostess - Natalia Vasilievna.

The host filled our tall, goblets with this ruby liquid, and having cleared his throat, offered a toast to the health of his guests, and said: "I am happy that among former enemies and people with differing political and ideological views from us, that there are people, like my wife and I, who are honored to receive and host such guests today in our home. I drink to your health, your families and your country." The speech was short, well-said and meaningful. We drank eagerly, our cups filled with ruby malmsey.

In response, I thanked him for everything, starting with the fires he had set that first brought us here on that dark and stormy night, and ending with the serving and taste of unparalleled, masterpieces of culinary art, which we very much enjoyed here, and not having anyone else to thank but our nice and charming hostess, Natalia Vasilievna.

The feast went on till midnight, and the crystal carafe never once "showed its bottom," and the bowls, salad plates and saucers were continually refilled with fresh supplies of delicacies.

To end off, an expansive copper samovar was set out, and some excellent Ceylon tea was brewed in a large stone "kettle", specially bought for the occasion in a store for the privileged. Such as me - with reluctance - said the host. We drank the tea in glasses "*w prikusku*," in the same way I had described on our way to Tokyo.

A small but characteristic observation that had stuck in my mind came to me as I was falling asleep that night. The type of crystal carafe from which we poured an excellent brandy reminded me of the religious spiritual vessels of the orthodox rite, which I had seen in the sacristies of monasteries in Wołyń and in the Kiev region during the 1920 campaign. These decanters were used to store liturgical wine by Orthodox "*monachów*" (monks). Thus, from age to age, and from generation to generation, throughout the history of mankind, the jewels of national cultures survive, in order to bear witness to the political and social breakthroughs in the history of these nations. With this thought in my mind, I fell comfortably asleep.

At six in the morning, we were already up. Kubiak and I ran out to the water pump in the yard. At my request, Kubiak poured a few buckets of ice water over me. As a young man, I often used cold water to improve my physical and mental well-being. It seems, that I should apply these same types of spartan preparations today in order to deal with the difficulties I have in descending and then ascending the fairly steep stairs of the Toronto subway system.

After drinking some tea with milk (no longer "*w prikusku*") and eating excellent, crispy, fresh rolls with butter and curds with cream, we began to say goodbye to the hostess. At that moment comrade "Awiachim" arrived, having along the way, picked up and brought home the Pastuszkow children. We said our final farewells to the lady of

the house, and I handed the little kids an American dollar each as a souvenir and then we were gone. The President's car dropped us by the machine in front of the hangar.

The weather was good. Sergei stepped up to the Breguet. He looked it over one more time. He shook his head, looked at us and said:

A ja srazu skazał, kogda wy siuda, w etot szkwał, w potiomkach priletieli, czto wy, motodcy. Ja etoj myśli, nikogda nie smieniu " (As I said when you arrived here in that squall, in the dark, that you are „motodcy. (brave men)“ I will never change my opinion of you).

I thanked him. We had a firm and truly friendly hug.

"Well, are we flying, Mr. Zielonka. After all, my friend Mr. Piecyk is waiting for us there in Warsaw,"⁴⁴ I said to Kubiak.

Contact! We nodded to the group of friendly people and drove to the far end of the field. On the way to the starting place, I saw Mrs. Pastuszkow with the children standing at the edge of the airport. I gave them a farewell nod "*na doswidaniija*."

The takeoff was long, and although I had just half a load and a long field, I opened the throttle just enough to slowly pick up the speed needed to lift the machine off the ground, saving whatever power the engine still had left. Suddenly, I became thrifty. The Scotsman woke up in me unexpectedly, shit!

We broke loose from the turf, took a slight turn to the right, about ten degrees, or something, and we set a course for Arzamas. From there, with the "rail way at hand" to Murom, and then on to the red capital. The motor shook and choked asthmatically, but we were getting used to it. Basically, the engine still pulled us along, probably because the propeller, black as ebony, embellished with copper bracelets, like a beautiful girl from the proud Zulu tribe, was still turning and drawing us forward. Oh Billy, Billy, these bunnies, "on the higher levels" are having way too much fun, the rascals.

We landed in Moscow in the early afternoon.

I could have been stubborn and continued on to Warsaw after a short break, and landed in Mokotów in the dark. But after considering the matter, I gave up on this idea, not wanting to cause problems for those wanting to honor us here in Moscow, as well as for those in Warsaw who had already received notice from the local station, that we would arrive tomorrow, on September 25th.

We taxied to a familiar spot where a group of people were waiting for us. I jumped down from the height of my cockpit straight into the arms of Deputy Kętrzyń. Next was Captain Grudzień, with whom we kissed "as from a shotgun." From here, this beloved and very devoted officer informed me that he had already promised our committee here in Moscow, that we would stay overnight and of course we would be available as guests at today's banquet at the hotel "Savoy." The banquet was organized by the authorities at "Awiachim." We were to spend the night at the Savoy, the best hotel in Moscow.

From the airport, after a welcome from the representative of Awiachim, Grudzień took me by car to the city. Kubiak stayed at the machine under the care of the

⁴⁴ "Are we going, Mr. Zielonka" is a frequently used Polish saying.

chief mechanic, the same guy who had replaced my broken mirror with a new one, less than a month ago. After completing his inspection, my companion would be brought to the city in an Awiachim car.

Driving along the streets of the red capital, I took advantage of the opportunity to listen to Captain Grudzień's descriptions of everyday life in Moscow. We spent about two hours on a very general tour to the city, including a "pilgrimage" to see the glass sarcophagus with the mummy of Lenin in the mausoleum on Red Square.

In the evening at eight o'clock a banquet was held in our honor at the Savoy. It was interesting, and very obvious, that there were no official representatives of the military, and especially that there were no representatives from the Soviet air force. After all, me and Kubiak, we were a military crew flying officially on a military plane.

During the reception it was nice to sit next to Mikhail Gromov - an ace of the Russian air force, who at the time was officially a civilian pilot. (In later years he became a marshal in the air force.) It turned out that - as he told me during my previous visit - he had not undertaken a flight around Europe for technical reasons. He expected, however, that soon the planned flight would take place and then we would certainly see each other in Warsaw. Indeed - Misza Gromow was in Warsaw a few weeks later. I was at the airport near Topolowa Street to meet him. He saw me! It seemed that he was glad to see me. We greeted each other. Unfortunately, after exchanging a few sentences, members of the Soviet legation surrounded him so tightly that I was cut off from him. I never saw him again, because I chose not to go to the banquet in his honor, for which I did receive an ostentatious, official invitation.

I must also point out that the colonel - the Japanese attaché and his wife were at the airport to give me a warm welcome. They were also at the banquet at the Savoy and then at the Polish Embassy.

I did not want to stay in Moscow over the next day.

Therefore - our Military Mission revamped their schedule and held a banquet in the mission that same evening, at eleven o'clock. That reception ended at three in the morning.

Very sleepily, and me with a slight "hangover," since at that time I was not in the habit of wasting anything to drink, we arrived at the airport at seven in the morning. There was already a large group of people there to see us off. There were many air force men. I recognized them by the blue patches on the collars of their "*gimnastiolek*" (tunics). The Japanese Attaché was there, of course, with his wife. It was nice to see them all again. We bid a cordial farewell. I shook at least two hundred hands. The air men slapped me on the shoulder, jokingly calling me, "sumazszedszj" (a madman), and bidding me farewell in their "*ni pucha, ni piera*" way.

Perhaps the deeper meaning of those macabre words of the air man's farewell, was that in saying goodbye to their aviator friend, those that stayed behind were wishing, that if he was to die on the flight, that he didn't suffer for long. If he was to crash, let it be that "neither down, nor feathers" would be left of him.

We climbed into our seats. Belting myself in, I thought - "would I be un-belting myself in Warsaw, at the Mokotów airport, or somewhere else? Or maybe I won't be

un-belted myself there at all." This last thought was very brief and stupid; it just flashed in my mind ... But, it was there.

SEPTEMBER 25. MOSCOW-WARSAW. 1,150 KM. 6 HOURS.

I turned on the ignition.

I turned the starter crank. Once ... Twice ...

The propeller moved. Once. Twice ... smoking, coughing ... as if it wanted to but couldn't. In the end ... with great effort, bursting with gray-blue thick smoke, my "Omega," began to turn irregularly under its own power. It was no longer my "Omega" (the one from before Byrka), rather it was an old forager, down to the last hours of its life.

We taxied out, without any preliminary testing (what would have been the point), to the farthest corner of the Trockawo Aerodrome.

The takeoff was on a diagonal runway, so that we took off close to a very large crowd of people. They had a good show. Here was a crazy aviator, with another one much the same, flying on a crippled airplane with an engine which was only really good for smelting down, starting on a flight to a destination over 1,100 kilometers away. Was there no one there to stop these half-wits and get them out of that wreck?

But it was too late. They were already in the air. They have already turned west. In a moment, there was only a large dot with two transverse lines on the horizon. A few seconds after that - they were gone. They melted into the quivering morning haze.

I decided to push our way along for the whole trip. In any case, we did not have any parachutes. In the event of a fire, which I did not rule out, I thought it would be better to be closer to the ground. We couldn't jump anyway. I remembered someone's saying: "an aviator, who needs a parachute, and doesn't have one at hand, will probably never need one again anyway."

The motor shook and back-fired every so often, but then it would "start up" sharply, just like a stubborn horse after stumbling. It gave the impression, of feeling ashamed of its sluggishness and was now trying to make up for it.

I did not pay much attention to the areas below us, or rather, using a more appropriate term, "around us," because we flew so low that we could easily take in a panoramic image of the world that surrounded us.

Just like before, when over the Siberian forests, I would pop up a hundred or two hundred meters in order to find, or rather to check, whether I needed to make a course adjustment.

Somewhere in the vicinity of Orsha (a city in Belarus), because the engine began to back-fire and cut out so suddenly, which caused it to lose rotations, I began to look around for some kind of field or meadow where I could land if necessary. Apparently, oil was leaking through the rings and getting on to the cylinder heads.

After crossing the Berezina River, the ceiling dropped significantly. If I had found myself in similar conditions on one of the previous stages, I would have thought about landing. But not now. Now, "we were flying to Warsaw."

A few hours earlier, Grudzień had sent a telegram from Moscow - "Orliński took off for Warsaw at eight o'clock." How could I abandon them on the Mokotów air field? Now the back-firing eased up gradually, the engine was working much more evenly. The vibrations, however, were still quite strong.

We passed over Minsk Litewski (now Minsk), Niegorieloje (now Niehareleje in Belarus), and then came Stołpce (now Stoŭbcy in Belarus).

Here's Poland! (But today this area is in Belarus)

The sun shone unexpectedly. How did it know when to shine?

I saw the large shadow of the Breguet against the backdrop of a dense green forest. The shadow showed itself right next to us, on the right, expanding or shrinking, depending on the height of the forest.

The City of Słonim (now in Belarus). On the left, I saw a complex of chocolate-red barracks. A few dozen kilometers from us to the north was the City of Lida (now in Belarus), the headquarters of my 11th Fighter Squadron. They probably have bad weather there, or maybe Warsaw didn't let them know in time that I was returning. Otherwise, they would have been up here with me for sure, my dear boys.

At one point an idea flashed in my head: "I should change my course by 90 degrees to the right and in twenty minutes - I would be landing in Lida."

But that was only one, sudden spasm of weakness. In the next few seconds I had already forgotten about it. After all, my objective for today was Warsaw. What a disappointment it would be for those who were waiting for us, if we didn't show up. "Push on brother," I said to myself. Time started to drag. Not because I felt any special fatigue. I could still sit at the helm for a few thousand kilometers if I had to.

The towns of Mińsk Mazowiecki, Wołomin - on the right, and Otwock - on the left. Hey! ... the Vistula River was shining in front of us. The engine was rattling away, but it was not back-firing. The beast was ashamed - "Omega!" Someone might think that it suffered from indigestion and lacked good manners. It shook like it was having an attack of malaria. It had lost a little more power, but the Japanese propeller blades were still turning.

I looked in the mirror at the face of my flying companion. His glowing eyes were "tearing" up somewhat. It must have been from the wind!

Marszałkowska Street ... Polna ... I flew across the poplars behind the hangars near the racetrack fence! I closed the fuel stick!" I turned off the engine! We were on the ground!!!

People were running ... Soldiers. Students. Policemen. Familiar faces - colleagues, friends ... Long live the Polish Air Force! Long live the Polish Air Force!

ΦΦΦΦΦΦΦΦ

Today, with the passage of fifty years, I think about those memories and when writing these memoirs, I experienced moments when, thinking of what the long-dead Leonard Kubiak and I thought of and felt, and I see faces peering out of the mist, I can smell burnt oil, I hear the voices of welcome, the humming of our healthy and then our

very sick "Omega," I feel the resistance of the control stick during low turns on a stormy night over Kazan, I think that the spirit, springing from boyhood dreams, and faith in the importance of an assigned task along with a sense of duty, which, by merging into one, gives birth in a man, of that "optimum strength, (the Omega)" which we can call - "determination" - through which many, seemingly impossible, physical obstacles can be overcome. This sense of determination can sometimes even overcome the fear of that "Great Unknown" - Death.

Bolesław Orliński
Toronto, Canada
Spring, 1978

