

Polish Air Force Section of the Polish-American Living History Association

By Michael J.Dobrzelecki

I am sure that mini Replika readers are well aware of re-enactors wearing Polish uniforms at various events and commemorations in Poland, but the hobby is also alive and well in the USA. Depicted are members of the Polish Air Force Section of the Polish American Living History Association (PALHA) photographed at the "World War II Weekend" show at the Reading Pennsylvania Airport posing by the Lancaster Mk.10 based in Hamilton Ontario Canada, which was one of the visiting aircraft that flew in the air show that weekend.

Although the PALHA was formally established as a non-profit organization in 2002, its roots go back to the late 1990's when it was a more loosely organized group of Polish-Americans fascinated with Polish history who wore Polish uniforms at various air shows and historic military vehicle displays. They started out representing the 1st Polish Parachute Brigade and eventually members branched out to represent other Polish units such as the 1st Armored Division, the Polish 2nd Corps, and their newest impression presented in the photos, the Polish Air Force. As time went on, more interested people (most of whom are of Polish descent, or were born in Poland, and some who were just fascinated by Polish history) became interested in the hobby with the group growing in size (currently around 25 members)

The Polish Air Force (PAF) section of the PALHA started "officially" January 2006. The PAF representation was present several years prior within PALHA unofficially. The PAF impression's founder, Chris Moore, started collecting Polish Air Force (PAF) and Royal Air Force (RAF) items over 20 years ago. Chris began representing the PAF at events in the late 1990's. He was joined by Jacob Duda, who started collecting PAF and RAF items about 8 years ago; and began representing the PAF at events in 2000. They both felt that the PAF must not be forgotten and the public needs to know the great accomplishments and heroic feats these brave men made in WWII".

In a way, their decision to form a PAF contingent was reminiscent of how the original Kosciuszko Squadron was formed in 1919 by M. Cooper and C.

Fauntleroy. They chose the Polish 305 Squadron as their main unit, but are able to portray any Polish Squadron in exile in England in any time period (i.e., Battle of Britain, mid-war, late war). They wish they had their 300 "Mazowiecki" Squadron insignia with them the day of the Reading show, which would have been more appropriate for posing with the Lancaster.

So far, they have a total of 4 members willing to represent the PAF fulltime at events with full kit (Chris Moore, Jacob Duda, Chris Petronis, and Richard Holiday) and several others in PALHA who can fall out in the RAF/PAF blue uniform as well. Four of their members dedicated to representing the PAF also have prior "real life" military service in their backgrounds. Chris Moore served in the US Coast Guard. Jacob Duda served in the US Marine Corps. Chris Petronis and Richard Holiday both served in the US Navy

Their hobby is a "real labor of love" project as every member spends countless hours and their own finances on research, uniforms, equipment, vehicles, etc., to "do-it-right". Their reward is the great friends they meet, the celebration of our Polish heritage, and foremost-"to keep the memory alive about the sacrifice and contributions made by Poland and her Armed Forces in WWII". They attend various events throughout the year, such as the "World War II Weekend" in Reading Pennsylvania, which is one show that I never miss. The Reading event includes not only World War II aircraft, but historic military vehicles, various re-enactment groups, mock battles and, most importantly, lectures by real World War II heroes, such as David "Tex" Hill (American Volunteer Group, *aka*, "The Flying Tigers"), George Tibbets (B-29 "Enola Gay" pilot), Don Lopez (75th Fighter Squadron – flew with Urbanowicz in China), Dick Hewitt (P-47 & P-51 pilot - USAAF) and members of the 101st Air borne.

Other venues include World War II re-enactment events at the President Eisenhower Farm in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and the Pulaski Day Parade in New York City, just to name a few. They also had the privilege to be part of the Honor Guard at the Katyn War Memorial dedication in Baltimore, Maryland in 2000.

Many thanks is owed to PAHLA Member, Jake Duda, who helped in the preparation of this article.

Other information:

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Chris Moore (PAF impression Leader and also PALHA's elected Secretary)

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Current PALHA unit officers:

Krzysztof Czuj-President

Chris Moore-Secretary

Jim Sieradzki-Treasurer

Mike Dymkowski-Board Member at Large (Mike was also the first to wear the Polish uniform at the living history events-they call him the "first Pole" and Mike was also PALHA's first President serving two 2 year terms.

Jack Rissmiller-Board Member at Large

PAF Section Newsletter Title: "Sokol"

Photos 1: "Polish Air Force Camp 1" (from left to right):

Chris Moore, Jacob Duda, Chris Petronis, and Richard Holiday

Photo 2 "Lancaster crew 2"(from left to right):

Jacob Duda, Chris Moore, Chris Petronis, and Richard Holiday

Photo 3 "Lancaster crew leaving for mission" (from left to right):

Chris Petronis, Chris Moore, and Jacob Duda