



From the left: Author Arkady Fiedler and Witold Urbanowicz, Polish OC 303 Squadron.



Arkady Fiedler's military identity card.

Excerpted from "303 Squadron: The Legendary Battle of Britain Fighter Squadron" by Arkady Fiedler, Copyright (c) 2010 Aquila Polonica (U.S.) Ltd.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE¹

When in September 1940 I reported in London to the Head of the Polish Armed Forces in Great Britain, General Władysław Sikorski, I was astonished that none of the numerous Polish men of letters in the British Isles had hitherto hit on the idea of chronicling the extraordinary achievements of the Polish airmen of 303 Squadron, which the British press had been extolling to the high heavens.

General Sikorski enthusiastically ordered me to write a broader account of 303 Squadron's actions and directed me to RAF Northolt outside London where 303 Squadron was based. Easily establishing a friendly rapport with most of the squadron, the fighter pilots as well as the ground crews, I eagerly got down to writing what I had decided would be a broader battlefield report, written in the heat of the moment and with a patriot's true enthusiasm: a report, and not a work of literature, since that was what that exceptional time clearly needed.

Among all my books, *303 Squadron* is probably the one truly written 'live,' under the direct influence of the events of 1940: the first pages emerged during the final phase of that extraordinary drama called the Battle of Britain, and I put the finishing touches to the last ones a dozen or so weeks later when, rather like an echo of the battle, the roar of the Luftwaffe could still be heard at night over London and bombs continued to fall on the city.

¹ Excerpted from the Author's Preface to a Polish edition of *Dywizjon 303* that was published in the early 1970s.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Although the book was born out of high emotion and although the world has moved on a great deal since then—and the author's understanding has of course matured over the course of these thirty-odd years—I must with some surprise record the fact that while preparing the book for a new edition, I did not need to make any major changes to it. The parts that I have somewhat altered deal with minor, incidental and secondary matters.



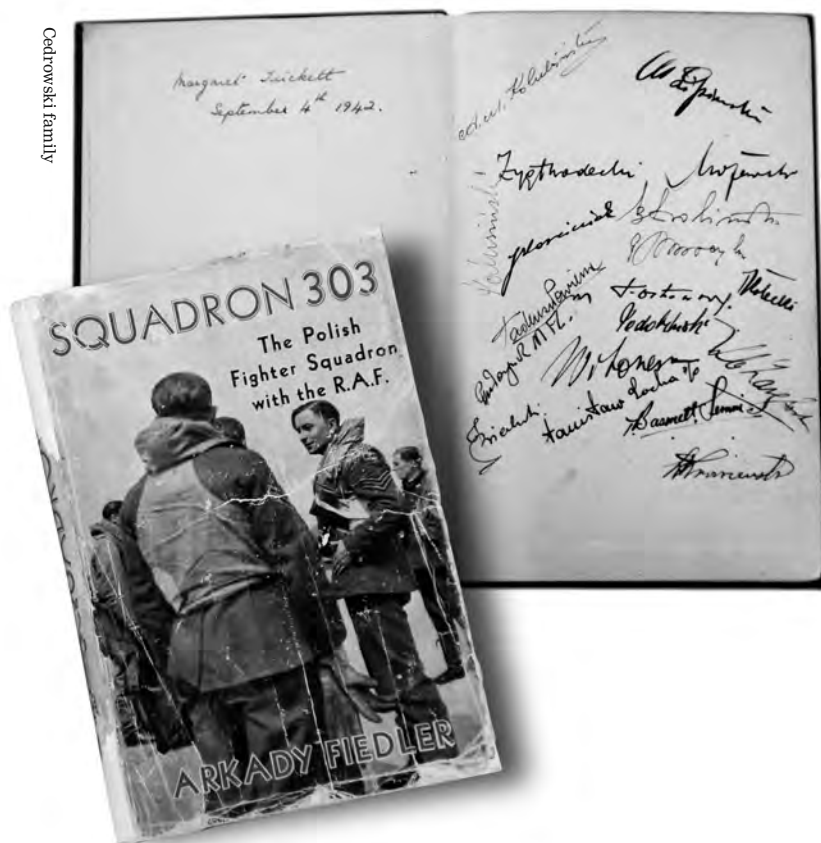
303 Squadron, as a picture of the heroism of the Polish airman, gained a wide audience and effectively achieved its goal. It aroused sympathy and recognition for the Poles among readers in Great Britain and the Dominions, in the United States, in French-speaking Canada and in Brazil, and went through several editions. Proof of the eagerness with which it was read in these countries are the almost three hundred press reviews, most of them positive.

In 1943, the book appeared in Occupied Poland. A miniature edition produced in London was parachuted into Poland by air, and there were several subsequent underground printings within Occupied Poland. In that especially grim year for Poles living under a reign of terror, this book played an extremely important role in providing a boost of much-needed encouragement. It stiffened resolve and infused many with new courage—possibly the greatest satisfaction and reward a writer can have. The publisher of the English version of *303 Squadron* took advantage of the book's success in Occupied Poland by including on the 1945 dust jacket a blurb to the effect that it was 'the only Polish book, written in exile, but also published in Occupied Poland in 1943.'

ARKADY FIEDLER

POZNAŃ, POLAND, JANUARY 1973

Cedrowski Family



A 1942 edition of *Squadron 303* signed by pilots and other personnel in the squadron. The book was a gift from Tadeusz Cedrowski, a fitter in 303 Squadron, to his English girlfriend Margaret Trickett.