

76766 Flying Officer Jerzy J "George" SOLAK.

Born on 22nd August 1910 at Przecław near Cracow, the young Jerzy Solak moved to Lwów in 1920 where he was to complete his education, first passing his General Certificate of Education, and later graduating from the city's Polytechnic.

In 1935 he graduated from the Air Force Reserve Cadet Officers' school, and subsequently flew with flights of the 6th Air Regiment at Lwów, to whom he was later drafted in August 1939. The following month, Solak organised the evacuation of some student pilots to Rumania before himself leaving for France, subsequently arriving in Great Britain in January 1940. After converting to British aircraft, he was posted to No.151 Squadron on 28th August 1940 at the height of the Battle of Britain, flying Hawker Hurricane Mk I's from RAF Stapleford-Tawney in Essex. Almost a month later, on 27th September, he was posted to No. 249 Squadron, again on Hawker Hurricanes, who were stationed at RAF North Weald in Kent. He was to stay with 249 until 22nd February 1941, when he was sent to become one of the initial batch of pilots forming No. 317 (Wilenski) Squadron, also flying Hawker Hurricane Mk I's. On 30th October 1941, by which time the squadron was stationed at Exeter and had converted to Supermarine Spitfire Mk VB's, his courage was officially recognised with the award of the Polish Cross of Valour.

On 9th June 1942 he was again posted, this time to No. 164 (Argentine-British) Squadron who were flying Supermarine Spitfire VA's from Skeabrae in the Orkney Isles. His next posting, on 8th August 1942, was to No. 609 (West Riding) Squadron, who were then converting onto the new Hawker Typhoons at RAF Duxford in Cambridgeshire, where he arrived on 14th August, having been delayed through bad weather. 3 months later, when the squadron departed RAF Duxford for RAF Biggin Hill, Solak stayed behind and joined the Air Fighting Development Unit as a test pilot, before being posted once again, this time to No. 41 Squadron, flying Supermarine Spitfire Mk XII's, on 9th April 1943, with whom he scored his first confirmed 'kill', when on 4th June 1943 he shot down a Focke Wulf Fw 190 whilst flying from Friston in Sussex. He actually claimed 2, but one was credited to an anti-aircraft battery to improve their morale. In October 1943 he was rested, with a posting to Headquarters Fighter Command, at RAF Bentley Priory with the Polish Liaison Office, receiving a bar to his Cross of Valour on the 20th of the month. In April 1944 he became operational once more, and this time joined the United States Army Air Force, being posted to the **43rd Fighter Group** of the 9th Air Force, with whom he stayed until 29th May 1945, when he became Liaison Officer to 84 Group of the Royal Air Force, and on 26th June 1945 he was decorated again, receiving the Polish Silver Cross of Military Virtue. In 1946, Jerzy Solak left the Air Force, and subsequently emigrated to America, where he worked as a construction engineer.

From 609 Squadron ORB:

Aug 14th. Arrival today of a Polish pilot, F/O Solak - long overdue through being marooned in the Shetlands by bad weather.

Sept. 3rd. As rain clouds, in accordance with the prophecy of F/O Solak, now advance from the west, advantage is taken by a dozen officers of the WAAF's and CO's cars for a pre-luncheon session at the Red Lion; ...

Sept 8th. 'dinghy drill' party at Royston, for which the aquatic F/O Solak has clamoured, and which proves to be the last.

Sept 9th. F/O Solak flies the Hurricane to Exeter to take part in the birthday celebrations of his former squadron, No 317 (Polish)

Sept 22nd. The CO is followed by S/L Igoe, who explains the general R/T procedure, with special reference to the CHL and GCI stations under whose control a/c at advanced bases will be working. Conversation piece. Archbinder F/O Solak: "And supposing, Sir, I want a homing from the Channel and my R/T is not working and my compass has been shot away " F/O Wilmet (sotto voce): "And he bales out and finds there is no more water in the Channel..."

Sept 25th.The weather in fact rapidly deteriorates, and the only flying is the sending of 3 fresh a/c to Hawkinge, a visit by F/O Solak in the Hurricane to Wales, a ride given by P/O Raw to an ATC boy in the Maggie, and a Typhoon flight by W/C Findley DFC, Group EO

Sept 30th. Another evening patrol is carried out from Hawkinge by F/O's Wells and Solak. They have just landed when Huns appear and a pilot of 91 Sqdn on an air test damages 2 Fw 190's, one right over the aerodrome within earshot of the chagrined 609 boys, making 91's bag for the day 1 Ju 88 destroyed, 2 190's damaged. General feeling of 609 is that it is only a question of time - or of the goat.

Oct 10th.At 0915 F/O's Astbury and Solak are scrambled from Hawkinge without result.

Oct 16th. At 0200 hours F/O Wilmet arouses F/O Solak, who says "Anything you want, but let me sleep now" At 0500 he arouses him again with the words "you promised to fly me to Gatwick". At 0700 the Tiger takes off.

Nov 2nd. To most peoples surprise the day dawns fair and sunny, and at about 0930 all serviceable Typhoons take off for Manston, the formation being only up to 'attachment' standard and not up to that of a final farewell. Left behind are F/O Solak, about to be attached to AFDU, Duxford, and F/O Hagger, about to go overseas.

249 Squadron, North Weald. 29th October 1940.

"Our squadron taxied to the take-off point, waiting for the signal. The neighboring British squadron did the same, positioning itself for take-off on our left side, exactly at the right angle. Suddenly, my plane shuddered, with the corner of my eye I saw bomb explosions at the other end of the airfield, one of them tossing a portion of the officer's mess into the air! Then a red flare was up - the signal for take-off. We quickly started the engines and immediately applied full throttle, all at the same time. The pilots of the other squadron did the same... I just had time to think to myself: how many of our planes will collide?

Explosions on the ground! We're airborne... I can see the falling bombs, still in the air... I curl in the cockpit... Explosions on both sides... To my right, a very close one... The Hurricane on the right vanishes in the cloud of smoke and dirt, mine is tossed up, the commander is too still flying. I can hear the rattling of debris hitting the wings and

fuselage... The commander waggles his wings and dives, something's wrong with his machine. I am alone.

Above me, I see a Messerschmitt, and a Hurricane on its tail. But four other Germans are diving on the Hurricane. I pull back on the stick and fire a long burst in front of their noses... My Hurricane stalls, but the Messerschmitt's break their formation. 'Like partridges', it crosses my mind.

When I regained control, I found myself close to a German, escaping eastward. There were swamps beneath us, the visibility was getting worse. I was slowly gaining on him at full throttle, positioning myself under his tail... Totally composed, almost relaxed, I fired a long, well-aimed burst. The German pulled into vertical, then tumbled downwards trailing a long, thick band of smoke, and disappeared into the fog over the swamps.

I turned back to the airfield. Near the dispersal area an overturned Hurricane was burning. The guard booth at the airfield gate, which had been rebuilt maybe four times already, had vanished, a big crater in its place. A fire brigade truck was laying upside-down! The ground crew were glad to hear about my victory. Alas, the burning Hurricane was the right-wing plane of our section..."

Jacob Solak joined 14.08.42 ex 164 and 317 Sq. Posted on 02.11.42 to AFDU at Duxford, later with 41 Sq,

Flight Lieutenant Jerzy Jakub Solak, 90, Polish, 151 Squadron, United States, Hurricanes.