



Janina and Mieczysław Lewandowski at the Tęgorz airport. Photo from the collection of the Gen. Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki Museum of Greater Poland Insurgents in Lusowo

## BIOGRAM / BIOGRAFIA

# Janina Lewandowska, the only woman murdered in Katyń

## HISTORICAL ERA

(1939-1945) II wojna światowa

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Among the Polish officers murdered in Katyń in the spring of 1940 there was only a single woman — pilot officer Janina Lewandowska.

She was a young, tall, brown-hair woman in a baggy air force uniform. She was confident, ambitious, strong

and brave. Serving her country was more important to her than her life.

## **Music**

Janina Antonina Lewandowska came to this world on April 22, 1908, in Kharkiv. She had two brothers and a younger sister. She was raised in a house with strong patriotic values, military upbringing and a love for music. She was the daughter of Gen. Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki and Agnieszka, from the house of Korsuńscy. Janina's father became famous as, among others, the supreme commander of the Greater Poland Uprising. Her mother was musically gifted, but she sacrificed her artistic career for her family.



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**Janina Lewandowska from the house of Dowbor-Muśnicki, 1930s. Photo from the collection of the Gen. Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki Museum of Greater Poland Insurgents in Lusowo**

After moving multiple times, the ten-year-old Janina settled in Lusowo, near Poznań. In August, 1920, only a year after the youngest child in the family had been born, her mother died. However, she managed to instill her love of music in her daughter. This love of art became the foundation of Janina's education.

After she passed, she graduated from the prestigious Gen. Zamoyska Junior High School in Poznań, and then took up piano studies in the National Musical Conservatory. She also learned solo singing. At the end of her

studies, she made contact with the Lviv comedy scene, which did not come to her father's liking. As a result, she stopped her studies and began working as a telegraph operator at a post office.

## **Air Force**

As she was determined and ambitious, she still searched for her life path. In the end, she devoted herself to flying, as she was fascinated by it since her childhood years. She joined the Poznań Aeroclub. She trained in the gliding school in Rzadkowo and Bezniechowa, near Lesko. She completely lost herself in this new passion.

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When she was barely 20, she became the first woman in Europe to jump with a parachute at the altitude of five thousand metres. She constantly took on new challenges. She took part in flying courses in Dęblin and Lviv. In 1936, she graduated from the Pilot School in Poznań's Ławica.

She joined her unusual at the time professional interests with typical female activities. She often designed and knitted her own clothes, she liked to cook and she liked to garden. She also loved sport. She rode horses, she liked to swim and she skied in the winter.



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**Janina Lewandowska at the Ławica airfield. Poznań, 1936.**  
**Photo from the collection of the Gen. Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki Museum of Greater Poland Insurgents in Lusowo**

### **Call-up and Soviet captivity**

In 1936, during a glider show in Tęgorz near Nowy Sącz, she met a pilot instructor from Cracow, Mieczysław Lewandowski. After three years of friendship, joined with love and passion, they got married in June, 1939. But their marital happiness did not last long. In August, 1939 she got conscripted to serve in the 3rd Air Force Regiment, stationed near Poznań.

The woman's skull, along with several others, were transported to Wrocław by the German forensic doctor, prof. Gerhard Buhtz. Polish professor Bolesław Popielski, who kept it for many years in secret, only revealed that

secret in 1997

She was sent east in the first days of the war. On September 22, she ended up in Soviet captivity. She was first sent to a camp in Ostaszkowo, and then jailed in Kozielsk. Fearing for her life and knowing her heritage, she gave a false date of birth and she changed her father's name. She showed her strong will, resilience and bravery in the face of adversity and uncertainty. During her stay in the camp, she helped the chaplain during the secret Holy Masses. She sang and she baked communion wafers. According to Major Kazimierz Szczekowski, who shared her fate, Janina Lewandowska was simply a very courageous woman.

On April 22, 1940, her story made a full circle. Exactly on her 32nd birthday, Janina Lewandowska began her eternal service, murdered with a shot in the back of her head by the officer of the NKVD. She was buried in one of the mass graves next to other victims of the Soviet crime. The name of Janina Lewandowska is on the list of prisoners sent to death from the camp in Kozielsk, no. 0401, point 53, from April 20, 1940.



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**Janina and Mieczysław  
Lewandowski after the wedding  
in Tęgorz (Nowy Sącz  
municipality), June 17, 1939. The  
photograph was taken at the  
Tęgorz airport. Photo from the  
collection of the Gen. Józef  
Dowbor-Muśnicki Museum of  
Greater Poland Insurgents in  
Lusowo**



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**Janina and Mieczysław  
Lewandowski at the Tęgorz  
airport. Photo from the collection  
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### **A secret and memory**

In spring, 1943, the Germans found her remains during the exhumations, but did not reveal that information. The woman's skull, along with several others, were transported to Wrocław by the German forensic doctor, prof. Gerhard Buhtz. Polish professor Bolesław Popielski, who kept it for many years in secret, only revealed that secret in 1997. His words were confirmed with research.

The body part of the heroic pilot returned to her family in 2005. The skull of the daughter of Gen. Dowbor-Muśnicki was placed in the Muśnicki family tomb in Lusowo. In 2007, Lewandowska received a post-mortem promotion to the rank of lieutenant.



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Janina Lewandowska's younger sister, Agnieszka shared her fate, as she was murdered by the Germans in Palmiry, in June, 1940.

An Oak of Memory in Połczyń-Zdrój is one of the many initiatives honouring the memory of Janina Lewandowska. In March, 2020, the National Bank of Poland issued a silver collectable coin worth 10 zloty called "Katyń, Palmiry 1940", with the faces of Janina Lewandowska and Agnieszka Dowbor-Muśnicka, honouring all those who died in 1940 in Katyń and Palmiry.

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