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Camouflage & Markings

■ A Question of Polish Khaki

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Colours of the Polish Military Aviation in the 1930s is a wide and enigmatic subject. For many years what little was known was largely based on suppositions and the elusive memory of the surviving veterans. To my knowledge, there have been no preserved documents regulating the paint application at the time, or the original paint samples. During recent years a few samples of the original paints were located in Poznan and these were used for subsequent colour formulation for the Polish colours in the Pactra range. These hobby paints, however, turned out to be too light.

The ground-breaking work in the subject of Polish aircraft colours was a series of articles by Krzysztof Wagner published in 1992 in *Lotnictwo Aviation International*. The systematic review of the camouflage colours was coupled with the first attempt to describe the colours by the corresponding Federal Standard 595 numbers. The author recovered a few samples from the preserved PZL P.11 in Cracow (long before proper restoration of this aircraft) and identified the Polish Khaki as [FS 30118](#). The same research indicated the lower surfaces to be light grey, close to [FS 36307](#), with the remark that this paint had aged in time to a paler shade [FS 26329](#).



The PZL P.11c in the Cracow Aviation Museum is the only surviving aircraft of the Polish Air Force anno 1939. Although it has been repainted many times (sometimes crudely) during its museum career, it was a natural starting point for the colour research described herein.

Photo: Szymon Wlazlowski

In the later part of the 1990s, these colours were widely used in Polish modelling literature. En effect of this development was also the convergence of the interpretation of the Polish Khaki in modelling.

While back in the 1980s one could see models of Polish aircraft ranging in colour from dark green to olive drab, those produced more recently that can be seen on the internet and o modelling shows display much better consistency of colour interpretation.

Polish Air Force Colours

When Jadar Hobby company turned to me with a request for preparing a complete colour set for the inter-war Polish Air Force I found an opportunity to organize the knowledge and data which I had collected in many years. I have had a long interest in the subject, having personally considered camouflage colour research to be the most exciting area among all aviation-related interests.

I am far from attempting to tear down the accepted views on the matter and building a new colour system of my own origin. However, certain circumstances prompted me to adjust the commonly accepted colour

shades based on the research which is over 15 years old. The first one was a new Federal Standard 595B colour deck obtained a few years ago through a colleague in the US. Equipped with this tool I could relate the available reserved samples with the literature without the aid of the 3rd party. It was also easier to compare aircraft colours with colours of other equipment of the Polish Army in the 1930s, from gas mask filter containers to motorcycles.

The second circumstance which prompted the revision of Wagner's findings was the surfacing of colour photographs of Polish aircraft from the September 1939 campaign. Probably taken by a German officer at PZL Okecie after the surrender of Warsaw, the photographs show partially completed PZL 43, PWS-33 Wyzel and PZL 37B Los rolled out of the factory at the adjacent airfield. The same set contains also photos of Polish military vehicles such as TKS tankettes and Wz. 29 armoured cars taken in other locations. Naturally the colours from photographs, especially the early colour films available at the time, cannot be taken at face value. Compared with bits and pieced collected by enthusiasts (my special thanks are due to Przemysław Chorazykiewicz) and with the aid of colour computer software and the Federal Standard 595 chips I feel that we can get even closer to how the true colours looked like.

A problem with preserved pieces of wrecked aircraft is that painted surfaces had been exposed for years to the effects of weather, sunlight, water or were buried in the ground. The kind of soil, humidity, pH and so on all could affect pigments in the paint, which was apparent when comparing the samples.

The fruit of my labours are the following colour matches. These is also the one that Jadar Hobby used to order a set of Polish colours in hobby acrylics from Agama.

Basic Colours of the Polish Air Force in 1939 and the Immediate Pre-war Period

Polish khaki

[FS 34088](#)

This was the basic camouflage colour for the upper surfaces of aircrat produced in the 1930s, such as PZL 37 Los, PZL 23 Karas, P.11c, RWD-14 Czapla, PWS-33 Wyzel, PZL-38 Wilk and more. This was the same colour as use in the Polish Army for cars and artillery.

The nearest Humbrol equivalent used to be No. 155. The factory-fresh paint coat was semi-matt. In field conditions this colour aged fairly rapidly to [FS 30118](#) or even [FS 30097](#).

Colour samples

[FS 34088](#) is believed to closely match Polish Khaki.
This colour could age to more brownish shades of [FS 30118](#)
or [FS 30097](#).

[See all three shades together for comparison](#)

Grey-blue

[FS 26329](#)

Used for lower camouflage of the aircraft mentioned above. This colour also faded - towards [FS 25530](#) or even [FS 36495](#).

Colour samples

[FS 26329](#) is believed to closely match the undersurface grey-blue.

This colour could fade towards towards a lighter and less saturated [FS 25530](#) or even [FS 36495](#).

[See all three shades together for comparison](#)

A view often repeated in the literature is that there supposedly were two different shades of the Polish Khaki - "light" used on fighter aircraft and "dark" for bombers. I have found no evidence whatsoever to support this theory. On the contrary, it seems to simply have been repeated by consecutive authors. I believe that there was only one specified colour, although one cannot rule out certain differences between different batches or suppliers of paint. On one of the colour photographs, PWS-33 Wyzel sytands very close to PZL 37 Los and both carry the same colour. Also, I reviewed the available black-and-white photographs showing PZL 37 Los standing alongside P.11c and P.7a and none of them indicated that the Los was darker in shade than the fighters. The photographs are, of course, no bullet-proof evidence, but a distinct indication that the colours were indeed standardised.

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