

In late September 1943, the JU 88 was transferred to the USAAF for movement to Wright Field for evaluation. Dismantling the aircraft for surface shipment could have altered valuable data on the quality of design and construction as well as performance data from the flight evaluation program. Ninth Air Force felt that a ferry flight from Cairo to Wright Field was feasible and started looking for a volunteer two man crew.

FINDING A CREW FOR THE PROJECT

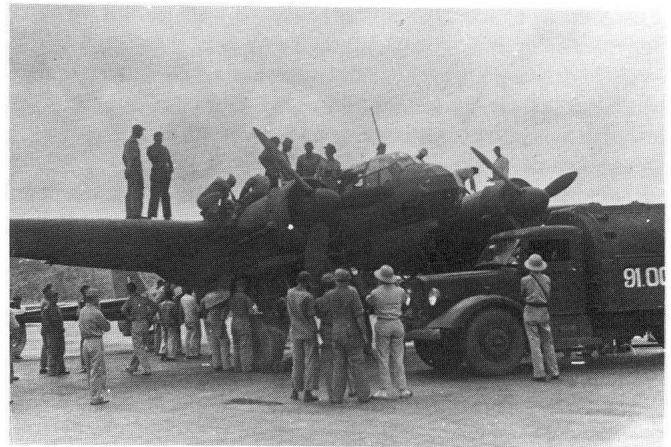
Lt. George W. Cook and I had been assigned to the 26th Air Depot Group (ADG) for the last six months of our tour in the Middle East Theater and were scheduled to rotate back to the U. S. on 1 October 1943. We left our base at Deversoir, Egypt, early that morning and arrived at Payne Field, the newly activated U. S. support base on the east side of Cairo, about 0730 for out-processing. During the briefing, our attention was called to a 9th AF request posted for a volunteer crew of two to fly an aircraft to the U. S. I had flown my B-25 over to Egypt as part of the 12th Bomb Group deployment and preferred to fly myself back rather than return as a bored passenger. Lt. Cook felt the same way and we decided to check out the posting. It gave no details of the ferry flight, only a phone number to call if interested. We joked about the old Army adage of don't ever volunteer but decided to respond, feeling we could probably back out if the situation turned out to be too hairy. I made the phone call.

We were instructed to go to the entrance of the building where we would be picked up by a staff car within 15 minutes and driven to 9th AF headquarters. We picked up our B4 bags and in a few minutes we were on our way. We were met at 9th AF and escorted to the intelligence staff offices. We were taken to a room in the technical intelligence sections and introduced to several staff members. We had a cup of coffee and were told that they had a special project that needed a highly qualified flight crew with a strong technical background, but still were given no clue as to what equipment was involved. They advised that they needed to document our qualifications and experience.

Very detailed interviews were conducted and they were particularly interested in the facts that I had flown a B-25 from the U. S. to Egypt, had participated in service testing of the B-25D at Wright Field, was involved in a number of 12th Bomb Group and 9th Air Force directed special tasks and projects, and had flown a number of different aircraft. On the negative side, there was noticeable disappointment and cooling of staff interest when they learned that I had graduated from flying school in March, 1942, and had only 18 months of commissioned flying service.

The interview was concluded about 1100 and we were told to return at 1300 as the staff needed to summarize their data on the project and crews and brief the senior staff during lunch. Lt. Cook and I left the headquarters and went to an early lunch at the famous Shepherd's Hotel. We still didn't know what aircraft we had volunteered to fly to the U. S. and this lack of disclosure was beginning to worry us. Having lunch or dinner at Shepherd's was usually a special and pleasant experience, but our preoccupation with the mystery of the assignment took the bloom off the occasion.

We returned at 1300 and were escorted to the intelligence briefing section. We were surprised to find the staff extremely cordial and were promptly advised that we had been selected for a project to fly a German Junkers 88 aircraft to Wright Field. We were then briefed on the project to bring us up to date. Because of wartime



There was always plenty of help wherever the JU 88 stopped enroute to the USA. (27-1)

security, information on the defection was limited at the time to the fact that a Rumanian Air Force pilot had become disenchanted with the Nazi cause and Luftwaffe officer corps, had picked up a new JU 88D-1 reconnaissance aircraft, took off and headed for Syria, got lost, was low on fuel, and landed at an RAF field in Cyprus and surrendered. We were further briefed that the RAF had completed their evaluation and had given the aircraft to the USAAF.

The US had no flyable Ju 88 at this time and wanted to get one to Wright Field for flight and technical evaluation. The briefing concluded with the disclosure that the JU 88 was at Heliopolis Airport and was ready for transfer.

At this point, Lt. Cook and I were struggling with the surprise of the project and were clearly developing doubts and reservations, but we were still drawn by its challenge. We asked for a copy of the project plan and learned that a comprehensive plan was yet to be developed. I asked the key question, i.e., "What is the range of the aircraft?" Answer "Estimated to be about 1300 miles." Then I asked if a technical order file or flight manual for this model was available. There was only very limited data. We concluded that a great deal of work needed to be done before we would attempt a transatlantic flight. We asked the staff to arrange for us to fly the JU 88 to the 26th ADC; and get us the best priority they could to develop the plan and prepare the aircraft. We talked about security and advised that the project had to be unclassified as many people would need to be involved. Support bases on our route had to be notified of our flight and, most importantly, defense units along our route must be informed. The staff pondered this briefly and then agreed. They felt they could get approval and would take up the matter with their seniors.

Maj. Morgan Nelson and Lt. Col. Charles E. Thompson of the 9th Air Force Crash Intelligence Office had handled the transfer

