

The loss of a rare Ju 188 D-2 reconnaissance aircraft over Belorussia in 1944

German loss records report the loss of a Junkers Ju 188 D-2 reconnaissance aircraft belonging to the reconnaissance squadron 4.(F)/Aufklärungsgruppe 11 on 20 August 1944 near Baranavichy,¹ in an area that had been part of eastern Poland before the war and had been annexed to the USSR under the terms of the secret protocol to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact.² The aircraft had the production number 150224 and unit identification code 6M+DM.³ This incident is interesting for several reasons. The Ju 188 was a rare aircraft, an improved and enlarged version of the mass-produced Ju 88 bomber. When it arrived on the Western front in small numbers in early 1944, the Ju 188 was employed as a bomber in Operation *Steinbock* (Capricorn), an attempted bombing campaign against the British Isles which failed because the superiority of Anglo-American air power had become overwhelming. Attempts by the Luftwaffe to employ the Ju 188 as a bomber essentially ended in summer 1944.⁴ The reconnaissance versions of the aircraft were used for a longer period and were employed on the Eastern front, as well as in the West and in the Mediterranean. The Ju 188 D-2 sub-type accounted for just under a third of all Ju 188 built, 404 aircraft out of a total production run of 1,234. The D-2 was the last version of the Ju 188 to remain in production, until February 1945.⁵ The specific aircraft shot down near Baranavichy was flown by a highly experienced crew, including the squadron commander (*Staffelkapitän*), the observer *Hauptmann* Bock. The observer and pilot, *Oberleutnant* Jochems, had both served in Stabsstaffel/St.G. 2, the dedicated reconnaissance unit of the famous Luftwaffe dive-bomber wing. Their unit was disbanded in June 1943 and both men eventually joined 4.(F)/Aufklärungsgruppe 11.⁶ They both survived to become prisoners of war after they had been shot down, unlike the other three members of this crew.⁷ The aircraft which they flew was one of the first five Ju 188 D-2s which were delivered in to the unit in July and August 1944. It was the unit's only loss in August and possibly the first loss of a Ju 188 D-2 in the East, demonstrating the much lower level of risk involved in German aerial operations on the Eastern front as compared with those in the West.⁸

Now that the Russian government has published a large body of wartime documents online, though in an incomplete form, it is possible to identify the Soviet crews who shot down this German aircraft. The interception was conducted by two pilots of the 439 IAP (fighter regiment), subordinated to the 148 IAD (fighter division) of the 84 division PVO (air defence area command), Northern Front PVO.⁹

¹ Note that contemporary local place names are used throughout the text here, in order to aid identification using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software, for example Google Maps

² See text of secret protocol at "Secret Additional Protocol", 23 August 1939, *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/addsepro.asp Accessed 16 March 2018. See also "German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty", 28 September 1939. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/gsbound.asp. Accessed 16 March 2018.

³ Message by Matti Salonen on the *Twelve O'Clock High* online forum, <http://forum.12oclockhigh.net/showpost.php?p=249215&postcount=2>. Accessed 16 March 2018.

⁴ William A. Medcalf with Eddie J. Creek. *Junkers Ju 88: Volume 2*. Hersham, Surrey: Ian Allan Publishing, 2014, pp. 465, 615-9

⁵ Herbert Ringlstetter, *Flugzeug Classic Special 7*. GeraMond: 2011, p. 54

⁶ Message by Gerhard Stemmer on the *Twelve O'Clock High* online forum, <http://forum.12oclockhigh.net/showpost.php?p=249228&postcount=4>. Accessed 16 March 2018.

⁷ Message by Matti Salonen on the *Twelve O'Clock High* online forum, <http://forum.12oclockhigh.net/showpost.php?p=249215&postcount=2>. Accessed 16 March 2018.

⁸ Michael Holm, *The Luftwaffe, 1933-45*, Flugzeugbestand und Bewegungsmeldungen [Aircraft Inventory and Movement Reports], 4.(F)/Aufklärungsgruppe 11, <http://www.wv2.dk/oob/bestand/aufkl/b4ag11.html>. Accessed 16 March 2018.

⁹ Documents from TsAMO [Central Archives of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation]. Mikhail Bykov, Vladimir Anokhin, *All Stalin's fighter regiments: the first full encyclopaedia*. Yauza-press: 2013 (Михаил Быков,

<https://airlandbattle.wordpress.com/2018/03/16/the-loss-of-a-german-junkers-ju-188-reconnaissance-aircraft-in-1944-the-soviet-side-of-the-hill-and-a-comment/>

This fighter regiment was a peripheral unit within the Soviet air defence network, which claimed a total of just 22 aerial victories during the war¹⁰.

At 10:39 on 20 August 1944 a Ju 88 was identified flying along the route from Pruzhany to Baranavichy at an altitude of 7,500 metres. Pilots Senior lieutenant (*starshy leytenant*) Mitenkov and Lieutenant Semenov, flying Yak-7b fighters, intercepted this aircraft 20 km north of Baranavichy. The Ju 88 was shot down 10 km south-west of Bycień settlement. 130 rounds of 20 mm ShVAK cannon ammunition and 420 rounds of 12.7 mm BS machine-gun ammunition were expended by the intercepting fighters.¹¹

Comment

This incident presents on a small scale the problems of German resource mis-allocation during the Second World War. The Ju 188 D-2 was powered by the same Jumo 213 A engines as the Fw 190 D-9, or 'Dora', the best German piston-engine fighter of the war. The 'Dora' appeared in September 1944 and its designer, Kurt Tank, stated explicitly that the Jumo engines had become available "because the bomber programme had been cancelled".¹² Therefore, even in 1944 Germany had been allocating very scarce powerful engines to bomber and reconnaissance aircraft. This was futile not only because fighters were urgently needed, but also because the bomber types could not be fundamentally improved even with much more powerful engines than those that had been available hitherto. The Ju 188 D-2 could achieve a maximum speed of just 540 km/h (336 mph) at an altitude of 6,000 metres (19,700 feet).¹³ This left it vulnerable even to obsolete Soviet fighters, a key example of which was the Yak-7b. The Yak-7 fighter was an emergency conversion of a twin-seat trainer, first delivered to frontline units in October 1941, long before the Ju 188.¹⁴ The Yak-7b, with heavier armament, entered production in May 1942. This interim and unsatisfactory design was ordered out of production by the Soviet State Defense Committee (Gosudarstvenny komitet oborony – GKO) in late October 1943 and all production had ended in July 1944, a month before the incident described here. The best late-production Yak-7b had a maximum speed of 594 km/h (369 mph) at 4,100 metres (13,500 feet)¹⁵. This performance was well below that of contemporary Allied and German fighters, yet it proved sufficient to shoot down the Ju 188. The waste of German resources is underlined by the fact that the Yak-7 was of largely wooden construction, in contrast with the all-metal Ju 188. If the Ju 188 could not have been cancelled earlier, in favour of more advanced designs, it would have been better employed in night-time operations on the Eastern front, where even the long-obsolete Heinkel He 111 could still be successful because the USSR did not possess radar-equipped night fighters¹⁶.

Владимир Анохин, *Все истребительные авиapolки Сталина: Первая полная энциклопедия*. Яуза-пресс: 2013, p.592)

¹⁰ Mikhail Bykov, Vladimir Anokhin, *All Stalin's fighter regiments: the first full encyclopaedia*. Yauza-press: 2013 (Михаил Быков, Владимир Анохин, *Все истребительные авиapolки Сталина: Первая полная энциклопедия*. Яуза-пресс: 2013, p.593)

¹¹ Documents from TsAMO [Central Archives of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation].

¹² J. Richard Smith and Eddie J. Creek. *Focke-Wulf Fw 190: Volume 3*. Classic, 2013, p. 724

¹³ Herbert Ringlsetter, *Flugzeug Classic Special 7*. GeraMond: 2011, p. 58

¹⁴ Sergey Kuznetsov. *Yak-7: the total war fighter*. Eksmo: 2014. (Сергей Кузнецов. *Як-7: Истребитель тотальной войны*, Эксмо: 2014, pp. 15, 23)

¹⁵ Sergey Kuznetsov. *Yak-7: the total war fighter*. Eksmo: 2014. (Сергей Кузнецов. *Як-7: Истребитель тотальной войны*, Эксмо: 2014, pp. 50, 54, 179)

¹⁶ Richard R. Muller, "Blow Out at Poltava", *HistoryNet*, <http://www.historynet.com/blow-out-at-poltava.htm>. Accessed 16 March 2018.