

before. We picked up three or four more kmph. We both felt the engines were no longer getting worse.

We were now less than an hour out and the left engine was running smoothly. The right engine was stable with a steady vibration with the dead cylinder. I told Cook I thought we were going to make it now. With the air speed increasing, I was tempted to throttle back a little, but decided that the improved condition had come after power was increased, so I left things alone.

I now had a good bearing to Natal on the radio compasses once again, dead ahead. Shortly after passing the five hour point, I spotted land and, in a few more minutes, the airfield at Natal. I called the tower and gave our position advising that I was starting my descent. We reached the field and the tower told us to circle while they launched a group of airplanes deploying overseas. We had to circle for nearly thirty minutes.

We were cleared to land and entered the traffic pattern, but when I lowered the gear, it did not go all the way down. Checking the problem, we noted very low hydraulic pressure. Lt. Cook used the gear valve position on the emergency system panel and the hand pump to lower and lock the gear, then peaked the brake accumulator. We had to circle the field one more time while lowering the gear. We were again cleared to land and Cook lowered partial flaps on final approach, again using the hand pump. I went in fast as if making a no-flaps landing. The JU touched down nicely and I watched the brake pressure as we taxied in, parked, and shut down. Cook got out of the airplane and chocked the wheels, in case we lost brake pressure.

This landing gear emergency, proved the value of our taking the time to analyze, diagram, and describe each system at Deversoir to compensate for lack of tech data on the main hydraulic system, probably because of a loose fitting or cracked line, induced by the prolonged operation with the vibrating and rough engines. Lt. Cook had gone to the emergency panel, set the selector, and hand pumped the gear down and locked. The brake system had a separate accumulator charged by the main system through a check valve to prevent loss of pressure if the main system went out, retaining several liters of fluid for the hand pump. He had selected brake system and peaked it with the hand pump, giving us at least ten braking applications. It could also have been recharged further with the hand pump if necessary. On final, Lt. Cook set the selector to flaps position and gave me what flaps he could with the hand pump. All of these actions took place while I went once around the pattern. The effort at Deversoir put us in position of knowing the systems and how to use them quickly.

The ten days of long hours, short nights, this long flight day, and the last two hours of stress were taking their toll on us. I decided we would stand down for a day and regroup. We secured the JU 88 for the night, closed the flight plan, sent a status wire, and checked into quarters. After a good shower we went to the officer's club to relax and have a leisurely dinner. The Natal club was the best club we had seen since we left the States. We decided to get a good night's rest and planned to delay working on the plane until 0900.



JU 88 under tow by the Crew chief Swiheart at Wright Field 14 Oct 1943 (37-1)

As I turned in, I reflected on what a day it had been. It started with a promotion to Major, success at hitting Ascension Island dead on, the frustration and concern over having to use 100 octane fuel, the malfunctioning engines, the circling delay at Natal that used up our daylight, and the final blow: the loss of hydraulic pressure and the landing gear. It was indeed a day of adversity, but we had a lot of good luck as well, and the Lord was surely with us. All turned out well at the end of the day, including a good and relaxing dinner at the best club we had seen in a year and a half. But by far the most important event was the first known successful crossing of the Atlantic Ocean by a JU 88.

The next morning, Lt. Cook found the hydraulic leak at one of the selector valves and corrected it. We decided to remove and clean the spark plugs, as they were coated with a film that the engine shop said was lead accumulation from the high octane gas. They were able to clean and test all plugs satisfactorily except the two from the front left bank cylinder of the right engine. With the special plug tool the crew was able to remove and replace all the plugs in about two hours. The two dead plugs had to be replaced with U. S .plugs which required some modification of the ignition wires.

We decided to remove the P-38 tanks as they would not be needed for the remaining flight legs. We drained all the gas out of the aircraft to get rid of the highly leaded 100 octane fuel which had caused our rough engine problem. I learned months later that increasing power to burn off the lead was the correct action to take. Our decision, based on other considerations, to increase power saved our mission (and perhaps our lives).

We refueled with 91 octane fuel, completed other servicing, and did the post flight inspection. We ran the engines, did power and magneto checks, and exercised the hydraulic system. Everything checked out. We topped the tanks and secured the aircraft, then went into Natal to look the town over and buy some leather goods. I also had major's leaves sewn on all of my flight clothes.

The next morning, 12 October I filed for Belem, Brazil, and we took off, picked up a heading of 292°, and climbed to 10,500 ft cruise altitude for the 950 mile flight up the South American coast. With the drop tanks removed, the JU really flew off the runway