

Noyes Report.

Captain Leigh Noyes was the commanding officer of the USS *Lexington*.



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UNITED STATES FLEET
AIRCRAFT, BATTLE FORCE Y95/JJC/rma
U. S. S. LEXINGTON

At Sea,

JUL 29 1937

From: Commanding Officer.
To : Commander, VT Squadron Two-B.
Subject: Commendation of Aviation Cadet R.M. Stanley, U.S.N.

1. The Commanding Officer desires to express his appreciation of the excellent drafting work done by Aviation Cadet R.M. Stanley, U.S.N. in connection with formulating plans for the search of Amelia Earhart.

2. It is requested that a copy of this letter be placed on his official record.

LEIGH NOYLS.

Copy to:
Av. Cadet Stanley

FIRST ENDORSEMENT: VT SQUADRON TWO

At Sea,
30 July 1937.

From: Commanding Officer, VT SQUADRON TWO.
To : Aviation Cadet R.M. Stanley, USNR.

1. Forwarded with congratulations.
2. A copy of this letter will be placed in your official record.

W. SINTON.

DISCUSSION AS TO THE BEST AREA IN WHICH TO CONDUCT SEARCH

I N F O R M A T I O N

1030 AM
1. At 0000 GCT 2 July, Amelia Earhart took off from Lae, New Guinea, for Howland Island, distant 2,201 miles, and gave her estimated time of flight as 18 hours. She was accompanied by Captain Noonan, who has been navigating surface craft and aircraft for the past twenty years, and had the reputation of being an excellent navigator. *ETA*

2. The plane was in communication with Coast Guard Cutter ITASCA from 1418 GCT until 2025 GCT 2 July. It is therefore known to have been in the air at least twenty hours and twenty-five minutes.

3. The only complete position report from the plane stated that at 0720 GCT it was in latitude 4° 33' South, Longitude 159° 06' East. This point is about 795 miles from Lae, and indicates that the plane was on course making a ground speed of 111 knots during this part of the flight. 111 x 20.4 (total time) equals 2,264 miles. This exceeds the distance to Howland Island, 2201.

4. The following incomplete reports were received at times indicated:

0615 Howland time (1745 GCT) (15 minutes before estimated time of arrival) Earhart plane reported "200 miles out and no landfall".

0646 Howland time (1816 GCT) Earhart reported "Approximately 100 miles from ITASCA, position doubtful".

0742 Howland time (1912 GCT) Earhart reported "30 minutes gas remaining no land fall, position doubtful".

0758 Howland time (1928 GCT) Earhart reported "Circling trying to pick up island." (At this time signals were received with greatest strength from plane by ITASCA).

0843 Howland time (2013 GCT) Earhart reported "Line of position 157°-337°".

0855 Howland time (2025 GCT) Earhart reported "Heading north and south", and gave same position line as before. (This was the last message received from the plane).

A S S U M P T I O N S

1. That Captain Noonan navigated the plane as close as possible to the great circle course between Lae and Howland Island.

2. That he was approximately on a line passing through Howland in direction 157°-337° at 0843 and at 0855 (Howland time).

3. That he was not certain of which side of the island he was on, since the last message stated they were running north and south.

4. That he was closest to Howland Island at 0758 (based on strength of radio signals received by ITASCA) and that he may have been on any course at that time.

5. That 57 minutes later the fuel gave out and the plane was forced to land.

6. That during those 57 minutes the plane did not maintain course and speed since last message reported heading north and south trying to pick up island, and 0800 message reported circling trying to pick up island.

7. That the plane landed shortly after 0855, on the water within 120 miles from Howland Island, actual position unknown, but approximately on a line running through Howland Island in a direction 157°-337°.

OTHER POSSIBILITIES

1. That the plane may have landed well to the north of its intended course. This is substantiated by several radio messages supposed to have been sent out by the plane. One message stated "281 north"; another "225 NNW". Broadcast experiment of KGMB indicated that the plane was north of Howland and on the water.

2. That the plane may be well to the south of Howland. This is substantiated by dubious radio bearings supposed to have been taken on the plane two or three days after it landed.

3. That the plane continued well to the eastward of Howland. This is contradicted by the bearing line reported at 0843 and 0855 as being 157°-337°. It is also contradicted by the fact that headwinds greater than anticipated existed over the route.

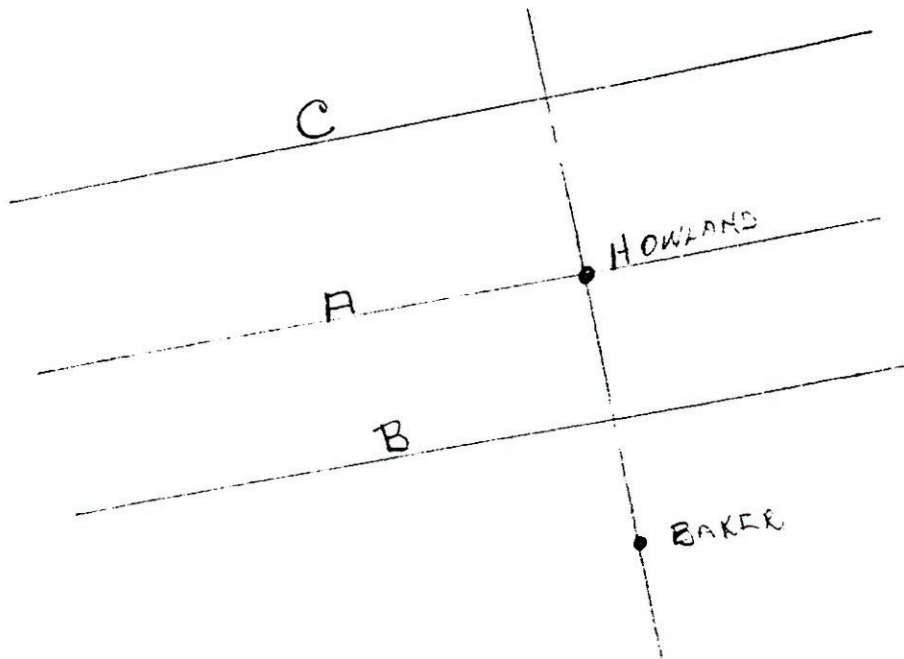
4. That the plane landed far to the westward of Howland. This does not agree with the bearing line sent from the plane. The one ground speed check available also

indicates that the plane would arrive in the immediate vicinity of Howland Island at 1928 GCT, at which time ITASCA reported strength of radio signals to be greatest.

5. Of these four possibilities, it appears that the first two are the only possible ones and that the plane landed well south or well north of Howland. The COLORADO, ITASCA, and SWAN are investigating the area to the south, and it need not be considered by the LEXINGTON group.

6. The area well to the north must be considered since it has not yet been thoroughly searched. Radio signals have been received purported to be from the plane which stated that the plane was north. A glance at the attached sketch will show that it is more likely that the plane went north rather than south. A navigator coming up any one of the courses A, B, or C could check his advance with sun lines to determine at what time he would arrive at Howland Island's longitude. He could then run north or south until he picked up the Island. There appears to be a good possibility that the Earhart plane was on course C and that upon arriving at the longitude of Howland a northerly course was taken to locate the island. If plane had been on course A, he would have sighted Howland. If he had been on course B, he would have sighted Baker if he had turned south, and Howland if he had turned north. A run directly away from the island would make radio signal strength diminish more rapidly than if the island were merely passed abeam.

7.



POSSIBLE MOVEMENTS OF PLANE AFTER A FORCED LANDING

1. ITASCA reports current sets toward the west at a rate of $\frac{1}{2}$ knot, and estimated that wind would cause the plane to drift an additional knot. Assuming that the plane remained afloat, it would have drifted westward at a rate of 36 miles per day. It is believed that a rubber boat loaded with two persons would drift at about $1\frac{1}{2}$ knots in the reported average wind of 10 knots from east. Eleven days will have elapsed before LEXINGTON group commences the search:-

11 days	$\frac{1}{2}$ knot	12 miles/day	132 miles
11 days	1 knot	24 " "	264 "
11 days	2 knots	48 " "	528 "

It appears that plane or the rubber boat carrying the occupants may be anywhere from the position at which the forced landing occurred to a position 528 miles to the leeward.

LIMITATIONS OF OPERATIONS

LEXINGTON and 3 destroyers will have sufficient fuel upon arrival at Howland to conduct the search for a period of 7 days, in which time an area of about 200,000 square miles can be efficiently and thoroughly searched. This is an area about 400x500 miles.

The information actually available indicated that the plane arrived in the vicinity of Howland Island at about eight o'clock on the morning of 2 July. During the night run the navigator should have been able to check his position accurately and frequently by star sights, and it must be assumed that this was done, and that the navigator knew the position of his plane and the ground speed it had been making good during the night. Information available on the weather conditions do not indicate that any radical change in direction or force of the wind occurred at Howland Island during the two and one half hours preceding eight o'clock. At 0615 the plane reported that they were 200 miles out; one hour and forty-five minutes later they circled and attempted to pick up the island. This time agrees very well with the time it would take the plane to cover 200 miles at 111 knots, and it also checked with the time at which the ITASCA reported hearing plane's radio at the greatest strength. All of the above indicates that the planes 0615 position was reasonably accurate. This being the case, it is not reasonable to suppose that the plane was more than 60 miles off its course one hour and forty-five minutes later.

Having arrived at the navigator's position of the island the plane maneuvered to make a landfall, circling

first and then running north and south indicating that they were fairly sure of their longitude. With the gasoline supply practically exhausted ($\frac{1}{2}$ hours gas supply remaining was reported at 0745) it is not likely that the plane ventured more than 40 miles from the navigator's best position. Assuming that the gasoline gave out when the plane was at the end of one of these runs farthest from the island, the distance from Howland would be only 100 miles.

The commanding officer of the ITASCA was of the opinion that the plane passed north of Howland for he reasoned that Baker would have been sighted if the plane had passed south. He further assumed that the plane was within 120 miles of the island and proceeded to search a sector 320° - 045° to this distance. This search took place on the afternoon of the second of July and on the third. This search was apparently thorough. After the third of July, numerous radio messages supposedly coming from the plane kept the ITASCA searching everywhere except in the vicinity of Howland, and except for the ITASCA'S search of a relatively small sector that area has never been searched.

The current in the vicinity of Howland is reported to set west at one half knot. The wind is from the east and the average velocity is reported to have been 4 to 7 knots since 2 July. The effect of the wind on a plane in the water or upon a rubber boat is problematical. Several persons of experience (Lt. Comdr. Williams, USNR, the Coast Guard Honolulu and a merchant skipper who sailed these latitudes) have estimated that the drift would be about 48 miles a day to the westward. However, little is known about the area and it is believed that it would be unwise to rely upon these estimates and immediately start search 550 miles west of Howland.

The area to the south has been searched and may be eliminated. The area to the north has not been searched completely and numerous rumors indicate that the plane may be in that area. The currents in that area are uncertain, and the plane, if it landed in that area, may be to the eastward instead of westward. There is about a fifty-fifty chance that it would remain in about the same spot.

The area to the eastward does not look fruitful, because if the plane had landed in that area it would have probably have drifted to the western area during the eleven days lapse.

The western area appears by the foregoing logic to be the most promising, since prevailing winds and currents should carry the plane into the western area if it landed anywhere within one hundred and twenty miles of Howland.

DECISION

That this force will search the vicinity of Howland Island to a distance of 120 miles, using all available aircraft on the first day. Thereafter, extending the search to the westward up to and including the Gilbert Islands. Then should this search be negative, proceed to the point 290 miles north of Howland Island and conduct such search as remaining fuel will permit.

REPORT OF EARHART SEARCH OPERATIONS 3 - 18 JULY 1937

1. In accordance with despatch orders from the Navy Department and from Commander Aircraft, Battle Force, the U.S.S. Lexington departed from Santa Barbara at 1650, 3 July 1937, arriving at San Pedro at 2300, 3 July 1937. Preparations were begun to conduct a search for Amelia Earhart. Fuel and stores were received during the night. Upon completion of fueling at 0605, 4 July, the LEXINGTON departed for Coronado Roads to receive squadrons.

2. In the meantime, by order of Commander Aircraft, Battle Force, the following squadrons, which were temporarily based on shore, at the Naval Air Station, San Diego, California, made the necessary preparations for embarkation:

VS Squadron Two
VS Squadron Three
VS Squadron Forty-One
VS Squadron Forty-Two
VT Squadron Two
VB Squadron Four



Officers and men of these squadrons were recalled from shore leave and liberty. The planes were prepared to fly aboard and a lighter was loaded with baggage and spares.

3. The LEXINGTON arrived at Coronado Roads at 1048, 4 July 1937. The lighter with squadron personnel and baggage was immediately brought alongside and unloading was effected as rapidly as possible.

4. In compliance with OPNAV despatch 0004 - 1200, Captain J.S. Dowell, U.S. Navy, came on board the LEXINGTON and took command of the LEXINGTON Group which then consisted of the following vessels:

LEXINGTON
LIMSON
DRAYTON

The destroyers CUSHING and PERKINS were directed by Commander Destroyer Squadrons, Scouting Force, to fuel and provision at San Pedro and join the LEXINGTON Group later.

Mr. Paul Brook, International News Service Reporter, came on board the LEXINGTON in accordance with OPNAV despatch 1004 - 1332

5. The LEXINGTON; LAMSON, and DRAYTON departed from Coronado Roads at 1258, 4 July 1937. The following squadrons with planes as indicated below were received on board the LEXINGTON.

<u>SQUADRON</u>	<u>COMMANDING OFFICER</u>	<u>NO. PLANES</u>	<u>TYPE</u>
VT-2	Lt. Comdr. Sinton	9	PM
VS-2	Lieut. D.F. Smith	11	SBU
VS-3	Lt. Comdr. MacMahon	9	SBU
VS-41	Lt. Comdr. Taylor	14	SBU
VS-42	Lieut. Hoskins	9	SU-4
VB-4	Lt. Comdr. Roswall	10	BG-1
Lexington Utility	Lieut. (jg) Carver	1	03U-3



One plane, No. 4-B-4 could not lower its hook and had to return to San Diego. This plane was accompanied by plane No. 4-B-7. Repairs to the hook were effected and both planes returned to the LEXINGTON. Lieut. (jg) George L. Hutchinson, U.S.N. developed serious illness and was transferred from the LEXINGTON to the Naval Hospital, San Diego, via the U.S.S. Chandler at 1620, 4 July 1937.

6. Due to engine trouble the destroyer PERKINS was unable to join the LEXINGTON Group, but the CUSHING joined about 10 miles south of China Point at 1845, and the Group proceeded to the Hawaiian Islands.

7. In accordance with CINCUS despatch 0106 - 1225 the Commander of the 14th Naval District was directed to assume charge of search operations.

8. The LEXINGTON arrived at Lahaina Roads at 1146, 8 July 1937 and the destroyers arrived at Honolulu the same day.

9. Captain Dowell and Captain Noyes of the LEXINGTON flew to Pearl Harbor via Fleet Air Base Patrol Plane for a conference with Commandant, 14th Naval District, regarding the conduct of the search.

10. All vessels were fueled to capacity and provisioned. In addition the LEXINGTON received about 11,000 gallons of aviation gasoline.

11. Mr. Charles Mounce of the United Press and Mr. Earl M. Wolty of the Associated Press came on board the LEXINGTON by authority of the Navy Department.

12. The LEXINGTON Group re-assembled and departed from Lahaina Roads for the Howland Island Area at 1515, 9 July 1937.

13. ANALYSIS OF PLANS FOR THE SEARCH

Manifestly it was not possible to search more than a limited area of the Pacific Ocean. Therefore, a study of all available information was made to determine the limits of the areas of probability. From the maze of information and mis-information, it was necessary to sift out that which was authentic and to base conclusions regarding the search thereon. The following facts were established: At about 0000 GCT, 2 July 1937, Amelia Earhart took off in a Standard Lockheed Electra Airplane from Lae, New Guinea, for Howland Island, distance 2227 nautical miles. She was accompanied by an experienced navigator, Mr. Fred J. Noonan. During the flight the plane was in communication with the Coast Guard Cutter Itasca, which was in the vicinity of Howland Island. The plane reported its position at 0720, GCT 2 July, 1937 at latitude 4°-33' South, Longitude 159-06, about 295 miles from Lae, which indicated that the plane was on its course but making good a ground speed of only 111 knots. The following radio reports were received from the plane by the ITASCA on 2 July 1937:

At 1745 GCT - 0615 Howland time, 15 minutes before the estimated time of arrival, the plane sent the following message:

"Two hundred miles out and no land fall"

At 1816 GCT - 0646 Howland Time:

"Approximately 100 miles from ITASCA, position doubtful"

At 1912 GCT - 0742 Howland Time:

"30 minutes gas remaining, no land fall, position doubtful".

At 1928 GCT - 0758 Howland Time:

"Circling, trying to pick up Island".

At this time the radio signals from the plane received by the ITASCA were of greatest strength.

At 2013 GCT - 0843 Howland Time:

"On a position line 157 - 337 degrees". (This line may have been a sun sight or it may have been a radio bearing observed by the plane on the ITASCA and it presumably passed through Howland Island.

At 2025 GCT - 0855 Howland Time:

"Heading north and south", giving the same position as above.

This was the last authentic message received from the airplane.

14. Numerous radio messages were reported to have been received by various agencies, particularly amateur radio operators, which purported to give information received direct from the plane after it landed. Many of these messages were in conflict and many of them were unquestionably false. None could be positively verified. These messages were a serious handicap to the progress of the search, especially before the arrival of the LEXINGTON Group. Information was received from reliable sources which indicated that the airplane could send no radio message after landing on the water. Supposed receipt of radio messages sent by the missing flyers after they had landed, indicated that the plane was on an island or reef. As a result of some of these messages, the COLORADO, ITASCA, and SWAN were detailed to search the Phoenix Islands, thereby taking them away from the vicinity of Howland Island, which in the early stages of search, was the most probable area. After due consideration it was decided to concentrate the LEXINGTON Group search on the sea area. This decision was based on the assumption that the Earhart plane had landed in the water and that the survivors were afloat either with the airplane or in a rubber boat.

15. Two plans for searching the maximum possible area were formulated and are appended hereto. Search Plan I contemplated operations for an indefinite period. By using 2/3rds of the LEXINGTON planes, opportunity for rest periods and for routine checking of airplanes was afforded every third day. To search efficiently it was considered essential to keep the personnel and planes in excellent condition. About 7 or 8 hours per day was regarded as the maximum flying time that could be expected of personnel and yet have them remain on the alert while searching. Search Plan II was formulated in order that all the ship's airplanes could be used at one time and thus search the maximum area in any

given day. It was recognized that this plan could only be used for a single day and that at all other times Plan I above would have to be used. Both plans were similar in that they placed the planes on a scouting line on either side of the carrier, half on a side, with a scouting distance of 2 miles, and the search was extended 90 miles on either side of the carrier. In the case of Plan I, 42 planes were used, 21 on either side. The advance along the base course was dependent on the number of planes used. An extra plane on either side was used to provide an overlap in order to insure that no holiday was left between the leg out and the return leg. One destroyer was used at the carrier as plane guard for launching and recovering of planes. In addition it was available if needed for emergency rescue work near the carrier. The other two destroyers were stationed on either beam, 60 miles from the carrier on base course, for purpose of effecting rescue. The carrier was advanced along the base course at a speed which would intercept the planes returning from the search. With a destroyer on either flank; planes were never at a greater distance than 30 miles, measured normal to the base course, from the track of a ship. Based on available information it was decided, that the most effective altitude of the search was 300 - 500 feet and the most effective airplane speed was 90 knots. This was confirmed by experience during the search.

16. Information was obtained from the ITASCA, COLORADO, and SWAN to the effect that the average wind from the time of the end of the Earhart Flight until arrival of the LEXINGTON Group, was southeast 10 knots, and the current was westerly, average 5/10 knots. Since the missing plane had been down for about 11 days by the time of commencement of the LEXINGTON Group search, the area westward of Howland Island was chosen as the most probable area for the search. Since Howland Island was the destination of the Earhart plane and inasmuch as NOONAN was conceded to be an excellent navigator, it followed that the plane probably landed fairly close to Howland Island. The weather on the morning of 2 July was reported average and it is reasonable to assume that NOONAN obtained star sights during the early morning hours. A circle of 150 miles radius centered at Howland Island was selected as the probable boundary of the area in which the forced landing took place. This area could be expected to travel westward with the current and wind. If the survivors remained with the floating plane, the wind would have little effect but had they abandoned the plane and used the rubber boat, the effect of the wind would have been added to that of the current. No information was available on which to base an estimate of the effect of the wind on a rubber boat

but undoubtedly wind, if appreciable, would move a rubber boat at a comparatively greater speed than the current. After considering all features of the search it was decided to use Plan 2 (all planes) on the first day, and to search in the vicinity of Howland Island. The reason for searching Howland Island was that it was the destination of the Earhart Plane and if the search began on the extreme eastern limit and worked to the westward, it was believed that eventually a drifting plane or a rubber boat would be overtaken and further, that continuity of the search would thus be effected. Had the plane overshot Howland Island it was concluded that the drift would have taken it back to the westward and therefore no search east of Howland Island was deemed necessary.

17. On the morning of 13 July the LEXINGTON Group arrived at a point about 100 miles north of Howland Island and began the search. The weather was squally with wind velocity 22 to 28 knots and general flying conditions were undesirable. A search covering about 10,000 square miles however was made and the airplanes were recovered. In the afternoon about 27 planes were launched when rain squalls prevented further operations and made it necessary to recall planes already in the air. Even though this first day's search, due to the unfavorable weather, did not cover as great an area as was planned, it was decided to move further westward for the next days operation in order not to lose time in arriving at what was considered to be the most likely area. Current and wind experienced by the LEXINGTON Group confirmed the information previously received that drift of the floating plane or rubber boat would be definitely westward and at an appreciable rate. The wind on this day, and on all days of the LEXINGTON Group search, was stronger than expected, averaging about 18 - 20 knots.

18. Commencing 14 July and continuing up to and including 18 July, search Plan I was used. As a coincidence, the afternoon flight of 14 July began at Latitude 00-00 and Longitude 180°. On 14 and 15 July some interference was experienced due to rain squalls but in general the areas on these days were considered about 90 to 95 percent covered. Planes on the scouting lines approaching a rain squall necessarily had to divert their course somewhat to avoid dangerous flying conditions. Usually however, squalls were not very thick and the planes could easily pass through or around them. The

area covered by a heavy squall, of course, could not be searched but this had to be accepted as area lost in order not to delay advancing of the search. Figuring the drift, later search, on 17 and 18 July covered practically all of the area missed on these two days.

19. On 15 July the LEXINGTON encountered a current which gave a decided set to the northwest. Because of this and also the fact that the wind had been from south southeast force 3 to 4 since the beginning of the LEXINGTON Group search, it was decided to extend the search to the northwestward on 16 July. In general the wind and currents were greater in the northwesterly direction than expected. Weather conditions as regards rain squalls improved on the 16th and from this day until the end of the search, practically no area was left unsearched on this account. During the morning of the 16th an unidentified steamer was seen by the searching planes in latitude $04^{\circ}-38'N$, Longitude $177^{\circ}-32'E$. This was the only vessel not a part of the search force which was sighted by the LEXINGTON Group. On this day the northern flank destroyer encountered definite northeasterly winds indicating that it was not necessary to extend the search further to the north.

20. Since the Sailing Directions and Chart indicated that breakers were reported in this area in 1914, on 17 July all pilots were instructed to look for shoal water. No reef or discolored water was sighted although the weather was clear and visibility was good which indicates that this shoal does not exist. On 18 July the search area was selected so as to include areas missed due to rain squalls on 14 and 15 July and to extend the search to the northeastward.


21. The most probable areas having been covered upon completion of air operations in the afternoon of 18 July, orders were received to discontinue the search.

22. Appendix (A) is a chart of the last flight of the Earhart plane. Appendix (B) is a chart showing the area covered by the LEXINGTON Group search. Appendix (C) is a chart of the entire area searched by the Earhart Search Group. Appendix (D) consists of two diagrams showing the track of the carrier, destroyers and aircraft employed in Search Plans 1 and 2. These plans are similar except that more aircraft are employed by search plan 2, the flights are longer and the advance greater. A Flank Scout Commander was placed in charge of each Flank but it was found necessary to further divide each flank into three groups with a group leader immediately responsible

for his group. This facilitated passing around and through squalls and provided flexibility of the Scouting line. During the search operations the problem of re-covering planes when squalls existed was a matter of considerable moment. Bearings were frequently taken of the windward squalls and it was found that with careful maneuvering of the carrier they could be avoided. Reports from airplanes of weather conditions to windward were also of value in this connection. By carefully timing the search, the start of which was announced by the flank commanders, the position of any given plane of the search could readily be determined at any instant. Radio bearings were frequently taken both by the planes on their loops and by the ship. These bearings served as a good check of their position. Radio bearings were also taken on the flank destroyers and were of material assistance to these destroyers in maintaining stations. Appendix (E) is a Plotting Diagram for tracking planes while on search.

23. The statistics below indicate the extent of the air operations during the search period 13 July to 18 July inclusive:

Area Searched	- 151,556 square miles
Miles Flown	- 143,242
Plane Hours in the Air	- 1591.1



24. In general air operations were carried out smoothly. Communications were excellent. There was only one instance of radio failure of a plane, which resulted in that plane's elimination from one flight. There were two minor airplane accidents in which damage of material resulted. The more serious of these occurred when plane 4-B-8 failed to engage the arresting gear and the plane crashed into the barrier. The damage was such that a major overhaul is necessary. The second was occasioned by plane 2-T-13 landing off center to the left, which resulted in damage to the left lower wing and landing gear. No injuries to personnel occurred in either of these accidents.

✓ 25. Except for the comparatively small areas that were blanked out by rain squalls, the search was thorough, and it is the conviction of the aviators who did the flying that neither the Earhart plane nor the survivors were in the area searched. An estimate was obtained from the ITASCA, which vessel had had the most experience in the Howland Island area, of the most probable location of

the missing flyers on 16 July, if afloat. This estimate coincided with that of the LEXINGTON Group.

✓ 26. As a result of the experience of six days continuous flight operations, it is believed that the search plans devised are sound. The performance of personnel and material was satisfactory in all respects.

✓ 27. Although unfortunately the fate of the missing flyers remains a mystery, it is considered that the search made was efficient and that the areas covered were the most probable ones, based on the facts and information available.

Leigh Noyes

LEIGH NOYES
Captain, U.S. Navy,
Commanding, U.S.S. Lexington.

