

CAPTAIN IRVING JOHNSON
Yankee Cruises, Inc.

Permanent Address
Johnson's Bookstore
1379 Main Street
Springfield, Mass.

Yacht *Yankee*
Now on Third Cruise
Around the World
Returns April 27, 1941

June 4, 1940

Miss Bessie M. Young,
2257 Kalia Road,
P.O. Box 2630
Honolulu, Hawaii.

Dear Miss Young:

We are approaching the last island on our visit to the Ellice and Gilbert Group. We have spend over four weeks sailing from island to island and have learned much that, had we known before, would have made unnecessary this search for Miss Earhart.

The sailing in these groups is very interesting, but somewhat dangerous, although we grounded but once. The charts are very inaccurate and the islands so low that they are hard to see at night. The first island in the Ellice Group was Nukulaelae. We learned that in 1928 an 8000-ton steamer ran on the island at night because strong currents had set her off her course.

From there we went to Funafuti and from there to Veitupu [*Vaitupu*]. Here we learned from the Acting Administrator much about the Ellice Islands and learned that he as well as his predecessor at least once a year visited every island in the group, all of which are inhabited. None of the natives had seen an airplane except for those at Funafuti when H.M.S. *Achilles* brought one there a year ago.

After sailing close by another Ellice Island called Niutao, we went on to the first of the Gilberts, Arorai. The natives were quite pleasant and we traded tobacco for hats, sharks' teeth swords, baskets and so forth. From there we went on to Nukamau [*Nukunau, Nikunau*] and then to Beru. We were surprised to find over 2,000 natives on each of these islands and to learn in Beru from a missionary that the other Gilbert Islands were similarly populous. This missionary ran a school and had quite an establishment on Beru, drawing natives from all the other Islands in the Group. Usually he would visit the islands himself to pick them out, and having been many years in the group, he had first hand knowledge of nearly everything that went on. They have radio there and when Miss Earhart was lost, he attempted to find out from the thousands of natives in the London Missionary Society's control whether any airplane had been seen at the time. He said that in certain cases, it was hard to tell whether some ignorant native had actually seen an airplane or wished he had, but that it was believed that the Earhart plane had flown eastward high up over the island of Taputeouea. He said that not a particle of a wrecked

plane or any wreckage that could possibly be from airplane had been found on any of the islands although the natives often walk along the reefs to see what they can pick up in the way of drift, especially as their islands are so heavily populated that anything they can get is useful.

This did not stop us from going all through the islands, however, and we went on to Anatoa [*Onatoa*]; then to Taputeouea. It was there that we sailed in the world's largest outrigger canoe, some 96 feet long with three masts and a colossal outrigger of some 40 feet. The widest part of the canoe itself is 5 1/2 feet. Next we sighted Nonati [*Nonouti*], also Oneaka [?], and Kuriae [*Kuria*], and at Arenuka [*Aranuka*] we took underwater pictures of beautiful coral and fish, and one of the native brought up a huge sea clam about 2 1/2 feet long. From there we sailed to Apamama [*Abemama, Apamama*] where Robert Louis Stevenson once spent several months. Then we skirted Maiena [*Maiana*] and anchored at Tarawa, the headquarters of the District Officer of the whole group. He has also been to all the islands at least every six months and had been especially on the lookout at the time Miss Earhart was lost.

It was here that we net old Captain I. R. Hendley who, at the request of Mr. Putnam, set out in a small cutter to search an area of the ocean where the natives believed there was an island. There was not good basis for this belief except the natives said their dead went to this island, but that it couldn't be seen by human eyes. We learned that boats had been sailing this area for over 100 years and it is therefore considered impossible that any island should exist unknown at this time in an area that has been frequented so much. We believe we are the fourth yacht ever to have visited these waters and the first yacht to visit many islands we have mentioned. The only other American yacht to visit Tawawa [*Tarawa*] was Vincent Astor's *Nourmahal* which came down a year or so ago.

We found written evidence that the U. S. Coast Guard cutter *Itasca* had stopped at some of the islands during the search for Miss Earhart.

We are now approaching Ocean Island which is the headquarters for both groups and there we shall send this mail. I am extremely sorry to report that the search has been entirely unsuccessful except to prove without a shadow of a doubt that Miss Earhart's plane did not come down on any of the islands of the Ellice or Gilbert Group or that any of the wreckage drifted to the islands.

On the way down from Honolulu we also searched in the Phoenix Group, but did not call at several inhabited islands including Hull. Three years ago these islands were not inhabited, but since then they have had a very bad drought in the southern Gilbert Islands and over 1000 of the natives have been transported to the Phoenix Group in order to relieve the food situation. This means that several government officers as well as these hundreds of natives have been in the Phoenix Group. This also means that schooners have crisscrossed many times between the Gilbert Islands and the Phoenix Islands within the last two years.

It is my opinion and that of all those with whom I have talked in this area that the search be considered finished and that everything that is humanly possible had been done to find any trace of Miss Earhart.

Sincerely yours,

IMJ/ESJ

Irving Johnson

RADIO MESSAGES RECEIVED FROM THE "YANKEE"
Via K 6 FVL

April 22, 1940.

Lowell Thomas who is a friend of mine broadcast news about search. Apparently my brother has not heard from foundation but when he saw their news release he sent out his own. I shall now wire Suva for special permission for search. No mail can reach us now until July 10 in Port Moresby, New Guinea. Everything fine. Start search in two weeks. Candy and magazines arrived in good order. Many thanks and all the best to you. Will send you up a souvenir in the Gilbert Islands.

Irving Johnson

May 5, 1940

We are now on our way to the Ellice Islands having been at VauVau [*Vava'u, Tonga*] Nukualapa [?] and Tin Can [?] Islands. We have radio permission from Suva and we are all set for search. Has foundation completed arrangements with my brother?

Irving Johnson

May 7, 1940.

Everything fine. Two more islands have been searched. Searching operations are being continued.

Irving Johnson

May 12, 1940.

Visited island after island but no news yet. Just left Funafuti heading north.

Irving Johnson

May 19, 1940

Yesterday we landed at Arorai Island and found that U. S. Coast Guard cutter search for Amelia in 1937 had been there. We have just left Nukamae [*Nukunau*] Island and heading for Beru Island and have learned of attempt by local trader to find Amelia in 1937. Will send full report by mail. Many more islands to visit. Please have Foundation send my brother money for search.

Irving Johnson

May 25, 1940.

We sailed through area around Hull Island in Phoenix Group and stopped at uninhabited islands but skipped those with hundreds of natives and visiting ships passed. Visiting many islands. Now at Abamama [*Abemama*] where Stevenson once lived. At Taputeouea we sailed world's largest outrigger canoe longer than the *Yankee*. All islands seem to be inhabited by many natives.

Irving Johnson

June 30, 1940.

Search progressing satisfactorily.

Irving Johnson