Lambrecht-Goerner Letter.

Sometime during the 1970s (the document is undated) *Colorado* senior aviator John Lambrecht responded to written questions from author Fred Goerner. Goerner later provided TIGHAR with a copy of Lambrecht's answers.

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ANSWERS TO MR. GOERNER'S QUESTIONS

1. Where was COLORADO when she was ordered into the search?

She was in Honolulu Harbor moored to a pier. According to my flight log, she had arrived in the afternoon of 1 July, 1937, having come up that same day from the big island. Before proceeding into the harbor, my unit of three planes was catapulted to proceed to Ford Island (Pearl Harbor) where I hoped to get in some much needed (and uninterrupted by ship's routine) engine and aircraft maintenance. Sometime during the night of 2-3 July the ship received her orders to search for Miss Earhart, and later on the same night proceeded to Pearl for fuel and supplies. My unit was of course ordered back to the ship almost simultaneously. Fortunately the maintenance had proceeded to the point we were able to get the planes back together sufficiently to taxi over to the ship the next morning. Remaining maintenance was accomplished on the way south. The ship departed Pearl about 1300 (on the 3rd) and proceeded toward Howland and Baker Islands at 18 knots.

2. How was the COLORADO air search planned?

I don't know that it could have been said to have been "planned" in the generally accepted military sense of the word. In any event, shortly after we cleared Pearl Harbor the Old Man called the navigator and me on the bridge where the navigator broke out the pertinent charts and we looked over the situation. The appropriate search procedure became evident almost immediately:

(a) With only three obsolete aircraft of limited range, it would have been utterly impossible to have searched wide spread ocean areas. Besides the LEXINGTON was on the way down from San Diego to cover that aspect.

(b) There were islands a little south and east of Howland and Baker (the Phoenix Group) on which Miss Earhart, having missed her intended landing point, might have landed - in an island lagoon, inside a barrier reef or, if she were lucky, on a nice smooth beach.

Accordingly it was decided to put the emphasis on a search of the Phoenix Islands, scouting the sea areas, with a three-plane scouting line, enroute to and from and between the islands.

3. What type of aircraft did you fly in the search?

These were O3U-3 observation type aircraft. In case you are not familiar with the Navy's designation of aircraft types at that time, here is a decode:

O - Observation; its primary employment; scouting and search were secondary.
3 - The 3rd model of an observation plane made by that particular manufacturer.
U - Manufacturer: Chance Vought.
3 - The third modification of that model.

It was an open cockpit bi-plane. The only navigational instruments were a magnetic compass, an airspeed meter, and a turn-and-bank indicator. As I remember, we normally cruised at 90 knots indicated airspeed. No voice radio - just Morse code transmitter and receiver with a trailing antenna. I am sure the Department of the Navy would have photos of this plane on file. I don't.

4. What areas were actually searched?

See my "news letter" and the newspaper account.

5. There is an uncharted sand bank and reef (UNCHARTED AS TO EXACT LOCATION) between Howland and the Northern Phoenix Islands. Did COLORADO locate and survey this area during the search?

See my "news letter" and the newspaper account.

6. Which of the Phoenix Islands were actually searched or contacted?

All of them.

7. What were your personal experiences during the search?

This was a routine operation as far as I was concerned. I mean by that that I had previously been in a carrier based scouting squadron and for squadrons like that, scouting and search missions, when carrier based, were quite frequently the order of the day. Other than that, the weather in the search area was excellent and the condition of the sea good. Navigation on our flights was simple dead-reckoning: from-where-you-are to where-you-want-to-go, with a simple intercept problem on the return leg. Entirely routine - good training. I might say, however, that some of the search flights we made were longer in mileage than most carrier scouting hops I'd ever made.

Probably the only personal experience of note was my landing in the lagoon at Hull Island. This is covered in my "news letter."

8. Was any aerial photography of the Phoenix group accomplished during the search?

None officially. We had no photographic equipment. However, I seem to remember that some of the observers (the guys in the rear seats) had personal cameras and did get some pictures of some of the islands. I do not have any copies.

9. What was the general feeling aboard COLORADO with regard to the area where Miss Earhart may have gone down?

At the time that we began considering our line of procedure in searching for Miss Earhart, I think we hoped (or perhaps even thought) she might be down on one of the Phoenix Islands or in the Gilberts. (If the latter, that was a job for the LEX). My personal feeling was that if she were not found on one of the islands of these two groups, she had gone down at sea. I think the Skipper felt the same way. Of course when the possibility of her having made a landing on a Jap held

island was expressed, I personally was not too impressed with that idea (nor am I now) for the following reasons:

(a) All such islands were well off her correct track - had Miss Earhart run into an emergency condition requiring a delayed landing, there were British owned islands a lot closer along her track. And if there were no emergency, I find it hard to believe that Noonan's navigation was so in error as to get them so far off their correct track that they would have wound up on any Jap held island.

(b) At that time (most naive in light of what we now know, but at that time) I supposed Japan to be a civilized maritime nation who would adhere to the customs and usages of the sea and air and all international rules pertaining thereto, and automatically would have rescued, or otherwise correctly attended to any stranded aviators, notifying those concerned of their condition and assisting in arrangements for their return.

I think the general feeling in the COLORADO was that Miss Earhart got lost and ran out of gas. Speculation on board as to what then happened ran all the way from "lost at sea" to "she's down on some island and someday she'll be found". Perhaps Captains Fox and/or Short can be more enlightening on this question.

10. The late Dr. M.L.Brittain, President of Georgia Tech University, was quoted in the press in 1937 and again during World War II that there was an official feeling aboard COLORADO that Miss Earhart may have been captured by the Japanese. Was there any truth to that statement?

On the way down, during the search, and on the way back, I talked with Dr. Brittain on numerous occasions about the search. I do not remember him making any such statement. Nor do I think there was any "official" feeling that Miss Earhart had been captured by the Japs - if there was, I was not aware of it. Furthermore, I note I made no mention of it in my "news letter" and I think that if the conjecture had even approached an official feeling, I would have said something about it in that letter. As a matter of fact, I showed my letter to Captain Friedell and upon reading it said he was going to use it as his official report. (I argued that it first should be revised somewhat and put in more official language. His reply boiled down to "nuts" and his report went in as I had originally written it. However, it may be noted in passing that it had to be forwarded via the Commander in Chief who noted in his endorsement to the Chief of Naval Operations its "breezy manner" and "flippant tone"). The point is, however, had there been any "official" feeling, it would have been the Skipper's and I'm sure he would have included it in his report.

See also final paragraph to question 9 for the feeling as to what happened to Miss Earhart.

11. What are your personal feelings regarding the Earhart disappearance?

I think she was lost at sea. I base this on the supposition that she was ill prepared (equipment wise as well as experience in navigation) for a long overseas flight which was to end up at a pencil dot on a chart of a large ocean. I may say that I have made flights of

this nature and personally I wanted all of the navigational and radio equipment I could get. My information was that she had no where near enough. After the search, I talked to friends (experienced aviators) stationed at Ford Island at the time Miss Earhart cracked up on take-off on her previous East to West attempt around the world. The feeling there was, at that time she did not have all of the proper equipment. And furthermore, they felt, as I did, that such operations were better left to professionals. There is no reason to believe that anything had changed on her second attempt from West to East.

12. Can you give me names and addresses of any other persons who might have information pertinent to the Earhart matter?

Two names are included in my letter of recent date. However, something I wrote above rings a bell - it occurs to me that the navigator of the LEX at the time of the Earhart search was, I think, a Commander (later an admiral and CINC, Pacific Fleet) Felix B. Stump. His address I believe is: P.O.Box 357, McLean, Va. 22101. I regret that both the Skipper and the navigator of the COLORADO are deceased.

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