

The Murfin Report.

Admiral Murfin was the Commandant of the Fourteenth Naval District headquartered at Pearl Harbor, Oahu. On July 2, 1937 he was put in charge of the U.S. Navy's efforts to find the lost Earhart flight. Four days later, the Coast Guard cutter *Itasca* was added to his command. Reproduced here is Murfin's report which served as a preface to the Report of Earhart Search made up of the combined reports of the ship commanders under his authority. Those reports are included individually on this DVD.



The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery
2812 Fawkes Drive • Wilmington, DE 19808 • USA
Voice 302.994.4410 • Fax 302.994.7945 • www.tighar.org • info@tighar.org

OFFICE OF THE COMMANDANT
 FOURTEENTH NAVAL DISTRICT
 AND
 NAVY YARD, PEARL HARBOR, HAWAII, U. S. A. WAH/s

JUL 31 1937

From: Commandant, Fourteenth Naval District,
 To : The Chief of Naval Operations.

Subject: Report of Earhart Search, 2-18 July, 1937.

- Enclosures: (A) Dispatch file.
 (B) Commanding Officer, Coast Guard Cutter, ITASCA, report.
 (C) Photostat ITASCA Track Chart.
 (D) Commanding Officer, USS COLORADO, report.
 (E) Photostat COLORADO Track Chart, Sheet 1.
 (F) " " " " " 2.
 (G) Photostat USS SWAN Track Chart.
 (H) Photostat USS LAMSON Track Chart.
 (I) Photostat USS DRAYTON Track Chart.
 (J) Photostat USS CUSHING Track Chart
 (K) Commanding Officer LEXINGTON Group Report.

1.. Amelia Earhart Putnam and Fred J. Noonan, engaged in a land plane flight around the world, departed Lae, New Guinea, at 1000, 2 July (zone-minus-ten-time), or 2400, 1 July, G.C.T., for Howland Island. The flight was guarded by the USS ONTARIO at approximately midpoint of the flight and by the U.S.C.G.C. ITASCA at Howland. The USS SWAN was on station midway from Howland and Honolulu to guard the next leg of the flight. Except for the services of the ONTARIO and the SWAN and weather reports from the Fleet Air Base, Pearl Harbor, the Navy had no connection with the flight.

2. At 1100, 2 July, information was received that failure of the flight was imminent, and shortly thereafter that the plane was believed to be down.

3. At 1400, 2 July, the Commandant conferred with the Commander, Minecraft, Battle Force (the Senior Officer Present Afloat), and the Commanding Officer, Fleet Air Base, Pearl Harbor. It was agreed that no naval vessel stationed in Hawaiian waters was suitable for search operations in the distant area and that a PBY seaplane could reach Howland Island and under favorable conditions could carry out limited operations, basing on the ITASCA. The Department was so informed. Meanwhile, the Department had directed the Commandant of the Fourteenth

NAVY DEPARTMENT
 RECEIVED
 AUG 9 1937

SEARCHED
 INDEXED
 SERIALIZED
 FILED



AUG 9 1937

Subject: Report of Earhart Search, 2-18 July, 1937.

Naval District to use all available naval facilities in the search. Accordingly, it was decided to dispatch a seaplane to Howland and at 1923, 2 July, patrol plane 6-P-3, Lieutenant W. W. Harvey, commanding, departed from Pearl Harbor Howland Island. The ITASCA was directed to stand by at Howland to tend the plane and the SWAN to proceed toward Howland.

4. The Department promptly approved the recommendation that the COLORADO, then in Honolulu, be diverted from her R.O.T.C. Cruise to join the search, and the COLORADO was at 2115, 2 July, ordered to proceed, when fueled. In a conference with the Commanding Officer, USS COLORADO, prior to his departure from Pearl Harbor, he was given all information then available, and it was agreed that the COLORADO should first search the southeast quadrant from Howland and the Phoenix Islands.

5. The patrol plane, commanded by Lieutenant Harvey and manned by the following personnel, proceeded toward Howland through the night of 2-3 July, contacting the SWAN enroute on schedule.

PERSONNEL, PATROL PLAN 6-P-3

Lieutenant W. W. Harvey, commanding.
Lieutenant (jg) W. M. Drane
Lieutenant (jg) E. S. Lytle
Aviation Cadet P. W. Smith
W. C. Curry, A.C.M.M.
E. J. McCormick, C.R.M.
F. M. Williams 3d. R.M. 2-c.
C. L. English, A.M.M.2-c.

At 0710, 3 July, Lieutenant Harvey reported:

2003 APPROXIMATE POSITION LAT 06-35 LONG 72-00
PERIOD LAST TWO HOURS IN EXTREMELY BAD WEATHER
BETWEEN ALTITUDE 2000 AND 12000 FEET SNOW SLEET
RAIN ELECTRICAL STORMS PERIOD IN DAYLIGHT CON-
DITIONS LOOK EQUALLY BAD CLOUD TOPS APPEAR TO BE
18000 FEET OR MORE PERIOD AM RETURNING TO PEARL
HARBOR NOW HAVE 900 GALLONS FUEL ON BOARD 1710

6. Vessels were dispatched from Pearl Harbor to guard the return flight of plane 6-P-3 in case of fuel exhaustion, but the prudence and skill of personnel safely returned the

Subject: Report of Earhart Search, 2-18 July, 1937.

plane to Pearl Harbor at 1926, 3 July, after being in the air for 24 hours and 5 minutes and flying approximately 2570 sea miles. Faultless two-way communication was maintained throughout the flight of the plane; navigation was accurate, as evidenced by contacts with surface vessels and landfall, all of which occurred precisely on schedule. This performance of duty reflects great credit on Lieutenant Harvey and the officers and men of his crew.

7. The Department inquired as to the feasibility of seaplane search operations basing on Johnston Island. The Commandant considered this impracticable, due to the 2200 mile turn around between Howland and Johnston Islands and stated that if a more extensive search than possible with the COLORADO, ITASCA, and SWAN were desired, a carrier would be the most practicable and efficient unit.

8. The LEXINGTON Group was organized on 4 July, consisting of the LEXINGTON, LAMSON, DRAYTON, CUSHING, and PERKING (the last vessel was later detached from the group, due to machinery trouble). Under command of Captain J. S. Dowell, Commander, Destroyer Squadron Two, this group was expeditiously assembled and departed for Hawaii, for fuel, thence to proceed to the search area.

9. The ITASCA meanwhile had resumed her search operations in the vicinity of Howland Island, as shown in her report and track chart. The difficulties confronting her may be inferred from the following dispatches:

FROM: ITASCA
TO : COMNAVSEC
INFO: COMFRANDIV

6002 YOUR 6002 1401 WE HAVE HAD NO POSITIONS
COMMA SPEEDS COMMA OR COURSES FROM EARHARTS
PLANE EXCEPT SO CALLED LINE OF POSITION AT 0843
WHICH HAD NO REFERENCE POINT PERIOD SHE GAVE US
NONE OF HER BEARINGS PERIOD BELIEVE SHE PASSED
TO NORTH AND WEST OF ISLAND ABOUT 0800 AND
MISSED IT IN THE GLARE OF RISING SUN THOUGH
WE WERE SMOKING HEAVILY AT THAT TIME PERIOD
JUDGE SHE CAME DOWN BETWEEN 337 AND 90 FROM
HOWLAND AND WITHIN 100 MILES PERIOD HAVE
BROADCAST AS INDICATED 1402



6002 YOUR 6002 1401 WE HAVE HAD NO POSITIONS
COMMA SPEEDS COMMA OR COURSES FROM EARHARTS 3
PLANE EXCEPT SO CALLED LINE OF POSITION AT 0843
WHICH HAD NO REFERENCE POINT PERIOD SHE GAVE US
NONE OF HER BEARINGS PERIOD BELIEVE SHE PASSED
TO NORTH AND WEST OF ISLAND ABOUT 0800 AND
MISSED IT IN THE GLARE OF RISING SUN THOUGH
WE WERE SMOKING HEAVILY AT THAT TIME PERIOD
JUDGE SHE CAME DOWN BETWEEN 337 AND 90 FROM
HOWLAND AN WITHIN 100 MILES PERIOD HAVE
BROADCAST AS INDICATED 1402

Subject: Report of Earhart Search, 2-18 July, 1937.

FROM: ITASCA
TO : COMSANFRANCISCO DIVN
INFO: COMHAWN SECTION

6002EARHART ONLY ACKNOWLEDGED
RECEIVING ITASCA SIGNALS ONCE AND DID NOT
ANSWER QUESTIONS AS TO POSITION COURSE SPEED
OR EXPECTED TIME ARRIVAL PERIOD EARHART USED
VOICE ENTIRELY STATIC INTERFERENCE HEAVY AND
ITASCA RECEPTION FRAGMENTARY IN EARLY HOURS
.....1945

The ITASCA was covering an area along the probable earhart track when apparently reliable radio intercepts indicated that the Earhart plane was 281 miles north of Howland. The SWAN was approaching that vicinity enroute to Howland and was directed to conduct coordinated search with the ITASCA. The steamship MOORSEY also joined in the fruitless search of this area.

10. On 6 July, the Commandant, Fourteenth Naval District, was directed to take charge of all naval forces engaged in the search. The ITASCA was also directed by Coast Guard Headquarters to operate under the Commandant's authority. Accordingly, the Commanding Officer, USS COLORADO, then approaching the area, was directed to take charge of all vessels in the area and conduct a coordinated search until the arrival of Commander, Destroyer Squadron Two, when the latter would take over command.

11. The details of the search were left to the discretion of the Commanding Officer, USS COLORADO. The decision to search the quadrant southeast from Howland and the Phoenix Islands still appeared to be sound. The search was conducted as shown in the Commanding Officer, USS COLORADO, report, enclosure (D). No evidence of the flyers or their plane was found. However, by eliminating that quadrant, the LEXINGTON Group was later enabled to plan and execute a more practicable and more extensive search of the western semicircle from Howland.

12. In order to release the COLORADO at the earliest practicable date, it was decided that she should complete the search of the Phoenix Island and vicinity, then proceed to rendezvous with and fuel the LEXINGTON Group destroyers. This was done on 12 July and the COLORADO released from further duty in connection with the search. The result of her operations was definitely to establish that neither the plane nor its passengers were ashore in the Phoenix Group and therefore that they were not on any known land within 450 miles of Howland and that they were not afloat in the extensive areas searched by the ship and her three seaplanes. The duty was efficiently performed under



Subject: Report of Earhart Search, 2-18 July, 1937.

conditions of considerable hazard, due to the inadequacy of surveys of the waters traversed. During the period of his command of the searching force, the Commanding Officer of the COLORADO, Captain W. L. Friedell, exercised sound judgement and effective direction of the units at his disposal.

13. While the LEXINGTON Group was fueling at Lahaina and Pearl Harbor, the Commandant held a conference with the Commander, Destroyer Squadron Two, the Commanding Officer of the LEXINGTON, and senior commanders in the District at which all available information and studies of the weather and probable location of the Earhart plane were made available to the LEXINGTON Group. The daily search plan for the LEXINGTON Group was submitted and accepted. The details of the studies and assumptions are included in those set forth in Commander, LEXINGTON Group report, enclosure (K), and are omitted from this report for the sake of brevity.

14. Commander, Destroyer Squadron Two, took over command of all units in the search area on 11 July and put into effect his search plan, based on the information available up to that time and subject to certain limitations of fuel and endurance of the vessels in his command. The LEXINGTON was required to complete the operation and return to the West Coast with the fuel on board. The ITASCA and SWAN could operate until 16 July and reach Honolulu without refueling. The destroyers could match the LEXINGTON'S time limit. There was thus an absolute maximum of nine successive days for operations in the search area. Prudence dictated a reduction of this time to seven days' operations in order to provide a reserve. In order to insure an efficient search despite some anticipated bad weather, the Commandant directed that the plan provide for not more than seven days of searching and he subsequently directed that it terminate on 18 July, if good weather prevailed on 17 and 18 July, otherwise the search should end on 19 July. The Commander, Destroyer Squadron Two, accordingly laid out and executed his plan of search, as shown in his report attached.



Subject: Report of Earhart Search, 2-18 July, 1937.

15. The details of the plan and the reasons for its various provisions were sound and met with the full approval of the Commandant. The operation was well conceived and skillfully executed. It reflects great credit on the Search Commander, Captain J. S. Dowell, and on the commanding officers, officers, and crews of the vessels and plane squadrons under his command.

✓ 16. The performance of duty of the Commanding Officer of the Coast Guard Cutter ITASCA, Commander, W. K. Thompson, U.S.C.G., has been commended by letter to his immediate superior. His intelligent and zealous conduct of the initial phase of the search under most trying conditions deserves especial commendation. His reports, together with the wholehearted cooperation of the Commander, Hawaiian Section, U. S. Coast Guard, were of great assistance to the subsequent conduct of operations by the Navy. The performance of the ITASCA was excellent in all respects throughout the flight and the search. Careful study of all communications and other information pertaining to the flight, and the preparations therefor, indicate clearly that the ITASCA left nothing undone to insure the safe completion of the Earhart flight.

✓ 17. The USS SWAN was the smallest vessel engaged in the search and the last to return to port. She was at sea for thirty-seven days during which she steamed approximately 7,000 miles. Despite the onerous operating conditions involving shortage of provisions and supplies, she carried out all assigned duties in a manner reflecting great credit on the commanding officer, Lieutenant H. F. MacComsey, the officers and crew. During her entire cruise there occurred no machinery failure nor a single sick day.

✓ 18. It is most gratifying that there occurred no serious injury to men or material in the very extensive and sometimes hazardous operations of ships and planes.

✓ 19. To Summarize briefly:

The initial phase of the search was based on the ITASCA's well reasoned belief that the plane was north of and fairly near Howland. A reasonably complete search of this area was made on 2-3 July. Then, on the strength of radio intercepts which appeared too reliable to be ignored, the search shifted to the westward and then 281 miles to northward of Howland. Both areas were searched without success and subsequent analysis discredits the radio intercepts on which this search was based.

The second phase of the search moved to the southeastern quadrant on the basis of radio intercepts and bearings and other considerations which indicated the plane was on land and probably in the Phoenix Islands. With this assumption

Subject: Report of Earhart Search, 2-18 July, 1937.

eliminated, the third phase was logically based on the assumption that the plane had landed in the water probably within two hundred miles of Howland and that the subsequent drift of wreck or boat would have moved well to the westward and north-westward in the 11 day interval prior to arrival of the LEXINGTON.

The LEXINGTON Group covered an area approximately 300 miles square to the west and northwest of Howland which included all probable positions of plane or passengers if afloat. As an additional but unlikely possibility the Gilbert Islands were searched. It is regrettably unreasonable to conclude other than that the unfortunate fliers were not above water upon conclusion of the search.

Miles steamed by vessels enroute to and during the search	48,000
Miles flown by planes	149,000
Plane hours in air	1,654

Square miles searched:	
By vessels	94,800
By aircraft	167,481
	<u>262,281</u>
TOTAL	

✓ 20. Due to the geographic location of the search area and the composition of the force, certain features of the search were of outstanding interest:

The extensive weather and current data should prove a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the area.

It is believed that the plan used by the LEXINGTON and her squadrons is unique, and was particularly well designed for the management of widely separated forces and for communications concerning the operation.

The experience in false messages, interference, and confusion on critical frequencies indicates the need for some provision for authoritative control of such frequencies in emergency. Obviously, such realistic radio programs as the March of Time should not be broadcast when they may affect relief measures in progress.

If the Navy or the Coast Guard are to be involved in future private transocean flights, the licensing authority for such flights should be prevailed upon to require from the fliers a specific minimum performance in giving to those concerned reliable information prior to and during the progress of the flight.



Subject: Report of Earhart Search, 2-18 July, 1937.

✓ 21. It may be assumed that the Navy will be called upon to attempt rescue of crew and passengers of a transpacific clipper should one unfortunately be forced down at sea. Plans for coordinated rescue effort in the Hawaiian Area have been under consideration for the last several months. They provide for joint action by local agencies of the Navy, Coast Guard, and Pan-American Airways. The greater part of the transpacific air route is beyond the effective radius of local forces. Therefore, it would appear desirable to provide tentative plans for such rescue effort by units of the Fleet as may be anticipated.

✓ 22. Dispatches of particular interest are included in Enclosure (A); they were selected from a total of 385 dispatches concerning the search.

✓ 23. There are appended reports of the Commanding Officer U.S.C.G.C. ITASCA; Commanding Officer, USS COLORADO; and Commander, Destroyer Squadron Two, together with track charts of the vessels and planes participating in the search.


O. G. MURFIN.



Copies to:

Commander-in-Chief U.S. Fleet (2).
Comdr. Hawaiian Section, U.S. Coast Guard.
Comdr. Fleet Air Base, Pearl Harbor.