

USCG Report.

This is a critique of a document entitled Pan American Airways Report on Proposed Joint Rescue Plan. The document itself has never come to light but this critique was sent by Captain Stanley Parker, commander of the Coast Guard's San Francisco Division, the commanding officer of the Coast Guard's Hawaiian Section.

Parker's demonstrably false assertions in paragraph 8 have often been used to dismiss the possibility that distress calls from the Earhart plane were received after the plane was down.



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22 March, 1938.

From: Commander, San Francisco Division.
To : Commander, Hawaiian Section.

Subject: Pan American Airways Report on Proposed Joint Rescue Plans.

Reference: (a) Pan American Airways System Report on Proposed Joint
Rescue Procedure, Serial No. 3, August 26, 1937.
(b) Headquarters letter 6 January, 1938 (OP-651-64-601).

Inclosure: (1) Reference (a). - *MISSIVE*
(2) Copy of reference (b).

1. After due study of reference (a), the comments in the following paragraphs are made with reference to certain statements made therein.

2. Referring to paragraph 3 of reference (a), it has never been learned definitely just what radio equipment the Earhart plane carried. Information given the San Francisco Division was that the plane carried a 30 watt transmitter capable of using either CW or voice on 333,500,3105, and 6210 kc, with a receiver capable of operating on all bands mentioned, with complete coverage up to about 10.0 megacycles. A direction finder was also carried capable of covering the same range. From all indications, there is some basis for the belief that the receiving equipment on the plane was not functioning properly, as no acknowledgements were received from the plane to any dispatch sent by the ITASCA. It has been established that neither Miss Earhart or Noonan knew how to use CW key, at least at normal operating speeds, and complete dependence was placed on radiophone. The ITASCA was to be used as a homing beacon only as no C.G. direction finder equipment capable of operating on the higher frequencies was available on the ITASCA. From all experience so far with high frequency direction finders, the results obtained on loops are subject to many indeterminate errors and are considered unreliable. Miss Earhart was specifically warned by the San Francisco Division against attempting to use the high frequencies for direction finder purposes, and to confine all attempts at direction finding to the intermediate frequencies. This advice was not followed by Miss Earhart as her requests for homing signals were for the ITASCA to transmit on 6210 kc. She did not choose to make known whether she could not or would not use the intermediate frequencies. The information received from the plane was very meager and of little or no value to assisting forces. It can be stated that every arrangement entered into by the Coast Guard in connection with the Earhart flight was carried out, all in spite of the fact that the ITASCA was given only a

few hours notice prior to leaving the States, and that all instructions were issued by dispatch. It was very evident after the flight started that the entire flight was badly managed, and that Mr. Putman, at San Francisco, was not aware of all facts, and that the information which he furnished was often at variance with that received from Miss Earhart. The Coast Guard was not asked to take bearings on the plane and did not do so, although an effort was made to take bearings on a direction finder located on Howland Island. No accurate bearings were obtained.

3. The statements made in paragraph 4 are correct. All radio controls were available only to the pilot. The means of communication between pilot and navigator were extremely unsatisfactory and this one factor would make it possible for garbled dispatches in the plane itself.

4. The statement made in the first sentence of paragraph 5 is correct. There was one position report sent out from the plane about 700 miles from Lae. It was about this time that the first communications from the plane were received on board the ITASCA. Continued communications received from the plane indicates that the transmitter was functioning properly, but that there was considerable doubt as to whether the receiver was functioning properly. Only one acknowledgement was received from the plane, this about one hour before the crash.

5. The matters stated in paragraph 6 are entirely in error. The statement that "The U. S. Coast Guard was officially charged with the safeguarding of the flight" had no basis in fact. The Coast Guard was not ordered or designated to safeguard the flight. Messrs. Miller and Black of the Department of the Interior had more information on the flight and were representing Mr. Putman on board the ITASCA. The ITASCA was ordered to Howland Island for the purpose of acting as a radio homing beacon and plane guard at Howland Island. It is apparent that Mr. Black obtained the assistance of the Navy, as the U. S. S. ONTARIO was stationed midway between Lae and Howland. The Army also was represented at Howland Island. The statement that "They received no direct official information of the departure nor were there any pre-arranged schedules established for contacting the airplane by the Coast Guard or Navy surface craft which had been stationed to guard the flight" is at variance with the facts in the case. An official dispatch was filed by the San Francisco Division for and delivered without delay to the ITASCA immediately upon receipt of word at San Francisco that the flight had started. A dispatch was also filed for the Navy, but no information is available to indicate that the ONTARIO ever received the information before the plane had passed over her. Definite schedules had been arranged as to times and frequencies for use between the ITASCA and the plane, but unfortunately the plane failed to observe either times or frequencies. It was never intended that the ITASCA would take bearings unless they were on intermediate frequencies. As stated before, the purpose of the ITASCA at Howland Island was to act as a homing beacon and guard ship AT that place - and nothing else.

6. Paragraph 7 needs no comment. Practically every radio transmission from the plane was included in the ITASCA'S dispatches.

7. The statement in paragraph 8, last sentence, is at absolute variance with the facts and no basis exists for such a statement. Neither the Navy nor the Coast Guard was expected to arrange a search for the plane. There was no lack of coordination between any of the military forces, in fact the ITASCA was placed under the Navy command as soon as Naval forces arrived in the vicinity of Howland Island, and Coast Guard control relinquished until the Navy had completed the search. After the plane had failed to arrive on time at Howland Island, the wishes of Messrs. Black and Miller were apparently ignored, which was proper, as their function of coordinating the flight had ceased, and it was then strictly a matter for the military personnel. The statement regarding "Regrettable lack of coordination" might possibly have arisen from differences of opinion between the two civilians and the ITASCA'S officers, but it is apparent that the entire flight lacked coordination between assisting vessels and Miss Earhart, and that this was due, in a large measure, to the fact that the Coast Guard was not consulted by the civilians in charge of the flight. This last was due possibly to their own lack of information, as even Mr. Putnam at San Francisco was very poorly informed as to the flight schedules and as to actual conditions on the plane. In order for the San Francisco Division to obtain information as to radio equipment carried on the plane, dispatches were forwarded to Miami Air Station, Lockheed Aircraft Co., and Miss Earhart's technical advisers. No information has been received to date which indicates that any person knows the equipment carried on the last flight. The lack of coordination existed from the beginning of the flight between the principals, not the assisting agencies. Had persons who know the meteorological and radio conditions in the tropics been consulted, and the assisting agencies been given an opportunity to meet personally around a conference table and coordinate the flight, instead of doing everything half way around the world with extremely poor communication facilities, the chances of a happy ending for the flight would have been infinitely greater. It is true that no coordinating plan has been prepared to cover emergencies of the nature proposed, but so many variable factors enter into each individual case, that assistance duties are usually primarily dependent upon the availability and location of sea-going units at the instant of emergency. In the case in question, the Coast Guard happened to be the only agency which had a unit available for actual assistance work at the scene of the emergency, so there was little to coordinate. Communications were coordinated before and during the search by the San Francisco Division, and all information available was immediately forwarded to the Navy and ITASCA.

8. Referring to paragraph 9 of reference (a), it is not understood how any agencies other than the Navy, Coast Guard, merchant ships, and the Army (to a limited extent) are involved in any emergency search or aid to a plane in distress. The function of the Federal Communications Commission is to issue licenses and instructions regarding use of radio, and that agency need not be consulted in times of emergencies as control of communications is delegated by law to the ship or plane in distress. Just how the Department

of Commerce enters into the picture is not understood. It would appear that the function of that department is purely investigative after an accident has occurred. The use of the radio amateurs is questionable, due to the fact that much information received from that source is very unreliable and results in a needless waste of time when time is the important element in any search. The above statement is made with regard to facts alone, and is not meant to imply that amateur radio is untrustworthy. Great credit is due the amateur, but in cases where searches are made hundreds or thousands of miles distant from shore, it must be seen that the agencies best equipped for any radio intercept watches are those of the military and commercial organizations near the scene of the search and ashore. Not one of the amateur reports received during the Earhart search was accurate, and all reports of receipt of signals from the Earhart plane were definitely known to be false, as the San Francisco Division had a continuous intercept watch at three separate locations guarding 3105 and 6210 kc. using beam receiving antennas, with better equipment than is available to amateurs, and no signals were heard other than those of the ITASCA on 3105 kc. However, no reports were discarded until after due investigation by either the Coast Guard or a representative of Mr. Putnam, on the chance that radio signals had actually been heard by the amateurs due to the vagaries of radio. The San Francisco Division was in continuous direct communication with the ITASCA until that vessel came under the direction of the Navy, when the high frequency schedules were suspended on orders of the Navy. It appears that only the Navy, Coast Guard, commercial craft, Pan American, and possibly the Army, are directly concerned in any search for disabled aircraft.

9. The matters referred to in paragraph 10 are of importance and should be settled by a conference between the interested agencies.

10. Paragraph 11 is controversial, but the point made that all time records be made in Greenwich Time is well taken and should be agreed to. Witness the confusion in the Earhart search.

11. The matters set forth in paragraphs 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 are desirable and, if possible, should be arranged for at a conference of interested agencies.

12. Confer with representatives of the Navy, Pan American Airways, and other interested parties with a view to adoption of an appropriate plan for rescue operations and furnish the Pan American organization a copy of this letter.

STANLEY V. PARKER.