

# “Ship is on a reef south of the equator.”

**Y**ou might think that, after nearly seventy years, all of the significant contemporary sources of information about the Earhart disappearance had been long since discovered and analyzed. Not so, but far otherwise. We are constantly amazed by the amount of new information that come to light. Most recently, TIGHAR member and Earhart researcher extraordinaire Ron Bright recently scored a bull’s eye with an inquiry to the

Wyoming State Archives for any possible mention in the Wyoming newspapers of Rock Springs resident Dana Randolph and his alleged reception of a radio distress call from Amelia Earhart.

The Rock Springs incident was well known to us through its mention in official government message traffic and major newspapers. We knew that Dana Randolph was an African-American youth who reportedly heard Amelia say “ship on reef south of equator.” We also knew that the

message was supposedly received at 15:00 Greenwich Time on July 4, 1937 and that local Bureau of Air Commerce authorities had later investigated the claim and found it to be credible.

In response to Ron’s request, Wyoming State Archives Research Intern Suzi Taylor located an article published in the July 6&7, 1937 (combined) edition of the *Rock Springs Rocket*. The text of the article is reproduced below and reveals much more about the intercept and the circumstances surrounding it.

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## First Radio Contact With Miss Earhart Made By Springs Boy

The Fourth of July was a day for every boy in the United States to get excited over firecrackers—for every boy, that is, except Dana Randolph, 16-year-old son of Cyrus G. Randolph of 1408 Tenth street.

Dana was much too busy for firecrackers. His time was taken up answering inquiries as to the manner in which he became the first person in the world to pick up a radio message from Amelia Earhart, forced down in mid-Pacific in her world-girdling flight.

Listening on a commercial radio set equipped with a short

wave receiver, he heard Miss Earhart sending out a radio message for help between 8 and 8:25 a.m., Sunday.

Professional radio operators, operators of amateur stations, government radio men, and listeners in general throughout the world had been listening for such a call since Miss Earhart and her navigator, Capt. Fred Noonan, missed Howland island on their flight from Lea, New Guinea.

The Rock Springs boy, listening in front of his big set, was following a hobby he began eight years ago. Following suggestions

by his Uncle John Randolph he has studied and worked on the mechanics of radio. He has built sets. Sunday morning he was listening to reception brought in over a new antenna he had designed and just had erected.

He heard the following words come out of his loud speaker:

“This is Amelia Earhart. Ship is on a reef south of the equator. Station KH9QQ.”

The voice then began to give the location of the fallen “flying laboratory” in which Miss Earhart and her navigator had flown more than halfway around the

world. But the voice faded away and the young Rock Springs listener was unable to hear the noted woman flier tell exactly where she was.

“Hey, Paw!” Dana yelled to his father who was in the kitchen. “I got Miss Earhart!”

The elder Randolph came running and he and his son listened closely.

Again the woman’s voice came from the loud speaker, repeating her name, the call letters of her station, and fading away again as she began to give her location. The procedure was followed for 25 minutes.

Dana’s Uncle Victor Randolph, who lives next door, came in and was told about the reception of the call for help.

“Everybody wants to know about that,” he told his nephew. “Get down town and report that.”

Cyrus and Victor Randolph immediately went to the police station to learn where the report should be made. They were directed to a local department of commerce radio operator. He notified Washington of their report, saying that the plea for help had come in at 160,000 kilocycles, and then the three of them dashed to the Randolph home to listen again.

But despite constant vigilance at the radio almost day and night, no other clear message came through. Sounds that seemed almost to be the voice of the flier were heard but they were not clear enough to be understood.

The department of commerce in Washington sent notice to all radio men engaged in the search and shortly others reported hearing radio signals. Battleships, fleets of airplanes, and private ships were pointed toward the in-

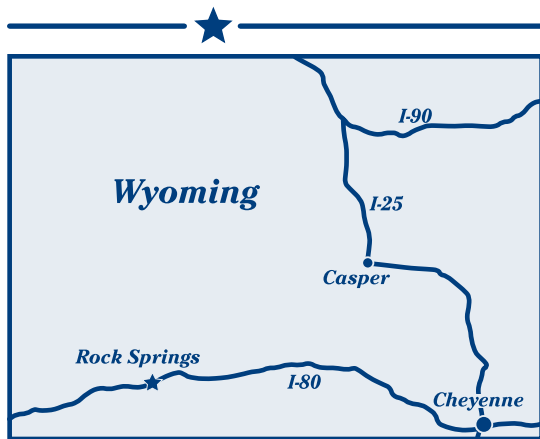
dicated spot. Later came signals that all could hear in the vicinity of the search.

In the meantime, the big press associations in Washington had been notified. The name of the local boy was carried in press stories throughout the world.

Tuesday the father received a telegraph message from a man signing himself Lieut. William J. Powell, of Los Angeles, requesting Dana’s picture and biography and saying that a tour for him is planned.

Operators of local amateur transmitting stations have interested themselves in him and have offered to help him become a licensed operator if he desires.

He has shown a decided bent for the technical side of radio. It is thought likely that his service in helping to locate Miss Earhart will provide means for him to carry his studies as far as he wishes.



“Betty’s Notebook,” *TIGHAR Tracks* Vol. 16 No.3 and on the TIGHAR website at [www.tighar.org/Projects/Earhart/Documents/Notebook/notebook.html](http://www.tighar.org/Projects/Earhart/Documents/Notebook/notebook.html))

Contrary to the article’s assertion, Dana Randolph was by no means the first to claim to hear distress calls from Amelia Earhart, but many aspects of Dana’s story are remarkably similar to that told by Betty Klenck of St. Petersburg, Florida. (See

Both Betty and Dana were young – Betty was 15, Dana was 16.

Both were using standard commercial shortwave radios attached to unusually sophisticated antennas.

Both appear to have been listening on or near



a harmonic of 3105 kilocycles.

Both reported hearing the signal fade out over time. Betty was able to reacquire it. Dana was not.

Both claimed to hear Earhart say she was on land at a time when popular opinion held that the plane was afloat on the ocean.

Both called their fathers who also heard the transmissions.

Both fathers brought the reception to the attention

of the authorities. In Dana's case there was a positive response. In Betty's case the report was dismissed.

The newspaper's claim that Dana heard Earhart say "Station KH9QQ" is curious. The call letters of the radio station aboard the Electra were KHAQQ. It's possible that Dana reported hearing KH8QQ and the newspaper simply got it wrong. (It happens.)

We don't know whether the tour planned for Dana

ever happened but, given the outcome of the search and the government's subsequent official position that the distress calls heard by amateurs were "all probably criminally false transmissions," it seems unlikely.

Ron Bright has determined that Dana Randolph is, unfortunately, no longer living, but we're grateful for the courage Dana and his father showed in stepping forward to tell what they heard.

