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## REPORT OF SIGNAL FLARES FALSE – CAUSED BY METEORS

Hopes for the rescue of Amelia Earhart skyrocketed today, then suddenly fizzled out when the Coast Guard cutter Itasca reported it apparently had mistaken a meteor for flares from the round-the-world flier's plane.

Despite the severe disappointment, the search continued today, with a prospect its center probably would shift from a point 280 miles north of Howland Island to the Phoenix Islands, an equal distance southward.

Hope of immediate rescue of Miss Earhart and Frederick J. Noonan, navigator of her \$80,000 "flying laboratory," soared when the Itasca was overheard at 3:45 am EST (2:45 Memphis Time) radioing the plane:

"We can see your flares; are coming toward you."

Forty-five minutes later came a second message: "We see your flares. Go ahead."

Then –

"Itasca calling Earhart! Itasca calling Earhart! Itasca calling Earhart!" The Itasca later radioed: "Objects sighted were apparently meteors as Howland reported same effect."

Tiny Howland Island, goal of Miss Earhart's 2,570-mile flight from British New Guinea last Friday, also reported seeing the lights. Flares carried by the missing plane could not be sighted by both.

The phantom lights were seen where a fragmentary message yesterday indicated the fliers, forced down by gasoline shortage, were drifting.

Miss Earhart's husband George Putnam, however, was so firmly convinced the message was misinterpreted that the San Francisco Coast Guard radio sent out a message to ships of three nations asking them to shift their hunt 280 miles southeast of Howland Island.

Putnam based his opinion on the inability of his wife's radio to operate when the plane is in the water.

The Lockheed Plant, builders of the plane, verified his opinion concerning the radio. Putnam has held persistently to the belief she reached one of the tiny atolls which dot the equatorial Pacific. None of them is within 300 miles north of Howland.

Lieut. Frank Johnson, San Francisco Coast Guard communications officer, radioed the battleship Colorado, nearing the scene from Honolulu, a suggestion that the warship send her three planes today to fly over the Phoenix Islands.

Officials here also began to share the belief that Miss Earhart, if alive, has found a temporary haven on some remote reef. They indicated the search would veer toward Phoenix.

Coast Guardsmen, however, commented:

"We can't overlook any bet. We must consider the possibility that Miss Earhart picked up new radio equipment somewhere on her flight and also Noonan's known adaptability.

They suggested Noonan may have adapted the radio to work when the plane was on the water, possibly from spare batteries.

Their attitude indicated the Itasca, the Navy mine sweeper Swan, and the British freighter Moorsby, might continue searching north of Howland.

None of the observers doubted that at least some of the many messages purporting to come from Miss Earhart's radio were authentic.

"There is reason to believe," Putnam commented at the San Francisco Coast Guard Station where he listened to reports, that some of the half-intelligible messages were actually from his wife.

It was "impossible," he said, for this to be correct if she were adrift at sea.

#### REVISED BEARINGS

The San Francisco Coast Guard reported that a computation on the basis of a bearing taken from yesterday's radio signals by Pan-American Airways and Miss Earhart's last known message "give indication of her position in the Phoenix group."

Naval officers said they thought the Colorado would change her course to comply with this message.

They also hinted that when the United States aircraft carrier Lexington and an accompanying fleet of four destroyers join the search, they will swing by the Phoenix group. This armada is en route from San Diego, Cal. via Honolulu where they will refuel.

American naval officers hazarded no guess as to what course the Japanese airplane carrier Kamoi, signaling from the South Pacific to join the hunt, would pursue.

[Costs of the various rescue expeditions suggested late unofficial estimates of hundreds of thousands of dollars.]

The message which suddenly converged the hunt at a point 280 miles north of Howland was heard at daybreak yesterday.

‘Above Water’

It was fragmentary, faint, and partly blotted out with static. Three operators at Wailupe Naval Station pieced it together as follows:

“281 North Howland Call KHAQQ (the signature of the Earhart plane) .... Beyond north...Don’t hold with us much longer...above water...shut off”

Searchers interpreted the message – if it came from the missing couple – as indicating various things: that the plane was sinking, that radio communication was failing because of weakening batteries, that the plane was floating, and that gasoline necessary to turn the right motor and furnish electricity was near exhaustion.

Putnam was heartened for the message but he expressed belief the pair were southeast of Howland, in the Phoenix group, about 280 miles south.

There is no known land near the position 280 miles north of Howland.

As the Itasca veered its course to race to the position, it radioed here “official information indicates that Earhart is down 280 miles north of Howland.”

The speedy (unreadable) reached the area about 7 o’clock last night and Coast Guard authorities in San Francisco estimated she was about (unreadable) minutes ahead of the slower Swan, pushing southward.

#### BACK AND FORTH

Throughout the black night the Itasca and Swan patrolled the unknown waters north of Howland, cutting the gloom with their searchlights and then watching for possible flares from the plane.

Their search procedure was to make long sweeps – in one direction for 10 miles or more, then turn at right angles and proceed for a similar distance before veering again.

Radio KGMB, Honolulu commercial station, again broadcast instruction to the plane in an effort to (unreadable).

On the two previous nights, the station’s queries were answered by apparent code replies and indistinguishable voice transmissions, of but little value to the hunt.

During last night, the plane was asked to break the transmitting wave twice if it was on land and three times if on the water.

Putnam and Mrs. Noonan, bride of the missing navigator, kept constant vigil as the hours passed without definite word. The motion picture executive spent last night at the Coast Guard radio station in San Francisco. Mrs. Noonan was cared for by friends in Oakland, California, her home.

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