

February 22, 2017  
Volume XIII, Number 5

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### Meridian Passages

Central Pacific Edition  
M/V Mermaid Vigilance  
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## Interview: Leo Bellarts

Chief Radioman, Coast Guard Cutter *Itasca*  
by Captain Elgen Long

On April 11, 1973 I interviewed retired USCG Lt. Leo G. Bellarts who was Chief Radioman on the USCG Cutter *Itasca* when Amelia Earhart was flying into Howland Island from Lae, New Guinea during the morning of July 2, 1937.

I was a Petty Officer First Class Aviation Radioman in the U.S. Navy during WW II, and had learned the navy's procedures as Bellarts had known them in July of 1937. As WWII expanded to include countries from all around the world that joined the Allied Forces the many procedures their radio operators used had to be modified and incorporated into a single unified system. Major changes had been made, "Z" signals had been eliminated and replaced with "Q" signals, the names and meanings of signal flags were changed, terminologies like "No Smoke" were forbidden, and a new phonetic alphabet had to be learned.



**Coast Guard Cutter *Itasca***

"We are circling but cannot hear you. Send a signal on 7500 kilocycles either now or on the scheduled time on half-hour."

Bellarts added that Earhart's signal was S-5, and was the strongest signal they ever received from her. Bellarts also said from the strength and sound of her signal he was sure

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KHAQQ CING ITASCA WE MUST BE ON YOU BUT CANNOT SEE U BUT GAS IS RUNNING LOW
BEEN UNABLE TO REACH YOU BY RADIO WE ARE FLYING AT A 1000 FEET
KHAQQ DE NRUI R MSG R QSA 5 R A-S (500 ES 3105) GA UNANSWD
KHAQQ DE NRUI R MSG R QSA 5 R A-S (3105)
KHAQQ FM ITASCA UR MSG OK PLS Y WID A3 A3 / 3105 / a-s FM NRUI A-2
KHAQQ CING ITASCA WE ARE CIRCLING BUT CANNOT HE U GA ON 7500 WID A ING COUN
EITHER NW OR ON THE SKD TIME ON 1/2 HOUR (KHAQQ S5 A 3)
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### Excerpt from *Itasca's* radio log

Leo Bellarts was able to tell me of the radio events that occurred during the morning of July 2, 1937 using the old 1937 procedures and terminology, and I was able to understand exactly what he was saying and what it meant.

Bellarts told me that at 0758 *Itasca* Ship Time, Amelia Earhart had called the *Itasca* on 3105 kilocycles and said the following:

she was close-aboard (very near), and no one was going to tell him, after listening to radios eight-hours a day over many years, that he couldn't tell when a radio signal was coming from a transmitter that was very close by.

In fact he said, "I actually did go outside and stand right outside the radio shack and started listening like mad thinking well I'm going to hear a motor any second." Earhart's radio signals sounded to him like she was coming in "like a ton of bricks."

Leo was so pleased that he could talk to someone who knew the procedures and understood what he was talking about, that he loaned me the original radio logs so I

... continued

### Plan of the Day February 22, 2017

- 0001-2400 Transit.
- 1000 Daily Progress Meeting.Ops Ctr.
- Noon "Surprise" fire drill.
- 1500 Sea School. Topic & location TBD.
- 1600 Sunline practice shots, bridge deck.



Cap'n Joe Says...

This afternoon the team gathered on the sea porch for a lecture on safety aboard ship by Cap'n Joe Litchfield. Drawing on fifty years experience at sea, he covered actions to be taken in the event of fire, man overboard, and abandon ship. Hopefully these will all turn out to be theoretical. He also emphasized keeping clear of AUV launch and recovery activities. Another particular danger aboard ship is the the parting of lines under strain. To demonstrate this, Joe had a line rigged to a winch and put a strain on it until it spectacularly failed. I think we got the message! Thanks, Cap'n Joe!



Cap'n Joe explains the dangers of stepping in a bight ...

... continued from page 1

could make copies of them. An audio-tape of the interview with Leo Bellarts and copies of the original radio logs are in the Amelia Earhart Archives.

“She was just about ready to break in tears and go into hysterics. That's exactly the way I describe her voice and I'll never forget it.”  
— Leo Bellarts

### RETURN TRAVEL

It's not too soon to start talking about how we're all getting home. The expedition will end in Majuro, RMI on a date yet to be determined. Availability of commercial air services is not plentiful or frequent. We anticipate that it will take several days to get enough seats for all of us. As soon as the WHOI equipment is removed, the ship will depart for Singapore. Likely, we will need to wait for flights while ashore.

Charlotte will meet us in Majuro. She will be booking airline seats as rapidly as we can fill them. Local Majuro hotels and transportation may be utilized for the remainder of persons awaiting flights. Once you get a flight out of Majuro, you'll be flying to Honolulu where you'll spend a night so that you can arrange for the return travel to your home the following day. I believe this is the most direct means to get home.

So, to take into account all your needs to get home as fast as possible, I'll use the priority system described below. I will consider any requests for consideration for a change of priority. Please let me know if you need it.

Prioritized list for departure Majuro:

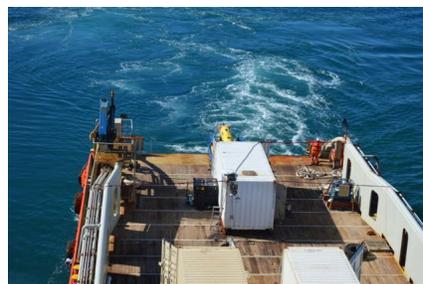
- Job holders
- Single parents
- Business owners
- Parents
- Ham operators
- WHOI
- Spence
- Charlotte

**Time Zones.** We will adjust the ship's clock tonight by one hour earlier to conform to local standard time. There will be one more time zone change this week on our way to the survey.

**Celestial Navigation.** We are tooled up celestial navigation observations again. Spence will lead the Sunlines for SunLovers seminars, and Dave will lead the Stargazers in Moonlight group. Appointments available.

### Nautical Term of the Day:

**Bulwarks** — an extension of a ship's sides above the level of the deck.



Bulwarks line the extensive aft deck of *Mermaid Vigilance*. Sometimes they even keep the water out.

**Still looking** for a REMUS nickname. Contest has been extended again. Prize has been doubled to TWO Oreo cookies for the winner. “Uncle” is not in the running..

**PLASTIC WATER BOTTLES.** If you take one, please finish it. We hate to throw away half used bottles. And please crush them to make it easier on the crew and their recycling efforts. THANKS!

### MERMAID CLASSIFIEDS

#### PERSONALS 100

**Lonely Heart** still lonely. Looking for a rousing game of double solitaire? Call 5555.

#### WANTED 200

**SEA STORIES** for *Meridian Passages*. Alternative-facts accepted. Call Dave 4031 or send straight to NAS.

**Photos!** Archivist seeks digital pictures for sharing. See Marika, 4062.

**Stargazers:** Polishing & oiling the sextant. We'll be ready! Dave, 4031.

**Weights:** Need for exercise class. Call Marika 4062.

#### FOR SALE 400

Styrofoam cups, all designs. Perfectly sized for the Cup Crusher 6000. Sue, nights on talkie CH-3344.

#### LOST & FOUND 500

**Lost:** Still seeking Lockheed Electra 10. Any condition. See Elgen, 4021.

**Place New Ads by Friday – ed.**