

C I V I L A E R O N A U T I C S B O A R D

BUREAU OF SAFETY INVESTIGATION

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT OF FACTS THUS FAR  
DEVELOPED CONCERNING PACIFIC ALASKA AIR EXPRESS  
DC-3 WHICH WAS REPORTED MISSING NOVEMBER 4, 1948, BETWEEN  
YAKUTAT, ALASKA, AND SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

March 16, 1949

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On November 4, 1948, a Pacific Alaska Air Express DC-3, NC-66637, was reported missing between Yakutat, Alaska, and Seattle, Washington. The aircraft had not been located since that date, and the fifteen passengers and two crew members are presumed lost.

At approximately 2226\*, November 3, 1948, the aircraft departed Anchorage for Seattle, Washington, via Homer, Yakutat, and Annette Island, Alaska, with a crew consisting of A. R. Kinnear, pilot, and R. A. Wilson, copilot. The flight arrived at Yakutat, Alaska, at 0257, November 4, 1948, after a routine flight. The aircraft was refueled at Yakutat, all tanks were filled to capacity. Approximately at 0407, NC-66637 took off from Yakutat with the same crew, fifteen passengers, 800 gallons of fuel, and as far as is known, no cargo. A position report was received from the flight by Gustavus radio at 0510 reporting over the Cape Spencer intersection (146 miles southeast of Yakutat) and estimating Sitka (240 miles southeast of Yakutat) at 0544. This was the last communication received from the flight.

Approximately one hour after the flight was due over Sitka, an emergency warning was issued by C.A.A. communications to all radio stations between Anchorage and Seattle. Also alerted was the Civil Aeronautics Board, the 10th Air and Sea Rescue Squadron, and the Coast Guard Air Facility. At 0700 the Coast Guard Air Facility dispatched a search plane to the Cape Spencer intersection area; however, there was no trace of the missing aircraft. Subsequently, from November 4 to November 23 an extensive search of the Sitka and Yakutat

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\*All times referred to herein are Alaska Standard Time based on the 24-hour clock.

area was made by the Coast Guard and the 10th Air and Sea Rescue Squadron. A total of 230 hours of flight time was consumed in the organized search of the area. Since that time there have been sporadic searches by the 10th Air and Sea Rescue Squadron, the Coast Guard, and aircraft flying the route between Seattle and Anchorage. To date no evidence of the aircraft or of the survivors has been found.

All en route radio contacts with NC-66637 were reported as normal. On November 5, 1948, the west course of Yakutat range was flight checked and found to be normal. The following day the southeast course of Gustavus range (which forms Cape Spencer intersection) was checked and it was found aligned as published. The Sitka range was found within tolerance.

At the time of departure from Yakutat the weather was reported to be ceiling 5000 feet, scattered, visibility 10 miles, wind from the east at 15 mph. Annette Island weather at 0710, special, was high thin scattered, 2500 scattered and 15 miles visibility. An aftercast revealed that the cloud base along the route was 3500 feet with tops at 9000 feet. The temperature ranged from a  $-23^{\circ}$  at Yakutat to  $-18^{\circ}$ C, at Annette Island and the relative humidity from 45 percent to 85 percent at the cruising altitude of 10,000 feet.

As part of the investigation, a public hearing was held February 28, 1949, at Anchorage, Alaska. Since all of the evidence could not be obtained at the time of the hearing the investigation will be continued. Upon completion there of a final report will be issued by the Civil Aeronautics Board.