

CONFIDENTIAL

15 November 1944

MEMORANDUM FOR COMMANDER NORTHERN GROUP

Subj: K-34, report on loss of.

1. Orders were issued by Commander Northern Group (Air Controller) on afternoon of 5 November 1944 to Commanding Officer Blimpron 11 to furnish air coverage, weather permitting, for the USS WAKEFIELD during the night 5 - 6 November 1944 to eastward of Cape Cod. As a result of these orders K-34 took off from Naval Air Station, South Weymouth, Mass., at 2256 Q, 5 November 1944. The weather forecast was for winds of 25 to 35 mph aloft, but as blimp was to be close to home base this was not considered hazardous to operations. Inquiry to E.S.F. disclosed that the area directly to southward was still being continuously patrolled by air indicating possible enemy submarines may be attempting to enter our coastal area. The actual decision as to the advisability of departure of the Blimp, considering weather, on this mission was placed in the hands of the Squadron Comdr. This has been the usual procedure although CNAG reserves the right to change or cancel any mission if emergency or necessity for such mission requires it. Blimp was due at 06/1115 November 1944. Its fuel allowance was estimated good until 1600.
2. At 0725 Q, Commander Northern Group (Air Controller), due to threatening wind and what looked like icing conditions, ordered the K-34 to return to Base. The K-34 receipted for these orders and was at that time in sight of the WAKEFIELD, and was in position 41-59N 69-23W, 30 miles from Cape Cod Light and 71 miles from South Weymouth.
3. At 0849 Q ZP-11, South Weymouth, reported that K-34 had not been heard from since 0725 at which time she receipted for message ordering her to return to base. K-34 should have reported her position at 0830. At 0852, Air Controller JOC, requested MIT Radar Unit, South Boston, as well as NAF Beavertail and NAS Brunswick to try to pick up any IFF signals. At 0909 DIO alerted Coast Guard Stations on Cape Cod and at 0915 vessels in vicinity were requested to report if and when they had sighted K-34. At 0922 Army Controller requested Army Radar Station at HECF Boston to attempt to locate any serial targets. At 0937 SC-672 was ordered to proceed to position 41-47N, 69-40W which was believed to be the most likely position of K-34 with information then at hand. At 0947 information regarding last sighting of K-34 was requested of WAKEFIELD. The answer to this was received about 1042 and gave 0730 position of K-34 as shown in paragraph 2. WAKEFIELD notified KLINE (APD-120) that Blimp may be in trouble at 42-02N, 69-34W as KLINE passed WAKEFIELD. CESF given all available information at 0943.

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4. Northern Group Vessels in vicinity were ordered to search area roughly thirty miles eastward, fifteen miles northward, and thirty miles down the Cape, and vessels inside Cape Cod Bay were ordered to search that area. The Radar Station operated by MIT gave Code 1 targets between Boston Lightship and Race Point. The Army Station gave targets 7500 ft. above the Graves Light. As subsequent events proved, no radar information received was reliable.

5. No forecasts of bad weather had been made during the night. The Northern Group Aerology Office did not receive any report of upper air soundings during the period 0730 Q to 1630 Q which was the time that the K-34 and personnel were missing. The Surface reports from Chatham, North Truro, and Rockport covering the area nearest to that in which K-34 was last sighted showed that the temperatures were between 37° and 40° F, and that there was light rain throughout the area. The wind was mostly from the North or North Northeast and was progressively stronger from Chatham Northward being about 20 - 22 MPH at Chatham while Truro had by 1030 Q worked up to better than 34 MPH. Rockport reported winds between 32 and 36 MPH throughout period. Vessels at sea reported winds between 40 and 50 knots. The Commanding Officer of WAKEFIELD later reported a change in winds between 0700 - 0800 from N.W. to 060° and then to 020° - 030°. The velocity was variable at the surface with gusts to 35 knots but averaged 22 knots.

6. At 1341, CGAS Salem was ordered to send a PBM to search from Cape Cod light along coast of Cape Cod and work off shore as visibility permitted. At 1358 PBM was airborne on search. At 1543 CG Salem advised that PBM was returning to base because of fog and rain. Posit. 10 miles east of North Truro. The PBM searched from North Truro Light to 42°-17' N 69°-45' W to 41°-37' N 69°-12W to Eastern Shore of Nantucket Island to posit. 4 miles east of North Truro Light, thence to Salem visibility 1-4 miles, ceiling 300 - 600' and carburetor icing. During the flight the APD 120 was sighted at 1438 at approximately 42°-00' N 69°-40' W and they flew over the area where raft was later picked up at about 1500. The survivors in the raft upon sighting the plane shot up a flare which failed to function and then, although the plane had passed without seeing them due to poor visibility, they shot up another flare which functioned properly. Either this second flare, or a subsequent flare, was seen by the APD-120 and led to the rescue of survivors.

7. CESF assisted in search by sending OP dispatch 061717 to the USS SAVAGE (DE-386) (enroute to Casco); to the USS KLINE (DE-687) (enroute Boston to Bermuda); to the USS AMICK (DE-168) (enroute from South to Boston); and to the USS BAINBRIDGE (DD-246) (enroute Boston to Norfolk) to keep a sharp lookout between 41-30N and 42-30N for the overdue blimp.

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8. CESF also sent OP dispatch 062009 to the USS MOFFETT (DD-362) (enroute with USS BUCKLEY DE-51, USS SPANGENBERG DE-223, and USS REUBEN JAMES DE-153 from New York to Boston); to the W.T. POWELL (DE-213) (enroute with USS LUKE DE-577 and USS PAINE DE-578 from Norfolk to Boston); to the USS ATHERTON (DE-169) (enroute from Delaware Capes to Boston); and to the USS NOTABLE (AM-267) (enroute Argentinia to Boston); advising of last known position of blimp and instructing them to keep sharp lookout for wreckage or survivors.

9. At about 1500 Q, permission was obtained to use USS KLINE (APD-120) and USS SAVAGE (DE-386) in search operations and these vessels were ordered to report to CNG for duty by dispatch CESF 061911Z (1511Q). SAVAGE reported at 2150 Z which was received by CNG at 1950 Q or two hours later, after KLINE report of recovery of survivors had been received. CESF gave C.N.G. authority to issue orders for search by SAVAGE and KLINE which was done in dispatches 0620100 P to KLINE and 062007 OP to SAVAGE. Although these messages were turned in to Northern Group Communication Office shortly after 1600 Q they had not been sent and were cancelled by order of Sub-Commander, Northern Group after KLINE reported rescue of survivors, which message was received in Joint Operations at 1815 Q.

10. When Captain Gingrich, USN, USS PITTSBURGH, was informed of loss of blimp by phone, he volunteered to use his vessel and his escort, USS BAINBRIDGE, in search through night.

11. Attempts were made throughout the night to contact KLINE to order her to return to Boston with survivors, but these attempts were completely unsuccessful.

12. At about 0710 on 7 November dispatch 062359 P from KLINE was received, which states she was proceeding on duty assigned, and at 0730 Surface Controller was notified by CESF Surface Controller that COTCLANT had been requested to order KLINE to return to Boston.

13. The following comment is made:

1. Present Radar setup could not give accurate information as to the presence or absence of an aerial target in the Cape Cod - Massachusetts Bay area.

2. Surface Vessels available to CNG for patrol are not of sufficient sea keeping quality to be of any real value in a rescue mission in winds above 30 knots. Ship Lane Patrol vessels assigned to CNG which have any sea-going quality of value are slow and are based too far at sea to be of immediate value in a sea rescue close to the coast.

3. The loss of time to alert vessels in vicinity of a crash or rescue mission, due to necessity to go through various echelons of command and delay in communications is excessive and reduces the

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value of these vessels for rescue operations.

4. When rough seas prevent landing by flying boats, which is frequently the case in this area, especially in winter months, the actual rescue of personnel is necessarily a function of surface craft. In such cases, the functions of aircraft are: (a) Search, (b) guiding surface craft to scene, (c) dropping rafts and supplies to personnel.

5. When poor visibility or other unsatisfactory flying weather prevails, search by aircraft is drastically restricted or impossible, and the full burden of search falls upon surface craft.

6. Communications on 2716 kcs (ship to shore frequency) between Northern Group and KLINE (APD-120) and SAVAGE (DE-386) for all practical purposes were non-existent due to unexperience and seasickness of their radio personnel and to poor reception in area.

7. Vessels assigned to rescue operations should go on 3000 ks. immediately upon receipt of orders to report to Task Group Comdr.

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