


Flight 19

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NAS Ft. Lauderdale training squadron markings of FT-28, Taylor's [Avenger](#)

Summary

Date	December 5, 1945
Cause	Pilot error
Site	Off the eastern coast of Florida  United States
Origin	NAS Ft. Lauderdale
Destination	NAS Ft. Lauderdale after completing a training mission
Fatalities	14

Aircraft

Aircraft type	5 x TBM Avengers
Operator	 United States Navy
Crew	14
Survivors	0

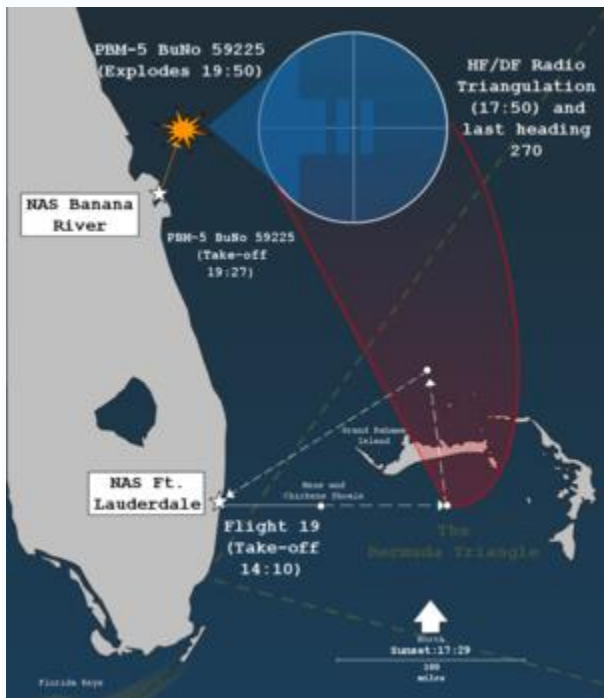
Flight 19 was the designation of a group of five [United States Navy](#) Grumman/GM [TBM Avenger](#) torpedo bombers which disappeared on [December 5, 1945](#) during a training exercise from [Ft Lauderdale Naval Air Station, Florida](#). All 14 airmen on the flight died as well as 13 crew-members of a search and rescue [PBM Mariner flying boat](#) which exploded in midair. Navy investigators concluded that Flight 19 became disoriented and ditched at sea when the aircraft ran out of fuel, while the PBM was a victim of mechanical failure. Some have questioned the Navy's version in the years since, with the resulting speculation contributing to the development of the [Bermuda Triangle legend](#).

Mission

Flight 19 undertook a routine navigation/bombing exercise to give the men advanced combat aviator and aircrew training in [VTB-type aircraft](#). The flight leader, [Lieutenant Charles Carroll Taylor](#), had about 2500-flying hours, most in aircraft of this type, while his trainee students had 300 total, and 60 flight hours in the Avenger.^[1] The aircraft were fully fueled and in the process of being pre-flighted, when it was discovered none of the aircraft had clocks. This was not cause for concern as it was

assumed each man had his own watch.^[1] Takeoff was scheduled for 13:45 local time, but the late arrival of Lt. Taylor delayed actual departure until 14:10.^[1] Weather at NAS Ft. Lauderdale was described as "...favorable, sea state moderate to rough."^[1] As is customary on training flights, one of the trainee pilots assumed the role of leader out front, while Taylor observed. The exercise was called "Navigation Problem 1", and it involved the Avengers negotiating a triangular course from Fort Lauderdale due east for 56 miles until reaching Hens and Chickens Shoals where bombing practice was planned. The flight would then continue east another 67 miles before turning to a course of 346 for 73 miles, in the process over-flying [Grand Bahama](#) Island. Finally, Flight 19 would have then assumed a course of 241 degrees for 120 miles bringing it back to NAS Ft. Lauderdale.^[1]

Radio conversations between the pilots were detectable by base and other aircraft in the area. It is known that the practice bombing operation was completed successfully, around 1500 an exchange where a pilot requested permission to drop his last bomb and was given permission indicated they were proceeding on to their first turn.^[1] Forty minutes later another flight instructor forming up with his group of students for the same mission, received an unidentified transmission. A male voice had asked Powers [one of the students] what his compass read, the recorded reply being "I don't know where we are. We must have got lost after that last turn." The instructor then transmitted; "This is FT-74, plane or boat calling 'Powers' please identify yourself so someone can help you." The response after a few moments was a request from the others in the flight for suggestions. FT-74 tried again and a man identified as FT-28 (Taylor) came on. "FT-28, this is FT-74, what is your trouble?" "Both of my compasses are out", Taylor replied, "and I am trying to find Fort Lauderdale, Florida. I am over land but it's broken. I am sure I'm in the Keys but I don't know how far down and I don't know how to get to Fort Lauderdale."^[1]



Flight plan (in white) of Flight 19 on [December 5, 1945](#). The light red flightpath indicates possible positions between first turn and HF/DF radio triangulation at 17:50. Bullseye indicates bearing and radius of Flight 19 based on radio fixes. Orange line indicates path of PBM-5 BuNo 59225 from Banana River NAS; explosion in orange.

FT-74 informed Fort Lauderdale that aircraft were lost, then advised Taylor to put the sun on his port wing and fly north up the coast to Fort Lauderdale.^[1] Ft. Lauderdale operations asked if the flight leader's aircraft was equipped with a standard YG ([IFF](#) transmitter), which could be used to

triangulate the flight's position, but the message was not acknowledged by FT-28. Instead, at 16:45, FT-28 radioed: "We are heading 030 degrees for 45 minutes, then we will fly north to make sure we are not over the Gulf of Mexico." During this time no bearings could be made on the flight, and [IFF](#) could not be picked up. Taylor was told to broadcast on 4805 [kilocycles](#). This order was not acknowledged so he was asked to switch to 3000 kilocycles, the search and rescue frequency. Taylor replied -- "I cannot switch frequencies. I must keep my planes intact."^[1]

At 16:56, Taylor did not acknowledge another request to turn on the transmitter for [YG](#) if he had one. A few minutes later he was heard calling to his flight "Change course to 090 degrees (due east) for 10 minutes." At about the same time, two others in the flight were heard to say "Dammit, if we could just fly west we would get home; head west, dammit."^[1] This was the first indication of panic in the flight.

As the weather worsened, radio contact became intermittent, and it was believed that the five aircraft were actually by that time over 200 miles out to sea east of the Florida peninsula. Taylor radioed "We'll fly 270 degrees west until landfall or running out of gas".^[1] and requested a weather check at 17:24. By 17:50 several land based radio stations had triangulated Flight 19's position as being within an electronic 100-mile radius of [29° N 79° W](#).^[1] Flight 19 was north of the Bahamas and well off the coast of central Florida, but the weak radio reception and interference from radio stations in [Cuba](#) meant the pilots could not be reached to give them this information. At 18:04 Taylor radioed to his flight "Holding 270, we didn't fly far enough east, we may as well just turn around and fly east again". By that time, the weather had worsened and the sun had set. Around 18:20, Taylor's last message was received. He was heard saying "All planes close up tight . . .we'll have to ditch unless landfall . . .when the first plane drops below 10 gallons, we all go down together."^[1] At the same time, in the same area, SS *Viscount Empire*, a merchant ship, radioed that she was in heavy seas and high winds northeast of the Bahamas, where Flight 19 was about to ditch.^[1]

PBM-5 (BuNo 59225)

PBM Mariner



[PBM-5 Mariner](#) similar to BuNo 59225
Note: BuNo stands for Bureau Number^[2]

Summary

Date	December 5, 1945
Cause	Midair explosion
Site	28.59° N 80.25° W
Origin	NAS Banana River
Destination	NAS Banana River after searching for Flight 19
Fatalities	13

Aircraft

Aircraft type [PBM-5 Mariner](#)

Operator  [United States Navy](#)

Crew 13

Survivors 0

Earlier, as it became obvious the flight was indeed lost, several air bases, aircraft and merchant ships were alerted. A [PBY Catalina](#) left after 18:00 to search for Flight 19 and guide them back if they could be located.^[1] After dark, two [PBM Mariner](#) seaplanes originally scheduled for their own training flights were diverted to perform square pattern searches in the area west of [29° N 79° W](#). PBM-5 BuNo 59225 took off at 19:27 from Banana River Naval Air Station (now [Patrick Air Force Base](#)), called in a routine radio message at 19:30 and was never heard from again.^[1]

At 19:50 the tanker SS *Gaines Mills* reported seeing a mid-air explosion, then flames leaping 120 ft high and burning on the sea for 10 minutes. The position was [28.59° N 80.25° W](#). Captain Shonna Stanley, reported searching an oily sea for survivors, but found none. The escort carrier [USS *Solomons*](#) also reported the explosion, in the exact position which an aircraft they had been observing on radar had vanished from the screen.^[1]

Investigation



Report of the loss of Flight 19 is at the bottom of the New York Times, December 7, 1945. (NYT)

A 500-page Navy board of investigation report published a few months later made several observations.

- Lt. Taylor had mistakenly believed that the small islands he had passed over were the Florida Keys so his flight was over the Gulf of Mexico and heading northeast would take them to Florida. It was determined that Taylor had passed over the Bahamas as scheduled, and he did in fact lead his flight to the northeast over the Atlantic.
- Lt. Taylor, although an excellent combat pilot and an officer with no problems with the Navy, had a tendency to "fly by the seat of his pants", getting lost several times in the process. It was twice during such times that he had to ditch his plane in the Pacific and be rescued.
- Blame for the loss of Flight 19 was placed upon Lt. Taylor.
- The loss of PBM-5 BuNo 59225 was attributed to a mid-air explosion.^[3]

This report was subsequently amended "cause unknown" by the Navy after Lt. Taylor's mother contended that the Navy was unfairly blaming her son for the loss of five aircraft and 14 men, when the Navy had neither the bodies or the airplanes as evidence.

Had Flight 19 actually been where Taylor believed it to be, landfall with the Florida coastline would have been reached in a matter of 10 to 20 minutes or less, depending on how far down they were. However, a later reconstruction of the incident showed that the islands visible to Taylor were probably the Bahamas, well northeast of the Keys, and that Flight 19 was exactly where it should have been. The board of investigation found that because of his belief that he was on a base course toward Florida, Lt. Taylor actually guided the flight further northeast and out to sea. Further, it was general knowledge at NAS Ft Lauderdale that if a pilot ever became lost in the area to fly a heading of 270 degrees west (or in evening hours toward the sunset if the compass had failed). By the time the flight actually turned west, they were likely so far out to sea they had already passed their aircraft's fuel endurance. This meant that there was little hope of rescue, even if they had managed to stay afloat. ^[4]

] Avenger wreckage

In 1986, the wreckage of an Avenger was found off the Florida coast during the search for the wreckage of the [Space Shuttle Challenger](#). In 1990, [aviation archaeologist](#) Jon Myer raised this wreck from the ocean floor. He was convinced it was one of the missing planes, but positive identification could not be made. In 1992 another expedition located scattered debris on the ocean floor, but nothing could be identified. In the last decade, searchers have been expanding their area to include farther east, into the Atlantic Ocean. In 1991 the wreckage of five Avengers was discovered off the coast of Florida, but engine serial numbers revealed they were not Flight 19. They had crashed on five different days "all within a mile and a half of each other". ^[5] It was determined through Navy records that the various discovered aircraft, including the group of five, were declared either unfit for maintenance/repair or obsolete, and simply disposed of at sea.

Bermuda Triangle connection

Main article: [The Bermuda Triangle](#)

In the April 1962 issue of *American Legion Magazine*, author Allen W. Eckert was the first to write of the "popular" reasons for the disappearance of Flight 19. Among them, it was claimed Taylor had been heard saying "We are entering white water, nothing seems right. We don't know where we are, the water is green, no white". It was claimed that officials at the Navy board of inquiry stated that the planes "flew off to Mars". Eckert's story, "The Lost Patrol", was the first to connect the supernatural to Flight 19, but it would take another author, Vincent Gaddis, writing for [Argosy Magazine](#) (February 1964) ^[2] to put Flight 19 together with other mysterious disappearances, coin a new catchy name, and call the whole "The Deadly Bermuda Triangle"; he would build on that article with a more detailed book (*Invisible Horizons*) the next year. Others would follow with their own works: [John Wallace Spencer](#) (*Limbo of the Lost*, 1969); [Charles Berlitz](#) (*The Bermuda Triangle*, 1974); [Richard Winer](#) (*The Devil's Triangle*, 1974), and many others, all keeping to some of the same supernatural elements outlined by Eckert. Berlitz, grandson of a distinguished linguist and author of various additional books on [anomalous phenomena](#), attributed the loss of Flight 19 to anomalous or unexplained forces, despite lack of evidence supporting his claim.

The men of Flight 19 and PBM-5 BuNo 59225

Aircraft number	Pilot	Crew
FT-28	Charles C. Taylor, Lieutenant, USNR	George F. Devlin, AOM3c, USNR Walter R. Parpart, ARM3c, USNR ,
FT-36	Edward J. Powers, Captain, USMC H.Q.	Howell O. Thompson, SSgt., USMCR George.R. Paonessa, Sgt., USMC
FT-3	Joseph.T. Bossi, Ensign, USNR	Herman A. Thelander, S1c, USNR Burt E. Baluk, JR., S1c, USNR
FT-117	George W. Stivers, Captain, USMC	Robert P. Gruebel, Pvt., USMCR Robert F. Gallivan, Sgt., USMC
FT-81	Robert J. Gerber, 2nd LT, USMCR	William E. Lightfoot, Pfc., USMCR*
PBM-5 BuNo 59225	Walter G. Jeffery, Ltjg, USN	Harrie G. Cone, Ltjg, USN Roger M. Allen, Ensign, USN Lloyd A. Eliason, Ensign, USN Charles D. Arceneaux, Ensign, USN Robert C. Cameron, RM3, USN Wiley D. Cargill, Sr., Seaman 1st, USN James F. Jordan, ARM3, USN John T. Menendez, AOM3, USN Philip B. Neeman, Seaman 1st, USN James F. Osterheld, AOM3, USN Donald E. Peterson, AMM1, USN Alfred J. Zywicki, Seaman 1st, USN
(*Note: This particular plane was one crew member short.)		

References

1. [^] [a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q](#) "[Lost Patrol](#)" Naval Aviation News June 1973, 8-16. By Michael McDonell article about Flight 19
2. [^] [Background on Naval Aircraft Bureau \(Serial\) Numbers](#) DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY -- NAVAL HISTORICAL CENTER
3. [^] [report of Flight 19/Training 49 loss](#) ibiblio.org

4. [^ \[1\] Skeptics Dictionary online](#)
5. [^ Dive to Bermuda Triangle \(2004\)](#); telecast on The Science Channel, [February 17, 2006](#)

[edit] External links

- [Flight 19 and Bermuda Triangle](#)
- [BBC Documentary on Flight 19](#)

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