

MH370 report: Underwater locator beacon battery had expired

March 8 2015, by Eileen Ng



Dai Shuqin, whose sister was on board Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 that went missing on March 8, 2014, is stopped by policemen as she speaks to journalists near Yonghegong Lama Temple during a gathering of family members of the missing passengers, in Beijing Sunday, March 8, 2015. Families of the 239 people on board Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 on Sunday marked the anniversary of the plane's disappearance, vowing to never give up on the desperate search for wreckage and answers to the world's biggest aviation mystery. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

The first comprehensive report into the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 revealed Sunday that the battery of the locator beacon for the plane's data recorder had expired more than a year before the jet vanished on March 8, 2014.

The report came as Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott said the hunt for the plane would not end even if the scouring of the current search area off Australia's west coast comes up empty.

Apart from the anomaly of the expired battery, the detailed report devoted pages after pages describing the complete normality of the flight, which disappeared while heading from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, setting off aviation's biggest mystery.

Families of the 239 people who were on board the plane marked the anniversary of the Boeing 777's disappearance, vowing to never give up on the desperate search for wreckage and answers to what happened to their loved ones.

Despite an exhaustive search for the plane, no trace of it has been found. In late January, Malaysia's government formally declared the incident an accident and said all those on board were presumed dead.

The significance of the expired battery in the beacon of the plane's flight data recorder was not immediately apparent, except indicating that searchers would have had lesser chance of locating the aircraft in the Indian Ocean, where it is believed to have crashed, even if they were in its vicinity. However, the report said the battery in the locator beacon of the cockpit voice recorder was working.

"The sole objective of the investigation is the prevention of future accidents or incidents, and not for the purpose to apportion blame or liability," the report said.

Even though the beacon's battery had expired, the instrument itself was functioning properly and would have in theory captured all the flight information.

The two instruments—commonly known as "black boxes"—are critical in any crash because they record cockpit conversations and flight data through the end of a flight.

The 584-page report by a 19-member independent investigation group went into minute details about the crew's lives, including their medical and financial records and training. It also detailed the aircraft's service record, as well as the weather, communications systems and other aspects of the flight. Nothing unusual was revealed, except for the previously undisclosed fact of the battery's expiration date.



Dai Shuqin, right, and Jiang Hui, left, relatives of passengers on board the Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 that went missing on March 8, 2014, speak to

journalists as they arrive near Yonghegong Lama Temple during a gathering of family members of the missing passengers, in Beijing Sunday, March 8, 2015. Families of the 239 people on board Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 on Sunday were marking the anniversary of the plane's disappearance with a vow to never give up on the desperate search for wreckage and answers to the world's biggest aviation mystery. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

The report said that according to maintenance records, the battery on the beacon attached to the flight data recorder expired in December 2012, but because of a computer data error, it went unnoticed by maintenance crews. "There is some extra margin in the design to account for battery life variability and ensure that the unit will meet the minimum requirement," it said.

"However, once beyond the expiry date, the (battery's) effectiveness decreases so it may operate, for a reduced time period until it finally discharges," the report said. While it is possible the battery will operate past the expiration date, "it is not guaranteed that it will work or that it would meet the 30-day minimum requirement," it said.

The report gave insight into the physical and mental well-being of the flight's pilot, Capt. Zaharie Ahmad Shah, saying he had no known history of apathy, anxiety or irritability. "There were no significant changes in his lifestyle, interpersonal conflict or family stresses," it said.

It also said there were "no behavioral signs of social isolation, change in habits or interest, self-neglect, drug or alcohol abuse" by Zaharie, his first officer or the cabin crew.

Financial checks also showed nothing abnormal about their spending patterns. It said Zaharie held several bank accounts and two national trust

funds. He had two houses and three vehicles, but there was no record of him having a life insurance policy.

The co-pilot, First Officer Fariq Abdul Hamid, had two savings accounts and a national trust fund. He owned two cars and "spent money on the upkeep" of his cars. "He does not have much savings in his bank account. He has a life insurance policy," the report said.

It also said 221 kilograms (487 pounds) of lithium ion batteries packed by Motorola Solutions in Malaysia's Penang state didn't go through security screening at Penang airport. The shipment was inspected physically by the airline cargo personnel and went through customs inspection and clearance before it was sealed and left Penang a day before the flight. At the Kuala Lumpur airport, it was loaded onto the plane without any additional security screening.

The report said the batteries were not regulated as dangerous goods. There were 99 shipments of lithium ion batteries on Malaysia Airlines flights to Beijing from January to May last year, it added.

In Sydney on Sunday, Prime Minister Abbott said the hunt for the plane would continue even if searchers scouring a 60,000-square-kilometer (23,166-square-mile) swath of the southern Indian Ocean off Australia's west coast do not find it.



Dai Shuqin, front right, and Jiang Hui, rear right, relatives of passengers on board the Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 that went missing on March 8, 2014, is intervened by policemen as they try to speak to journalists near Yonghegong Lama Temple during a gathering of family members of the missing passengers, in Beijing Sunday, March 8, 2015. Families of the 239 people on board Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 on Sunday were marking the anniversary of the plane's disappearance with a vow to never give up on the desperate search for wreckage and answers to the world's biggest aviation mystery. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

Prior to Abbott's comments, it was unclear what would happen if the search of that area, which is expected to end in May, yields no clues. Officials from Australia, Malaysia and China are scheduled to meet next month to discuss the next steps in the search, but Abbott's remarks indicate that ending it is not an option.

"It can't go on forever, but as long as there are reasonable leads, the search will go on," Abbott, whose country is leading the search, told

reporters. "We've got 60,000 square kilometers that is the subject of this search. If that's unsuccessful, there's another 60,000 square kilometers that we intend to search and, as I said, we are reasonably confident of finding the plane."

Meanwhile, family members of the passengers and crew aboard the plane marked the anniversary of the plane's disappearance. Voice 370, a support group for the relatives, hosted a "Day of Remembrance" at a mall in Kuala Lumpur with songs, poems and prayers.

"It is important to highlight to the public that we still don't have any answers and that we must pursue the search," said Grace Subathirai Nathan, whose mother, Anne Daisy, was on the plane.



Jiang Hui, a relative of a passenger on board the Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 that went missing on March 8, 2014, is stopped by a policeman as he tries to speak to journalists after a gathering of the family members at Yonghegong

Lama Temple in Beijing Sunday, March 8, 2015. Families of the 239 people on board the flight on Sunday were marking the anniversary of the plane's disappearance with a vow to never give up on the desperate search for wreckage and answers to the world's biggest aviation mystery. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

"The lack of answers and definitive proof—such as aircraft wreckage—has made this more difficult to bear," Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak said in a statement. "Together with our international partners, we have followed the little evidence that exists. Malaysia remains committed to the search, and hopeful that MH370 will be found."

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said his government would provide "all needed service to every next of kin" and help uphold their "legitimate and lawful rights and interests."

Most of the plane's passengers were Chinese.

"A year has passed, the plane has not been located, but the search effort will continue," Wang told a news conference in Beijing. "Today must be a difficult day for the next of kin. . Our hearts are with you."

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