

February 8, 1990

Frederick A. Goerner
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Dear Fred,

Since we last talked the Earhart Project has covered a lot of ground, as I'm sure you've seen in the media. Although you may not agree with our analysis of the situation in the central Pacific with regard to AE, you could perhaps be of great help in clearing up a small part of the mystery as it relates to Gardner Island.

You are familiar with the bone story as told by ex-Coast Guardsman Floyd Kilts in 1960. You have said, "I did considerable research on the Floyd Kilts story. ... The human remains on Gardner were of a man, not a woman. There were only the remains of one person, and that person was a Polynesian man. There was no attempt to take the remains to Suva. The 'white planter' in the story was a New Zealander who died on Gardner of peritonitis. He is buried in a marked grave on Gardner. Floyd Kilts was a part of the U.S. Coast Guard personnel constructing the Loran station on Gardner during WWII. He had been taken to Gardner aboard the U.S. Coast Guard vessel U.S.S. Planetree." (your letter to Rob Gerth 9 April 1989)

We're curious as to where you found this information. Like Kilts' version of the story, yours contains enticing bits of accurate information mixed in with misinformation. The "white planter" was, of course, Gerald B. Gallagher, Officer-in-charge of the Phoenix Island Settlement scheme. He was by no stretch of the imagination a New Zealander, being a Cambridge educated Irishman working for the West Pacific High Commission in Suva, which answered to London, not Wellington. I have stood by his grave on Gardner, where he did indeed die of peritonitis on September 27, 1941. Floyd Kilts was a Chief Carpenter's mate disassembling (not constructing) the Loran station in March 1946 (not WWII). I don't know what ship brought him there, but if there was a U.S.S. Planetree, it was not a Coast Guard vessel but a U.S. Navy vessel. The only known casualties on the island prior to the Gilbertese settlement were five British seamen and six Arab firemen (stokers) lost in the wreck of the Norwich City on November 30, 1929. The bodies that washed up were buried by the survivors.

We'd be very interested to know the source of your version. We've seen nothing similar in the Fiji Archives or British Public Records, nor in the published literature concerning the colony, but if we knew where your perceptions came from it might help piece together the truth.

Sincerely yours,

Richard E. Gillespie
Executive Director

REG/am