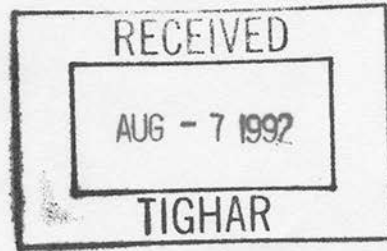


FREDERICK ALLAN GOERNER
Twenty-four Presidio Terrace
San Francisco, California 94118

March 1, 1990

Mr. Richard E. Gillespie
Executive Director
TIGHAR
1121 Arundel Drive
Wilmington, Delaware 19808



Dear Mr. Gillespie:

Please forgive the brief delay in answering your letter of February 8, 1990.

The questions you posed have required me to research my files which are quite voluminous. I have more than 75,000 documents and letters and notes in my Earhart file alone.

When I wrote to Mr. Gerth and spoke with you by telephone last year, I was writing and speaking strictly from memory without reference to any documents. As my involvement with the Earhart matter is thirty years old this year, my memory is far from totally trustworthy.

To properly answer you I have dug into a lot of material, much of which I have not perused for a decade or more.

With respect to the Floyd Kilts business: One of our KCBS investigative reporters, Bill Dorais, who was deeply interested in the Earhart story, dug into Kilts' claims. Dorais concluded that it was third-hand information at best and totally suspect. Bill became convinced that Kilts had seen FLIGHT FOR FREEDOM in which the female pilot character was supposed to land at "Gull Island" and because Hull Island was a part of the Phoenix Islands, speculation was rife that the Earhart plane had come down on one of the Phoenix Islands.

Bill wrote to the Central Archives of Fiji and The Western Pacific High Commission for information, and the archivist, named Tuiniceva, replied that "No skeleton has ever been reported found on Gardner Island." Bill finally decided (as did I) that Kilts' story was the result of a corruption of varied events, difficulty in translation, vivid imagination and the traditional exaggeration of the story over the years.

I learned more in November, 1968, at the time I took a film crew to Tarawa in the Gilberts to do a documentary on the 25th anniversary of the World War II U.S. invasion of Tarawa. I was accompanied by General David Shoup, USMC, Ret., who was awarded

the Medal of Hour for his valor at Tarawa, and five U.S. combat correspondents, who had been part of the Tarawa invasion. The film, TARAWA D+25 was aired in 1969.

During our stay at Tarawa in 1968, I had some long conversations with a Mr. Roberts, who was a top assistant to the British High Commissioner. Roberts was sort of an unofficial historian for the Gilbert Islands Colony.

I tried out the Kilts' story on Roberts, and he gathered together several of the older Gilbertese, who had been a part of the colonizing activities at Gardner shortly after the Earhart disappearance. After much conversation and deep-thinking, it was decided that there was a legend about the remains of a Polynesian man being found on Gardner, what year or specific circumstance unknown. They were firm, however, that the skeleton of a woman had NEVER been found. There was, too, a strange story of a woman's "high-heel shoes" turning up at some point on Gardner. This was a matter of some hilarity.

Roberts said he was absolutely certain the remains of a woman had never been found because it would have been a matter of considerable import to everyone. He added that the Polynesian man story was plausible because Polynesians from Niue occupied Gardner Island sometime around the turn-of-the-century.

Roberts told me that if I had further interest I should seek out a man named Harry Maude, who headed an expedition to Gardner late in 1937. He said Maude was the most knowledgeable man in the world about the Gilbert and Phoenix Islands, and he was considered a world-class historian. Roberts also told me a quite sensational story about the travail of the crew of NORWICH CITY, but I have never found time or motivation to pursue the matter.

I did not search for Maude, but recently I have been told that Maude has authored several books about the islands, and he is a Professor at the Australian National University in Canberra. If I were you, I would contact Maude for a full story on Gardner.

Finally, Roberts told me that if Earhart and Noonan had been on Gardner they could have survived very nicely as there were plenty of coconuts, crabs and birds which could be caught by simply walking up to them and grabbing them.

Several times in the 1970's I visited the archives in Auckland and Wellington, New Zealand. Basically I was searching for information about the cruiser HMS ACHILLES which was involved in the Earhart puzzle in 1937. I was also interested in why the British through the New Zealanders were so vitally interested in the Phoenix Islands and in particular Canton Island at a time when those interests collided with those of the United States.

I thought your man Gallagher was a New Zealander because his name appears in the New Zealand files about Gardner Island. If

you are certain he was British, I have no information that would refute that conclusion. Also, I have no proof that Floyd Kilts was removing the Loran station on Gardner as opposed to constructing it. Bill Dorais got the idea he was involved in the construction.

By the way, U.S.S. PLANETREE was indeed a U.S. Coast Guard vessel. It was a 180-foot tender of the MESQUITE (180 (B) Class). Her visual call sign was WAGL-307 (bn CG-140). She was commissioned November 4, 1943. As of 1982, PLANETREE was still on active duty. She was the vessel which delivered the initial construction force to Gardner for the Loran station. For further information, I refer you to Robert Scheina, who is official historian for the U.S. Coast Guard. I'm sure he could get you all of the information about the Gardner Loran installation and the reports that were filed from that installation. He can also give you a complete biography of U.S.S. PLANETREE.

Again, with respect to the records found in the archives in Auckland and Wellington, I have neither the time or inclination to give you a full story of the competition between the U.S. and Britain over the islands, but I will give you some highlights of some of the material.

H.M.S. WELLINGTON visited Gardner in August, 1935 and accomplished a survey. In February, 1937, HMS LEITH, again visited Gardner, and a British flag was raised on the island and a large marker was constructed proclaiming Gardner as a British possession. Mr. Maude and his Gilbertese people arrived on Gardner sometime in October of 1937. This was separate from the activities which originated in New Zealand. The Gilbert Islands had a severe problem with excess population, and colonizing the Phoenix Islands appeared as a method of easing that situation.

In November, 1938, a joint New Zealand and British team, which was known by the acronym NZPAS (New Zealand Pacific Air Survey) landed on Gardner. The team was headed by E.A. Gibson, M.W. Hay, R.A. Wimbush, Jim Henderson and Jack Payton. They stayed on the island until January 30, 1939, and they conducted a full survey of Gardner which included setting the boundaries for a landing field and clearing obstructions in the lagoon for a seaplane landing area.

The effort was the brainchild of Sir Ralph Cochrane and E.A. Gibson, and it had twin purposes: To prepare the islands for possible use in the event of a war in the Pacific and to claim the islands for Britain for later use for trans-Pacific commercial aviation. The work was accomplished in considerable secrecy.

In 1939, the U.S. Navy ship BUSHNELL surveyed Gardner for defense and commercial purposes. The survey also included aerial photographs and mosaics of the island.

You of course know of the occupation of the island by the Coast Guard during World War II and the fact the Gilbertese colony held on until the early 1960's.

During all of this time, no official report was ever filed by anyone which would suggest that Earhart and Noonan landed on Gardner in July, 1937.

The above information was what finally dissuaded Fred Hooven from the Gardner conclusion.

By the way, despite our conversation of last year, nowhere have I seen you acknowledge that your recent efforts were motivated by the work of Fred Hooven. As you well know, the information did not originate with Mr. Willi or Mr. Wade. Though Fred Hooven has been dead for five years, responsible researchers have the obligation to identify their sources of information.

As I wrote to Mr. Gerth and as I discussed with you by phone last year, I knew the pilots Lambrecht, Short and Fox of U.S.S. COLORADO. They were not fledgling flyers. They were seasoned U.S. Navy aviators, and they would have liked nothing better than to find Earhart and Noonan. To suggest that they saw signs that someone was living on Gardner and simply ignored them is an extreme insult to their memories. John Lambrecht assured me that they were totally convinced that Gardner and the other Phoenix Islands with the exception of Hull Island were uninhabited. His "signs of recent habitation" on Gardner were undoubtedly the markers left by HMS LEITH in March, 1937.

At the risk of making you angry, I feel I must say several things to you, Mr. Gillespie.

The temptation to get easy publicity is immense. Evidence your recent claims, along with those of Messrs. Willi and Gannon, about a battery, a cigarette lighter, bits of metal, etcetera that you found on Gardner that "possibly could have belonged to Earhart and Noonan or come from the Earhart plane".

Given the number of people who lived on or visited Gardner since 1937, there must be a mass of debris there, and the more logical conclusion is that these items belonged to those people rather than Earhart and Noonan. There must be many old batteries there. The Coast Guard used them for many purposes. Anyone could have lost a cigarette lighter. And "a boxlike piece of metal with a serial number on it (that) may have enclosed radio equipment" is more logical to the Coast Guard. Metal was at a premium on Gardner where the natives were concerned for many purposes including catchments for rain. I'm sure the Coast Guard personnel gave the natives anything they could. That's the way it was during WWII. Also remember that U.S. planes flew into Gardner during WWII to re-supply the Coast Guard station and to deliver mail.

Once you float "possibilities" to the media and there never is a follow-up, it catches up to you and credibility plummets. The hardest thing in the world is to come back from an expedition and tell the media and friends and members of your organization that nothing was found that could be identified as belonging to Earhart or Noonan or their plane. I know that because of personal experience.

The only thing that will write an end to the Earhart mystery is positive identification of their aircraft or their remains. That does not mean a piece of metal or some unidentified human remains. It means NUMBERS from the props, engines or instrument panel or remains that can be identified by dental charts.

If you return to Gardner, don't bring back more "maybes" for publicity. If you bring something back, be absolutely positive you have clear identification before making the search for Earhart and Noonan more of joke than it already is.

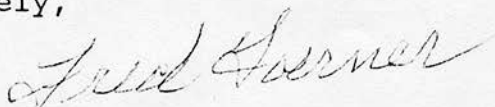
As I discussed with you by phone and as I wrote to Mr. Gerth, Fred Hooven and I dismissed the possibility of Gardner or McKean because of the massive amount of information that made such a conclusion illogical. We arrived at the conclusion that the most logical places to search were the tiny reefs which lie between Howland Island and the Phoenix Islands. I have asked the U.S. Navy to search those bits of coral, and I'm hopeful they will do just that some time in the not distant future.

You must remember, too, that the direction finders circa 1937 were not considered to be accurate at distance closer than 5 degrees. That information was given to me by Captain August Detzer, USN, (Ret.), who in 1937 was head of OP-20-GX, the direction-finding division for Naval Intelligence Communications.

If you want further information, don't hesitate to ask.

Good luck with your organization and any further searches. Simply remember to provide all information to your membership and investors, and use the media carefully. They will not remain tolerant of "maybes" forever.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fred Goerner". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Fred Goerner
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