

# TIGHAR TRACKS

newsletter of

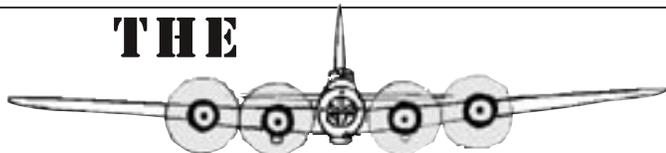
The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery

Winter 1985

© TIGHAR

Vol. 1 No. 1

## THE



## AGAIAMBO E

TIGHAR has confirmed that the world's last restorable B-17E survives in a grassy swamp near Agaiambo, New Guinea. The aircraft appears to be remarkably well preserved and complete. In addition to being the last surviving example of its production type, there is a possibility that this particular aircraft was a member of the famous flight of B-17s that arrived at Pearl Harbor, unarmed and out of fuel, at the height of the December 7th attack.

Of the more than 12,700 Flying Fortresses that once darkened enemy skies only a handful survive today. Not one is a B-17E. The E was the first of the big-tailed Forts. Only 512 were built, but a few of the first off the line were sent to the Pacific in late 1941 in response to the deteriorating diplomatic situation. They got a welcome they hadn't expected. In the weeks following the Day of Infamy the few B-17s that survived the Japanese onslaught in Hawaii and the Philippines fought a desperate rear guard action until reinforcements could be sent.

On February 23rd, 1942, B-17E serial number 41-2442, trying to reach Townsville Australia after a catch as catch can raid on Rabaul, ran out of fuel over southeastern New Guinea. The tall kunai grass of the Agaiambo swamplands made for a soft forced landing that left even the Perspex nose uncracked. The crew walked out through some of the most hostile country on earth, but 41-2442 remained among the snakes, termite mounds, and killer hornets to become the Agaiambo E.

This aircraft is potentially one of the most significant aviation recoveries in history. Late this year a small TIGHAR team will conduct an on-site recovery evaluation. A suitable restoration facility will be selected and recovery preparations will begin. Watch TIGHAR TRACKS for update.

## OPERATION BARNSTORMER

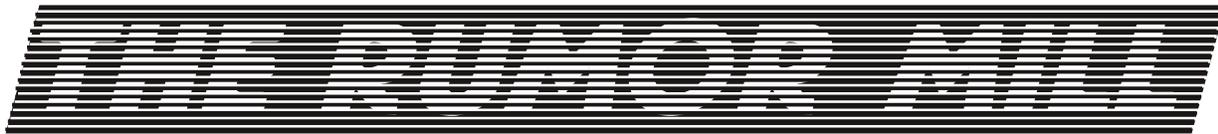
While many recovery opportunities involve aircraft in woods, deserts, and jungles, there are many other rare aircraft closer to home, semi-protected, but inaccessible to the restoration community because of the intransigence of their owners. Classically, the aircraft are stored disassembled in a shed or barn. The owner is often aware that the aircraft are valuable, through experience, suspicion or apathy, has kept the existence of the aircraft confidential.

TIGHAR, because of its unique position, can devote the time and energy needed to track down rumors and, when the aircraft are located, negotiate with the owner as an unbiased historical advocate. By assuring the owner that his identity and location will remain confidential, TIGHAR can then bring photographs and information before the restoration community. Interested collectors may submit bids which TIGHAR can relay to the owner. In this way aircraft are brought into the marketplace which would otherwise be lost to fire or building collapse.

Initial results are encouraging. After months of tracing rumors, and over 1,000 miles of driving, a barn has been located containing a number of antique aircraft never before brought to the restoration market. These include:

- An OX-5 powered Curtiss Robin
- A Wright J-5 powered Curtiss Robin
- A Wright J-6 powered Fairchild KR 34
- An original Curtiss Junior
- An Aeronca C-3
- Two Waco UPF-7s
- A Fairchild PT-19
- A Fairchild PT-23

The aircraft are disassembled, are generally complete, and although in a very respectable state of preservation, are endangered by the poor condition of the barn in which they repose. Photographs of all but the OX-5 Robin are available to interested members for a small fee to cover costs. Call or write for details.



At the heart of every rumor, every legend, is a grain of truth, however small. In this section of TIGHAR TRACKS are published rumors and legends just as they come in to TIGHAR headquarters. Members are encouraged to write in with any information that might help get to the truth or with new rumors to be investigated.

#### **The Lost Condor**

**Rumor:** The last of the original Conqueror-powered Curtiss Condors lies partially disassembled in a barn somewhere in New York State.

**Fact:** Only six aircraft were built. They preceded the more numerous Cyclone-powered Condors operated by American Airlines. They first saw service in 1930 with the newly organized T.A.T. (Transcontinental Air Transport or Take A Train), later to become TWA. They were soon sold to Eastern Air Transport which, in turn, sold them in 1935. The next owner of four of the Condors was Clarence Chamberlin of transatlantic fame. Chamberlin modified the 18 passenger behemoths to accommodate an incredible 29 passengers. He then barnstormed the northeast, selling sightseeing hops, sometimes operating out of strips as short as 1,200 feet.

Eventually three of the Condors were destroyed by fire. The fourth was last seen at Teterboro New Jersey in the late 30's. There is reason to believe that the fourth Condor was sold to a collector from the Utica, New York area. Because of legal problems, he had his considerable collection distributed in several barns around the state. When he died a few years ago a strong box containing much of the paperwork and the locations of the aircraft disappeared. Some of the aircraft have been recovered but the whereabouts of the Condor, if it still exists, remain a mystery.

#### **Buccaneer of the Dismal Swamp**

**Rumor:** A Brewster Buccaneer rests deep in the Great Dismal Swamp southwest of Norfolk, Virginia, largely intact but very difficult to reach. There is no complete Buccaneer in captivity.

**Fact:** Two Buccaneers are being restored near Philadelphia but the aircraft were in poor condition and are still missing many major components. A third salvageable Buccaneer would be of great help in the restorations.

#### **Underwater Peashooters**

**Rumor:** There are a number of Boeing P-26 Peashooters on the bottom of Lake Michigan, not far from shore. The victims of various training accidents, these all-metal fighters would survive quite well in the lake's fresh water.

**Fact:** One hundred thirty nine P-26s were built for the Army during 1933-36. One survives in the Air Force Museum and the last airworthy P-26 belongs to the Ontario Air Museum. In terms of rarity and historical significance few aircraft can rival the diminutive Boeing fighter.

#### **Where is the June Bug?**

**Fact:** The June Bug was the third flying machine designed and built by Glen Curtiss. On July 4, 1908, it became the first aircraft to fly a measured kilometer in the United States, winning the Scientific American prize for Curtiss.

Presented to the Smithsonian in 1913, it was crated and shipped to Washington by rail. It never arrived. Records of the aircraft's progress stop at Philadelphia. The Curtiss Museum of Hammondsport, New York has re-opened the search to track down the June Bug.

# MIDNIGHT GHOST

Project Midnight Ghost started with an unconfirmed legend of an aircraft crashing in the Maine woods. It has grown into a well-established theory of the fate of l'Oiseau Blanc and its 1927 disappearance, carrying crew Charles Nungesser and François Coli with it into oblivion. Search operations throughout 1984 explored the use of several types of technology, all with disappointing results. Finally, in the fall of 1984, search teams were organized and sent into the hills west of Round Lake, Maine, on foot, with metal detectors and magnetometers. No spectacular results were expected from this approach, and none were achieved, but it had to be tried.

Meanwhile, Project Midnight Ghost has raised public consciousness of the flight to such an extent that formerly unknown reports of sightings have come to light over the winter. These reports, each independently of the others, establish a logical and sequential line from Newfoundland To Round Lake. The line is consistent with the intentions of the crews and the performance of the aircraft. They are the only unexplained aircraft sightings/hearings beyond Newfoundland on May 9, 1927.

The first one is in Nova Scotia, where two separate lobster fishermen saw an aircraft on the right day at the right time. Their evidence is reported in the May 13, 1927 edition of the Bangor Daily News. A trip to Nova Scotia is planned for the summer to confirm this report.

In addition to the evidence of Anson Berry and Ray Beck, two more sightings/hearings have surfaced in Maine. A first-hand report from Norman Foss places l'Oiseau Blanc 13 miles ESE of Round Lake on May 9, 1927, sputtering and coughing and very low. Foss is now in his mid-seventies but remembers the day clearly—airplanes were very unusual over Washington County then. Very shortly thereafter, Mr. and Mrs. Everett Scott heard an airplane over the TWP 19 road, which is just

east of Round Lake. While both the Scotts are dead, their story is well known in Machias, and, in any case, is merely one of many better-supported reports.

No foot expeditions are planned to Round Lake for the spring. TIGHAR is awaiting the results of an overflight of the hills with a highly specialized radar. Details cannot be released because the device is highly classified, but TIGHAR has been assured that the radar could find anomalies to search closely if the arrangements can be made to use this new technology.

Research will continue, in Nova Scotia and in Paris. The next issue of the newsletter will have details of interviews and answer any questions from members. If the new radar is deployed on behalf of Project Midnight Ghost, a search expedition will be mounted as soon as the results of the tests have been released to TIGHAR, or at the end of the black fly season if it's still summer. A call will be made for volunteers. Watch this space!



# Public Exhibits 1985

<u>Sun 'n' Fun</u> EAA's Spring Celebration of Flight	<u>Lakeland, Fla.</u>	<u>March 17-23</u>
<u>NATA Convention</u> National Aviation Trades Association	<u>Las Vegas, Nev.</u>	<u>April 28-May 1</u>
<u>The Paris Air Show</u>	<u>Le Bourget Airport</u> Paris, France	<u>May 31-June 9</u>
<u>EAA Int'l Fly-In</u> Convention and Sport Aviation Exhibition	<u>Oshkosh, WI</u>	<u>July 26-Aug. 2</u>

The International Group for

**TIGHAR**

Historic Aircraft Recovery

SUMMIT AIRPARK  
MIDDLETOWN, DELAWARE  
19709 USA