



TIGHAR TRACKS



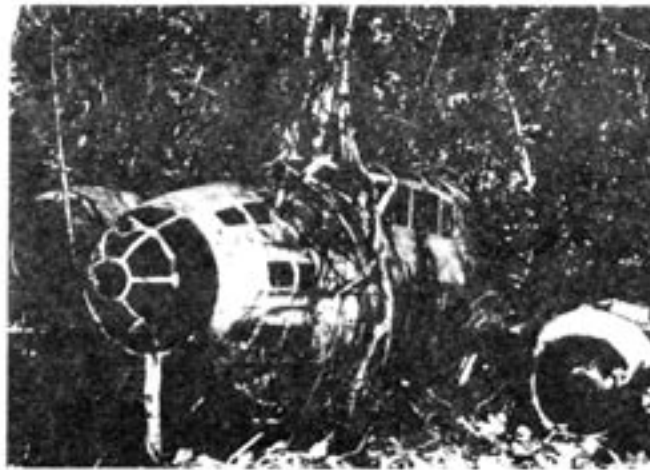
newsletter of

The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery

Winter 1986

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Vol. 2 No. 1



...THAT THEY MIGHT ESCAPE THE TEETH OF TIME AND THE HANDS OF MISTAKEN ZEAL.

--John Aubrey

1660

When pioneer British antiquarian John Aubrey wrote these words in 1660, he was expressing what was then a new idea: that relics of the past have worth beyond their physical value, that they provide us with a window on the past and, as such, merit preservation and study. Today the museums of the world stand in testimony to the wisdom of those principles.

Yet we in aviation, while enthralled with the heritage of flight, have been slow to heed the lessons of history. Magnificent museums display great aircraft of the past, but recovery or rare aircraft from the field is too often reminiscent of treasure hunting and grave robbing. The result is a vicious spiral of theft and official restriction in which the real losers are future generations who will never see the artifacts which eventually succumb to the teeth of time.

It does not stop there. Too often, rare and historic aircraft are restored to airworthy condition only to be destroyed through negligent and irresponsible flying. Only when all who pilot such aircraft understand and respect their responsibility to history will we stop the needless loss of irreplaceable aircraft to the hands of mistaken zeal.

This is what TIGHAR is all about: a full-time, international foundation dedicated to the cause of responsible aviation archeology, so that rare and historic aircraft the world over might escape **the teeth of time and the hands of mistaken zeal.**



For TIGHAR members who have not yet subscribed to the Mission Updates, we'll recap the drama which has been unfolding since the last issue of TIGHAR Tracks gave notice of our upcoming B-17 recovery expedition to Papua New Guinea. Originally scheduled for January and now targeted for October, this will be the largest, most ambitious aviation archeological operation in history. Its object is the recovery of B-17E 41-2446 for restoration by the Travis Air Force Base Historical Society as part of the United States Air Force Museum collection. The complexity of the operation is surpassed only by the historical significance of the aircraft.

One of a Kind

Rolled from the Boeing factory literally on the eve of war, December 6, 1941, 41-2446 was still a brand-new airplane when it was landed, out of fuel, in the Agaiambo Swamp on the north coast of New Guinea on February 23, 1942. The crew had just flown over 1,000 miles from Australia, fought tropical storms, and shot down 2 of 11 attacking Zeros to carryout the war's first raid on the Japanese stronghold at Rabaul. The bomber was virtually undamaged landing in the tall grass but the crew faced a six week odyssey in what they described as a living hell before they returned to civilization. The aircraft remained in the swamp, protected and preserved by the environment which imprisoned it. Today 41-2446 is the only surviving B-17E in restorable condition. Only three other surviving B-17s have seen combat. Only one other shot down attacking aircraft. The Smithsonian's Swoose, although a very historic aircraft, is a composite of cannibalized parts, making 41-2446 the oldest complete and original B-17 in existence.

Photography shows the aircraft to be in a remarkable state of preservation. Guns, instruments, radios, etc. have been removed over the years, but most can be recovered. In December 1985 an Air Force corrosion expert conducted an on-site evaluation of the aircraft for the recovery project. His report describes the bomber as structurally sound with almost no apparent corrosion. We don't understand why this aircraft has not suffered the deterioration so often seen in similar relics. We only know that through some fluke of nature it is virtually intact. Unfortunately, photography also shows that the swamp is gradually drying up. Provident has done its part in preserving the airplane for 44 years. Now it's up to us.

The recovery plan calls for a carefully selected team of volunteers to fly to Papua New Guinea aboard a USAF C-5. Royal Australian Air Force Chinook helicopters will transport the team to the swamp, where the aircraft will be partially disassembled for helicopter lift to the airfield. There it will be loaded aboard the C-5 for return to America. The recovery will receive major television documentary coverage. The story of the airplane and its rescue will be made all the more poignant by the presence on the expedition of Fred Eaton, the Army Air Corps pilot who landed 41-2446 in the swamp. In 1986 he will return as a member of TIGHAR to help us bring his ship home.

Diplomatic Hurdle

Over the past six months TIGHAR has been working full time to make this recovery a reality. With your support we have assembled the components of an operation of unprecedented scope. The U.S. Air Force, the RAAF, the National Museum of Papua New Guinea, the National Geographic Society, the Travis AFB Historical Society, Honeywell Military Avionics Division, Lockheed-Georgia, Sun 'n' Fun EAA Fly-In, Inc., and many individual TIGHAR members, are all doing their part. Many hurdles are behind us but a few still remain. The biggest is the need to reverse a very disturbing decision by Papua New Guinea's new Minister of Civil Aviation, Culture and Tourism. In a move which came as a surprise to everyone, including the PNG National Museum, Mrs. Nahau (pronounced na-HOW) Rooney disapproved the recovery of B-17E 41-2446 for removal from the country. It is her opinion that all such relics should remain where they are as historic monuments and tourist attractions. For all of us familiar with the realities of historic aircraft preservation it is obvious that such a policy would condemn the aircraft to destruction. However, we must remember that Mrs. Rooney is acting in what she believes to be the best interests of her country. Once she has been shown that those interests are better served by cooperative recovery efforts rather than what would amount to facilitated looting and vandalism, we are confident that a reasonable policy will be adopted. In April TIGHAR management will go to Papua New Guinea to attempt to secure the release of 41-2446 for the October expedition.

You Can Help

In the meantime, here's what you can do:

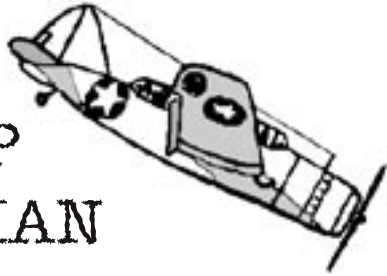
- Volunteer for the recovery team. Rescheduling for October enables us to put together the very best recovery team possible from a wide range of sources. If you are in excellent physical condition, have appropriate skills and experience, and can be gone for the month of October, send to TIGHAR for an Expedition Application. Even if you have already sent us a letter, please send for an application and fill it out.
- Patches and T-shirts bearing the distinctive expedition logo are available. Patches are \$5 each. T-shirts are \$10. Please specify size--S, M, L, XL.
- Subscribe to the Mission Updates. For a contribution of \$50 or more, you will receive up-to-the-minute progress reports. In addition you will receive a handsome Certificate of Appreciation.
- For a contribution of \$150, you will receive a video tape of the television documentary of the expedition, Mission Updates, and a Certificate of Appreciation.
- For a contribution of \$250, you will receive a print of the original oil painting of 41-2446 on its final approach to the Agaiambo Swamp. Each print is signed by award-winning aviation artist Donald Gillespie, and by pilot Fred Eaton. The original of this painting will become part of the Air Force art collection in Washington, DC. You will also receive Mission Updates and a Certificate of Appreciation.



ROUND UP

Here's the latest on TIGHAR's other continuing projects.

THE SWAMP ORPHAN



What is rumored to be the last complete Brewster Buccaneer dive bomber still eludes us in the swamps of eastern North Carolina. We now believe that the North American O-47 recovered by the Marines several years ago was, before its removal, mistaken for a Buccaneer. And yet, the rumors persist--and so will we.

OPERATION: GOLD RUSH

As reported in the last issue, TIGHAR was contracted to provide recommendations concerning historic aircraft management as part of the Department of Defense "World War II clean-up" in Alaska. Our report was submitted November 1st. The final government report has not yet been released. Meanwhile, Federal agents are making it tough for would-be treasure hunters. Late in November a Missouri man was cited for illegally trying to remove P-40 parts from one of the remote islands. This is the kind of piracy which hurts all of us.



Operation Sepulchre

TIGHAR's research into underground WWII German hangars still existing and sealed since 1945 continues to accumulate evidence of sites that should be opened and investigated. A comprehensive program will require a great deal of inter-service and international cooperation. You'll be hearing much more about this exciting project as we near a time when long-sealed doors are opened once more.

OPERATION BARNSTORMER

In our continuing effort to make little known aircraft and components available to museums and collectors we have come across a couple of unusual opportunities.

A 1929 Waco Taperwing, NC8584, is for sale in Maine. The aircraft is complete and original. It was being restored for sale to Johnson's Wax, its first owner, for eventual display at the EAA Museum. The deal fell through and the aircraft is available. The owner is resisting offers by a potential buyer who would extensively modify the aircraft for aerobatic work. TIGHAR would very much like to see this aircraft in the hands of a collector or museum. Contact us if you're interested.

We have an engine for sale. One of our members has donated a Nemasa/Hirth Model G IV B. Originally for a Buecher Jungmann, this 150 hp engine has 300 SMOH (TBO 1000) and is complete and in its original factory container. An excellent powerplant for restorations or replicas, it can be installed inverted. The price is \$1,500.

MIDNIGHT GHOST

In May TIGHAR will return to northeastern Maine for the largest expedition to date in the epic search for the remains of l'Oiseau Blanc--the White Bird of French transatlantic aspirants Charles Nungesser and Francois Coli. Had their 1927 Paris to New York attempt succeeded they would have beaten Lindbergh by nearly two weeks. Vanished in Lindbergh's words, "like midnight ghosts," the two World War I heroes may at last be found it two years of TIGHAR research pay off. Last fall two TIGHAR expeditions resulted in further evidence that the flight ended on a remote forest hillside in Maine. TIGHAR has found a witness who, while hunting in 1970, came upon what appears to be the crash site of l'Oiseau Blanc. A sketch made by the witness shows features of the site which are unique to that aircraft. The witness is able to identify the general area but not the specific location so that we are faced with searching about a mile of hillside which, since 1970, has suffered considerable spruce budworm damage. Areas which were once quite open are now extremely dense with new growth. TIGHAR members who participated in Midnight Ghost '85 can testify to the formidable nature of the terrain to be covered.

In the past we have run search operations over a weekend, staying at a motel in the nearest town and commuting to the search area by FWD and on foot. This time we will establish a base camp in the search area and conduct continuous operations over a two and a half week period from May 9th through Memorial Day weekend (May 26th). Members will be able to register and participate for all or whatever portion of the time fits their schedule. A formal Notice of Expedition and registration form will go out to members soon.

One unique aspect of Midnight Ghost '86 will be the use of backpack Loran. Special units provided by Racal Megapulse will enable us to bring ground navigation in the search area under precise control and greatly increase search efficiency. Search team management and communications will be improved through helicopter support and airborne radio relay. This will be, by far, the biggest effort yet mounted to find l'Oiseau Blanc. We have every reason to anticipate success. This time.... This time....



Is this the wreck of the White Bird? A hunter sketched this scene showing an engine he saw half-buried in the woods. The relative dimensions are correct for the 450 h.p. Lorraine-Dietrich. The protrusion on the extreme left of the engine matches the unique ram air intake of l'Oiseau Blanc. When he made the sketch, the hunter had never seen a photo of the aircraft or its engine.

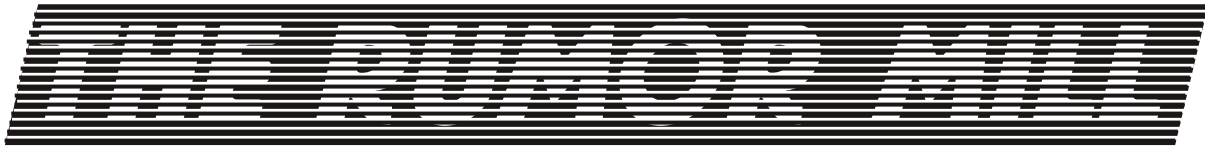
P-47 DISCOVERED

How many times have you been looking for something you've lost only to find something else you didn't even know was missing? TIGHAR's Swamp Orphan project turned up just such a find in the form of a razorback P-47 in the scrub land of North Carolina.

The remains of the Thunderbolt were first spotted during an aerial search for the missing Buccaneer. Some weeks later TIGHAR was back, this time with member Karl Stoltzfus, who had agreed to sponsor a ground investigation of the wreck. The hike in to the crash site was, to say the least, interesting, involving briars, a canal that was deeper than it looked, and head-high brush.

The aircraft proved to be in pretty rough shape. Brush fires had reduced the fuselage to a melted hunk and no major components appear restorable. However, many minor assemblies could be very useful in restoration projects. The gear legs are there and could be restored for a static display airplane. The razorback canopy frame is, inexplicably, largely intact, and the wing ammunition bays and their hinged covers are almost perfect.

TIGHAR is now investigating the question of ownership and, when permission is secured, we plan to call for volunteers for a recovery team. Watch for a Notice of Expedition on this project.



Such a Deal

In last issue's Rumor Mill we described a B-17 which was recently sold from a junkyard in Maine and asked if anyone could help us find out where it went. Member Ernie Raudenbush from Vero Beach, Florida, wrote in to tell us that a man from Massachusetts bought it for what he considered to be a very low figure, until he realized that keeping it would also cost him his wife. He elected to part with the Fort and sold it to "someone in Illinois," quadrupling his money in the process. We're still tracking the airplane. Tune in next issue for the next thrilling installment in this tale of the phantom Fortress.

More Tales From New Guinea

Even though it's been over 40 years since the jungle stopped echoing to the thunder of war, new and sometimes grisly discoveries continue to emerge from Papua New Guinea.

Our friends at the Aviation, Maritime, and War Branch of the National Museum of PNG recently located a B-24 which crashed on March 22, 1944. With the help of a U.S. Army team the bodies of nineteen U.S. airmen and soldiers were recovered from the wreckage.

From TIGHAR member Pat Donovan in Seattle, Washington, comes a report that six P-39s have been found in New Guinea by Lou Holtrup. Can anyone confirm this? Who is Lou Holtrup? And from TIGHAR member R.E. Fullenwider of Waveland Indiana we have a first hand account of a group of B-25s, A-20s, and P-38s, about 38 aircraft in all, which ran out of fuel and ditched in the kunai grass much as our B-17E did. Fullenwider was a Signal Corps officer in New Guinea at the time and heard the whole debacle as it occurred.

The Pittsburgh B-25

Robert Johns of Natrona Heights, Pennsylvania, has sent us a classic example of how several tons of airplane can disappear literally overnight, leaving only ripples of speculation. It seems that on the afternoon of January 31, 1956, at precisely 4:09 p.m., an Air Force TB-25N ditched in the Monongahela River near Pittsburgh. The aircraft sank less than 200 feet from shore in less than twenty feet of water. Two of the crew were lost before they could reach shore. The crash had many witnesses and the spot was almost immediately marked with a buoy. Recovery efforts began the next day but the airplane was nowhere to be found. Sonar, probes, and drag lines failed to turn up any trace of the B-25, and to this day its fate is a mystery.

— STRICTLY BUSINESS —

TAXES

TIGHAR is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. Contributions, including memberships, are tax-deductible. If you need a copy of our exemption letter from the IRS, just give us a call.

CHAPTER POLICY

TIGHAR management has been looking into the idea of local chapters for those of you who have expressed an interest. After much thought and discussion we have decided that TIGHAR is not yet big enough to support local chapters as they would deserve. This is, of course, a temporary state of affairs. Meanwhile, we encourage all members to support the parent organization by forwarding rumors and sightings of aircraft to us. Several of our members are working on projects in their areas, and we're glad to have the help. Encourage others to join as well. The faster we grow, the faster we'll be able to support chapters and start local projects.

If you would like a list of other TIGHAR members in your state for sharing transportation to expeditions, please write to us and we'll send that out to you.

EXPEDITION REGISTRATION

We're getting a tremendous variety of TIGHAR members from all over the world. To best catalog the many skills and interests of our members, we are beginning a new program of expedition registration. If you are a member, you will find inside your newsletter (in fact, you already have) a registration form to fill out. It looks long and threatening; however, you need only fill it out once. After that any time you want to come on an expedition, all you'll have to do is send in the little tear-off form in the Notice of Expedition. If you register for Category II expeditions, you will also be asked to fill out a medical questionnaire and provide us with a health certificate.

Please note: This form is not going to be used to "select" members for Category I and Category II expeditions. Anyone and everyone is welcome. We only want to know what you can do so that we can do a better job of forming teams from the people who come on the expedition.

Category III expedition members will usually be selected from applicants whose health, skills, and experience give them the best chance of making the recovery a success. Every effort will be made to give people who want to go on these expeditions a chance to do so; however, the health of applicants will have to be taken into account when we may be hundreds of miles from the nearest hospital.

SPONSORS

TIGHAR is supported entirely through charitable donations. In addition to the many individuals whose contributions make TIGHAR possible, we would like to thank the following corporate sponsors who have recently dedicated their resources to the advancement of aviation archeology.

For the B-17 Recovery Expedition:

Honeywell Military Avionics Division
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Sun 'n' Fun EAA Fly-In, Inc.
Lakeland, Florida

Lockheed-Georgia Company
Marietta, Georgia

Ed Marshall Insurance, Ltd.
Salem, Virginia (cont. next page)

(Sponsors, cont.)

For Project Midnight Ghost:

Aerospatiale, Inc.
Washington, DC

Racal Megapulse
Bedford, Massachusetts

Stead Aviation Corporation
Manchester, New Hampshire

For the Swamp Orphan and the P-47 Investigation:

Avotek Division of K&K Aircraft, Inc.
Bridgewater, Virginia

For General Support:

Alpha Aviation Insurance
Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey

Aviation Insurance Unlimited
Center Square, Pennsylvania

ATA Fitness Center
Newark, Delaware

MANY THANKS!



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