

# TIGHAR TRACKS

A PUBLICATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL GROUP FOR HISTORIC AIRCRAFT RECOVERY

## TESTING THE HYPOTHESIS

The money has been raised, the team assembled, and the thousand and one details have been handled. As this TIGHAR Tracks goes to press, The Earhart Project is set to depart Los Angeles September 4 on an expedition which will take a specially selected TIGHAR team to one of the most remote places on earth. When they return October 16 they will have covered over 12,000 miles by air, 3,000 miles by sea, and what will probably seem like twice that many miles on foot or underwater. They may also have solved the most legendary of aviation mysteries -- the disappearance of the Earhart/Noonan flight.

Building on the work of TIGHAR members Tom Willi and Tom Gannon, the foundation has spent the past 15 months researching, planning and fund-raising for an expedition to the Phoenix Islands in the central Pacific, now part of the Republic of Kiribati. There the team will conduct search operations, concentrating on the island of Nikumaroro (formerly Gardner Island), an uninhabited, densely vegetated atoll about 3.5 miles long, sur-



rounding a lagoon about one mile wide. To get there the team will fly to Fiji, then board the 115 foot support vessel Pacific Nomad for the 1,400 mile voyage to Nikumaroro. Three weeks of simultaneous operations by land and underwater search teams, supported by documentation and communication teams, will determine whether or not Nikumaroro holds the key to the Earhart mystery.

This project is a true landmark in the fledgling science of aviation archeology. For the first time a large, highly qualified team will carry out a logistically complex operation in a remote and hostile environment, purely in the interest of aviation history. Funding for the project has not come from investors who hope to acquire an aircraft, or from individuals looking for fame or an adventure vacation. Instead, the contributions, large and small, have come from people who share TIGHAR's commitment to responsible aviation archeology. Their reward is the knowledge that they have struck a blow for the intelligent pursuit of historical truth, and blazed a trail for others to follow.





Selection of the TIGHAR members who make up the expedition team has been an eight month process during which dozens of applicants have been evaluated and qualified. Criteria for selection were:

- Membership in TIGHAR.
• Participation in team forging and selection evaluations.
• Completion of TIGHAR's Introductory Course in Aviation Archeology
• Completion of rigid health and physical examinations.
• Ability and willingness to contribute time and expertise for the entire six week expedition.
• Waiver of all liability for injury and assignment of rights to any property discovered.

Financial considerations had no bearing on team selection. The expedition team will be comprised of the following:

Project Director

Richard E. Gillespie
Wilmington, DE

Expedition Director

Patricia R. Thrasher
Wilmington, DE

Archaeologist

Thomas F. King, Ph.D. #0391
Silver Spring, MD

Physical Sciences

Jessica Krakow, Ph.D. #0299
San Francisco, CA

Medicine

Dr. Tommy L. Love, D.O. #0457
Ft. Worth, TX

Search Operations

Joseph M. Lative #0185
(underwater)
Dade City, FL

Observer

Kautuna Kaitara
Deputy Chief Customs Officer
Republic of Kiribati

Julie Williams, R.N. #0763
Bossier City, LA

Navigational Research

Thomas A Willi, CDR USN (Ret.) #0537
Ft. Walton Beach, FL

H. J. "Dutch" Kluge #0174
(underwater)
Homestead, FL

Communications

C. Bart Whitehouse, Ph. D. #0657
Littleton, CO

Photography

Russell Matthews #0509
Princeton, NJ

LeRoy Knoll #0750
(underwater)
Garden City, KS

Thomas F. Gannon, Lt. Col. USAF (Ret.) #0539
Ft. Walton Beach, FL

Mary DeWitt #0704
Euleuss, TX

William Decker #0010
Greensboro, NC

Diane Whitehouse #0657
Littleton, CO

Michael J. Bowman #0758
(underwater)
Marina del Ray, CA

Veryl Fenlason #0053
St. Cloud, MN

Team Forging

Richard A. Schreiber, Ph.D. #0491
Morgantown, WV

John Clauss #0142
Homewood, CA



THE LOGIC

At 8:44 a.m., 2 July 1937, the time of Earhart's last confirmed in-flight radio transmission, signal strength indicated that she was within 100 miles of Howland Island. In that message she stated that she was "on the line of position 157/337 running north and south."

Known fuel data for the flight indicated that she had approximately two hours of fuel remaining at that time.

Four islands fall along that line of position within two hour's flight time: Howland (we know she didn't land there), Baker (nor there); McKean (maybe, but it's small, barren and uninviting), and Gardner.

Over the next three days at least 24 radio transmissions believed to originate from the lost plane were received. Lockheed engineers insisted that the aircraft must be on land. Direction Finding bearings were obtained on six of the signals. All cross in the area of Gardner Island.

The U.S. Navy's initial search in 1937 focused on the Phoenix Islands. The aerial search of Gardner Island reported "clear signs of recent human habitation" on an island that was uninhabited at the time. Despite that, no search party was put ashore nor has anyone ever searched there for Amelia Earhart since then.

In later years a small (80 people), abortive Gilbertese colony and a wartime U.S. Coast Guard radio station (25 men) resulted in anecdotal evidence which seems to support the hypothesis that Earhart ended up on the island.

In short, no one ever really looked in the most likely place. The TIGHAR expedition will correct that oversight.

