

The Return To Nikumaroro

September 29 — November 2, 1991



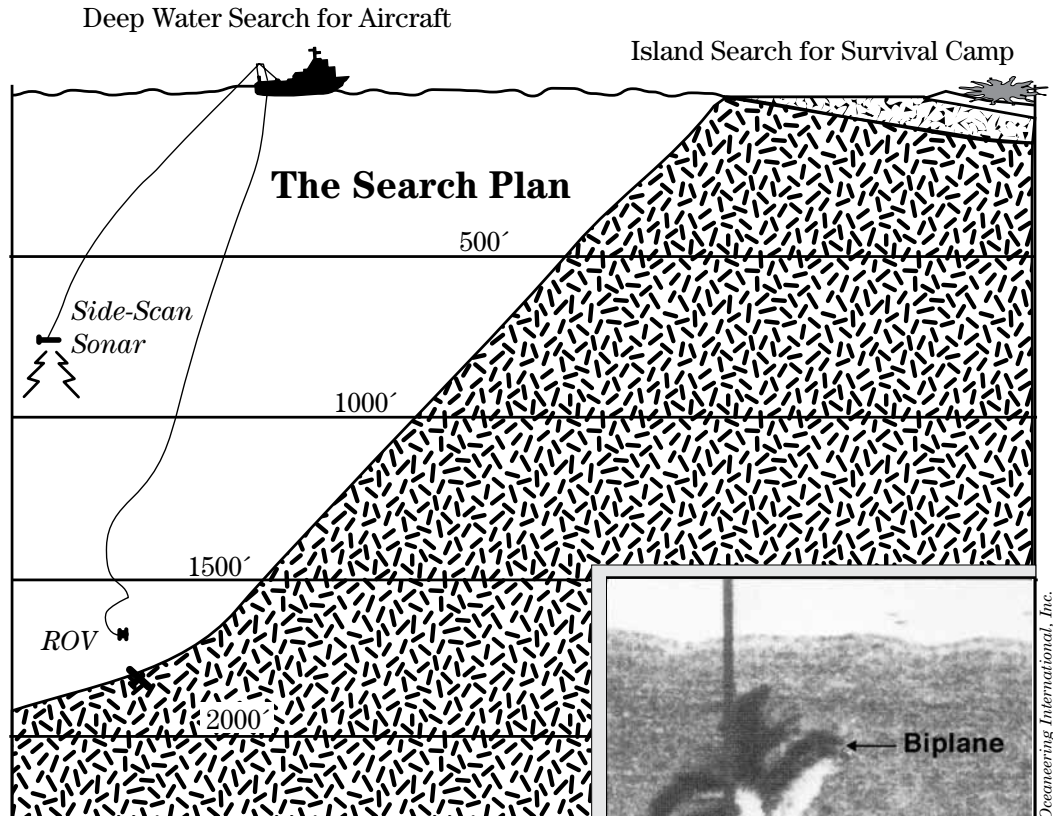
“Preparation, I have often said, is rightly two-thirds of any venture.”

—Amelia Earhart, *Last Flight*, p. 51.

On March 2 & 3, 1991, the Earhart Project expedition team primaries and alternates assembled in Washington, DC for two days of intensive training and planning in preparation for next fall's return to the island. They also received briefings from some special guests.

- Keith Zorger, representing White's Electronics (whose metal detectors have become standard equipment on TIGHAR expeditions), demonstrated a variety of new products TIGHAR is now testing for use on the island.
- Mike Kutzleb of Oceaneering International familiarized the team with the technology that will permit a conclusive search of the deep water surrounding Nikumaroro. A towed-array Side-Scan Sonar has been selected as the principle underwater search tool. Using this system, Oceaneering has built an impressive record of discoveries. Once a target has been located by the sonar “fish,” a special Remote Operated Vehicle (ROV) known as the “Phantom” will dive down to verify and photograph the find. No attempt to recover the aircraft will be made this trip.
- Bill Hillier of NBC News Productions explained plans for a two-hour, prime-time television documentary on The Earhart Project to air upon the expedition's return. The film will explore the public's enduring fascination with Amelia Earhart, examine who she really was, and document the detective story of how TIGHAR has unlocked the mystery of her disappearance. An NBC crew will accompany the expedition.

There are some strange parallels between Earhart's 1937 World Flight and TIGHAR's 1991 expedition to discover her fate. Both endeavors are second attempts to accomplish something unprecedented in history; both are long and arduous journeys requiring elaborate logistical and diplomatic arrangements; both employ the best technological support available; and both are non-government ventures funded by public contributions (AE's Electra was purchased with money donated through Purdue University). And both have as their primary purpose the setting of an example. In 1937 Earhart was out to show the world that international air travel had come of age. In 1991 TIGHAR is out to demonstrate that aviation historical studies have, likewise, come of age. If we can do that by solving the riddle of the Earhart/Noonan disappearance, we will have performed a great service to aviation and to their memory. But in aviation archeology, as in many things, money is the difference between doing and dreaming. The budget for The Return to Nikumaroro is \$400,000, of which \$150,000 has been pledged so far. TIGHAR members collectively provided the roughly \$300,000 that has, since 1988, brought the investigation to its present level of success. Some money has come as major donations and for those we are, of course, grateful. Other funds have come as \$5,000 Project Sponsorships. If you're able to bat in those leagues, we urge you to call Project Director Richard Gillespie to learn more about the benefits of sponsorship. But a very significant amount of the funding for The Earhart Project has come from purchases of publications and merchandise by ordinary TIGHAR members who want to help. It is no exaggeration to say that those who buy a project book, a poster, or a patch participate in the solving of the Earhart mystery just as much as those who hack through the jungle on Nikumaroro.



At right, Side-Scan Sonar imagery of Grumman F3F-2 biplane found at 1800' depth off San Diego, California by Oceaneering International in 1975. In this “sound picture” the airplane's wings and tail are easily discernable. This is the same aircraft recovered by the U.S. Navy last year and now under re-build at the San Diego Aerospace Museum (see *Hope for Drowned Airplanes*, page 6).

Photo courtesy Oceaneering International, Inc.