

BIASED TOWARDS THE FACTS

Throughout the month of April the syndicated two-hour television documentary “Untold Stories: The Search for Amelia Earhart” was aired all around the U.S. at various times and on various dates. Whether or not you caught it on a local channel or might want to get the video tape when it comes out, we thought you might like to know how it was made and what we think of it.

The show is a biography of Amelia interlaced with the story of the search for the answer to her disappearance. Although a whole gallery of Earhart authors, researchers and theorists make cameo appearances, the show focuses mainly on TIGHAR. And let’s be fair – that’s mainly because NBC News Productions, who produced the show, paid TIGHAR for the right to send a cameraman with us to Nikumaroro last year. The fee helped fund the expedition. Afterward, we worked closely with the producers to insure that the show would be historically accurate, and the extent to which we succeeded is due largely to Russ Matthews (TIGHAR #509CE). Russ served on both expeditions to Nikumaroro, then signed on as Senior Researcher for NBC’s production. It was Russ who tracked down the rare news-reel footage, photographs, and documents that make the show, by far, the best biography of AE ever made. Throughout the production process TIGHAR headquarters fought Hollywood “Who’s gonna know?” attitudes and was accused of being “biased toward the facts” (we plead guilty).

Of course, it’s not the show we would have made if TIGHAR had been calling the shots. The style is far too gushy for our taste. Besides, there’s too much of Gillespie and not nearly enough of the team and Nikumaroro (both of which are better looking than Ric). And despite Russ’s best efforts, some of the chronology in Amelia’s life got screwed up, some of the airplanes shown in the 1937 search sequence are completely wrong, and poor old Fred Noonan gets the weeny again about his alleged drinking. Then, of course, they had to let Al Bresnick tell his silly story about Amelia being pregnant and then show us excavating what turned out to be an infant’s grave. The phone has been ringing off the hook with people wondering if that could have been AE’s kid (buried in a traditional Gilbertese grave).

So it ain’t *The Civil War*, but it’s not bad either. The overall impression of who Amelia was and what made her tick is really very good and the story of TIGHAR’s research, expeditions, and results is absolutely accurate (because we wrote that part of the script). As soon as it’s out on video tape we’ll let you know how to get a copy. 