

TIGHAR TRACKS

A PUBLICATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL GROUP FOR HISTORIC AIRCRAFT RECOVERY





*... that they might escape the teeth of time and
the hands of mistaken zeal.*

— JOHN AUBREY
STONEHENGE MANUSCRIPTS
1660

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Richard Cobb
Richard E. Gillespie
Geoffrey S. Hurlbut
Peter Paul Luce
Richard J. Reynolds
John Sawyer, Chairman
Patricia R. Thrasher

Donald V. Earnshaw, *In Memorium*

TIGHAR deeply regrets the passing of Donald V. Earnshaw, TIGHAR #0296B, on June 21, 1994. A member since 1987, and a member of TIGHAR's Board of Directors since 1989, Don had been gravely ill for some months with brain cancer. He died at his home in Chatham, Mass.



Don was a B-25 pilot during World War II, and his interest in aviation continued, eventually drawing him to TIGHAR. He retired in 1981 from Continental Can as Executive Vice President, then served in the first Reagan/Bush Administration in the Department of Commerce. He also served the State of Massachusetts as Undersecretary for International Trade and Investment in 1991.

As a TIGHAR Board member, Don was always available with advice, counsel, and ideas; his unusual abilities and contacts provided TIGHAR with opportunities which would otherwise never have come our way. His active involvement with Project Midnight Ghost in Maine was of prime importance to the Project. He will be missed for his good humor, his sharp insights, his leadership ability, and most of all—just for himself. We at TIGHAR extend our deepest sympathy to his family and friends. Any TIGHAR member who wishes to make a memorial donation in honor of Donald V. Earnshaw may do so to the TIGHAR Scholarship Fund, a program he proposed.

Contents

The Way It Was	3
Project Reports	
Notes From All Over	6
The Earhart Project	7
Project Midnight Ghost	8
Historic Preservation	11
TIGHAR to TIGHAR	12
In Review	14

COVER:

This never-before-published photo of Amelia Earhart was taken on or about June 22, 1937, outside the Hotel Preanger where she and Fred Noonan stayed while in Bandoeng, Java. The photo was taken by Mr. Wiersma, the Chief Technician for KNLIM (Royal Dutch East Indies Airlines) and was presented to TIGHAR by his widow via Lou Schoonbrood (TIGHAR #1198).

Written by Richard Gillespie & Patricia Thrasher.

Research by The members of TIGHAR.

Design by Patricia Thrasher.

Special thanks to –

Jim Tierney, Pasadena, California,
TIGHAR #0821 – Proofreading.

Randy Jacobson, Chantilly, Virginia,
TIGHAR #1364 – Special research for
The Earhart Project.

Jay Veith, Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania,
TIGHAR #0767CE – Special research
for Project Midnight Ghost.

TIGHAR Tracks, published four times each year, is the official publication of The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery. A subscription to TIGHAR Tracks is included as part of membership in the foundation (minimum donation \$45.00 per year). The editors welcome contributions of written material and artwork. Materials should be addressed to: Editors, *TIGHAR Tracks*, 2812 Fawkes Drive, Wilmington, DE 19808 USA; telephone (302) 994-4410, fax (302) 994-7945. Photographs and artwork will be returned on request.

HIT OR MYTH

In our investigation of aviation history's two greatest mysteries—the loss of l'Oiseau Blanc and the disappearance of the Earhart Electra—we are struck by parallels between the two tragedies. Each aircraft was a modification of a proven design and each crew was made up of a celebrity pilot and a highly professional navigator. Both flights were assumed to have gone down at sea and almost certainly did not, yet the remains of both aircraft will probably be discovered underwater. In each case an aerial search shortly after the disappearance seems to have come agonizingly close to discovering the fate of the lost fliers. And in the case of both flights there is today widespread public misconception about what happened and its significance.

We commonly hear concerns that, should we prove that the White Bird crossed the Atlantic nearly two weeks before the Spirit of St. Louis made its flight, Lindbergh's record will be invalidated. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. The first nonstop aerial crossing of the North Atlantic (Newfoundland to Ireland) was made by Alcock and Brown in 1919. Eight years later, Lindbergh was the first to fly nonstop between New York and Paris (over twice the distance flown by Alcock and Brown). The fact that he did it solo was icing on the cake. The Lone Eagle's record would only be in jeopardy if we were to discover that Nungesser and Coli made a successful landing in New York (only to be captured by the Japanese?).

If the White Bird's place in history is misunderstood, the Electra's disappearance has become pure mythology (see reviews of the latest film and book in this *TIGHAR Tracks*, pp. 14 & 15). For example, everyone knows that the 1937 search for Amelia Earhart was the greatest sea and air search for a missing airplane ever launched and that it was entirely a U.S. Navy operation – and everyone is wrong. Although now largely forgotten, the attempt to find and rescue Nungesser and Coli ten years earlier dwarfed the Earhart/Noonan search in nearly every respect (number of participants, ships committed, time spent, area covered, etc.). What's

more, neither search can be accurately described as an organized effort by any one agency. Rather, each was an ad hoc, frantic, and poorly coordinated scramble involving an assortment of aircraft, naval and merchant marine vessels, bureaucrats, commercial firms, well-meaning private citizens and, occasionally, cruel hoaxers. Little wonder that confusion reigned during both searches and that, all these years later, trying to sort out what really happened is a monumental task. Fortunately, for each of these two great mysteries, most of the information available to the would-be rescuers is on record in various archives. What we have that they didn't have is the time to sort out what was really going on.

Jacobson's Ladder

We also have the incomparable advantage of computerized information management. After a two-year archival search, TIGHAR's senior researcher for the Earhart Project, Randy Jacobson (TIGHAR #1364), has assembled some three thousand U. S. government radio messages relating to the Earhart disappearance. From these documents, after many months of cross-checking and data entry, Randy has created the Amelia Earhart World Flight Radio Message Database, a relational database in Microsoft Foxpro 2.50. In real life Randy is a scientist with the U.S. Navy's Office of Naval Research near Washington, D. C. and, as you can imagine, he has some advantages over your garden-variety Earhart researcher (such as a security clearance that goes all the way up to Really Neat). His Earhart database is a powerful research tool. For the first time, the story of the preparations for Earhart's flight and the conduct of the search as told in official communications can be studied as a cohesive narrative rather than as a cryptic and disjointed jumble. Voluminous as the database is (printed in 6-point type *like this*, it runs about 500 pages and weighs in at 6 pounds), it is only the beginning of an integrated information cataloging and retrieval system which will eventually include all the various letters, memoranda and reports which make up the rest of the historical record.

The Dog Ate My Homework

Randy's examination of official message traffic dating from the days immediately preceding the departure of Earhart's first world-flight attempt has uncovered a revealing incident. On March 9, 1937, just four days before AE's planned takeoff for Hawaii (weather delayed the actual departure until the 17th), George Putnam received notification from the Bureau of Air Commerce that, because his wife's Commercial Transport Pilot's License was scheduled to expire on April 15th (during the contemplated circumnavigation) the Commerce Department was going to withhold permission for the flight to proceed until she passed an instrument written test, a basic instrument flying test, and a "radio flying" flight test. This last-minute official check of her abilities has been ignored by the various Earhart biographers, with the exception of Doris Rich. In her book *Amelia Earhart, A Biography* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), Rich says that Earhart passed the instrument flight test but "She didn't take her written and radio tests until March 14 Delayed by bad weather, she took and passed both and the Electra was also certified by Air Commerce for the flight." To support this statement Rich cites a document dated March 14, 1937 in National Archives Record Group 237 file 835.

However, in that same record group is a telegram sent from Supervising Aeronautical Inspector Bedinger to R. R. Reining of the Department of Commerce at 11:16 a.m. on March 11, 1937 which reads:

Flight check Earhart instrument flying satisfactory stop Written and radio flying not given account her desire to expedite and save engines stop Air mailing written report

The next day, March 12, Assistant Secretary of Commerce J. M. Johnson wrote a letter granting permission for the world flight to proceed.

What's going on here? Given the events that transpired in the central Pacific a few months later it becomes rather important to know whether or not Amelia Earhart demonstrated her expertise in radio navigation to a federal flight examiner in March. Did Amelia pass the tests or not?

The answer is, she did not. The document cited by Rich is a Commerce Department message which confirms only that the "pilot [Earhart] has been certified for radio and instrument ..." It doesn't say



Photo courtesy Purdue University Library Special Collections.

she took the tests and, as is shown by the March 11 telegram, it's clear that the requirement was waived. Was Amelia really concerned about the couple of hours the radio flying examination would put on her engines, or did she fear that she couldn't pass the test? One thing is certain. The radio test she failed en route to Howland Island in July had graver consequences.

Earhartian Darwinism

One of Randy's most interesting discoveries is a clipping from an Australian newspaper dated June 28, 1937 which includes a first hand description of Earhart's arrival in Port Darwin. According to Earhart's posthumously published book *Last Flight*, this is where "... we left the parachutes we had carried that far, to be shipped home. A parachute would not help over the Pacific" (p. 128). This, of course, has become part of the traditional story of Earhart's disappearance, but the recently found newspaper article specifically says, "The first thing she [Earhart] did after being officially welcomed was to inquire if parachutes, part of the emergency equipment for the Pacific crossing in front of her, had arrived from America. They reached here more than a week ago." Later in the article, more detail is provided. "One of her first actions was to ask the Civil Aviation Officer (Mr. Alan Collins) whether two 'Irvin caterpillar 'chutes' had been delivered from



America. Fully tested and ready for immediate use, the parachutes were waiting in Mr. Collins' office. As a safeguard against emergency they will be carried on the hazardous final stages of the flight."

Which source should we believe? We know that *Last Flight* was edited and embellished from notes sent back by AE during her trip. Some of her handwritten notes are in the Earhart Collection at Purdue University but they do not include any reference to the parachutes. The "Special Representative" whose byline is on the newspaper story was simply describing what he saw and heard on the day he saw it and heard it. His account is, therefore, the more contemporaneous and credible.

So we have new information, but it's important to define just what that information is. What we can now say with some degree of certainty is that Earhart and Noonan picked up, rather than dropped off, parachutes in Australia. We do not

know that the 'chutes were later carried on the Lae/Howland leg (they might have changed their minds), but it does seem probable that the equipment, including parachutes, seen piled in front of the Electra's cabin door in a photograph taken in Darwin, is going aboard the aircraft rather than being offloaded.

In addition to the parachutes we see:

- What appears to be a pressurized cylinder capped with a hex nut and encased in a canvas sleeve upon which the stenciled letters COMM and some illegible numbers are visible. Can anyone identify?
- A spare tail wheel. Seems like a reasonable precaution against a blowout at Howland. The inventory of the aircraft following the March 20th Luke Field crash includes a spare tail wheel.

- A spare control wheel. Not what you'd expect, but an item that was also on the Luke Field inventory for the previous attempt to fly to Howland. Why?
- A round paint-style can with the label partially visible. The first word ends in the letters —BRICANT (lubricant?) and the second, shorter word appears to end in the letters —AIN.
- AE holds a square can labeled MOBILUBRICANT.
- Two cans just inside the doorway appear to be tomato (AE said "tomahto") juice, her favorite inflight drink.

Why the parachutes? The logic might go something like this. The only difference between the flying so far (when they didn't feel they needed parachutes) and the flying to come is that they'll be over water almost all the time. It is evident that they can foresee a situation where it would be preferable to abandon the aircraft rather than ride it down. Such emergencies might include inflight fire, structural failure, or the lack of any acceptable surface upon which to land the airplane. Because the first two possibilities seem little changed from before, the carrying of parachutes on the over-water legs would seem to indicate that Earhart and Noonan had a very low opinion of the advisability of a water landing in the Electra. Interestingly, there was no life raft inventoried after the March 20th crash, only "Life Preserver Vests, pneumatic," and we've found no mention anywhere of flotation devices of any kind being carried in July. Perhaps the parachutes are an indication that while Earhart and Noonan considered a ditching at sea to be suicidal, the need to bail out over an island was seen as a genuine possibility.

Photocopies of the entire Darwin newspaper article and Randy Jacobson's write-up of the flight test incident are available to TIGHAR members on request. His Amelia Earhart World Flight Radio Message Database is not yet publicly available. 🐾

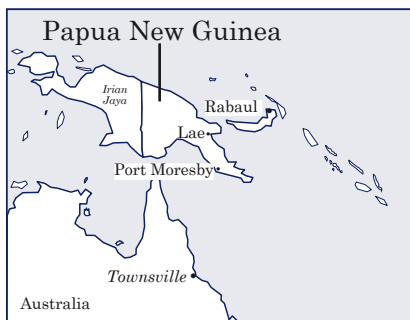
Photo courtesy Purdue University Library Special Collections.



Lady In Waiting

We are sorry to report the death of Fred Eaton, TIGHAR #0096 and pilot of B-17 41-2446, on March 31, 1994, of Alzheimer's, in Hilton Head, South Carolina. Fred was flying the Fort on its first mission from Townsville, Australia, to Rabaul in New Britain, when they were bounced by Zeroes over the target. With tanks holed and extra fuel used up during evasive maneuvers, they didn't have enough reserves to make Port Moresby, their refueling destination. Fred set the bomber down in "an open grassy field" – the Agaiambo Swamp on the north coast of Papua New Guinea, about halfway between Lae and the tip of the island. Following the crew's six week trek to rejoin their unit, Fred went on to fly bomber missions in the Pacific and over Europe, finishing the war as a colonel. His airplane stayed in the swamp, forgotten until a Royal Australian Air Force survey flight found it in 1972.

Fred joined TIGHAR in 1985, at the very beginning of our (still continuing) efforts to find a way to recover and preserve B-17 41-2446. He continued his membership and his interest until the end of his life. Our sympathy and best wishes go out to his family. Memorial donations may be made to the Alzheimer's Foundation or to TIGHAR's Scholarship Fund in Fred's honor.



NOW WHAT?

An unconfirmed report has appeared in *Flying* magazine (May, 1994) that the P-38 in which Antoine de Saint Exupéry disappeared may have been found. In an article by Mike Jerram, underwater specialist Jean Roux, after searching unsuccessfully in the Mediterranean off Monaco, is reported to have followed stories of a twin fuselage airplane crash to the Golfe de Giens, southwest of Nice. Sonar sweeps were inconclusive, but a hunch led Roux to put divers over to take sediment samples from an area showing a sonar shadow. They recovered fragments, including fasteners confirmed to have been used on P-38s.

Should the find be proved, some difficult questions must be addressed. There is certainly not a recoverable intact aircraft at the site, but there may be human remains. A war grave, to be marked and respected? A battle casualty, to be retrieved and given a state funeral? What about the last fragments of the aircraft? Souvenirs, trophies, or historic property? These issues must be dealt with carefully, and have great bearing on what may be a similar situation with l'Oiseau Blanc. We would welcome member discussion. 🐾



**STUFF IS
HARD
TO FIND**

Minnesota artist Bryan Moon and a group of divers have returned from Tantou Shan, China, and their quest for the Doolittle B-25 which landed in the water just offshore of that island. Their search was not successful. A week spent towing sonar gear over the postulated site, with divers working the area as well, produced no results. The group is speculating that typhoons and current action over the 52 years since the landing broke up the aircraft, and it is now buried deep in the mud bottom of the channel. A parachute harness release was purchased from a local resident who said it had come from a crew member of another Doolittle bomber which crash landed, killing two. No other artifacts from the Doolittle raid were retrieved.

Thanks to Kenton Spading, TIGHAR #1382CE, for acquiring this information for publication.

AS A MATTER OF FACT ...

Most everyone has heard some version of the old joke that ends with the punchline, "Yeah, but these Fokkers were Messerschmitts!" Ever since Dutch designer Anthony Fokker's airplanes began making news during the Great War, English speakers have been a bit uncomfortable with the name, often pronouncing it "Foh-ker" just to be sure nobody thought they were saying that other word. But, as a matter of fact, all is in vain. The Dutch word "fokker" means "breeder" and is very probably the etymological origin of the English word everybody is trying to not say (anybody got a good dictionary of slang?). The best we can hope for is that we never have to describe Tony's mom. 🐾



LOOKING IN THE RIGHT PLACE

The water slapping the short, sharp Gardner shoreline is as warm as your bath and as blue as your baby's eyes. At low tide the smoothest coral in the world is exposed for 200 yards. From the air it looks as if you could dry your nets there ... or, alas, land your plane. And in the warm, blue water slapping the Gardner shore ... Amelia Earhart's airplane ... lies in a crust of shells. ... Miss Earhart crashed on the coral trap of the Gardner beach and crawled into the bush and died.

A familiar theory, to say the least. What's surprising is that this description of Earhart's fate comes from a *San Diego Tribune* article published July 21, 1960 and is based upon different information than the documentation which led TIGHAR to develop the same hypothesis. That summer of 1960, the California news media were buzzing with "new evidence" that Amelia Earhart had died on Saipan, a prisoner of the Japanese. A retired Coast Guardsman in San Diego was sure they were wrong. Floyd Kilts told a reporter that in 1946 he was dismantling the Loran station at Gardner when one of the Gilbertese colonists told him a bizarre tale of a woman's skeleton with American shoes found by the first laborers brought to the island to clear underbrush for coconut planting late in 1938.

TIGHAR learned of the story in 1989 (by which time Kilts was long dead) and we've been trying to figure out how much of it might be true ever since (see *TIGHAR Tracks* Vol. 6 No. 1, March 1990, "Bones," p. 6). In 1991, our discovery of "American shoes" on the island in an area which had been cleared early in the island's colonial period prompted a closer examination of the anecdote. According to Kilts, the skeleton was found "in the brush about five feet from the shoreline." Where could that be? Certainly not on the atoll's barren oceanfront shore. Only along the lagoon shore does the underbrush come down close to the waterline and it was, in fact, close to just such a spot that TIGHAR found fragments of what had once been an American woman's blucher-style oxford, size eight or nine, with brass eyelets and a replaced heel. AE was wearing just such shoes when she disappeared.

In January of 1992 we learned that this spot on the lagoon shore was the place where, in October of 1937, British Colonial Service officer Eric Bevington had noted "signs of previous habitation" which, he said, "looked like someone had bivouacked there for the night."

Heads Will Roll

One technique used in examining old stories is to focus on odd details. Because everybody wants to be believed, anecdotes tend to evolve so as to sound more credible. Elements which don't seem to make sense but remain part of the story may have survived because they are true. Kilts said that "farther down the beach he [the brush clearer] found a man's skull, but nothing else." Why just a skull?

And what became of the rest of the skeleton?

We recently came across a possible explanation:

"Because one of the [body's] heaviest parts is supported by one of the most fragile, when a body disarticulates, the head will often fall off the neck and go its separate way. Sometimes, when the remains are at the top of an incline ... it travels so far that it is the only part to be recovered." (*Bones—A Forensic Detective's Casebook*, Ubelaker & Scammell; Harper Collins Publishers, New York 1992, p. 145). If we say that Noonan died in the shade near the lagoon shore lying on his back with his head propped up on something, it is not difficult to explain how his skull could end up down near the waterline while the rest of the skeleton remained out of sight up in the bushes (the suspected area is just at the edge of the old coconut planting). If that's what happened, some of the larger bones could still be there.

To pursue this line of thinking a bit further, it would seem that Bevington's visit to the site on October 14, 1937 occurred at a time when the bodies did not reveal their presence by smell but before the skull had rolled down onto the beach. Given Nikumaro's aggressive ecosystem this would seem to indicate that Earhart and Noonan survived on the island for a matter of weeks, but not months, before succumbing. The alternative, of course, might be that they were not yet dead but just somewhere else on the island when Bevington visited their campsite.

This kind of exercise is not merely idle speculation. By thinking through what makes sense and what doesn't in the light of known experience we stand a better chance of correctly focusing our search when we return to the island.



Photo courtesy National Archives.

A group of dual-interest TIGHARs has set up a ham radio group to discuss the Earhart Project and Earhartia generally. They come up on the 20 meter band on 14.290 at 1600 EDT (2000 UTC) every day, and would welcome any TIGHARs who care to tune in. Among the member participants are Tom Gannon, #0539 (WA4HHJ) and Lynn Wilke, #1131 (WA2DAC). Also in the loop: Herm Stevens, retired Lockheed structural engineer and shop foreman (KA3ZSO).



UNFINISHED WORK

*"I propose to fight it out on this line, if it takes all summer."
—General Ulysses Simpson Grant, May 11, 1864.*

In ten years of searching for l'Oiseau Blanc, the disappointments, frustrations and dashed hopes have become so familiar that it's easy to lose sight of how far we have come. Most recently, the TIGHAR volunteers of Project Midnight Ghost Expedition XXIV (March 22—31, 1994) and Expedition XXV (May 21—28, 1994) carried out technologically and logistically complex airmobile operations in one of the most challenging environments on earth and did it with safety, efficiency and precision. That they didn't find the White Bird is not nearly as important as the fact that the information they did find has put us a giant step closer to our goal.

This summer could see the successful conclusion of TIGHAR's search for the most historically significant lost aircraft in history. Like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle falling ever more quickly into place, new clues are providing an emerging picture of an aircraft that was lost not once, but many times. As the evidence builds and alternative explanations are eliminated, it looks more and more like the unfortunate plane-in-the-pond was none other than l'Oiseau Blanc. Many questions, however, remain to be answered and the most important pieces of the puzzle must yet be found before the fate of Nungesser and Coli can pass from legend into history.

In July a research and logistics team will return to Newfoundland to make preparations for a major search operation now planned for September. Project Midnight Ghost Expedition XXVI, like all of TIGHAR's archeological investigations in Newfoundland, will be conducted in close cooperation with the Newfoundland government under a permit issued to Project Archeologist James Carucci, Ph.D. (TIGHAR #1431E). As soon as the necessary approvals are received and dates are set we'll put out a Project Bulletin.

In the meantime, here's a summary of what we know so far:

- Contemporaneous written testimony from a variety of witnesses chronicles the passage of an aircraft over Newfoundland's Avalon Peninsula on the morning of May 9, 1927. The descriptions of the airplane fit l'Oiseau Blanc. There were no aircraft

of any description operational in Newfoundland at that time.

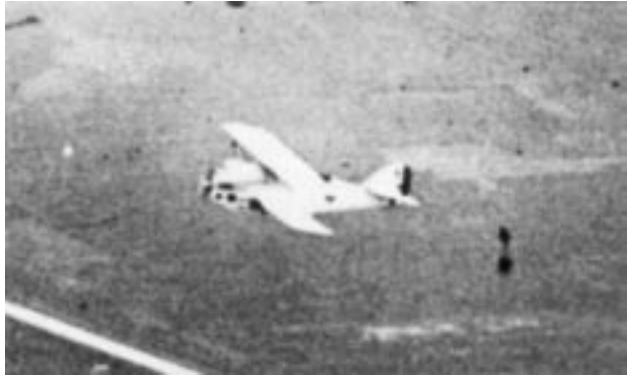


Photo courtesy Musée de l'Air et de l'Espace

Rare photo of l'Oiseau Blanc enroute to the French coast on the morning of May 8, 1927. Note that the undercarriage has been jettisoned.

BANDITS IN THE HILLS

As if Nungesser and Coli had not suffered enough misfortune, the fullest possible understanding of their fate is now being threatened by a brazenly illegal attempt to "beat" TIGHAR to the discovery of whatever remains of their aircraft. For the past several months a group operating in defiance of Newfoundland's Historic Resources Act has repeatedly conducted illegal search operations at the Gull Pond with the declared intention of finding the White Bird. By operating outside the law, as well as outside the constraints of ethical archeological practice, it is not uncommon for looters to get quick and dirty results. It was, therefore, disappointing but hardly surprising to learn that a metal artifact suspected of being part of l'Oiseau Blanc has recently been smuggled out of Newfoundland and sent to France for identification. Whatever becomes of the object now, its provenance has been destroyed along with its usefulness as evidence.

This is an old problem in archeology but fortunately, in this case, good strong laws with sharp, pointy teeth are in place. We can only hope that enforcement action will be taken before further damage occurs.



- The diary of Sidney Cotton, leader of the 1927 Nungesser-Coli Search Expedition, tells of local reports that an aircraft was seen “on Red Head on fire.” Red Head is a coastal headland nine miles from the Gull Pond and, on June 17, 1927 (five weeks after the disappearance) Cotton flew his Fokker Universal over the area “where machine reported crashed.” Whether Cotton searched inland as far as the Gull Pond is not known, but his flight discovered no explanation for the witness reports.

Photo courtesy Newfoundland Archives.



Fokker Universal “Jeanne d’Arc” of the Nungesser-Coli Search Expedition arrives in St. John’s, Newfoundland aboard S.S. Silvia, June 9, 1927.

- Local folklore about airplane wreckage seen at, and recovered from, the pond in the late 1920s through the 1940s has been corroborated by recently found government correspondence describing an aircraft wreck “15 to 20 years old” reported seen in 1948. This effectively eliminates WWII as a source of the wreck and puts the event back into a period which greatly narrows the possible identity of the plane-in-the-pond.

- One candidate, “The Endeavor,” lost during a March 1928 transatlantic attempt, has been eliminated thanks to documentation found by Russ Lowe (TIGHAR #1436EC). A letter from the Air Ministry in London dated March 1, 1929 confirms that a serial-numbered wheel from the Stinson Detrioter washed ashore in Ireland that previous December. That leaves only “The Dawn,” the “San Raphael,” and the “Golden Hind” as even remote alternatives to l’Oiseau Blanc.

- An artifact matching the description of debris reported seen at the pond prior to World War Two was recovered by TIGHAR from the shallow water near the small rocky island in 1992. Although too badly damaged to be diagnostic, it confirms that the tales of the plane-in-the-pond are more than folklore (see “A Piece of the Plane in the Pond,” *TIGHAR Tracks* Vol. 9 No. 1, p. 6).

- Another artifact suspected of being part of l’Oiseau Blanc—possibly one of the pieces recovered

in 1930s (see “Found Objects,” *TIGHAR Tracks* Vol. 9 No. 4, December 1993, page 5)—has been illegally salvaged and smuggled to France by a group of looters operating in defiance of Newfoundland’s Historic Resources Act (see “Bandits in the Hills”).

Bits And Pieces

But if the evidence that the White Bird crashed at the Gull Pond seems to be building, it is also apparent that whatever remains of the largely biodegradable aircraft is now very hard to find. Just how much wreckage was once visible and how much was carried off by people who later visited the site is unknowable, but the most reasonable answer to both questions would seem to be “not much.” Anyone removing debris during the period when such removal is reported to have taken place (1932 to 1941) would have necessarily been traveling on foot or snowshoes (the footing is impossible for horses) and would have had to carry or tow their trophy about 10 miles to the closest village.

The torn, battered or crumpled condition of the debris found at the pond suggests an event of considerable violence. At the same time, the absence of stories describing the discovery, much less removal, of an engine or any other large structure suggests that the main body of wreckage was never found. How much of the wreck, wherever it is, may still survive? The one artifact TIGHAR has found in the pond is made of a low-carbon, fairly ductile steel and exhibits significant loss of structure due to oxidation. When found (with a White’s Electronics PI3000 metal detector) the surviving portion of the object was completely buried in the silt. What clue does that give us about what we can expect to find and where we can expect to find it?

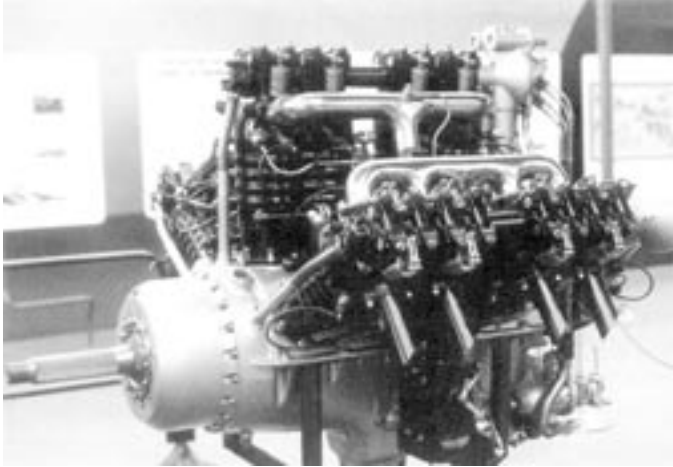


TIGHAR recovers Artifact 1-21-1 from the Gull Pond, October 25, 1992. Diver Harlan Lanoue, TIGHAR #0074E, far right, is near the spot where the object was first discovered by Paul Squires, TIGHAR #1391CE, inset.

TIGHAR Photos by P. Thrasher.

PROJECT REPORT—PROJECT MIDNIGHT GHOST

The aircraft's engine is, of course, the most obvious target for a remote-sensing search. Assuming that the plane-in-the-pond is l'Oiseau Blanc, the engine is a 450 h.p. Lorraine-Dietrich with twelve cylinders arranged in a distinctive W configuration (sort of a V8 with another bank of four down the middle). It's big, measuring about five feet long by four feet wide by three feet tall; and heavy, weighing 906 lbs dry. The crankcase is aluminum as are the pistons, but the cylinders are milled out of solid billets of steel and encased in thin steel water jackets. It seems reasonable to postulate that the twelve and



Twelve cylinder Lorraine-Dietrich engine of the same type as installed in l'Oiseau Blanc. TIGHAR photo by H. Lanoue.

a half foot long, forged aluminum propeller is still attached, as may be the copper pipes and radiators of the cooling system. How the corrosive forces in the pond might react with this carnival of dissimilar metals is anybody's guess, but it is difficult to imagine that the engine would not survive, if only as a heavily corroded mass.

A Pond In Name Only

The word “pond” evokes images of gold fish and willow trees but such are in short supply at the the Gull Pond. Nearly a mile long and, in places, half a mile wide, it covers an area of 33 hectares and is perhaps best described as a lake on a high barren plateau. The surrounding terrain is muskeg – a marshy, windswept moonscape of rock and moss crisscrossed with caribou trails and dotted with tangles of gnarled underbrush. Low scudding fog and rain are

the rule in this place that gets fewer days of sun than anywhere in North America except the Aleutians. Water depth in the pond ranges from about one foot near shore to not much more than six or seven feet in the deeper areas where silt covers a clay subsurface. Much of the bottom, however, is a painful jumble of slime-covered, angular boulders which, we have learned to our chagrin, includes highly mineralized material dropped there 10,000 years ago by the glacier that carved the land. In the center of the pond the boulders rise to form a small rocky island and it is here that wreckage once lay strewn about or “jammed in the rocks.”

In a typical year, ice forms on the pond in December and builds to roughly two feet in thickness before breaking up in April. Significant portions of the pond freeze to the bottom encasing rocks and boulders (and anything else) in blocks of ice which, in the spring, become miniature icebergs driven by the wind. The effect of their powerful grinding action is readily apparent along the shoreline. What they might do to aircraft wreckage over the course of sixty-seven winters can only be imagined.

But in spite of all the forces and factors, natural and human, that have kept the fate of l'Oiseau Blanc hidden for all these many years, it is becoming increasingly apparent that our favorite saying is as true as ever: nothing vanishes without a trace.



The Gull Pond



TIGHAR photo by P. Thrasher

In the summer of 1987, *TIGHAR Tracks* carried an editorial which dared to suggest that the accident rate among airworthy World War Two aircraft was unconscionably high. Although no one knew it at the time, that article marked the beginning of a revolution in aviation historic preservation.

As we studied the problem we began to realize that saving historic aircraft from “the teeth of time and the hands of mistaken zeal” is not a matter of flying safety, but one of public education. We came to grips with the difficult truth that the destruction of historic aircraft occurs most frequently not in airshow crashes but in “restoration” shops. We learned to accept that, because nearly all of the people in the aviation museum world have come from aviation rather than museum backgrounds, they quite naturally treat historic airplanes in an aviation, rather than a museum, way. There’s a big difference. In aviation we try to keep everything like new. In museums we try to preserve things that are old. It is hardly surprising, then, that, despite the impressive and growing number of aircraft collections worldwide, very little aviation historic preservation has been taking place.

Calling attention to this situation has often brought a shoot-the-messenger response from the aviation historical community. Equally frustrating has been the difficulty we’ve experienced in getting the traditional historic preservation world to see aircraft as genuine historic properties worthy of the same attention and protection as historic buildings and ships. But perseverance pays off and a recent article in a U.S. government publication is an example of the breakthrough we’re helping to bring about. The magazine is called *CRM (Cultural Resources Management)* and is published by the Department of the Interior’s National Park Service Cultural Resources division. The current issue (Vol. 17, No. 4) includes an article entitled Aircraft Restoration Practice and Philosophy by Ed McManus, Chief Conservator at the National Air & Space Museum in Washington, DC. The VIEWPOINT section of the magazine also includes two pages of letters discussing aviation preservation matters.

After seven lonely years other voices have been added to TIGHAR’s. Intelligent discussions of aviation issues are now being presented in the larger context of traditional historic preservation. It is, perhaps, the end of the beginning of the aviation historic preservation revolution. 🐾

“Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. It is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.” Sir

Winston Spencer Churchill, November 10, 1942.

RESTORATION MYTHS



For many years now, restoration has reigned as the dominant treatment option. Aircraft restorations are generally accomplished by experienced aircraft mechanics and others with an interest or background in aviation. In the absence of recognized standards and because of multiple objectives, assumptions have emerged to justify the various restoration philosophies that now exist. I call them restoration myths. They include:

- It isn’t an airplane unless it flies;
- Restoration is preservation (or conservation);
- Restoration preserves technology;
- Restoration is like zeroing the clock;
- Once restored, an airplane is good for another 100 years at which time it can be re-restored;
- Restored aircraft do not have to be treated like museum objects;
- Restorations should be accomplished according to flight worthy standards;
- Restoration is the only treatment option;
- Always use original parts, materials, and techniques.

From “Aircraft Restoration Practice and Philosophy” by Ed McManus, Chief Conservator, National Air & Space Museum; CRM Vol. 17, No. 4, 1994, pp. 8-10. 🐾

HARD DRIVE SUCCESS

TIGHAR is pleased to announce the successful completion of the Hard Drive campaign to upgrade our computer equipment. By the heroic efforts of Don Widdoes of Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, TIGHAR #1033, we have acquired new equipment and recycled old to produce a system substantially faster and with far greater capabilities than we thought possible – all for about half the money we thought we would have to spend. We have also laid the foundation for a substantial upgrade in about two years when the PowerMac/PowerPC technology is thoroughly tested and proven. The final item added to our system was the printer, a substantial upgrade from 300 to 880 dots per inch. That being on line, all those who donated to the Hard Drive Fund will be receiving their promised certificates soon. Thanks to all for your support; you'll see the results in TIGHAR Tracks and many facets of member services as we come up to speed.



File

Edit

Window

?

TIGHAR Bulletin Board

... under things to remember.

... your TIGHAR reference to include the bulletin board number: 302/998-6678 — to be activated this summer.

... on news, items of interest, other TIGHARs' activities; the latest on projects, plans, and issues; digests of articles; lists of museums — who knows what all.

Call TIGHAR for more info and technical details.

Announcing the
TIGHAR BULLETIN BOARD

TIGHAR is also pleased to announce a new computer bulletin board service for all TIGHAR members. Due to the generosity of TIGHAR Board Member Richard Cobb (TIGHAR#1059B) who has donated the hardware, and the expertise of Don Widdoes, we will be inaugurating TIGHAR's entry into the information superhighway about the first of August. The telephone number is above (we'll be sending out more information, of course). Please drop us a line and let us know what kind of information you would like to see on line. We're planning the first stages now, so let us hear from you.

Member Requests

One type of information we will be carrying on the bulletin board is lists – museums, aircraft in museums, aircraft derelict in parks, airfields derelict in the weeds, anything which applies to aviation historic preservation. Member Vance Blaettler (TIGHAR #0116C) is putting together just such a list and would welcome member input. He is interested in U. S. Navy jets now serving as gate guardians, playground gyms, pigeon roosts, and other inappropriate uses anywhere in the world. If you have an aircraft for his list, please write to him at 4678 Oregon Street, San Diego, CA 92116. When we come on line we will

place his list on our bulletin board for member access.



Lawrence Tagg, TIGHAR #1868, reports that the Pima Air Museum has recovered a mostly intact AT-9 from the Gila National Forest in New Mexico. With the help of a son in the Forest Service and a son who is an archeologist, Larry was able to coordinate the museum volunteers, the paperwork, and the forest service helicopter lift into a successful recovery. Some parts of this very rare aircraft are

missing, such as the doors, and Larry would be very glad to hear from anyone who might be able to help with parts, manuals, drawings, or background on the aircraft. Please write or call him: 9021 E. 5th Street, Tucson, AZ 85710; 602/885-7066.



Bob Dabrowski, TIGHAR #1341, is in the market for Allison V12/1710C. I. engines and parts. Get in touch with him at P. O. Box 616, Marlborough, NH 03455-0616, 603/876-4046.



PLEASE DO NOT BEND, FOLD, SPINDLE OR MUTILATE

As of January 1, 1994, the IRS will be requiring “substantiation and disclosure” for any single donation of \$250.00 or more. IRS publication #1771 (11-93) states that:

... no deduction will be allowed under section 170 of the Internal Revenue Code for any charitable contribution of \$250 or more unless the donor has contemporaneous written substantiation from the charity. In cases where the charity has provided goods or services to the donor in exchange for making the contribution, this contemporaneous written acknowledgement must include a good faith estimate of the value of such goods or services. Thus, taxpayers may no longer rely solely on a cancelled check to substantiate a cash contribution of \$250 or more.

Whew! What’s this mean to you? Just that you need to keep those blue receipts we send you, that’s all. Here’s how to read your receipt:

Date:	June 15, 1994 ¹	Cash Amount:	US\$250.00 ²	No.	5678 ³
For:	Donation ⁴				
Received From:	TIGHAR Member Whatever Address Any City, State, Zip				
Member Number:	2345 ⁵	Renewal Date:	September 30, 1998 ⁶		
<p><i>Thank you for your donation to TIGHAR. This is your receipt – save for tax purposes.</i></p> <p><i>The tax-deductible portion of your gift is US\$250.00.⁷</i></p>					
TIGHAR • 2812 Fawkes Drive • Wilmington, DE 19808 • USA • (302) 994-4410					

- 1 – This is the date we received your donation.
- 2 – This is the full cash amount of your donation in U.S. dollars.
- 3 – This is your receipt number. We keep the bottom of the page, which has the same number on it. If you lose this receipt, or the dog eats it, we can generate a duplicate receipt for you by referring to our copy.
- 4 – This tells you (and us) why you sent the money. If you renewed your membership, this space will say Membership Renewal; if you order a T-Shirt, it’ll say so.
- 5 – This is your member number. Please check it periodically to be sure it has any letters it should have: C for completing the course, E for expedition qualification, B for a Board member, S for a student member.
- 6 – This is the date your current membership expires. Please check this date when you receive your receipt for renewing your membership and make sure we remembered to put the new year in your membership record.
- 7 – If you ordered a book or T-shirt, this amount may be less than the full amount of your check. The difference represents our “good faith estimate of the value of such goods or services.”

Please call us if you ever have any question about the deductibility of any donation you make to TIGHAR. TIGHAR is a 501(c)(3) public charity. All donations are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law. Oh, and by the way – thanks for thinking of us!



ANNIE HALL CIRCUMNAVIGATES SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA IN A TWIN BEECH:

AMELIA EARHART

The Final Flight

with

Diane Keaton as Amelia Earhart

Bruce Dern as George Putnam

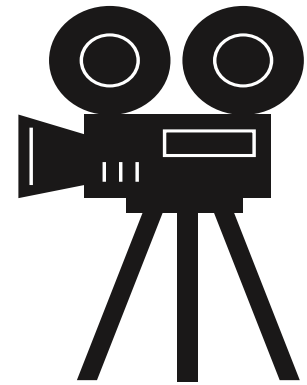
Rutger Hauer as Fred Noonan

Written by Anna Sandor

Directed by Yves Simoneau

Produced by Turner Network Television (TNT)

Two hours (with commercials)



Some of the aerial photography is spectacular. She does not get captured by the Japanese. Her difficulties in learning to master the airplane and her lack of expertise in radio navigation are well portrayed.

There. Never let it be said that we couldn't find something good to say about this boring attempt to capitalize on the current round of Ameliamaania. Loosely based on Doris Rich's gossipy and error-strewn biography of AE, the film perpetuates much of the book's Smithsonian-endorsed mythology – Amelia the whiny proto-feminist, Putnam the manipulative huckster, Noonan the alcoholic, Mantz the consummate pro, etc. (The characterizations aren't necessarily inaccurate. They're just matched to the wrong people.)

In the film, a short and chunky Amelia practices in her little Beech 18 (adorned with what looks like a basketball hoop for a loop antenna) over the dry and barren mountains of southern California, then takes off on her world flight against a backdrop of the dry and barren mountains of Miami. Guided by her perpetually pickled navigator, that blond Irishman with the Dutch accent, Fred Noonan, she presses on over the dry and barren mountains of South America, Africa and Asia.

Back home, her oddly aged husband with the bushy gray mustache agonizes interminably while Earhart suffers through a fictional engine failure and assorted hissy-fits. Finally Amelia reaches the dry and barren mountains of Lae, New Guinea, which has somehow become populated with Asian children. There, she makes a breathtaking takeoff from the paved runway and, as do all pilots of overgross aircraft embarking on long distance flights, buzzes the field in celebration. Aboard the air-conditioned *Itasca*, the Coast Guard is busy modeling modern-day uniforms unaware that the gyro has failed in Fred Noonan's polished brass nautical sextant causing the flight to become hopelessly lost (swear to God). As Amelia sobs off into the sunrise the film ends with a left-handed compliment to TIGHAR as an endpiece caption somewhat desperately reminds the audience that "To this day, no trace of her plane has ever been found." Uh huh.



A NOVEL APPROACH

LOST STAR *THE SEARCH FOR AMELIA EARHART*

by Randall Brink

W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1994, 206 pp. w/photographs, \$25 US, \$33 Canada.

There must have been some misunderstanding. Surely the publisher intended this rehash of discredited fantasy to be marketed, like the author's previous books, as fiction. To call it biography could subject author and publisher to allegations of outright fraud.

Consider, for example, the author's statement that Earhart's navigator was a pilot and, indeed, a flying instructor who joined Pan American in 1930 as a flying boat pilot. The passage is footnoted to page 245 of Mary Lovell's biography *The Sound Of Wings, the Life of Amelia Earhart* (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1989). The problem is that on that page of her book Lovell specifically states that Noonan was not a pilot and joined Pan Am in 1925. Does Mr. Brink not read well, or is he intentionally trying to hoodwink the reader?

Surely his description of the political situation in the central Pacific of 1937 is intended as a satiric parody of post-Pearl Harbor racism and paranoia. The very U. S. government documents he cites to support his case establish the falsity of his allegations. American interest in the equatorial islands was commercial, not military, and the principal tension in the region was between the United States and Great Britain, not Japan.

One would certainly hope that his star piece of evidence that Earhart was a spy is intended to be taken as humor. When placed in context, the transcript of Secretary of the Interior Henry Morgenthau's telephone conversation with Eleanor Roosevelt's personal secretary is anything but mysterious. In 1937 the U. S. Coast Guard was part of the Treasury Department. On July 19, 1937 the captain of the Coast Guard Cutter *Itasca* submitted a lengthy account of the events surrounding the disappearance and failed search. The report, readily available to any researcher today, is scathing in its criticism of Earhart and lays the blame for her loss (justifiably or not) on her incompetence. The document was classified as "confidential" (not "secret") in accordance with Coast Guard regulations. On April 26, 1938 Earhart's former technical advisor, Paul Mantz, wrote to Mrs. Roosevelt asking her to intercede in his attempts to obtain a copy of the report. On May 10, 1938 the First Lady sent a note to Morgenthau asking if he could "send the

man [Mantz] these records." Brink's much-vaunted transcripts merely record Morgenthau's May 13 response that "if we're going to give it to this man we've got to make it public ... and if we ever release the report of the *Itasca* on Amelia Earhart, any reputation she's got is gone." Finding these documents doesn't require the skills of a super-sleuth. They were all reproduced in a widely known biography written in part by Earhart's sister and published in 1987 (*Amelia, My Courageous Sister*, Osborne Publishers, Santa Clara, California). Whether Brink ever saw the book or not is hard to say. *Lost Star* contains no bibliography.

Perhaps comedy is, after all, Brink's real purpose. Why else would he tell the reader that a Japanese airplane (the Zero) which was not built until 1939 forced Earhart down after taking off from an aircraft carrier (the *Akagi*) that was in drydock in Japan? Why would he represent a photograph of Amelia Earhart as being taken on Saipan in September 1937 when it is known to have been taken by Walter E. Peterson at Luke Field, Hawaii on March 20, 1937? Why would he say that a wartime photograph of a supposedly twin-tailed airplane on a Japanese airfield in the Marshall Islands must be Earhart's because "the Japanese built no twin-tailed monoplanes, either before or during World War II"? (Japan's best long range bomber in the late 1930s was the twin-tailed Mitsubishi Type 96, but the airplane in the photo is most probably one of the Japanese-built copies of the twin-tailed Lockheed Model 14 "Super Electra" purchased legally from the U. S. before the war.) The errors go on and on until, ultimately, the reader who is the least bit familiar with the Earhart case is forced to either throw the book down in disgust or simply laugh.

Maybe that's the answer. Maybe we've all been had. *Lost Star* only makes sense if it is, in fact, the ultimate send-up of all of the Earhart conspiracy theories. Could a responsible house like W.W. Norton otherwise publish a book that says that much of the Pacific Ocean remains uncharted; that Earhart's destination, Howland Island, is in the Line Islands; that Tarawa was ever part of the Japanese Mandate; and that the knot (one nautical mile per hour) is metric? Gotta hand it to you, Mr. Brink. You really had us going for a while there.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

July 13—23 — Logistical and research trip to Newfoundland for Project Midnight Ghost.

August 13 & 14 — Introductory Course in Aviation Archeology, Wilmington, Delaware. Demonstration museum: Dover Air Force Base Museum.

September 7—20 — Project Midnight Ghost Expedition XXVI, at The Gull Pond, Avalon Peninsula, Newfoundland, Canada. Category II Expedition. Team will be selected from among volunteers who have completed the Aviation Archeology Course.

October 13—16 — Project Midnight Ghost Reunion, Machias, Maine (see flyer enclosed with this magazine).

MEMBERSHIP FORM

I would like to join TIGHAR. Enclosed is my donation of

☐

\$45 for a one year membership
\$30 for full-time students

☐

\$80 for a two year membership

☐

\$195 for a five year membership

☐

\$1,000 for a corporate membership

Please send me —

TIGHAR Tracks four times a year

Invitations to participate in expeditions, courses, seminars, and Gatherings

Opportunities to subscribe to special internal TIGHAR project publications

Opportunities to do research, interviews, and reports for aviation historical projects

Name

Address

Telephone

Please return this form with your membership dues to TIGHAR, 2812 Fawkes Drive, Wilmington, DE 19808 USA; Telephone (302) 994-4410, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. EST/EDT, M-F; Fax (302) 994-7945. ALL DONATIONS TAX-DEDUCTIBLE IN THE UNITED STATES WITHIN THE LIMITS OF THE LAW. Personal checks may be drawn in U.S., Canadian, or European Community funds.

