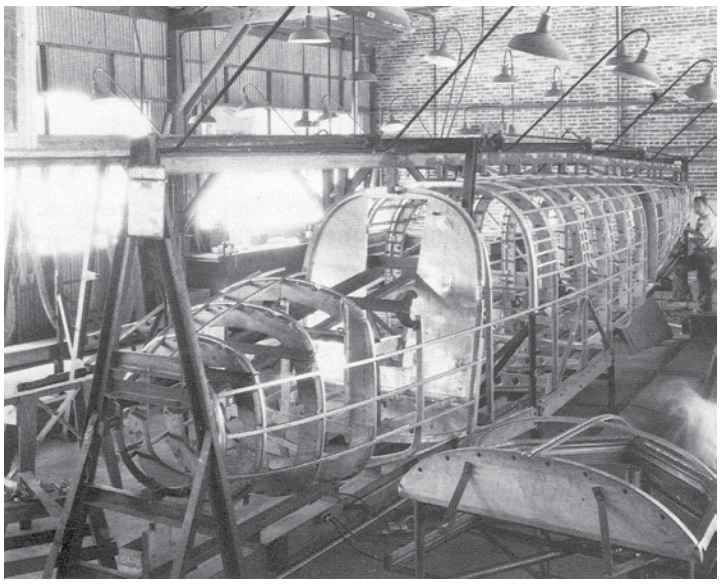
Research In Progress

# CAUTION: HISTORY UNDER CONSTRUCTION

On March 16, 1936 George Putnam sent a "financial arrangements just completed…" telegram to Lockheed Aircraft Corporation's president Robert Gross which initiated the construction of Lockheed airframe #1055 (the 55th example of the Model 10) as a "special 10E." Thus began the short life of the airplane in which Amelia Earhart and Fred Noonan would vanish less than fifteen months later. During the year between its first registration on July 19, 1936 and its disappearance on July 2, 1937, the "Flying Laboratory" underwent many modifications, equipment additions and deletions, and changes to its external markings. And because its owner was the world's most famous woman pilot, it became one of the most photographed aircraft in history.

It is ironic that the many photos of the airplane in its many guises – images which, when matched with the surviving original paperwork provide a coherent, if not complete, history of the machine's evolution – have, instead, fueled endless speculation about its purpose, its use, and its ultimate fate. On the sillier side, the twin pitot tubes under the nose have been labeled secret radio antennas, the flare tube covers have been dubbed camera doors, and the fairing over a special radio compass antenna has been identified as an astrodome. More significantly, respected biographies have unwittingly perpetuated myths such as "She dropped the trailing wire antenna" in Miami (*Amelia Earhart, A Biography* by Doris Rich) and "Amelia… was persuaded… to discard the Western Electric equipment for the Bendix RA-1 series." (*The Sound Of Wings, The Life of Amelia Earhart* by Mary Lovell). Without a reliable chronology of the airplane's evolution, serious researchers are confused and often misled by what appear to be contradictory, or even suspicious, photos of Earhart's Electra.

To augment our own investigation, and as a service to everyone who is interested in the Earhart disappearance, TIGHAR is preparing a major article which will appear in three parts in *TIGHAR Track*s Vol. 11, Nos. 2, 3, & 4.



*A Model 10 in the jig at Lockheed's Burbank facility circa 1936. Photo courtesy Lockheed Corp.*

Part One will cover the airplane from its initial registration in July 1936 through an inspection performed in November of that year. Part Two will chronicle the changes made for the first world-flight attempt, the repairs and alterations made after the Luke Field crash, and the configuration of the Electra at the time of its disappearance. Part Three will trace the evolution of the airplane's cockpit instrumentation, including radio remotes.

This is a huge project and, as the research has progressed, several needs have come up which we hope the infinitely diverse, knowledgeable and resourceful TIGHAR membership will be able to help fill. But first, a note to the helpful: Photos must be copyright free or permissible to use

with a proper credit and will, of course, be returned on request. Facts (need we say it?) must be documented in a contemporaneous written source. Okay. Here's what we need.


The photo that appears on page 155 of the Summer 1978 issue of the *American Aviation Historical Society Journal* which shows X16020 with a large inflated parachute in the background. A slightly different angle on the same scene appeared on page 11 of the June 1994 issue of *Air Classics* magazine.


A good photo of R16020 at the time of the Bendix Race in September 1936. This was the only time the airplane is known to have had painted engine cowlings. Two badly reproduced photos appear on page 182 of Carol Osborne's book *Amelia My Courageous Sister*.


A good photo of NR16020 just prior to the first attempt. We need a profile shot of the starboard side showing the large rear window and the aft belly antenna masts.


A good print of NR16020 taxiing for takeoff at Miami. The photo appears in Mary Lovell's book *The Sound Of Wings.*


Does anybody know what MIT professor Frederick J. Hooven's relationship with Bendix was (if any)? In 1982 Hooven claimed to be the inventor of the radio compass installed in the Electra in October 1936 and removed shortly before the first world-flight attempt.


Can anyone document when the window was first installed in the cabin door?


We need to pin down the nomenclature for the loop antenna installed over the cockpit prior to the first world-flight attempt.

If you have a question about whether information you have may be useful just write, fax or call Earhart Project Director Richard Gillespie.