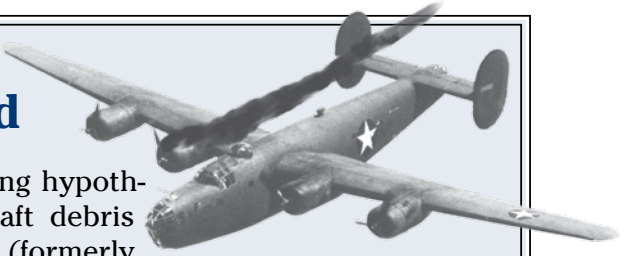


The Crash At Sydney Island



Our current working hypothesis is that the aircraft debris found on Nikumaroro (formerly Gardner Island) originated from two distinct aircraft. One was a B-24. The other was Earhart's Lockheed. To test that theory it is essential that we make a conclusive identification of the only aircraft known to have crashed and been salvaged for metal by the Phoenix Island colonists. The only written mention of this crash found so far appears in a scholarly report entitled *Titiana* written in the late '60s by anthropologist Kenneth Knudson. According to Knudson,

During the late war years, a large four-engined aircraft from Canton Island crashed on Sydney (an island about 200 miles east of Nikumaroro). Apparently low on fuel or with one engine on fire, it circled the island once before attempting to ditch in the lagoon. The approach was made too low, however, and the airplane sheared off a palm tree and crashed just inland from the village. ...[T]he wreck became the chief source of aluminum for the islanders, who had learned on Canton Island to make women's combs and other ornaments from this material. Eventually almost nothing remained of the aircraft.

The Niku II expedition recovered just such an aluminum comb from Nikumaroro in 1991 and the island's former residents now living in the Solomons recently told a TIGHAR researcher that such objects were made from pieces of the wreck on Sydney (see "Solomon Islands Expedition," page 14). Part numbers on two other artifacts found on Nikumaroro confirm that they are from a B-24 aircraft. We can pin it down even further. At least one of the parts came from either a B-24C (not likely, because only nine were built) or one of 1,559 B-24Ds. If the Sydney crash was one of those B-24s that would handily explain the origin of all the non-Electra parts on Niku. If it was not one of those airplanes then the Liberator parts had to come from somewhere else and our working hypothesis needs changing.

To date, we've been unable to find any other record of the Sydney crash. Knudson does not specify the nationality but, coming from Canton Island, the airplane was almost certainly either American or British. Both, of course, operated the Liberator, and Canton was a hub of ferry activity. "During the late war years" is vague but PBY pilot John Mims remembers no such wreck as of the time he left Canton in the spring of 1945. We'd like to hear from anyone who can help identify and document this loss.



Sydney Island (Manra)

