

Impressions

Amelia, by Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V. Dillon. Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, Inc., 1997. 288 pp., \$24.95 (hardback). Notes, bibliography, index.

WE BEGAN THIS BOOK WITH HIGH HOPES. "AT LAST," we thought, "a biography of Amelia written by scholars." (The authors wrote, with Gordon Prange, such classics as *Miracle at Midway* and *At Dawn We Slept*.) So we were terribly disappointed as we read the sections dealing with the disappearance to find out that Goldstein and Dillon had used not primary sources, but secondary and tertiary ones, and had, as a consequence, made some fundamental errors of fact and interpretation. For example, on page 150 they state that "...Amelia's Electra, No. 14 R 16020, had a total tankage of 1,200 gallons, with fuel capacity of 1,170 gallons—not 1,150 or 1,151 as widely reported later." A footnote attributes this information as follows: Captain L.F. Safford, USN (Ret.), unpublished manuscript, *Flight Into Yesterday: The Tragedy of Amelia Earhart* pp. 121-126.

TIGHAR has a copy of Safford's manuscript which was revised 23 June 1971. In it, he has the airplane's fuel capacity correctly stated as 1,151 gallons. Perhaps Goldstein and Dillon had an older version of the manuscript, but the actual fuel capacity of the aircraft is established, not by a secondary source like Safford, but by primary source documentation. The Bureau of Air Commerce Inspection Report for the airplane dated May 19, 1937 (the last inspection before it departed on the second world flight attempt) establishes beyond doubt that its fuel capacity was 1,151 U.S. gallons. More disturbing than the error itself is Goldstein and Dillon's apparent willingness to accept outdated secondary sources rather than insist on primary source documentation. They should know better.

On page 169 they state that Noonan was a pilot and that he was an alcoholic. Noonan was

most definitely not a pilot and there has never been any real evidence that he had a drinking problem. The sources cited for this passage are, once more, secondary sources. Goldstein and Dillon are merely repeating rumors and representing them as facts. Throughout the book they treat anecdotal accounts told years after the event as truth when, in fact, such information is nothing more than folklore unless and until corroborated by contemporaneous sources.

The earlier sections of the biography, reaching far back into the genealogy of the Earhart and Otis families, are exhaustive, but necessarily suspect given the inaccuracies of the latter parts of the book.

TIGHAR's work is mentioned in the final chapter. At the time the book went to press, we were awaiting the results of the forensic testing Alcoa Aluminum was kind enough to do for us. They refer to TIGHAR's theory as "possible geographically although not very probable, because this location is a good 45 degrees off course"—thereby showing their lack of familiarity with Noonan's navigational techniques. They also assert that Noonan overindulged in alcohol in Lae (without any documentation to support this contention), and declare that the whole flight was pointless and "ill-advised."

So is this book.

Yet Another Biography of Amelia Earhart

East to the Dawn, The Life of Amelia Earhart, by Susan Butler. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1997. 528 pp., \$27.50 (hardcover). Notes, bibliography, index.

ONE BEGINS TO WONDER JUST HOW MANY BIOGRAPHIES of Amelia the market will bear. This one is long, exhaustive, and exhausting, with side trips into politics, sociology, genealogy, and most of the other categories of the Dewey Decimal system. Butler is an enthusiast of the Gene-Vidal-as... what? Lover, friend, confidant- school of Ameliana, and takes Gore Vidal's pronouncements as gospel. Out of 528 pages, she devotes two to the disappearance, and several more to the recent research done in Japan which should finally and forever put any question of Japanese involvement to rest. But this is strictly and only a biography, with no attempt to deal with

the technical data or historical minutiae of the disappearance.

There are some interesting details concerning the closeness of AE's relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt, and some factoids possibly hitherto

unrevealed about various facets of AE's life. For the dedicated Earhart enthusiast, it's worth a read when it is published in October. For those interested in the disappearance, save your \$27.50.

A Most Unusual Woman

Whistled Like a Bird, by Sally Putnam Chapman. New York: Warner Books, Inc. 266 pp. \$22.00 (hardback). Bibliography.

THIS IS A MOST INTERESTING BOOK ABOUT A MOST unusual woman, who lived with interesting and unusual people and led a unique life for her time. It is the biography of Dorothy Binney Putnam, George Palmer Putnam's first wife. Written by her granddaughter, the daughter of David Putnam, elder son of George and Dorothy, this book draws a portrait of Dorothy which is a far cry from the woman scorned many assume her to have been.

Born in 1888, Dorothy Binney grew up in a home full of nature, art, and education. A graduate of Wellesley College, she was exposed to the new ideas of a new century, and took most of them up with enthusiasm, including suffrage and freedom for women. There was plenty of money (her father invented the Crayola crayon), and she was able to travel widely. She met George on a trip to the Rockies in 1908 with the Sierra Club, where they climbed Mount Whitney. They married in 1911, and settled in Bend, Oregon where George was the publisher and editor of the local newspaper, and a force for good (i.e., fewer prostitutes, more churches) in the frontier town.

At first they were happy, but once they migrated back east and George became immersed in the publishing and public relations work which led him to his associations with Amelia Earhart and other adventure-celebrities, Dorothy was less and less satisfied with keeping house, giving dinner parties, and keeping up with fashion. In 1927 her unhappiness came to a head when she met a college sophomore 19 years her junior, and they fell in love.

In the end, nothing permanent came of this relationship; but the die was cast. When Amelia came into George's life, Dorothy welcomed her with

open arms, went flying with her, entertained her, and ultimately considered her to be a good friend. Far from feeling that AE was a homewrecker, she saw in Amelia the future of women, and perhaps part of her own future as well. When the decision was made to end her marriage, it was her decision, not George's, and was based on her deep unhappiness with this driven, hungry man to whom she was so ill-suited. She remarried slightly less than one month after her divorce was final.

Neither that marriage, nor her next, worked out very well. As is so often the case, although she was intelligent, well-educated, passionate, artistic, and articulate, Dorothy was not a particularly good judge of men. Her fourth marriage, finally happy, ended prematurely with the death of her husband from a heart attack. She lived another thirty years, dying at 94.

This book was possible because Dorothy kept a daily journal her entire life, in which she recorded everything she felt, thought, and believed. With this rich resource to draw on, Sally Chapman was able to capture the spirit of her grandmother—free, a little wild, passionate, and born too soon. A late 20th century woman in attitudes and appetites, Dorothy Binney Putnam was never able to live the life expected of a woman in the years prior to World War II (or after, for that matter).

Neither was Amelia. It is an interesting irony that the same man who seemed a jailer to Dorothy was an instrument of freedom to Amelia. Perhaps if Dorothy had understood a little earlier just how unsuited she was to traditional domestic life, she could have been free, with George, too.