

Ate another MRE.

The story of TIGHAR's Kanton Mission expedition is best told through the actual field notes of team member Kenton Spading (TIGHAR 1382CE). Kenton is a hydrologic engineer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Minnesota. His field experience with TIGHAR includes digging a P-47 out of the freezing Delaware mud, weathering a hurricane while searching for the White Bird in Newfoundland, and riding out tropical cyclone Hina during last year's Niku III expedition. You'd think he would know better by now.



Kenton (aka Kanton) Spading.
TIGHAR photo by H. Gillespie

Sat. February 14, 1998

1645 hrs landed at Canton Island. Stepped off the plane to a group of children, women, and men. Heather handed out leis to the kids. I met the airport official (Peter). He has been here since 1993 but he has nothing to do because the beacon is broken. Checked in with the Police/Customs guy. It costs \$75 to land here. Our co-pilot paid \$35 for the use of a truck and a 4-wheel ATV and trailer to haul us back down the runway to look for the engine. The truck is a badly beat-up Nissan pickup with a flat bed. It has a small diesel running right off the manifold (no exhaust). The dash is gutted. They push it to start it.

Walking east of the end of the main runway we found: a buried bulldozer, concrete footings, concrete slabs, rear ends from cars and trucks, radiator (truck?-quite large), and a bulldozer sitting above ground with half the engine block rusted all the way in to the crankshaft and connecting rods! Saw small chunks (2 feet-3 feet) of aircraft aluminum, all flush riveted.



We found... a bulldozer sitting above ground with half the engine block rusted all the way in to the crankshaft and connecting rods! TIGHAR photo by H. Gillespie.

This is a general recon trip. We think we have located the general area where Bruce dumped the aircraft engine. We found an area that had been a junk yard at one

time. We will come back here tomorrow. 1810 hrs-heading back.

We decided to camp on the lagoon shore. We started a fire, laying out under the stars on the beach. In bed 2100 hrs. Clouded up and sprinkled. Beautiful lagoon.

Sun. February 15, 1998

0500, raining. Got up, ate some oranges and a candy bar. Daybreak. Raining harder so heading for the aviation gas hangar. Ate a sandwich w/cheese, green peppers and cucumbers.

Note: In addition to the military MREs we had brought along for provisions, we had two huge coolers of cold cuts, veggies, cheese, etc. provided by the good people at Air Kiribati/Aloha Airlines who catered our charter. We asked for enough sandwich makings for lunch on the flight down. What we got was a flying delicatessen.

The truck broke down (fuel pump?) so we all started walking toward the old dump area at the end of the runway. Everyone except Bruce and I walked down the runway. We walked down the road between the runway and the lagoon. We lost sight of the others.

0905 hrs. We came to two 2x4s approximately 1 foot apart being used as posts just off



The truck broke down ... so we all started walking toward the old dump area at the end of the runway. TIGHAR photo by H. Gillespie.

the edge of the road. Bruce stopped. He thinks this is far enough. I walked toward the ocean and came to the rusty bulldozer seen yesterday. There are auto/truck engine blocks, heads, pistons, rear ends (differentials), rotted wood, barrels, etc. laying around. Ric walked back out to meet Bruce at the road. Bruce then led Ric in and they ended up at the old dump/bulldozer site. From Bruce's description, this seems like a likely spot.

We are not doing an organized grid search. Everyone is basically wandering around looking for signs of an aircraft engine. It is not too hard to cover a large area fast. The bushes have spaces between them and there is a lot of bare ground or ground covered with crawling vines. Bruce is very sure we are in the right place.

1145, raining, fairly hard-driving rain, windy, everyone is soaked. People are scrambling to get into bushes for cover-no use-soaked to the skin. Ric announced that anyone who wants to go back



Bruce is very sure we are in the right place. L-R: Bruce Yoho, Ric Gillespie, Tom King. TIGHAR photo by H. Gillespie

can (the truck is here now). Some are cold. Only Ric, John C., Russ M., Tom K., Johnny Johnson, and I stayed behind. I ate an MRE. Chicken stew.

The rain let up so we went to a pile of coral rubble just east of the bulldozer. The pile has chunks of iron sticking out. Motors, rear ends, etc. We started uncovering some of the stuff by hand. John C. uncovered some airplane parts. I looked around some-it is clear that a bulldozer has been all over the area. You can see where the blade has left ridges and low berms of coral. Other than the rusty bulldozer, 99% of the stuff is half buried. It is obvious that someone came in here to purposely bury the junkyard/dump.



The pile has chunks of iron sticking out. Motors, rear ends, etc. TIGHAR photo by H. Gillespie

Still raining, so we gave up and are heading back to the airplane. Very wet out. Sat around in the fuel shed and wrote notes. Ate another MRE. 🐾

The Kanton Mission Team

L to R-TIGHAR Board member and expedition sponsor Dick Reynolds, expedition sponsor Joe Hudson, ABC News cameraman and veteran of three TIGHAR expeditions Sam Painter, TIGHAR photographer Heather Gillespie, TIGHAR videographer Russ Matthews, Ric Gillespie, Bruce Yoho, John Clauss, team physician Col. Tommy Love USAF, expedition sponsor Kenton Spading, expedition sponsor Lee Kruczkowski, expedition sponsor Johnny Johnson, Earhart Project archaeologist Dr. Tom King. TIGHAR photo.

