

The pilots thought I was nuts...

Here, in his own words, is Bruce Yoho's account of how he came to recover the engine that is now the focus of so much speculation, anticipation, frustration, and, ultimately, excavation.

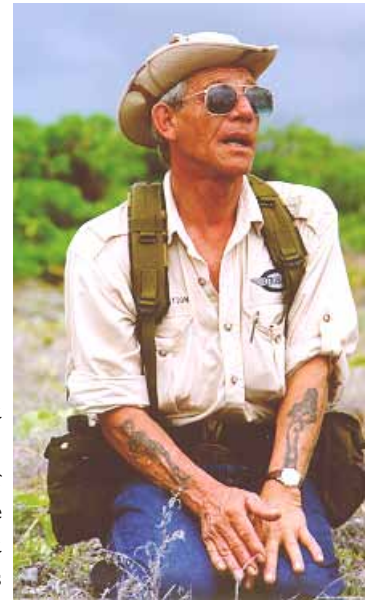
First you need to know that I was on the build up team for SAMTEC. There were not many rules as yet and the operation was running very loosely. It always seemed like, if someone wanted to fly, we went. I am not sure there were any flight plans as such at that time. We left word that we had left for a given destination and when we were expected to return. Long flights were always made with two helos, one for the work detail and the other for rescue if needed.

We would take cargo and workers to the other sites. Sometimes to other islands for, I suppose, some kind of research. Normally on long flights when we arrived at the destination all we (flight crew) had to do was scout around and look for glass fishing balls that may have washed up on the shore. They were popular souvenirs.

At times it got purely boring out there as SAMTEC had not set up entertainment or R & R distractions as yet. Therefore, one made or found his own.

This is how the engine came to be retrieved. As we were flying off of an island, I sat in the cargo door and watched the beach and coral reefs go by under the helo. One could see large sharks and stingrays swimming from time to time. One day we were leaving and I saw this engine on the coral reef. I talked the pilot into retrieving it and we all agreed (although the pilots thought I was nuts). So we slung the engine under the helo for the return to Canton.

We made an approach from the north east direction so others (managers) would not see that we had brought cargo back and



*Bruce Yoho. TIGHAR photo
by H. Gillespie*

what it was. It did not, however, take long for them to ask where I had gotten that engine. To this day I think I retrieved it from Gardner Island.

Only TIGHAR has been able to cause me to think I could be wrong because I don't remember a distinct landmark that is there. The fact is I did get it from one of the islands of the Phoenix Group.

(Note: Bruce remembers that the engine was just off the western end of whatever island it was. This matches the location where former residents say there was wreckage at Gardner. However, Bruce has no recollection of seeing the wreck of the S.S. Norwich City which is also off the western end of Gardner.)

The engine was placed alongside our hangar where our work was done when we were not flying. I would tinker with it from time to time. It was very corroded and the top cylinder heads (those that stuck out of the water on the reef) had corroded away. The cylinders were there and coral sand was packed into the cylinders. I could not dislodge it easily. I suspect that the chemical residue of corroding aluminum, mixed with the sand, turned it into a concrete type substance. Bolts that I attempted to turn were frozen and shoulders were corroded to the point that you could not get a good bite with a wrench. I recall there being a hole in the case and I could see gears. The crankshaft is a blur in my memory, except I recall there being items attached (definitely not a prop but there could have been the remains of the hub). I do not recall an

engine mount or if the accessories were removed or corroded away. The one thing I do know is that I had the engine sitting on what was left of the cylinders and it sat up without needing to be propped up with shoring. This means there were items sticking off of the engine to prop it up. To get an idea of what I mean, try balancing a quarter on edge.

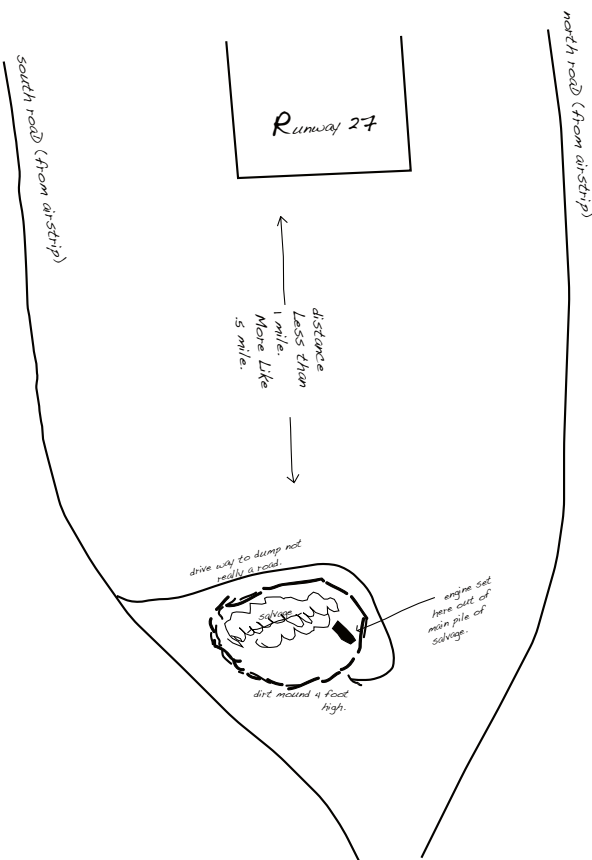
Mags, generators, starters would or should have been corroded to the point of coming off of the engine from the wave action of the ocean. All of these items have aluminum mounting faces and once they corroded there is nothing left to hold them on.

I got bored very soon with the engine as I was a young man and my attention span was only as long as the excitement. I could, however, watch the World Airways stewardesses stand on the ramp for hours trying to determine what they were wearing or not wearing and after 10 minutes they normally were not wearing much in our eyes.

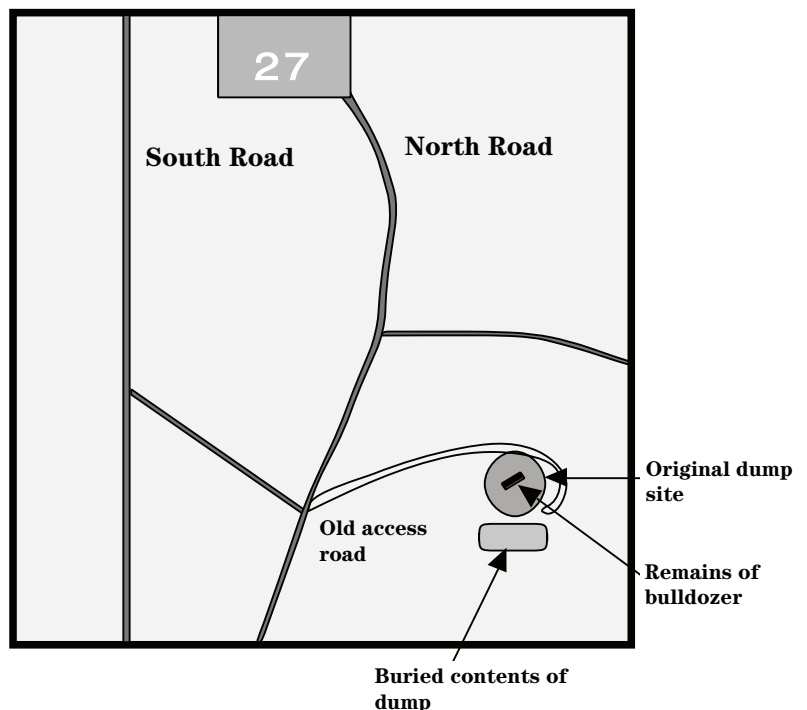
Ok, a two star general was to do some kind of inspection and the boss wanted

the area cleaned up so I was told to hide the engine. Well, totally bored with it, I took it to a salvage area and dumped it.

You may say, "Why?" I did not have much interest in history or A.E. At that time I was a young man trying to start his family and that occupied most of my time. I did not learn of TIGHAR until many years later when I saw an article in the paper about their expedition to Gardner. The article talked about the islands and that caught my interest and I discovered Earhart may have gone down there. I then remembered the engine and its size. It struck me, would TIGHAR like to know about it? I tried to find them but soon lost interest. Linda Finch's flight brought out another story and at the end of the article TIGHAR was mentioned again. This time I had the Internet and could not find them but I did get an e-mail address from Purdue University's Library. The rest is history.



Bruce's hand drawn map.



Map based on observations made on site.