



The Turning of the Tide

It hardly seems possible but this month, November of 1998, marks the tenth anniversary of the Earhart Project. Of course, people have been trying to figure out what happened to Fred and Amelia for about six times as long as TIGHAR has been on the case and there are those who would say that we have only added to the heap of conjecture. We would respond that whether or not you agree with our hypothesis that the missing flight ended at Nikumaroro, it is certainly true that TIGHAR has made significant contributions to the fund of knowledge concerning the Earhart disappearance.

But we can see something happening. Over the course of the past 18 months the nature of at least some of our investigation has changed in a fundamental way. Prior to the discovery of the Tarawa File (the official correspondence which describes the finding of bones on Gardner; see page 5) we were investigating suspected events. In 1988 we started with what seemed a logical premise that the Earhart flight may have ended at Nikumaroro and we were looking for evidence to support that hypothesis. We were asking, “Is there anything about this island to indicate that this event may have occurred here?” Now, ten years later, we’re asking a very different question. We now know for certain that something very odd happened on this island. We’re now asking, “Is the unusual thing that happened here what we think it was?”

From a practical standpoint, when we return to Nikumaroro we’ll no longer be looking in places we’ve selected based upon pure speculation for things we’ve theorized might be there. We’ll now be looking in specifically described places for things that we either know for sure were once there (i.e. the rest of the skeleton), or have been told were once there (the aircraft wreckage). We may still have the wrong places, or the things may now be gone, but there’s a big difference between looking for something that might be there and looking for something that you know was there once and should still be there.

The Earhart mystery will not be solved until we recover what Tom Crouch (Chairman of the Aeronautics Dept. at NASM) calls “the smoking gun” and what we call “the any-idiot artifact”—a bone that matches Earhart’s or Noonan’s DNA, an engine or other aircraft component with a serial number, or the whole darn wreck, or maybe all of the above. Until then, for most people, TIGHAR’s work will be just one more theory about happened to Amelia Earhart. But the tide has turned and those of us who are standing on the beach can see it.

