

TIGHAR Tracks



A Publication of The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery
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By Ron Bright, TIGHAR #2342

For several years now, TIGHAR researchers and subscribers to our online Amelia Earhart Search Forum have been signing their correspondence with the somewhat enigmatic closing “Love to Mother,” often abbreviated to “LTM.” First used in that context by Expedition Team member Russ Matthews (TIGHAR #0509CE), the phrase is taken from a document which has become a cornerstone of allegations that Earhart was alive and in Japanese custody at the end of World War II. At TIGHAR, the phrase has become popular as an irreverent reminder to be rigorous in our research and reasonable in drawing our conclusions.

Recently, as an independent research project, TIGHAR members Ron Bright (#2342) and Laurie McLaughlin (#2212), with assistance from oft-published Earhart researcher Rollin Reineck, set out to discover the true author of the Love to Mother message. Ron’s report, edited and reproduced below, summarizes an excellent piece of detective work.

Background

After Amelia Earhart disappeared on 2 July 37 enroute to Howland Island, an immediate Navy search disclosed not a single trace of Earhart or the Electra. In 1943, the fictional Hollywood film *Flight For Freedom* popularized the idea that Earhart’s flight may have been somehow associated with prewar U.S. intelligence gathering efforts.

One historical document which has often been offered as evidence that Earhart was held captive by the Japanese is a Radiogram message dated 21 August 45 from Weihsein Internment Camp, China, sent via the US State Department to George Putnam at N. Hollywood, Ca.

The text of the message read:

Camp liberated; all well. Volumes to tell. Love to mother.

It was transmitted as “unsigned.”

Putnam replied to the State Department on 9 September 1937 with a terse letter asking that any further telegrams be forwarded to his home at Lone Pine, California. Neither the government, Putnam, nor anyone else initiated an investigation of Earhart’s possible presence at Weihsein. Putnam apparently did not mention the communication to Amelia’s mother Amy or her sister Muriel Morrissey. The message was never made public.

Then in 1971, author and long time Earhart researcher Fred Goerner learned about the message and in 1975 received a copy from the National Archives. Goerner didn't publicize this discovery, although he exchanged letters with other researchers. Goerner, despite his personal conviction that the Japanese had captured Earhart, dismissed the document as a message to Putnam from someone at Weihsein who knew him before the war. He didn't believe it was from Earhart.

On 28 June 1987, the LA Times published an article claiming that a State Department employee had found an "unpublished" government telegram in the "Earhart" file at the National Archives. It was the Love to Mother message.

The clear implication was that Amelia Earhart had been a prisoner at Weihsein Civilian Assembly Camp. Some researchers took this to be compelling evidence that the Japanese had indeed captured Earhart and that she had been held since 1937 by the Japanese government. After the Camp's liberation in 1945, so the specu-

lation went, Amelia was returned to the US and evaded all publicity.

Adding support to the idea that the message was from Earhart, Lt. James Hannon, one of the OSS paratroopers who liberated the camp on 15 August 45, told researchers that the message confirmed in his mind some of the strange events at Weihsein. He described a comatose, incoherent female "Yank" whom he believed must have been Earhart because of the special treatment she was accorded. In September 1945, according to Hannon, she was spirited away by a Japanese "Betty" bomber.

Interviews with other OSS troops, camp administrators, internees, and camp documents, failed to confirm or conclusively deny the supposition that Earhart was at Weihsein. Most researchers agreed with Goerner and believed it was an associate or friend of Putnam that wrote the message pointing out that Putnam apparently did not ask for additional investigation. But then, who did write the Love to Mother message? If we could discover the author and it wasn't Amelia, that would close the speculation on Earhart's presence at Weihsein.



The Investigation



We began with three assumptions:

- 1) The author knew the 1935-41 address of Putnam at 10042 Valley Spring Lane, N. Hollywood, California,
- 2) The author knew Putnam well enough to send the message with some kind of reason and
- 3) The author was conveying a code or intimate purpose with the "love to mother" closing.

The research steps I followed were:

1. I examined a list of all 1400 plus internees on a June 1944 roster for any clues regarding, age, business, occupations, and nationalities (American) but none seemed to suggest a link a professional or business link with Putnam.
2. I examined the Radiogram from the State Department., transmitted from Chungking to the US State Department via Navy radio, with the 135 messages. They were mostly addressed to relatives, business partners, schools, and all limited to about 10 words.
3. Only two messages were designated with a (*) meaning signature omitted – Putnam's and the very next message. This suggested a possible transmission problem. Rollin Reineck wondered if a limit of "one message per internee" prompted Kamal to add the second message to Putnam, deliberately leaving off the signature in order to get the message out.

4. Examining the text of each disclosed that only two messages out of the 135 were strikingly similar in the phrasing of "camp liberated." Those messages belonged to an "A. Kamal" and to GP Putnam.

Putnam's: "Camp liberated; all well. Volumes to tell. Love to Mother. (sig. omitted)"

Kamal's: "Advise mother all safe concentration camp liberated books ready, Kamal."

5. Kamal's message was addressed to Maxwell Perkins at Scribner and Sons, a publishing house.
6. None of the other messages used the "camp liberated" phrase, and the "advise mother" phrase. I felt that Kamal could be a possibility as he was a self-proclaimed author and might be writing publishing house in competition with Putnam's. Maybe he was writing to Putnam too about a forthcoming book.
7. The camp roster listed A. Kamal as a 30 year old "student" and a Mrs. A.T. Kamal, housewife.

We then contacted numerous former Internees and learned that Kamal was "Ahmad Kamal" a supposed expert in Central Asia matters, authority on Mongolian and Chinese Turkestan, a guide on the Roy Chapman Andrews expedition in the Gobi desert, and an "author."

Former internee Pamela Masters, who wrote *The Mushroom Years*, a story of the Weihsein experience,

recalled that Kamal from Weihsein accidentally ran into her sister in LA in 1947 trying to sell a story – something about “Six Fathoms Deep;” he was attempting to break into the Hollywood scene. She described him as a “flaming red headed” Turk.

We reviewed publishing companies and found that an “Ahmad Kamal” had written seven books, including *The Seven Questions of Timur* published in 1938 and *Land without Laughter*, published in 1940. These books described his adventures in Central Asia, getting charged as a spy by the Russians, and escaping with a Chinese general to Peking.

These descriptions of the book led us to believe that the Ahmad Kamal at Weihsein was the same Kamal as the author. If he was an author it was possible that he had some connection with George Putnam pre-war, but we couldn’t find any direct link.

A fellow TIGHAR researcher, Andrew McKenna (TIGHAR #1045CE), found that AE and George Putnam had a social relationship with Andrews of the Gobi expedition in the mid- to late 30s.

Thus, we speculated, if Kamal at Weihsein was the author Kamal, it could be a common link between Kamal and Putnam.

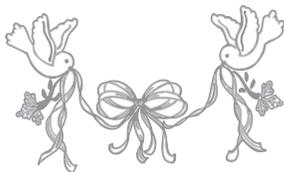
Then a major breakthrough came in April 2001. A review of FBI records on Putnam, obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, and just declassified in 1998, disclosed an amazing connection between Putnam and a “young man” who spoke Turkish and Chinese, and who was writing about his adventures in China circa 1935-38. According to the FBI files, Putnam was recruiting a “young man,” never identified by name, to be a double

agent against the Japanese at Los Angeles. The young man, said Putnam, was working for the Los Angeles Japanese Consulate and was furnishing them with aircraft data, construction information, ship movements, etc., gleaned from public sources. Putnam wanted the FBI to recruit him as a double agent. After an exchange of letters with J. Edgar Hoover, and meetings with the LA FBI agents, it was clear the FBI didn’t want anything to do with this scene, and they suggested that Putnam contact Navy Intelligence. Putnam declined as he had “bad experiences” with two Navy admirals earlier.

But who was this “young man,” whom Putnam declined to identify to the FBI? Was he Kamal?

A social security death index check disclosed that an Ahmad Kamal was born in 1914 and died 13 October 1989 at Santa Barbara, California. The FBI in Los Angeles estimated the young man’s age at 24 in 1938. As we knew that the Kamal at Weihsein was age 30 in 1945, this Kamal was looking better to us, but we could not find any existing autobiographies or biographies in major libraries about this Ahmad Kamal.

Our conjecture then was that the author Kamal was the same Kamal as Putnam’s young man based on age and on the Central Asia background, and Kamal’s published book in 1938 at Santa Ana, near Santa Barbara. Why would Weihsien Kamal send a message to Putnam? A new book? Kamal seemed to be the LTM author but why would he use the intimate phrase “Love to Mother?” How could we ever find a specific link between Kamal as the “young man” and the Kamal that Putnam was recruiting?



The Final Link



*On 18 April 2001, I located Ahmad Kamal’s son in Southern California and his revelations about his father were extraordinary. Yes, the author of *The Seven Questions of Timur* and *Land Without Laughter*, and the Kamal at Weihsein Civilian prison camp were one and the same. Yes, there was a close link between Putnam and Kamal at Los Angeles before World War II.*

The following is based on his son’s recollection. After extensive traveling in Turkestan, China, and Central Asia, Kamal returned to the US circa the early ’20s. In the late 1920s or early ’30s Kamal obtained a pilot’s license and kept an airplane at the Burbank Airport. There, in the mid-thirties, he met and flew with Howard Hughes. At Burbank he also met George Putnam and Amelia Earhart. Kamal was close to Hughes’ personal secretary Nadine Henly. Earhart was at Burbank airport prior to her first world flight attempt in March 1937.

During this time in 1937-38, Kamal became closely acquainted with Putnam who was helping him find a publisher. About this time, 1938, Kamal published his *Seven Questions* book about his adventures in Central Asia, fighting against the Russians, imprisonment, and escape to Peking.

Sometime about 1939-1940, Kamal returned to China where he met and married his wife at Tientsin, China. The war broke out in December 1941 and soon afterwards, the Japanese Secret Police captured him and his wife. Refusing to cooperate, they were transferred to Weihsein Camp in the summer of 1943. There they remained until liberated in August 1945.

According to his son, shortly after the camp was liberated, Kamal, sent out two radio messages: one to Scribner and Sons about publishing a book, and one to George Putnam. His son said he has seen either notes

or a journal of that message and could repeat it almost by heart – something like “camp liberated, all was well, volumes to follow and love to mother.” The “love to mother” was added, said Kamal’s son, because Putnam had agreed to look after Kamal’s aging mother when Kamal left for China. Mrs. Kamal lived nearby and Putnam was to look in on her. It was an informal caregiver arrangement.

Kamal spoke Turkish, Chinese and was an “international figure.”

Kamal’s son said that his father never discussed with him any of Putnam’s efforts to recruit him for the FBI. (The son was born in 1950.)

After liberation, Kamal returned to the US, continued to publish, and lived in the Los Angeles area from 1945-51.

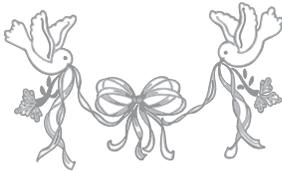
He does not know if Kamal ever got in touch with Putnam after the war.

In summary, Kamal said his father often discussed Amelia Earhart and various disappearance theories. His father, who knew Amelia, said she was not at Weihsein while he was there from 1942 until August 1945.

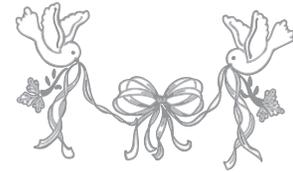
The story of Earhart being at Weihsein was, in the son’s words, “apocryphal” and that’s why he recalled his father’s stories while he was growing up in the 60s, 70s and 80s.

His father thought she went down in the sea.

The son said he would search through his father’s journals and provide any relevant document or record.



Conclusion



The author of the LTM message is Ahmad Kamal. Kamal was at Weihsein and he knew Putnam and AE. His message to Putnam was a generic hopeful notification. “Love to mother” was nothing more than an endearing message for Putnam to convey to his mom after his three years at the camp.

For those that wish to know more about Kamal I suggest reading his first two books. A further indicator of his mother’s role in Kamal’s life is seen in the dedication in his first book, *The Seven Secrets* in which he writes, “**TO MY MOTHER**” (in 20 point type).

Investigation Continuing

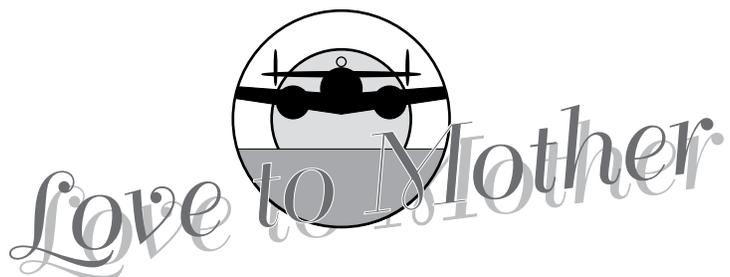
We intend to continue correspondence with Kamal’s son to obtain confirming documents and to supplement this preliminary report.

Acknowledgements

Laurie and I wish to thank Rollin Reineck, who initially researched and located State Department radiograms to Putnam and generously provided them. Also to Don Neumann, and TIGHAR members Pat Gaston (TIGHAR #2328), Don Jordan (TIGHAR #2109), and Andrew McKenna (TIGHAR #1045CE) for advice and direction in this investigation. Early researchers did not have the advantage of the 1998 declassified Putnam FBI file that disclosed the relationship between a Weihsein internee and Putnam.

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