

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

The “Treasure Map” article in the June issue of *TIGHAR Tracks* ended with an assurance that “...even if someone with lots of money and no ethics were convinced that we finally had the answer (to the whereabouts of the Earhart wreckage), it would be extremely difficult to get there ahead us.” True enough, but what if a lowly ocean-going salvage tug just happened to be trying to recover a grounded fishing boat at McKean Island 60 miles away, and what if the captain saw our “Treasure Map” article (which is also posted on the TIGHAR website), and what if the captain read that comment and said to himself “We’ll just see about that.”

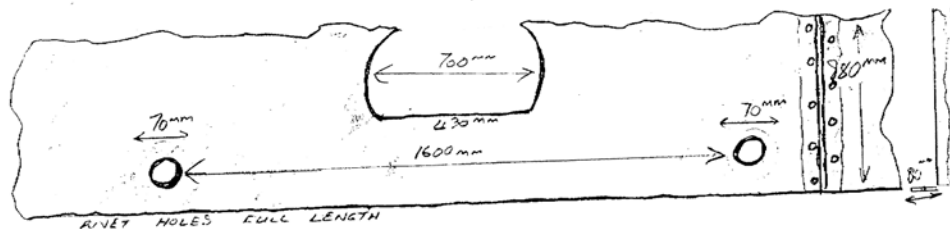
Captain Jürgen Ruh has neither a lot of money nor does he seem to be at all unethical, but he does enjoy a challenge and he is, after all, a salvager by trade. Having had no luck with the fishing boat at McKean Island he stopped by Nikumaroro on his way home and put three divers in the water for about 30 minutes along the reef edge north of the shipwreck. They didn’t find anything but they did recover a piece of metal debris from up on the reef flat. Jürgen emailed a photo of the piece to us along with a description of what they had done, where they had looked, and what they had found and not found. We, of course, expressed our regret that he had chosen to interfere with an archaeological site and pointed out that, had he actually found and recovered aircraft wreckage, important information would unquestionably have been lost.

In the end, no harm was done. The recovered object is quite obviously a piece of shipwreck debris and Jürgen, having made his point, is hoping that we’ll call on him should we ever need the capabilities of a salvage tug—but the incident does point up how complete the worldwide communications revolution has been and teaches us not to make assumptions about the remoteness of Nikumaroro.

Jürgen’s fruitless underwater inspection of

the reef edge north of the shipwreck would seem to reduce the possibility that there is anything of interest present. On the other hand, he didn't find anything that explains the anomaly we see in the satellite photo and our search plan for the expedition remains unchanged. We may not find anything either, but we'll look harder than he did.

LOCKHEED ELECTRA	PROBABILITY	41%
NORWICH CITY	PROBABILITY	99%



NOT TO SCALE

The piece of iron or steel debris recovered by the salvage tug is about 2.6 meters (8.5 feet) long and about .88 meters (2.8 feet) wide. It's probably a piece of topside bulwark plating from the S.S. Norwich City. It is certainly not aircraft wreckage. Sketch courtesy White, Young & Williams, Cairns, Australia.