

TIGHAR TRACKS

A Publication of The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery
TIGHAR • 2812 Fawkes Drive • Wilmington, DE 19808 • USA • www.tighar.org

May 2003

NEW!

Niku Vp Expedition

IMPROVED!

Different boat, new dates, some new team members, more time at the island – this year's expedition has evolved since the last issue of *TIGHAR Tracks*. When the time came to make firm reservations, some of the non-TIGHAR passengers for the planned Phoenix Rising Expedition backed out and our friends at *Nai'a Cruises* in Fiji had to cancel the trip for this year. Fortunately we had a Plan B ready to go, courtesy of our coral reef geologist Howard Allred in New Zealand. Rather than piggy-backing on the *Nai'a* diving tour of the Phoenix Islands, the Niku Vp Expedition will now be a stand-alone operation using the brand new 56 foot S/V (sailing vessel) *Mollie*.

Owned by veteran Pacific captain Ken Durey and crewed by Ken, his wife Louise and their young daughter Mollie, the boat sailed from its home port of Auckland, New Zealand on April 30th and is now making its way northeastward via various island groups to rendezvous with the TIGHAR team in Pago Pago, American Samoa. On July 3rd the Niku Vp expedition will begin the four-day, 600 mile voyage to Nikumaroro where the team will spend a week (rather than the 2 or 3 days previously planned) carrying out a number of tasks in preparation for next year's major effort.




The Niku Vp Team




The Niku Vp team will be led by **Col Van T. Hunn, USAF (Ret.)**—TIGHAR #1459EC. Van has extensive experience as a sport SCUBA diver with specialized training in underwater search operations and has been the Dive Team leader on three previous TIGHAR expeditions to Nikumaroro.

He has also been active in Earhart Project archival research and, most recently, has been instrumental in finding technical documents pertaining to the Electra component which seems to match the description of an object seen by a marine biologist last year at Nikumaroro.




Richard W. "Walt" Holm, TIGHAR #0980EC, is an electrical engineer currently engaged in defense-related research. Walt was a member of our Dive Team on the Niku III Expedition in 2001.



Howard Alldred, TIGHAR #2489, is a trained coral atoll geologist and diver who came forward to volunteer his services during the our daily internet coverage of the 2001 Niku III expedition. Since then Howard has traveled from his home in New Zealand to the U.S. to

participate in last year's Earhart Project Advisory Council (EPAC) conference and has become a valued member of the TIGHAR research team. His on-site observations at Nikumaroro should

give us new insights into how the islands works and help us target specific areas for searching.



Tom Roberts, TIGHAR #1956EC, is a Lockheed-Martin engineer at the legendary "Skunk Works." He earned his TIGHAR expedition certification at the Loon Lake, Idaho B-23 survey in 2000. This will be his first trip to Nikumaroro.

Expedition Coverage

When *Mollie* arrives at Nikumaroro on July 7th we'll put up on the TIGHAR website, and send out as a special edition newsletter, a research bulletin fully describing what we know and what we suspect about the object the team will be investigating at Nikumaroro.

The team will have a satellite phone with them and will be in daily communication with TIGHAR's office here in Wilmington, Delaware. Just as we did during the 2001 Niku III expedition, we'll post reports on the TIGHAR website every day during the week they are at the island.

Expedition Funding

Selling exclusive media rights to this trip is not an option, both because there is no more room on the boat and because, although he is not supporting this trip, Mr. Kammerer still owns the "commercial exploitation" rights to Earhart Project expedition work until the contract expires in December of this year.

However, through the generous support of the TIGHAR membership, including significant contributions by the team members themselves, the money needed to cover the basic costs of the expedition – the boat, provisioning, airfare – amounting to about \$28,000, is either in hand or pledged. But the direct costs of an expedi-

tion are always just the tip of the iceberg. Less obvious and harder to raise, but just as vital, is the money it takes to run the organization, provide the logistical support, and keep the membership informed. For example, in 2001, our near real-time internet coverage of the Niku III expedition put our daily website "hits" through the roof, generating several thousand dollars of special hosting costs. We still need to raise at least another \$47,000 to cover TIGHAR operating expenses to support this year's two expeditions, **Fiji Bone Search II** and **Niku Vp**.

Your contributions are the fuel that keeps TIGHAR going and growing and bringing home answers. Please use the enclosed card to send your donation today, or contribute directly through our secure website at:

<http://www.tighar.org/Projects/Earhart/fueldonate.html>



Fiji Bone Search II

A Jesuit priest from Buffalo and a retired Los Angeles county cop travel to exotic Suva in the Fiji Islands to search for the bones of Amelia Earhart. Next season's hottest prime-time TV series? No – just TIGHAR's current research expedition in our continuing effort to locate the bones and artifacts of a castaway found on Nikumaroro in 1940 and sent to British colonial headquarters in Fiji where they subsequently disappeared.

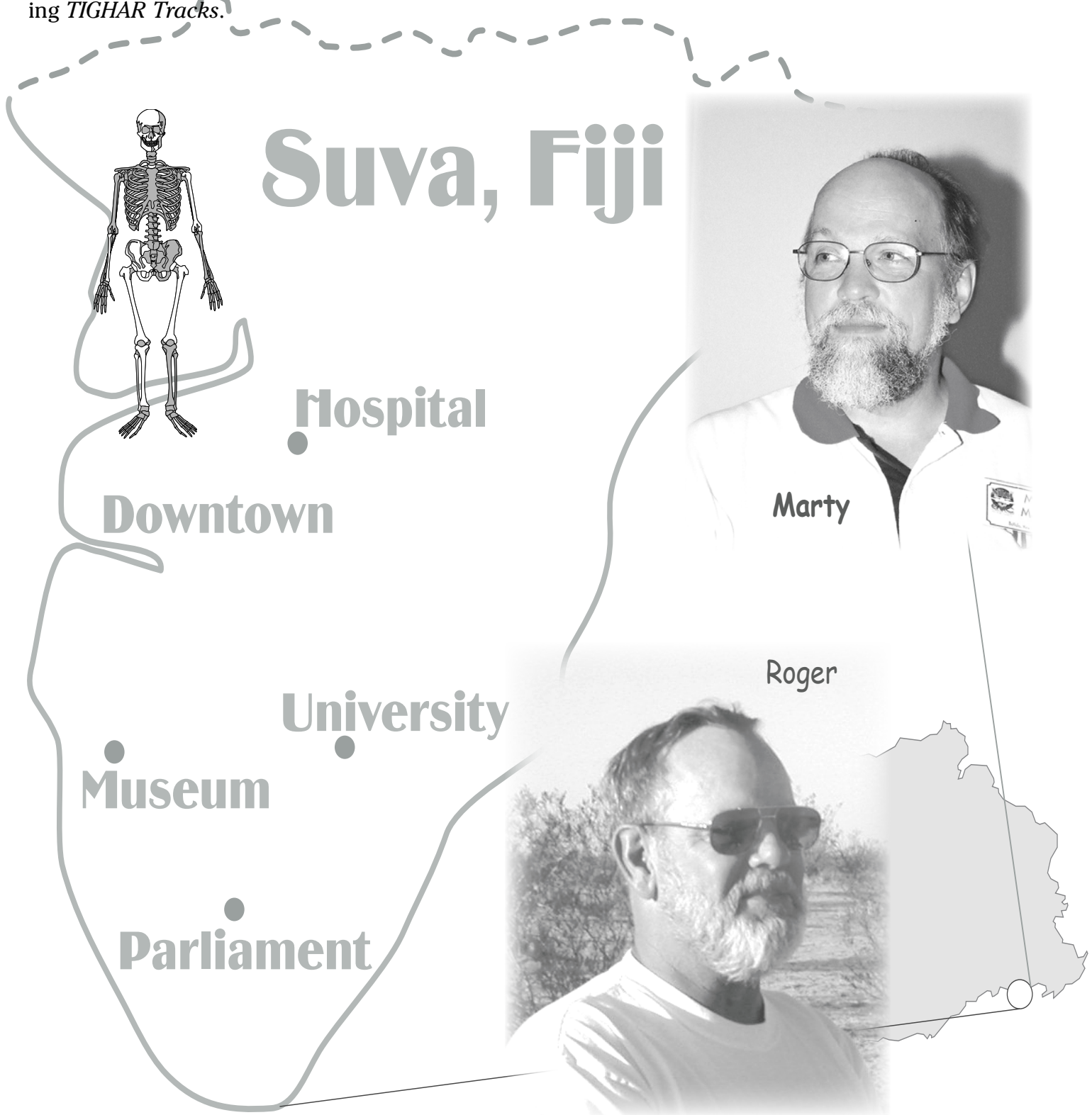
The partial skeleton is last known to have been stored at the Colony of Fiji's Central Medical School in 1941 "pending further developments," but the only further developments were the outbreak of the Pacific war, location changes for the school, and the eventual the emergence of Fiji as an independent nation. Somewhere along the way the bones were misplaced, lost track of, or somehow disposed of. If they still exist, and if they can be found, it should be possible to determine conclusively whether or not

they are the remains of Amelia Earhart. The various artifacts found with the bones (the sextant box, the shoe parts, etc.) are last known to have been in the custody of senior British colonial administrators in the months preceding the war. Their re-discovery would be less conclusive but nonetheless important in determining the identity of the castaway of Gardner Island

In 1999, TIGHAR's senior archaeologist Dr. Tom King, our forensic osteologist Dr. Karin Burns, and TIGHAR researchers Kristin Tague and Barbara Norris spent several weeks in Fiji interviewing contacts, checking records, examining bone collections and searching possible storage sites. They made a good start to the investigation, eliminating some possibilities, and identifying several leads that need further follow-up before they ran out of time and money. Since then, background research has continued by phone, mail, and email in preparation for the next on-the-ground round of inquiry.

Thanks to the generous support of the TIGHAR membership we were able to launch that next phase in the investigation with the departure on May 15, 2003 of Martin X. Moleski, Ph.D., SJ (TIGHAR #2359) and Roger B. Kelley (TIGHAR #2112CE) for a month of on-site searching and researching in Fiji. Marty is a Jesuit priest with a Ph.D. in systematic theology, a field which deals with standards of proof, evidence, and credibility. In Roger's long career in law enforcement he dealt with the same issues from a rather different perspective. Together they should make a formidable investigative team.

We wish them Good Luck and Good Hunting. We'll have a report on their findings in an upcoming *TIGHAR Tracks*.



The Suitcase In My Closet

3-15-40
are you there-fuzzy
hear from me hear from me
George
get the suitcase in my closet
Calif.
are you
Marie Hey!

Work on the long-promised and much-anticipated Post-Loss Radio Study is proceeding well and we're hoping to be ready to send it out to all TIGHAR members in June. Much of the delay in completing the report has been due to the need to investigate new information that keeps turning up. For example, we recently discovered a remarkable parallel to one of the more cryptic passages transcribed in Betty's Notebook* in a letter written by Amelia to her mother.

At roughly one hour into her reception of the alleged transmissions from Earhart, Betty wrote down:

**George
get the suitcase in my closet
Calif.**

Her later recollection of the entire phrase was:

"Tell my husband George to get the suitcase in my closet in California."

It seems like a strange thing for someone in Earhart's supposed position to say. If the voice Betty heard really was Amelia's, the situation was desperate and her survival very much in question. What could possibly be in the suitcase that would be that important? We even asked the Putnam family if they knew of any papers or items that may have been found in a suitcase after AE's death, but they knew of nothing like that. For some, the presence of such an apparently trivial phrase casts serious doubt upon the possible authenticity of the entire incident.

Recently, however, we've become aware of a passage in a letter that Amelia wrote to her mother in December of 1934 which provides a possible explanation. AE and her husband, along with Paul Mantz and his wife, had sailed from California for Hawaii on December 20 aboard the Matson liner S.S. *Lurline* with Amelia's red Lockheed Vega strapped to the aft tennis deck. It was a poorly kept secret that she was planning to attempt the first Hawaii to the U.S. mainland flight.

The day after Christmas, as the ship was nearing Honolulu, AE wrote a long chatty letter to her mother Amy who was house-sitting in California. That fall, George and Amelia had decided to move their place of residence from the Putnam home in Rye, New York to the Los Angeles area where GP could be near Paramount Studios for whom he was working at that time and Amelia could be near the Lockheed plant in Burbank where the Vega was undergoing overhaul in preparation for the Honolulu/Oakland flight. They had set up housekeeping in a rented bungalow at 10515 Valley Spring Lane near Toluca Lake in North Hollywood and persuaded Amy, who was living with AE's sister Muriel and her family in Massachusetts, to come out for a long visit.

In the December 26 letter to her mother, Amelia covers a multitude of subjects from the tropical weather, to the shipboard gossip her airplane is generating, to preparations for the upcoming flight. Toward the end of the letter she wrote:

"G.P. said you were an awfully good sport to stay alone in the little house. I said I had known that a long time.

"I have taken possession of the stuff in the zipper compartment of my briefcase. Put it away until I turn up and if I don't - burn it. It consists of fragments that mean nothing to anybody but me."

Just what it was that she wanted burned in the event of her death could be a subject for endless tabloid speculation, but the nature of the "stuff" is not important to our investigation. What is interesting is the synchronicity between the instructions to her mother in December 1934 and the putative instructions to her husband in 1937. The existence of extremely private papers and/or items that AE kept in a briefcase at home and her instructions to a close family member to retrieve the material for destruction "if I don't turn up" has the appearance of being a documented precedent for the passage in Betty's Notebook and one which a member of the general public could not possibly know about.

There are, of course, questions. Why did AE need to "take possession" of such private items? From whose possession did she take them? And how did a briefcase in 1934 become a suitcase in 1937? The answers can only be speculative, but the startling similarity between the two events is undeniable. We are forced to consider which of two highly unlikely events is the more improbable:

- that a nonsensical passage in a misunderstood or hoaxed radio transmission happened to mimic a real-life secret.

or

- a 15 year old girl in Florida heard a desperate call from Amelia Earhart.



**Betty Klenck heard distress calls from a person she believed was Amelia Earhart on her family's short-wave radio in July 1937. She transcribed words and phrases of what she heard in a notebook that still exists. For a complete description of the notebook and the transcriptions see Betty's Notebook on the TIGHAR website at <http://www.tighar.org/Projects/Earhart/Documents/Notebook/notebook.html>*

Final Approach Finally Arrives

It was worth the wait. The fine art prints of aviation artist Scott Albee's painting *Final Approach*, depicting Amelia Earhart's Lockheed Electra about to land on the reef at Gardner Island (Nikumaroro), have arrived. Having seen the artwork a thousand times on computer screens and small printouts, we were not prepared for the impact of the full-sized image on heavy paper. You can almost hear the rumble of the engines and smell the salt air. Scott feels that it is one of his best works and we are very pleased.

Everyone who advance-purchased an unsigned print should already have it by the time you read this. If you don't, please let us know. The limited edition signed and numbered prints are being sent out as we go to press.

Unsigned prints are available for \$50. There are still some of the original 200 Limited Edition prints, signed and numbered by the artist and autographed by TIGHAR's Ric Gillespie, available at \$100. For a limited time we'll include a free Nikumaroro Expedition Grid Map (\$25 value) with each print purchase. Use the enclosed form to order yours today.





Paradise Now

Raffle Results

The Paradise Now Raffle drawing was held on April 30 and the winner was Joshua King of Redmond, WA. Joshua and his wife are a young couple just getting started and would probably not be able to afford such a luxurious vacation as a week at Harbor Lights Villa in the U.S. Virgin Islands. We're delighted for them.

Joshua is a TIGHAR member, although that was not a requirement for winning the raffle, and his father, Dr. Tom King, is our senior archæologist, is on the TIGHAR board of directors, and is the principal author of the book *Amelia Earhart's Shoes* (Altamira Press, 2001). When we launched the raffle we decided to prohibit board members from being contestants because it would look bad if one of them happened to win. Tom, wanting to support the raffle, bought chances for several of his friends and relations, his son Joshua among them.

As a fund-raiser, the raffle was a considerable success with 375 chances sold and nearly \$8,000 raised. TIGHAR member Andrew McKenna, who donated the prize, is also offering a 10% discount to any TIGHAR member who didn't win the raffle but wants to experience Harbor Lights Villa anyway. You can email Andrew at andrew@harborlights.com, or contact him through TIGHAR.

Many thanks to all those who participated in the raffle, and congratulations, Josh!