

# *TIGHAR TRACKS*

THE JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL GROUP FOR HISTORIC AIRCRAFT RECOVERY





... that they might escape the teeth of time and  
the hands of mistaken zeal.

— JOHN AUBREY  
STONEHENGE MANUSCRIPTS  
1660

## About TIGHAR

TIGHAR (pronounced “tiger”) is the acronym for The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery, a non-profit foundation dedicated to promoting responsible aviation archeology and historic preservation. TIGHAR’s activities include:

- Compiling and verifying reports of rare and historic aircraft surviving in remote areas.
- Conducting investigations and recovery expeditions in co-operation with museums and collections worldwide.
- Serving as a voice for integrity, responsibility, and professionalism in the field of aviation historic preservation.

TIGHAR maintains no collection of its own, nor does it engage in the restoration or buying and selling of artifacts. The foundation devotes its resources to the saving of endangered historic aircraft wherever they may be found, and to the education of the international public in the need to preserve the relics of the history of flight.

*TIGHAR Tracks* is the official publication of The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery. A subscription to *TIGHAR Tracks* is included as part of membership in the foundation (minimum donation \$55.00 per year). The editors welcome contributions of written material and artwork. Materials should be addressed to: Editors, *TIGHAR Tracks*, 2812 Fawkes Drive, Wilmington, DE 19808 USA; telephone (302) 994-4410, fax (302) 994-7945; email tigharpat@mac.com. Photographs and artwork will be returned on request.

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## On the Cover

*Luke Field, Territory of Hawaii – 12:15 p.m., March 19, 1937*

*“The first indication that Miss Earhart might make use of Luke Field was a telephone message from Headquarters Wheeler Field at 11:15 a.m., March 19<sup>th</sup>, to the effect that Mr. Mantz was about to make a test flight of Miss Earhart’s airplane and would land at Luke Field in about 30 minutes ... (P)rovided he found the runway suitable Miss Earhart would make her take-off for Howland Island from this station.”*

*Phillips Melville, Major, U.S. Army Air Corps  
Operations Officer  
Luke Field, T. H.*

*Exhibit D – PROCEEDINGS OF A BOARD OF OFFICERS  
APPOINTED TO INVESTIGATE THE CRASH OF MISS  
AMELIA EARHART AT LUKE FIELD, 20 MARCH 1937  
TIGHAR collection*

## On the Web

<http://www.tighar.org>

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# We Have a Publisher

TIGHAR is very pleased to announce that on July 27, 2005, we signed a contract with the United States Naval Institute Press for the publication of a book “outlining, analyzing and critiquing the U.S. Government’s effort to locate Amelia Earhart in the weeks after her disappearance in July 1937 ....provisionally entitled *The Suitcase in My Closet – Uncovering the Key to the Amelia Earhart Mystery.*”



Located on the campus of the United States Naval Academy, the United States Naval Institute was founded in 1873 “to provide an open forum for the exchange of ideas, to disseminate and advance the knowledge of sea power, and to preserve our naval and maritime heritage.” The Naval Institute Press is the organization’s book publishing arm and is regarded as one of the world’s premiere publishers of historical works on nautical and aeronautical subjects.

When we decided to write a book that would tell the true story of Amelia Earhart’s disappearance and the search that failed to find her, we realized that the facts we presented would contradict long-established conventional wisdom about famous people and legendary events. We knew the book would be controversial and we wanted a publisher who appreciated the difference between academic rigor and wanton revisionism.

We also knew that the book would be critical of some aspects of the U.S. Government’s involvement in the flight, the search, and its aftermath. That meant finding a publisher whose endorsement would lend credibility to those judgments.

And finally, we knew all too well that books about what really happened to Amelia Ear-

hart are almost as common as books about who really assassinated JFK. If TIGHAR’s book was to stand out from the crowd, we would need a publisher who brought special stature to the project.

In the end, there was really only one choice, and we feel very fortunate to have been able to reach an agreement with exactly the publisher we hoped for. Our contract with the Naval Institute Press calls for the manuscript to be completed and delivered before the end of this calendar year. The finished work is targeted for release in time for the Christmas/New Years market of 2006/2007 – the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the events described in the book.

The Naval Institute Press is, of course, aware that the semi-final drafts of the book’s chapters are being serialized in *TIGHAR Tracks*. Like us, they recognize that the members of TIGHAR are providing valuable peer review as the writing and editing process continues. Just as important is the financial support donated through contributions to the TIGHAR Literary Guild.

This is your book. Please keep the corrections, the suggestions, and the checks coming.



# ... *the suitcase in my closet*

Uncovering the key to the Amelia Earhart mystery

near from me near from me  
George  
Get the suitcase in my closet  
Calif.

*Betty's Notebook, page 57.*

Introduction (*TIGHAR Tracks* Vol. 21 #1)

## **PART ONE: LOSING AMELIA**

Chapter One – Kamakaiwi Field (*TIGHAR Tracks* Vol. 21, #1)

**Chapter Two – Hawaiian Debacle**

**Chapter Three – Reversals**

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Chapter Eleven – Banquo's Ghost

## **PART TWO: A CRY IN THE NIGHT**

Chapter Twelve – Patterns

Chapter Thirteen – Weeding The Field

Chapter Fourteen – Synchronicity

Chapter Fifteen – Where The Lines Cross

Chapter Sixteen – The Haunted Women

Chapter Seventeen – Laying The Ghost

Chapter Eighteen – Finding Amelia

Acknowledgements

## **Appendix**

A quantitative analysis of the Post-Loss Radio Events.

The Introduction and Chapter One were published in the May issue of *TIGHAR Tracks*. If you did not receive your copy, please give us a call and we'll be happy to send one to you.

## Chapter 2

# *Hawaiian Debacle*

**T**he Electra landed at the Army's Wheeler Field early on the morning of March 18, 1937, having set a new record of 15 hours and 47 minutes for the trip despite mechanical difficulties. Upon arrival, Mantz told Lieutenant Kenneth Rogers, the Air Corps Engineering Officer, that for roughly the last half of the flight the propeller on the right-hand engine had been stuck at a fixed angle of pitch. He also said that the generator had stopped showing a charge due to a failure in the electrical control box. After a brief photo session, Mantz, Earhart, Manning, and Noonan left the airfield "with no word whatsoever as to what was to be done to the plane in the way of service or check-over." The previously announced plan had been for Earhart, Manning, and Noonan to take off from Wheeler on the flight to Howland Island at 10 p.m. that night, so Lt. Rogers and the local Pratt & Whitney service representative, Wilbur Thomas, "took it upon themselves to do what is usually done to put an airplane in suitable condition for the continuance of such a flight."<sup>1</sup> They changed the oil, cleaned and gapped the spark plugs, and performed a number of other routine checks. Nothing was wrong with the control box. The problem was that the current control had been improperly set resulting in a blown fuse. In servicing the propellers they found that both hubs took a surprising amount of grease even though there was no sign of a leak.

At 2:45 p.m. William Miller, back in Oakland, informed all government agencies supporting the flight that "Miss Earhart has postponed her departure from Honolulu to Howland Island 24 hours on account of weather."<sup>2</sup> However, in his later report to the

Chief of Naval Operations, the Navy aerological officer (meteorologist) who prepared the forecast said that he had predicted "favorable flying conditions over the entire route, except for cloudiness and showers near Pearl Harbor. It is understood that her delay was occasioned by other reasons."<sup>3</sup>

About the time that Miller was sending notification of the postponed departure, and just as Lt. Rogers and Mr. Thomas were about to run up the Electra's engines to see if the grease had fixed the propeller problem, Paul Mantz returned to the airfield and was briefed on the work that had been done. Mantz performed the run up himself and found that the right-hand prop still would not change pitch. The airplane was shut down and rolled into the hangar where Army mechanics partially disassembled the hub and found that the blades were "badly galled and frozen in place." The failure was judged to be "due to improper or insufficient lubricant." It was the opinion of some of the technicians that "the hubs were nearly dry when the plane left the mainland."<sup>4</sup>

The propellers from both engines were taken across town to the Air Corps Hawaiian Air Depot at Pearl Harbor's Luke Field for overhaul, and at 4:18 p.m. the Coast Guard notified its ships that "Earhart plane will probably take off late tomorrow afternoon, Friday, March 19<sup>th</sup>, according to latest information just received and authentic."<sup>5</sup>

At the Depot, Lt. Donald Arnold consulted with Mantz, who said that the propeller malfunction had first occurred immediately following a brief encounter with icing conditions. Upon disassembling the hub Lt. Arnold found that a "soft putty-like compound" had been used to lubricate the hub. This material

was much thicker than the grease used on Army aircraft and Arnold was of the opinion that the icing conditions encountered during the flight had rendered the lubricant useless, resulting in the seized blades.<sup>6</sup> Mantz left the Depot but telephoned at 7 p.m. that evening with the news that Miss Earhart might want to depart as early as eight or nine o'clock the next morning. The work continued into the night and at 2 a.m. the overhauled props were returned to Wheeler Field where Lt. Rogers had kept his men standing by to put them back on the airplane. "When the installation had been completed and the cowlings safetied and checked, the crew retired for a much needed three hours sleep. The crew and the Engineering Officer were back on alert at seven in the morning but found they could have used the time for sleep to advantage when none of the Earhart party arrived until nearly eleven o'clock."<sup>7</sup>

The Earhart party that arrived did not include Earhart, or Manning, or Noonan. It was Paul Mantz, who showed up with his fiancée Terry Minor and his friend Chris Holmes in tow. Mantz was recently divorced and had flown to Hawaii with Earhart, in part, to join his fiancée. Christian R. Holmes was an heir to the Fleischmann Yeast fortune and was letting the Earhart party use his beach house at Waikiki.

Mantz ran up the engines and found that both propellers appeared to be functioning properly. He informed the Army personnel at Wheeler that he and his guests were going to take the plane up for a test flight and then land at Luke Field, a shared Army/Navy airstrip on Pearl Harbor's Ford Island, to see whether that airport's 3,000 foot paved runway might be more suitable for Amelia's departure than Wheeler's sod field. The weather forecast for the route to Howland still looked good but there remained the possibility of local showers in the Honolulu area. Mantz undoubtedly wanted to avoid the delays the muddy field at Oakland had imposed and this time there should be no bu-

reaucratic obstacle to a last-minute airport change. The Army was accommodating but this was the first indication they had that Earhart might want to use Luke Field. The Operations Officer at Luke was notified and "steps were immediately taken to recall all airplanes and clear the airdrome." Mantz landed the Electra there at noon and announced that the machine was "performing excellently." He said that Miss Earhart would definitely be making her takeoff from Luke Field but her time of departure would depend entirely upon the weather. After making arrangements with Lt. Arnold to have the airplane serviced and fueled for the Howland flight, Mantz left with his guests at 1:30 p.m.<sup>8</sup>

A little over an hour later Mantz got a phone call from Lt. Arnold. There was a problem with the fueling. The Standard Oil truck with Earhart's gasoline had arrived at 2:30 and fueling had begun using a chamois strainer to check for contamination. "Considerable sediment" was observed which, upon closer inspection, appeared to be flakes of rust. The fueling was immediately halted and Arnold made the call to Mantz. Paul's solution was to ask that the fueling proceed using Army gas and permission was granted. Arnold then put Mantz on the phone with the Standard Oil representative to work out the details but "considerable arguing and wrangling" ensued. When Arnold took the phone again, Mantz said he was coming to the airport and to not do anything until he got there. There was clearly going to be no late afternoon departure for Howland and at 3:45 p.m. the *Shoshone*, standing by at Howland, received a message from Fleet Air Base, Pearl Harbor, that "Miss Earhart expects to depart 24:00 (midnight) today or daylight tomorrow, Saturday, depending on weather."<sup>9</sup>

While they waited for Mantz to arrive, the Standard Oil rep made a number of suggestions about how they might go ahead and fuel the airplane, but Arnold informed him that "the Air Corps had no interest in the matter whatsoever and that [Lt. Arnold] had neither

official nor personal authority in connection with the flight, the crew, or the sponsors, and must wait for Mr. Mantz.” At 4:15 Mantz arrived and some Standard Oil gas was put through the chamois strainer. Sediment was present. “The Standard Oil representative argued with Mr. Mantz that the dirt was already in the chamois and did not come from his tank. Mr. Mantz procured a new chamois and another test showed signs of sediment.” The fueling of the Electra was completed using Army Air Corps gasoline and the plane was locked in the hangar at 7:30 p.m.<sup>10</sup>

That afternoon Amelia wrote a long article for the next day’s Honolulu papers with a detailed explanation of how weather conditions had forced her to delay her departure. The plane’s engines were “having a mechanical rub-down to keep them in perfect condition.” She told her readers, “I went to Wheeler Field early yesterday morning to ride over the takeoff area. I changed the takeoff from Wheeler to Luke Field by permission. Wheeler is being improved and worked, and is temporarily rough in spots. Luke Field has a 3,000 foot hard surface runway which is adequate to my needs and would save the landing gear from the beating it would have on rough ground.” She explained that, in consultation with her navigators, a dawn takeoff had been rejected because the trip was expected to take about twelve hours and the plane must arrive at Howland in daylight.<sup>11</sup>

Nonetheless, at 9:30 that night the Operations Officer at Luke Field received word “that the takeoff was scheduled at dawn and that Miss Earhart and her party would arrive at Luke Field about 3:30 a.m., March 20<sup>th</sup>.”<sup>12</sup> It was closer to 4:30 a.m. when Earhart, Mantz, Manning, Noonan, and several reporters arrived. Mantz did the preflight inspection and warmed the engines while Amelia and the navigators went to a back room in the hangar to review the charts and weather forecasts.

After a brief discussion with Mantz she announced that she would wait for daylight before taking off. At 5:30 a.m. the engines were again started. “Captain Manning and Mr. Noonan took their places and at 5:40 she taxied out.”<sup>13</sup>

Later that day, Amelia Earhart watched the blue Pacific slide by below, not from the cockpit of her airplane but from the deck of the passenger liner Malolo carrying her and her crew back to California. The Electra lay wrecked on a trailer in the same Luke Field hangar where it had been secured the night before. Before sailing she had written another article for the Honolulu newspapers.

“Witnesses said a tire blew out. However, after studying the tracks carefully I believe that that may not have been the primary cause of the accident. The right shock absorber, as it lengthened, may have given way. ... There was no indication that anything was off normal until something happened on the right side.”<sup>14</sup>

The investigating board of Army officers concluded that “after a run of approximately 1,200 feet the airplane crashed on the landing mat due to the collapse of the landing gear as a result of an uncontrolled ground loop; the lack of factual evidence makes it impossible to establish the reason for the ground loop.”<sup>15</sup> There was no fire and there were no injuries, but the damage to the aircraft was extensive. Amelia was undaunted.

My present wish is to follow through as soon as the plane and engines are reconditioned. May I express my thanks to all who have been standing by so faithfully and warn them that I shall ask their cooperation again?<sup>16</sup>

Amelia Earhart made good on her warning and, a little over three months later, another Coast Guard cutter stood by at Howland Island waiting and hoping that this time her luck would be better. ◆

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> U.S. Army Proceedings, Investigation of Earhart Crash, Luke Field, March 20, 1937. Exhibit B – Work Performed.
- <sup>2</sup> Message from Miller to CinCus, et al. March 18. 1937.
- <sup>3</sup> Memorandum from Lt. Arnold E.True to CNO. Naval Historical Center archives SECNAV 1315-1544 (as cited in Lovell ).
- <sup>4</sup> U.S. Army Proceedings, Investigation of Earhart Crash, Luke Field, March 20, 1937. Exhibit B – Work Performed.
- <sup>5</sup> Message from Commander, Hawaiian Section to USCG Taney and Shoshone. March 18, 1937.
- <sup>6</sup> U.S. Army Proceedings, Investigation of Earhart Crash, Luke Field, March 20, 1937. Exhibit E – Depot Report.
- <sup>7</sup> U.S. Army Proceedings, Investigation of Earhart Crash, Luke Field, March 20, 1937. Exhibit B – Work Performed.
- <sup>8</sup> U.S. Army Proceedings, Investigation of Earhart Crash, Luke Field, March 20, 1937. Exhibit D – Luke Field Operations.
- <sup>9</sup> Message from Fleet Air Base, Pearly harbor to USCG Shoshone, March 19, 1937.
- <sup>10</sup> U.S. Army Proceedings, Investigation of Earhart Crash, Luke Field, March 20, 1937. Exhibit E – Depot Report.
- <sup>11</sup> U.S. Army Proceedings, Investigation of Earhart Crash, Luke Field, March 20, 1937. Exhibit O – Newspaper Clippings./
- <sup>12</sup> U.S. Army Proceedings, Investigation of Earhart Crash, Luke Field, March 20, 1937. Exhibit D - Luke Field Operations.
- <sup>13</sup> U.S. Army Proceedings, Investigation of Earhart Crash, Luke Field, March 20, 1937. Exhibit D – Luke Field Operations.
- <sup>14</sup> U.S. Army Proceedings, Investigation of Earhart Crash, Luke Field, March 20, 1937. Exhibit O – Newspaper Clippings.
- <sup>15</sup> U.S. Army Proceedings, Investigation of Earhart Crash, Luke Field, March 20, 1937. Findings.
- <sup>16</sup> U.S. Army Proceedings, Investigation of Earhart Crash, Luke Field, March 20, 1937. Exhibit O – Newspaper Clippings.



## Chapter 3

# Reversals

**I**tasca spent most of the night of July 1, 1937, drifting on the dark ocean just to the west of Howland, the island's surrounding reef being too steep to permit anchoring. At 2:39 a.m. the deck log recorded "ahead one third speed on course 95°" as the ship moved closer to the island in anticipation of the coming dawn and the arrival of Amelia Earhart. In the narrow radio room high on the top deck, the ship's Chief Radioman listened for the first call from the approaching plane. Below, the crewmembers not on watch and the thirty-two guests aboard for this historic cruise slept, or tried to. Among them was one man who had more than the heat and humidity to blame for any sleeplessness he may have suffered.

As the head of the Interior Department's American Equatorial Islands project, Richard Black was the official leader of the expedition. His responsibilities were to service the colonists and act as "coordinator of governmental assistance to Earhart flight as regards Howland Island."<sup>1</sup> He had waited here for Amelia before. In March he had led the mission to the islands aboard *Itasca's* sister ship, USCG *Shoshone*, a trip that had been fraught with tension and frustration. Heroic efforts had been made to get the airfield finished in time for the Electra's expected arrival, only to have the date repeatedly postponed. When Amelia's flight from Hawaii finally began, it ended on the runway with a wrecked airplane. That same day, George Putnam, in California, had sent a message to Black aboard the *Shoshone* waiting at Howland.

Telephoning from Honolulu before boarding the Malolo, Miss Earhart asked me to send a message directly to Howland Island to tell you how sorry she is to break

that engagement for tonight to which she had looked forward. She is sorrier for the trouble she has given you and the Coast Guard and Commerce officers and personnel with you. She is going to try again and next time hopes to be less of a nuisance.<sup>2</sup>

Two days later Black received a message from Bureau of Air Commerce liaison William Miller telling him that the airplane was being shipped to the Lockheed factory in California for repairs and that Earhart would begin her World Flight again from Oakland in six to eight weeks.<sup>3</sup>

On March 20th, the day of the accident, Putnam also sent a telegram to Secretary of Commerce Daniel C. Roper conveying Amelia's "deepest appreciation for the generous cooperation given her by the Department of Commerce." AE was "sorry for all the trouble" and wanted the Secretary to know that she "intends to try again when repairs are completed and next time hopes to be less of a nuisance to all concerned." The telegram ended with a special plea. "Especially I want to add that Bill Miller has been of invaluable help and our greatest hope is that he may be on deck with us when we try it again."<sup>4</sup> Earhart and Putnam were sincere in their desire to retain Miller's services. As the Bureau's point man in the colonization of the Equatorial Islands, Miller knew the ground and he knew the people. Since his first telegram to Earhart in November 1936, Miller had sent well over a hundred telegrams and cables coordinating every aspect of Earhart's projected flight across the Pacific with dozens of agencies and individuals in the U.S. and abroad.

Putnam sent several other telegrams that day to various government agencies;

all of them passed along Amelia's thanks, announced her intention to try again, and expressed her hope to be less of a nuisance next time. There is no record of a telegram to Fred Fagg, Miller's boss and Gene Vidal's successor as Director of the Bureau of Air Commerce. Fagg's Bureau had already demonstrated that the days of special treatment for Amelia were over. If Putnam thought he had a better chance of hanging on to Miller by going over Fagg's head and appealing directly to the Secretary of Commerce, Roper's reply was not encouraging.

Please express to Miss Earhart my thanks for her cordial message to the Department of Commerce for its cooperation. Also my congratulations on her splendid feat and my most sincere regret that a disappointing mishap has delayed her effort. You may be sure that the Department of Commerce is proud to have had a part in this achievement.<sup>5</sup>

For all its kind sentiment, the message made no mention of Miller and used the past tense in describing Department of Commerce support. By April 2nd, when the Electra arrived back in California, Miller had been reassigned to more conventional Bureau of Air Commerce duties. The next communication Earhart received from the Bureau was an April 19th letter from the General Inspection Service. Amelia had failed to submit a "report of accident, Form 87" on the Luke Field crash, a violation of regulations subject to a fine of \$500. The inspector in Honolulu had recommended that no action be taken but the matter was "being made of record."<sup>6</sup>

The Electra was under repair at the Lockheed plant in Burbank at an estimated cost of \$12,500 and Earhart was in New York with her husband trying to raise the money needed to put the World Flight back on track. The damage to the airplane was extensive, the repair cost was formidable, and the wind shift in Washington was adding to the financial burden. Services that previously had been cheerfully donated were now either un-

available or provided at a price. Prior to the accident, the Air Corps' Hawaiian Air Depot had worked all night to rebuild the Electra's propeller hubs at no charge. After the accident the work of preparing the wrecked plane for shipment was billed according to regulations. Earhart requested that the Electra be shipped to California on an Army transport ship. The answer was no.<sup>7</sup> Forced to buy space aboard a commercial vessel, she requested the use of a Navy barge to move the plane from Pearl Harbor to Honolulu. Again, the answer was no.<sup>8</sup> The plane made the trip to the dock on a commercial barge and returned to California aboard the Matson liner S.S. *Lurline*. The price tag for the prep work and transportation had come to more than \$4,000.

If the government was becoming less willing to give Amelia a free ride, so was the press. Newspaper coverage of the mishap had been generally charitable, blaming the crash on a blown tire. *NEWSWEEK* characterized the accident as "a tough bit of luck,"<sup>9</sup> but *TIME* magazine took a critical view of the entire World Flight endeavor:

Between 1924 and 1933 the globe was girdled six times by aircraft. Last year, when Pan American Airways started carrying passengers across the Pacific, reporters Herbert Ekins and Leo Kieran circled the globe on commercial lines. Soon after, Pan American's President Juan Terry Trippe and a party of friends also flew around on commercial lines. Last week, Aviatrix Amelia Earhart Putnam took off from Oakland 'to establish the feasibility of circling the globe by commercial air travel' and 'to determine just how human beings react under strain and fatigue'.

*TIME*'s description of the accident was no less sarcastic.

Down the long concrete runway the ship shot at 60 m.p.h. Suddenly the left tire blew out. Lurching, the plane crumpled its landing gear, careened 1,000 ft. on its bottom in a spray of sparks while the propellers knotted like pretzels. With sirens

screaming, ambulances dashed to the wreck just as Flyer Amelia stepped out white-faced. Said she: 'Something must have gone wrong.'<sup>10</sup>

The unkindest cut came from Major Alford Williams, a leading figure in aeronautical development. In 1923, as a young Navy lieutenant, Williams had set two world speed records and gone on to become a highly respected innovator of air combat tactics and techniques. Resigning from the Navy in 1930, he took a commission in the Marine Corps Reserve while continuing his aviation research and development work under the sponsorship of Gulf Oil.\*

Al Williams, like Amelia Earhart, had a flair for the written word, and in 1937 the 46-year-old aviation expert wrote a weekly column on aeronautical matters that was syndicated in newspapers all across the U.S. His March 31st offering excoriated "individually sponsored trans-oceanic flying" as "the worst racket" in aviation. Williams charged that "the personal profit angle in dollars and cents, and the struggle for personal fame, have been carefully camouflaged and presented under the banner of 'scientific progress'." The major was not bashful about naming names:

Amelia Earhart's 'Flying Laboratory' is the latest and most distressing racket that has been given to a trusting and enthusiastic public. There's nothing in that 'Flying Laboratory' beyond duplicates of the controls and apparatus to be found on board every major airline transport. And no one ever sat at the controls of her 'Flying Laboratory' who knew enough about the technical side of aviation to obtain a job on a first-class airline.

Williams didn't buy the blown tire story either. "She lost control of the airplane during a takeoff on the concrete runway of a standard Army airdrome and wrecked the 'Flying Laboratory'. ... That ship got away from her - that's the low down."

Most ominously for Earhart, Williams called for government action to stop her. "It's time the Bureau of Air Commerce took a hand in this business and it's my guess that the bureau will not grant Mrs. Amelia Earhart permission to make another attempt."<sup>11</sup>

As the end of April approached, a second World Flight attempt was still mostly brave talk. The sponsors who had put up the funding for the first trip had not pledged the dollars needed for another try, but money was not the only problem. The team had lost some key players. Harry Manning, the only member of the crew who was familiar with radio navigation and adept at Morse code, had left. The reason released to the press was that his leave of absence from his duties as a sea captain would expire before the plane could be repaired. Manning later said that he quit because he had lost faith in Earhart's skill as a pilot and was fed up with her "bullheadedness."<sup>12</sup>

More damaging was the loss of friends in high places. Without Vidal's influence and Miller's services in cajoling and coordinating government support, Al Williams' prediction of a federal ban on a second attempt was a real possibility. Amelia would have to mend the fences in person.

On April 27th Earhart sent a telegram to Rear Admiral Russell R. Waesche, Commandant of the Coast Guard, asking to see him the next day, preferably in the morning.<sup>13</sup> Waesche replied that he would be "delighted to see you anytime tomorrow morning, Wednesday, any time convenient yourself."<sup>14</sup> She also visited the Chief of Naval Operations who, later that day, advised the U.S. Naval Station in Samoa that "Amelia Earhart second flight starting within two or three weeks. Please have *Ontario* ready to render same service as on previous attempt. † Will advise time plane departure Oakland."<sup>15</sup>

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\*Army aviator James H. "Jimmy" Doolittle had a similar arrangement with Shell Oil.

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†The ocean-going tug USS *Ontario* had been positioned half way between Howland and New Guinea in March.

Earhart also paid a call upon Richard Black's superiors at the Interior Department's Division of Territories and Island Possessions. After the meeting Black was notified that Earhart had said she would be departing for Hawaii at the end of May and, after a short layover, would proceed to Howland. Although the letter to Black mentioned how charming Amelia had been it also instructed him to work with other agencies to arrange for the island to receive a precautionary visit by a military aircraft before the date of Earhart's anticipated arrival.<sup>16</sup>

The directive did not surprise Black. He was being ordered to implement his own idea. A week earlier, he advised Washington that he had, on his own initiative, written a memorandum to the local Navy intelligence officer offering the use of "Howland Island emergency landing fields in projected fleet operations." Black told his bosses that "best interest of government served if service plane were first to use fields. This recommendation made as result of recent happenings."<sup>17</sup>

The Division's Acting Director, Ruth Hampton, replied to Black's cable and authorized him, after the fact, to "inform Army and Navy that all facilities JHB [*Jarvis, Howland, Baker*] islands available to them for flight operations or otherwise as may be required." But she also asked Black what he meant by "recent happenings."<sup>18</sup> Black explained that the term referred to "Army, Navy and Commerce unofficial attitude toward Earhart accident Luke Field. Campbell [*the Commerce Department engineer who had built the Howland runways*] and I feel that in view of such uncertainty better for service plane to make first use Howland fields."<sup>19</sup> Hampton responded with a coded message so its content is unknown, but Black's reply that he was sending a letter with "full explanation ... on Clipper flying Tuesday"<sup>20</sup> makes it clear that the Acting Director wanted more information about the "unofficial attitude" toward Earhart's accident and the "uncertainty" it caused.

Black's airmailed "full explanation" does not seem to have survived but it is not difficult to understand his concern. As head of the Equatorial Islands project his primary interest was in their continued development. Gene Vidal's Bureau of Air Commerce had launched a scramble to build an airport on Howland Island for his friend Amelia Earhart, and a laundry list of agencies, including the Department of Interior for whom Black worked, had supported the effort. At the last minute, it had taken an executive order from the President before construction could go forward. By the time the work was completed Vidal was no longer head of the Bureau of Air Commerce but there were lots of fingerprints, including Roosevelt's, on the Howland airport project.

A Pan American Airways flying boat had just completed the first survey flight from Hawaii to New Zealand, landing and refueling in the lagoon at Kingman Reef. There was much discussion in the press about the prospect of commercial air service to the South Pacific, but Howland was not part of the equation.<sup>21</sup> If Earhart successfully crossed the Pacific Ocean in a land plane the usefulness of Howland's Kamakaiwi Field, and the value of the American Equatorial Islands, would be dramatically demonstrated, but portents were not promising.

Despite setting a speed record from California, Earhart had arrived in Hawaii in an airplane crippled by shoddy maintenance. Whether the subsequent accident that ended her first attempt to fly to Howland Island was the result of a mechanical failure, as she claimed, or simply poor piloting, it did nothing to inspire confidence that another try would have a happier result. If Earhart's second World Flight attempt ended like the first, perhaps this time with a crash at Howland Island, it could be very difficult for the Division of Territories and Island Possessions to argue for further development of the islands. There might also be some politically embarrassing questions asked about how the airport came to be built.

Black felt that the best protection against such eventualities was for the utility of the island airfield to be validated before Earhart had a chance to try again – hence his attempt to interest the Navy in making some use of the island during upcoming fleet maneuvers. All that was needed was for a plane from an aircraft carrier to land and take off as a demonstration that the island could be used as an emergency landing facility. In the end, the Navy wasn't interested and the projected fleet operations took place without using Howland.

For the rest of April and the entire month of May Black heard not another word about Earhart's plans. Finally, on June 1st, he sent a cable to Acting Director Ruth Hampton asking if she had any information about a number of confusing developments and rumors. Reports in the press were saying that Earhart had reversed her course around the world but Black had also heard that the Bureau of Air Commerce might ban Earhart's World Flight as unnecessary.<sup>22</sup> Hampton replied the next day saying only, "Earhart completed first lap east/west [*sic*] flight arriving San Juan but we have no further information than contained in press. No requests have been received from Miss Earhart or Mr. Putnam. Suggest you contact Navy, Coast Guard and Putnam's representative Honolulu and endeavor secure information."<sup>23</sup>

The Navy and Coast Guard personnel in Hawaii knew no more than Black, and there was no Putnam representative in Honolulu. Earhart was off on her second attempt to fly around the world and coordination of support for the most dangerous part of the trip had been exactly zero. The decision to reverse the direction flight came as a surprise to almost everyone. The surviving correspondence indicates that Amelia made no mention of it during her fence-mending visits to the Coast Guard, Navy and Interior Department in late April. The plan was first revealed in a May 5th letter from George Putnam to Richard Southgate, his State Department contact.

For your information it now appears that Miss Earhart will be able to renew her world flight attempt the latter part of May.

The original plan contemplated proceeding from Venezuela to Los Angeles via Central America and Mexico. Confidentially, because of increasing rains in that region it is now likely that she will attempt to fly from California, via a point in Texas, to Miami, and thence to Venezuela and on to Natal, via Porto Rico. That is, going West-East. ... Because of changed weather conditions it is now possible that the route in Africa may also be changed.<sup>24</sup>

Putnam asked Southgate whether the revised routes would require further permissions from the countries involved.

Three days later, on May 8th, Putnam revealed the new plan to the Chief of Naval Operations.

This note is to lay before you the exact situation. It is for the moment very confidential. Aside from Miss Earhart and myself only two people know the revised plan.

The delay from the chosen mid-March date has resulted in changed weather conditions on several stretches of the proposed route. In a couple of instances these are drastic. Specifically, the weather probabilities in the stretch from Natal north are increasingly bad as June advances. The same is true of the Dakar-Aden-Karachi route. Obviously it is therefore desirable to get to Natal and across the South Atlantic and Africa as promptly as possible.

So Miss Earhart has decided to reverse the route and to proceed from west to east. [*emphasis in original*]<sup>25</sup>

Putnam went on to explain that there would be "no announcement" and the takeoff from Oakland "will be simply the commencement of another 'trial flight'. ... As matters stand, this 'sneak' takeoff from Oakland will occur probably between May 18th and May 24th."

Putnam said that his best estimate was that his wife would reach Howland Island “somewhere between twenty-five and thirty days from the date of takeoff” and expected to be able to provide the Navy with more specific information “about a fortnight in advance” of the Lae/Howland flight.

No notification of the change appears to have been sent to the Coast Guard or the Interior Department.

That same day, Richard Southgate at the State Department replied to Putnam’s letter of May 5th. Not only would new clearances be needed from the various countries to be visited, but Southgate, on his own initiative, had discussed the matter “informally with an officer of the Department of Commerce, who stated in view of the changed circumstances it would be necessary to issue a new letter of authority for the flight. He suggested that you be advised to communicate directly with the Department of Commerce, furnishing the latest information concerning Miss Earhart’s plane.”<sup>26</sup>

The news that Commerce was going to require a new letter of authority for the flight was not welcome, but neither was it unexpected. Ever since Eugene Vidal’s departure, the Bureau of Air Commerce had been more hindrance than help to Earhart and there had been at least one public demand from a prominent aviation figure for the government to ban a second attempt. The decision to reverse the direction of the World Flight may have been as much influenced by the need to mollify the Bureau of Air Commerce as by weather considerations.

Neither Earhart nor her husband was independently wealthy and they depended upon Amelia’s market value as a celebrity for their income. Her much-hyped trip around the world could not be allowed to end on the runway at Luke Field. Earhart and Putnam had been able to secure the loans and sponsorships needed to make a second attempt possible. Much of the money had been donated, but George and Amelia had also gone

heavily into personal debt to complete the budget. In mid-April, the promise of another try at a trip around the world was enough to land a contract with publisher Harcourt Brace for a chronicle of her trip to be called *World Flight*. As she began to write the book Earhart acknowledged “that the stress and strains of an airplane accident and its aftermaths are just as severe financially as they are mechanically. On the prosaic dollar-and-cent side friends helped generously, but even so, to keep going I more-or-less mortgaged the future. Without regret, however, for what are futures for?”<sup>27</sup>

In fact, she had little choice. If she was to salvage her fame she had to make good on her promise to fly around the world and she had to do it soon because the newsworthiness of such a flight was steadily diminishing. At the same time Earhart was mortgaging the future, Eastern Airlines pilots Deck Merrill and Jack Lambie were making headlines with another specially modified Lockheed Electra almost exactly like her own. On May 9th they carried photos of the Hindenburg disaster nonstop from New York to England and, a few days later, brought photos of the coronation of King George VI back to the U.S., again nonstop. Their achievement was heralded as the first commercial round-trip transatlantic flight and yet another indication that transoceanic international air travel was becoming routine.

Earhart and Putnam were counting on sales of *World Flight* to put their finances back in order, but time was running out. The book had to be ready for the Christmas market, so the trip would have to begin as soon as the plane left the repair shop later that month. Setting off across the Pacific in a newly repaired airplane, however, would be blatantly foolhardy. Even if Earhart was willing to try it, the chances of the Bureau of Air Commerce issuing the necessary letter of authority for such an endeavor, especially in light of Earhart’s recent track record, were slim to none. It was also obvious that the enterprise could not survive another false start.

The request for renewed permission to make the flight was dated May 10th and went to J. Monroe Johnson, Assistant Secretary of Commerce.

In her book, Earhart wrote that “It is only fair to record that the Bureau of Air Commerce probably would have preferred that I abandon the effort. Its policy was to discourage all such extracurricular undertakings of the kind, the common or garden term for which sometimes is ‘stunt flights’. But having granted me permission once, the ship, personnel and flight plan being the same, it would have been difficult to withdraw it.”<sup>28</sup> Of course, neither the rebuilt ship, the reduced personnel, nor the reversed flight plan was the same and, given the dismal outcome of the first attempt, the Commerce Department might easily have felt justified in banning a second attempt if only to save Amelia from herself but, in the end, the revised itinerary was approved and on May 14th the a new letter of authority was issued and the State Department was asked to “go forward with the matter of notifying the various foreign Governments involved.”<sup>29</sup>

The plan conceived by Earhart and Putnam did have some disadvantages. AE would have to mislead the press and the public about the true nature of the flight from California to Florida and then, if all went well, admit that she had misled them. But Amelia had often been coy and dissembling about upcoming flights. The public was very forgiving. Of greater concern was the need to make sure that the press did not discover that the plan was to continue around the world until the plane was in Miami and ready to go. To minimize the danger of leaks, only a few key people would be told. Detailed coordination of support for the Pacific legs of the trip would have to wait until after the World Flight had publicly begun. On the other hand, reversing the direction meant that the Pacific would be crossed at the end, rather than the beginning, of the trip so there should be plenty of time to make the necessary arrangements.

On Wednesday, May 19th, the rebuilt Electra was inspected and signed off as fit to fly. The second World Flight attempt officially, but secretly, began the very next day. The shakedown flight across the country shook down several problems – some with the airplane, some with the pilot. At the first stop, in Tucson, Arizona, improper starting procedure resulted in an engine fire that nearly got out of hand. An unplanned overnight stay was necessary to repair the damage. As the trip continued it was discovered that the automatic pilot needed adjustment and the radio transmitter had very short range. Upon arriving over Miami on the afternoon of May 23rd, Amelia landed at the wrong airport, took off again, and upon landing at the correct field, Miami Municipal, she misjudged her height and dropped the airplane onto the runway in what she reportedly said was the hardest landing she had ever made in the Electra. An inspection by Pan American mechanics turned up no damage and, over the next week, they worked on the autopilot and radio problems with varying degrees of success.

On May 30th the front page of the New York Herald Tribune carried the headline “Miss Earhart Set To Fly Eastward Around The World.” The article, written by Amelia, explained that “There are several reasons for the change in direction. Or, perhaps, one basic one on which all others hang. The weather.”

She also justified the subterfuge about the beginning of the World Flight with an appeal for sympathy:

So much was written before and after the March 17 take-off at Oakland, and following the Honolulu accident that I thought it would be a pleasant change to just slip away. ... Incidentally, the career of one who indulges in any kind of flying off the beaten path is often complicated. For instance, if one gives out plans beforehand, one is likely to be charged with publicity seeking by those who do not know how difficult it is to escape the competent gen-

tlemen of the press. On the other hand, if one slips away, as I have generally tried to do, the slipper-away invites catcalls from those who earn their living writing and taking photographs. So I am hoping the pros and cons of the whole undertaking can wait until it is finally over.

The changes in the weather, she said, had also “brought an increase in personnel. Originally I planned to be alone except for

a navigator on the Pacific, where objectives were small islands on a vast ocean. Now I am taking Captain Noonan the whole distance to save time on occasion.”<sup>30</sup>

The radios and autopilot continued to give trouble and it was June 1st before the World Flight resumed, publicly this time, with the flight from Miami to San Juan, Puerto Rico. ◆

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Department of Interior report “Tenth Cruise of the American Equatorial Islands,” Richard B. Black, Field Representative, p. 2.
- <sup>2</sup> Message from Putnam to Black, March 20, 1937.
- <sup>3</sup> Message from Miller to Black and Campbell, March 22, 1937.
- <sup>4</sup> Message from Putnam to Roper, March 20, 1937.
- <sup>5</sup> Message from Roper to Putnam, March 22, 1937.
- <sup>6</sup> Letter from R.S. Boutelle to Amelia Earhart, April 19, 1937.
- <sup>7</sup> Message from Adjutant General Conley to General Drum, April 22, 1937.
- <sup>8</sup> Message from Secretary of Navy to Miller, March 25, 1937.
- <sup>9</sup> *NEWSWEEK*, March 27, 1937, page 27.
- <sup>10</sup> *TIME*, March 29, 1937, page 36.
- <sup>11</sup> *Cleveland Press*, March 31, 1937.
- <sup>12</sup> Manning interview with author Fred Goerner as related by Goerner at a National Air & Space Museum Amelia Earhart Symposium in 1983.
- <sup>13</sup> Message from Earhart to Waesche, April 27, 1937.
- <sup>14</sup> Message from Waesche to Earhart, April 27, 1937.
- <sup>15</sup> Message from CNO to NavSta Tutuila, April 28, 1937.
- <sup>16</sup> Letter from Richard Kleindienst to Richard Black, April 29, 1937.
- <sup>17</sup> Message from Black to Gruening, April 21, 1937.
- <sup>18</sup> Message from Hampton to Black, April 22, 1937.
- <sup>19</sup> Message from Black to Hampton, April 22, 1937.
- <sup>20</sup> Message from Black to Hampton, April 24, 1937.
- <sup>21</sup> “Route of Clipper is Found the Best,” article by Capt. Edwin Musick, *New York Times*, March 31, 1937, p. 6.
- <sup>22</sup> Message from Black to Hampton, June 1, 1937.
- <sup>23</sup> Message from Hampton to Black, June 2, 1937.
- <sup>24</sup> Letter from Putnam to Southgate dated May 5, 1937.
- <sup>25</sup> Letter from Putnam to Admiral Leahy dated May 8, 1937.
- <sup>26</sup> Letter from Southgate to Putnam dated May 8, 1937.
- <sup>27</sup> *Last Flight*, Earhart, Harcourt Brace, NY 1937
- <sup>28</sup> *Last Flight*, Earhart, Harcourt Brace, NY 19
- <sup>29</sup> Letter from J.M. Johnson to Secretary of State, May 14, 1937.
- <sup>30</sup> “Miss Earhart Set To Fly Eastward Around The World,” *New York Herald Tribune*, May 30, 1937, p. 1.



## Chapter 4

# *Not For Publication*

**A**s Noonan tracked the Electra's progress southward, Amelia let "Sperry" (the Sperry automatic pilot) do much of the flying while she made notes for her book about the "opalescent sea" and islands where "small streams look like green snakes."

The seven and a half-hour trip to San Juan was the first time she and Noonan had worked alone together and her jotted comments about the navigator speak of "Freddie." "Freddie looking for lighthouse." "Freddie points out a partly submerged wreck off shore." But there is a growing admiration in notations such as, "6:35. We sight a reef. Freddie said we'd pass one at 6:40. Pretty good." And, "Freddie says San Juan at 1:10 EST from white hankies of foam?" (an allusion to Noonan's ability to judge surface wind speed and direction from the appearance of the sea). Familiarity, in this case, seems to have bred respect, and Earhart's notes during subsequent flights refer to Noonan as "Fred" or "F.N.," never "Freddie."<sup>1</sup>

If it took some time before Amelia got to know her navigator, it was because Frederick J. Noonan, for all his affable nature and well-publicized accomplishments as Pan American's star navigator, was a very private individual. Amelia lived and thrived in the spotlight, writing and speaking freely about her feelings and opinions. Fred Noonan's personal life, however, was not for publication, and his public writings were confined to professional treatises on navigation. The letters and telegrams Earhart and Putnam sent to various government agencies survive as part of the public record, and much of Earhart's private correspondence was later donated to libraries and archives. By contrast, nearly all

of Noonan's surviving letters and telegrams are in private collections. Some have been released to researchers. Others, regrettably, have not.

In the years since his death, Noonan's inaccessibility has made him a one-dimensional figure in the Earhart legend – the expert navigator with a drinking problem. Newly available contemporary sources, however, reveal a more complete and very different picture of the man who flew with Amelia, and permit a better understanding of how they worked, and ultimately died, together.

Noonan's addition to the Electra's crew just days before the departure of the first World Flight attempt appears to have been occasioned by the discovery that the flight's designated navigator, Harry Manning, needed help. Manning was an experienced sea captain and a licensed pilot, but he was accustomed to applying his celestial navigation skills from the deck of a slow-moving ship at sea level. Shooting the sun and stars through the windows of a high-flying, often turbulence-tossed, airplane traveling at 150 mph was a very different proposition.

Noonan too held maritime ratings and a pilot's license, but he was also a celebrated aerial navigator. Born in Chicago in 1893, he went to sea at an early age serving in a succession of merchant ships and steadily advancing in his ratings and certifications. During the Great War, Noonan lived in New York and served aboard several American and British ships in the merchant marine but he was never in the Navy. In 1926 the United States Shipping Board awarded Noonan his license as "Master of steamers of any gross tonnage." His career was moving ahead and the next year, at age 34, he married Josephine

Sullivan in Jackson, Mississippi. The couple settled in New Orleans where Fred was working for the Mississippi Shipping Company as Chief Mate of SS *Carplaka*.<sup>2</sup>

If Fred Noonan hoped that his Master's papers would bring him a ship of his own, the next few years brought disappointment. Employment was steady despite the onset of the Great Depression, but Noonan sailed always as a mate, never as captain. In 1930, perhaps hoping for better advancement in a newer, and in some ways similar, field, he obtained a Limited Commercial airplane pilot's license and landed a job with Pan American Airways Caribbean Division in Miami. Later that year, the Noonans moved to Port au Prince, Haiti, where Fred had been made Field Manager of the company's new Haitian operation. Adapting his maritime navigational expertise to aviation, Fred was instrumental in developing techniques for the company's new Pacific Division and, in March 1935, he and Josie moved to Oakland, California. Throughout the year, five survey flights hop-scotched across the Pacific from the airline's new Alameda base near San Francisco, first to Honolulu and Midway, then to Wake Island, culminating in the China Clipper's celebrated round trip flight to Manila. Noonan was the navigator on all of the flights.<sup>3</sup>

In 1936 Fred Noonan made at least twenty-one flights as Pan American's senior navigator, including numerous, often lengthy, test flights and five round-trip Pacific crossings to Manila. His last flight with the airline – a sixteen-day marathon as navigator of the Martin M-130 "Philippine Clipper" – concluded on December 7, 1936. Some time later that month he left the company. The reason for his departure is not documented – no letter of resignation or notification of termination is known to exist – but the most contemporaneous explanation is found in a 1939 book written by Pan Am pilot William Grooch. According to Grooch, there was something of a rebellion among the airline's flight crews following the Nov./Dec Manila trip.

On the outbound voyage the crew had reacted normally; then, as they wearied of the long grind, tempers became frayed, movements sluggish. It was an effort to remain awake on duty. ... [P]ilots were averaging a hundred and twenty-five hours a month in the air. This was far in excess of the limit established by the Department of Commerce regulations. ... Ed [*Pacific Division Chief Pilot, Captain Edwin Musick*] felt they had a just grievance. He championed their cause with company officials, pointing out that his own promised raise in salary had not materialized. They shrugged and passed the buck to the New York office. There the matter was pigeonholed. Ed strove to convince the pilots that the delay was due to the press of more urgent business. ...

Fred Noonan said, "We've lived on promises for a year. I'm through." He resigned immediately. The others grumbled but carried on.<sup>4</sup>

Fred Noonan's professional record, both nautical and aeronautical, is spotless. From references in his own correspondence it is clear that Noonan enjoyed an occasional drink and it is possible, and even probable, that he sometimes overindulged, but stories about his drinking arose only after his death. There is nothing in the historical record to support later allegations that he was fired by Pan American for drinking.

The first months of 1937 were an unsettled time for Fred Noonan. He was 43 years old and his six-year career with Pan American had come to an end, as had his ten-year, childless marriage to Josephine. To what extent the stress and the long separations of the past two years were factors in the breakup is not known but, on March 3, 1937, Noonan's attorney filed divorce papers in Juarez, Mexico.<sup>5</sup> Around this time Fred was reportedly also involved in a serious automobile accident.<sup>6</sup>

A more positive development was the new love in his life. Mary Beatrice "Bee" Martinelli, herself a divorcée with no children,

ran a beauty salon in Oakland. The couple planned to marry as soon Noonan's divorce was final.

Ten days after Noonan filed for divorce, and just two days before Amelia Earhart's scheduled March 15<sup>th</sup> departure for Hawaii, Noonan's name first appeared in the press as a member of the Electra's crew.<sup>7</sup> No record of any agreement Noonan may have had with Earhart and Putnam regarding compensation for his services has come to light, but other documents provide clues to the arrangement.

As originally planned, navigators Fred Noonan and Harry Manning together would guide the Electra to Honolulu and from there to Howland Island. Noonan would leave the crew at Howland and Manning would continue on with Earhart as far as Australia. Amelia would span the remaining two-thirds of the globe alone. That plan, however, appears to have been altered after the plane reached Hawaii.

On March 19<sup>th</sup>, the night before the take-off for Howland, Noonan sent a telegram to Bee:

Leaving 1:30 a.m. your time. Amelia has asked me to continue with her at least as far as Darwin, Australia and possibly around the world. Will keep you advised. Trip around world will be completed before I can return from Australia.

I love you,

Fred<sup>8</sup>

In his message to his bride-to-be, Fred's concern was with the length of time it would take him to get home. He assured her that flying around the world with Amelia would be faster than sailing back across the Pacific from Australia. There was no mention of money, neither regarding the cost of a steamer ticket if he left the flight in Darwin nor of increased compensation for his services if he were to continue on as Earhart's navigator. Noonan's telegram would be consistent with an agreement by which Earhart and Putnam

covered Fred's expenses but, rather than being paid for his services, it would be up to him to turn fame into fortune.

The wreck at Luke Field the next morning ended the first World Flight attempt and did not enhance anyone's fame or fortune, but Fred did get back to his sweetheart sooner than expected. Noonan, Earhart, and Manning sailed for California that same day and, one week later on March 27, 1937, Fred and Bee were married in Yuma, Arizona.\* According to newspaper accounts, the couple planned to settle in Oakland but would "spend a brief honeymoon in Hollywood as Noonan is now engaged with Miss Earhart in preparing plans for the re-start of the world flight..."<sup>9</sup>

Eight days later, Fred Noonan found himself in yet another wreck. April 4, 1937 was his forty-fourth birthday and that night, as he and his bride drove through Fresno on their way back to Oakland along the Golden State Highway, they hit another car head-on. Fred escaped with minor bruises but Bee was hospitalized with "an extensive laceration on the knee and other injuries." The other driver was not injured but his wife and infant daughter were treated for bruises at Fresno Emergency Hospital and released. Noonan was cited for driving in the wrong lane.<sup>10</sup>

Little is known about Noonan's activities for the next six weeks except that he maintained a post office box address in Hollywood. During that time, Earhart and Putnam were back and forth between fund-raising and fence-mending on the East Coast and monitoring the progress of repairs to the airplane in Burbank, but Noonan did not attend the meetings in Washington and he does not appear in the photos and newsreels of Amelia inspecting the Electra in the repair shop.

The Electra was inspected and signed off by the Bureau of Air Commerce on May 19, 1937, and Fred was on hand in Burbank the next day for the "sneak takeoff" of the second World Flight attempt. For someone

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\*California did not recognize Fred's Mexican divorce.

who was unemployed, recently divorced and newly remarried, Fred seemed to be doing well. Photos taken at the airport show Earhart and Noonan loading the airplane while Bee watched from beside a new 1937 Terraplane Series 72 Super convertible.<sup>11</sup>

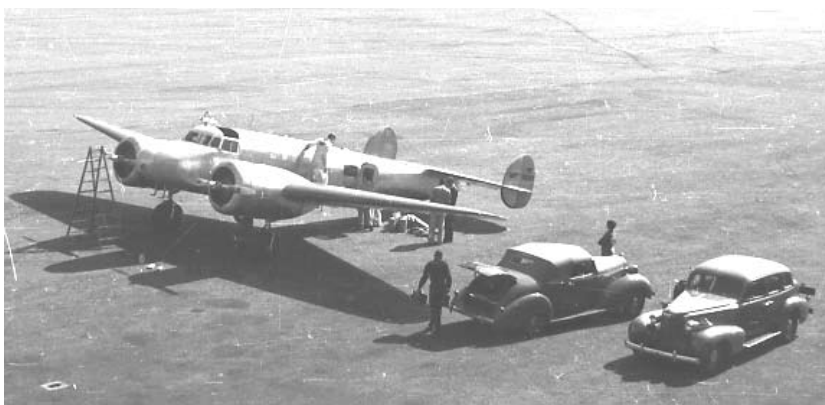
Three days later, Amelia, Fred, George Putnam, and mechanic “Bo” McKneeley arrived in Florida, having completed the Electra’s cross-country test flight. Fred was on familiar turf in Miami and he took the opportunity to renew his acquaintance with many old friends including a young woman by the name of Helen Day. From correspondence released by her family it is apparent that Fred Noonan, his recent remarriage notwithstanding, was very much taken with Helen Day and that he hoped to continue their association after the World Flight. In writing to the twenty-four year old Day, his language was not sexually explicit, but it was unabashedly flattering and romantic.

Of their time together in Miami, Fred wrote, “I cannot express the pleasure I found in the few hours you so kindly devoted to me. My only regret is that they were so few. I hope for better luck in the future.” After four pages describing the flight’s progress, he closed with:

I want to again express my pleasure at having seen you again – and to hope that I shall be equally as fortunate in the not distant future.

Oh yes – while we were in the cockpit waiting to take off from Miami, both Amelia and her husband paid you nice compliments – he said you were a mighty nice girl – and Amelia said, “Yes, mighty attractive, and beautiful with it.” I’m glad they could appreciate such obvious facts.<sup>12</sup>

During the time they spent together in the last days of May, Fred made it clear that he wanted to stay in touch with Helen after



*Noonan unloads items from the trunk of the car while Bee stands at the front. Earhart confers with someone near the tail of the aircraft. Carter-Johnson photo; TIGHAR collection.*

the World Flight was completed. On a piece of brown paper torn from a lunch bag, he jotted down several addresses where she could write to him – the house in Oakland where he lived with his new wife, a post office box in Oakland, and another post office box in Hollywood.<sup>13</sup>

Fred’s letter to Helen Day was written from Fortaleza, Brazil, five days into the trip and after crossing what he described to her as “...hundreds of miles of unexplored dense virgin jungle. ...It was interesting because of the lack of recognizable landmarks – a jungle is equally as devoid of distinguishable landmarks as an ocean. In consequence, at several times we had to rely upon celestial navigation to ascertain our position.”<sup>14</sup> He would write to her at least three more times during the World Flight.

From Fortaleza, Earhart and Noonan made the short hop to Natal on the eastern-most tip of Brazil and, at 3:15 a.m. on June 7, 1937, set off across the South Atlantic for Africa. The pre-dawn takeoff was intended to allow the flight to reach its destination – Dakar, French Senegal – before dark, but thirteen hours and twenty-two minutes later, at 7:35 p.m. local time, three minutes before sunset, the Electra touched down unannounced at Saint Louis, 163 miles beyond Dakar. That same evening, Amelia sent a press release to the *Herald Tribune* explaining what happened.

Here at St. Louis are the headquarters of Air France for the trans-Atlantic service and I am grateful for the field's excellent facilities, which have generously been placed at my disposal. But it is only fair to say that I had really intended to land at Dakar 163 miles south of St. Louis. The fault is entirely mine.

When we first sighted the African coast, thick haze prevailed. My navigator, Captain Fred Noonan, indicated that we should turn south. Had we done so, a few minutes would have brought us to Dakar. But a left turn seemed to me more attractive and fifty miles of flying along the coast brought us here.

Once arrived over the airport and having definitely located ourselves, it seemed better to sit down rather than retrace our track along a strange coast with darkness imminent.<sup>15</sup>

It was a good story, but it was not true. The chart Noonan used to track the flight's progress was sent home later in the trip and is now in the Amelia Earhart Collection at Purdue University.<sup>16</sup> Noonan's hand-drawn course lines and notations show very clearly that the flight made landfall on the African coast well south of, not north of, Dakar. The Electra then turned northward to pass several miles to the east – in other words, inland – of the city, which sits on a peninsula extending out into the Atlantic. There was no right or left turn. The flight continued up the coast to land at St. Louis.

In a letter written two days later, Noonan described the conditions that prevailed during the trip and made no mention of a disagreement with Amelia.

The flight from Natal, Brazil to Africa produced the worst weather we have experienced – heavy rain and dense cloud formations necessitated blind flying for ten of the thirteen hours we were in flight. To add to our woes the African coast was enveloped in thick haze, rendering objects invisible at distances over a half mile, when we made the landfall. And our radio was out of order – it would be, in

such a jam. However, with our usual good luck, if not good guidance, we barged through okay.<sup>17</sup>

In haze conditions such as Noonan described, forward visibility while flying toward a setting sun is virtually zero, so turning back toward the ocean to try to find Dakar with no radio, limited fuel, and failing daylight was not an attractive proposition. Finding St. Louis was a simple matter of following the coastline northeastward to where the Senegal River meets the sea.

Why Earhart so quickly put out a different story is not known, but at least one good reason is apparent. The decision to bypass Dakar under the prevailing circumstances was operationally correct but bureaucratically risky. The World Flight's path across Africa lay over French colonial possessions and there had been a great deal of State Department correspondence with Paris discussing specific routes and the various restrictions that would apply to each. Once the French authorities had been told which of the approved routes Earhart would follow, it was expected that she would go where she said she would go. All of the approved routes across Africa began in Dakar and failing to land there, if seen as willful disregard of the approved itinerary, might result in the airplane and crew being impounded and fined. However, if missing Dakar was represented as a navigational mistake – especially one for which the female pilot took the blame for not listening to her male navigator – the French authorities might be less likely to hold it against her. Whatever Earhart's motivations, the public and the French accepted her version of events and the next day the flight repositioned to Dakar without incident.\*

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*\*Earhart's bogus account, cleverly expedient as it was, has become a staple of the Earhart legend and has been cited as the justification for endless speculation about Amelia's relationship with Noonan and whether and how she might have disregarded his instructions during the Lae/Howland flight.*

The letter Fred Noonan wrote from Dakar on June 9, 1937 was addressed to “Eugene Palette, Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, Hollywood, California, Etas-Unis.” Palette was a popular and prolific film actor, best remembered today for his role as the rotund and raspy-voiced Friar Tuck in the 1938 Warner Bros. release “The Adventures of Robin Hood.” The exact nature of his association with Fred Noonan is not known, but from the tone and content of the letter it would appear that the two men were engaged in some kind of venture that involved Noonan keeping Palette informed about the progress of the World Flight via telegram from each and every destination. Noonan was running into difficulties meeting that obligation and his letter, sent back across the South Atlantic via airmail, was apologetic.\*

Dear Gene,

Having trouble sending messages such as I promised you – but I am doing the best that I can. Facilities are not always available, and therefore I am sending one message when possible, naming stop made since the previous message. Tried to get one off last night but some trouble developed at the cable station. As I had sent the cablegram to the cable office by messenger I have not yet ascertained the cause of the delay in transmission – but will do so later to-day.

After describing the flight so far, Noonan closed with:

We anticipate taking off for Niamey, French Niger, Central Africa, to-morrow morning, then to Khartoum, Egypt, and Aden, Arabia.

With kindest personal regards, and looking forward to a highball together in the not too distant future – I am

Sincerely, Fred Noonan<sup>18</sup>

Later that day, after the letter had been mailed, developing weather conditions prompted a change in the chosen route. Over

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\*Airmail service across the South Atlantic was inaugurated in 1930 by Aeropostale which became part of Air France in 1932. Service from Brazil to the U.S. was via Pan American Airways.

the next five days the Electra crossed Africa by way of Gao, French West Africa; Fort-Lamy, French Equatorial Africa; El Fasher and Khartoum, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan; and then to Massawa and Assab in Italian Eritrea.

Noonan’s letter to Palette ended up in the possession of Fred’s widow and, eventually, in a private collection of his correspondence. If there are other letters or telegrams from Noonan to Palette they have not been released.

Little is known about Noonan’s plans following the World Flight. In a 1937 newspaper interview, his wife said that they had plans to settle in southern California where Fred had “business offers.” Many years later she said that Noonan had hoped to start a navigation school. That may be true, but it is difficult to connect such plans with Palette’s apparent need to be constantly updated on the progress of the World Flight. Noonan’s Hollywood address and his association with a prominent film star suggest a possible connection with the motion picture industry, and it could be that a film based on the World Flight was being considered. If so, there was plenty of precedent. In 1936 Warner Bros. had released “China Clipper,” a fictionalized account of the headline-making 1935 Pan American survey flights. Similarly, the highly publicized round-trip flight to England by Dick Merrill and Jack Lambie in May, 1937 inspired “Atlantic Flight” a film released by Associated Artists later that year. Like “China Clipper,” the story line was fictional but the film featured the actual aircraft used in the famous flight. In the case of “Atlantic Flight,” the pilots, too, played major roles on the screen. The Earhart World Flight certainly fit the trend and it is an interesting coincidence that in 1937 Eugene Palette was working on “The Adventures of Robin Hood” with Warner Bros., the same studio that had made “China Clipper.”

The nature of the enterprise Noonan and Palette were pursuing is a matter of speculation but the fact that Fred had promised to feed information to Palette is not. During

the trip, Earhart sent press releases to the Herald Tribune under a deal negotiated by Putnam for exclusive newspaper coverage of the World Flight. No stories attributed to Noonan appeared in the press and it can be safely assumed that Putnam would not have permitted such competition. The messages to Pallette, therefore, were intended for some other purpose. Also, sending international cablegrams and airmail letters was expensive

and it follows that whoever was paying for them considered the cost justified.

Whether Earhart and Putnam were aware of Noonan's dealings with Pallette is not known, but given how closely they guarded and attempted to control every aspect of the World Flight, it is hard to imagine that they knew of Noonan's agreement to provide someone in Pallette's position with his own running account. ◆

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Earhart Collection, Purdue University Special Collections, West Lafayette, Indiana.
- <sup>2</sup> United States Shipping Board, Service Record, for Noonan, Frederick Joseph, November 20, 1928.
- <sup>3</sup> Original press reports and photographs reproduced in *Pan American's Pacific Pioneers* by Jon E. Krupnick, Pictorial Histories Publishing, Missoula, Montana, 2000.
- <sup>4</sup> From Crate To Clipper With Captain Musick, Pioneer Pilot, by William Stephen Grooch, Longmans, Green & Company, New York. 1939.
- <sup>5</sup> Associated Press story dateline El Paso, Texas, March 3, 1937.
- <sup>6</sup> *Last Flight*, Earhart, Harcourt Brace, NY 1937.
- <sup>7</sup> *Oakland Tribune*, March 13, 1937.
- <sup>8</sup> Telegram from Noonan to Martinelli, March 19, 1937, in private collection of Elgen Long.
- <sup>9</sup> *Oakland Tribune*, March 29, 1937.
- <sup>10</sup> *The Fresno Republican*, April 5, 1937.
- <sup>11</sup> Photo taken by Dustin Carter at Union Air Terminal, Burbank on May 20, 1937.
- <sup>12</sup> Letter from Fred Noonan to Helen Day dated June 5, 1937.
- <sup>13</sup> Paper fragment with addresses in private collection of James T. Bible.
- <sup>14</sup> Letter from Fred Noonan to Helen Day dated June 5, 1937.
- <sup>15</sup> *New York Herald Tribune*, June 8, 1937, page 1.
- <sup>16</sup> Earhart Collection, Purdue University Special Collections, West Lafayette, Indiana.
- <sup>17</sup> Letter from Fred Noonan to Eugene Pallette dated June 9, 1937.
- <sup>18</sup> Letter from Noonan to Pallette dated June 9, 1937.



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## *Our Sincerest Thanks.*

### TIGHAR'S 2005


### Aviation Archæology Course & Field School

**Dates:** Sunday, October 9, through Friday, October 14

**Location:** College Park Airport, Maryland

**Tuition:** \$750

College Park, just seven miles north of Washington, DC, is the world's oldest continuously operated airport. The original Army Aviation School was based in four hangars near the Baltimore & Ohio railroad tracks at the north end of the field. Over the years, the sites of two of the original hangars and several other structures have been paved over, but the foundations and floors of Hangars One and Two still survive under the grass. Archeological test pits from earlier evaluations at the site yielded an abundance of artifacts including parts, tools, and various types of equipment. For TIGHAR's survey, we plan to use Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) to identify the most promising areas for excavation.

The Field School will consist of two days of classroom work at the College Park Aviation Museum followed by four days of field work on the historic site under the supervision of TIGHAR's senior archaeologist Dr. Tom King. Because there will be no hiking or camping involved, there are no physical requirements for participation. Tuition includes all books and materials, lunch every day, and support services. Airfare, hotel, and other meals are not included, but we will be making special arrangements with a local hotel once we know how many people we have. We also expect to be able to provide daily transportation between the hotel and field school. Registration will be limited to 25 individuals, so use the enclosed form to sign up soon. 

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