

# TIGHAR TRACKS

newsletter of

## The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery

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TIGHAR would like to welcome its new members, those who joined at Sun'n'Fun and those who have come on since. Welcome aboard! and thanks for your support. We couldn't do a thing without you.

Our horizons have expanded in the last few months. In addition to the expeditions which are the centerpiece of our efforts, we have made some very special plans designed to boost the aerospace industry in general. We are in the process of putting together a one-hour TV special, using Project Midnight Ghost as the dramatic background for a documentary on our research and recovery efforts. This, in turn, will be expanded into an educational program, aimed at middle school students, to get them turned on to aviation and aerospace science at an early age. It will introduce them to logic and critical thinking, scientific method, research techniques, archeology, basic navigation, basic aerodynamics, meteorology, all in the context of our aviation historical investigations.

This program--the first in a series--will inspire young people with the fascination of flight at a time when a critical shortage of aerospace engineers, scientists, and pilots looms on the horizon. Negotiations are under way with a film company, and we hope to begin work as early as July. Any member of TIGHAR who has a background in the field of education, particularly those who are currently teaching, is urged to get in touch and make a contribution of expertise and opinion to this project.

We are, of course, continuing with the old projects and always looking for new ones (see the rest of this newsletter). Be sure to stop in and visit us at our booth (D-4) at the Oshkosh fly-in July 26 through August 2. We will have firm dates on a couple of expeditions at that time. Bring your friends and encourage them to join. See you soon!

## MIDNIGHT HOST

Those who have been following Project Midnight Ghost closely will recall that actual search operations are presently awaiting the employment of some very sophisticated and highly classified radar technology by the Air Force. While NASA is helping us arrange that rather large favor, we have become aware of the possibility that Shell Oil has a very similar device known as Graph Trax. If that is true it may provide a good "Plan B" in the event the Air Force mission falls through. Anyone with knowledge of Graph Trax or connections at Shell is encouraged to contact us here in Delaware.



Meanwhile, on the pure research side, TIGHAR president Pat Thrasher and executive director Ric Gillespie will be meeting in June with French officials in Paris. This will be the first time that the two groups investigating the Nungesser-Coli disappearance on both sides of the Atlantic will have the opportunity to exchange information in person. Ric and Pat will also be meeting with the surviving members of the families of the crewmen. We'll report on those meetings in the summer issue.

In this section of TIGHAR TRACKS we publish rumors and legends just as they come to us. Individuals and organizations may engage TIGHAR's services to conduct investigations of these rumors on their behalf. For this reason references to specific locations are omitted. If you are interested in having TIGHAR assist in an investigation or conduct one for you, or if you have information which may help verify one of these rumors, please contact TIGHAR headquarters.

#### THE UNDERGROUND LUFTWAFFE

Rumor: At the end of WWII U.S. Forces discovered an underground hangar used to protect German fighters from air attack. Rather than deal with the many booby-traps left by the retreating Germans, the army simply flooded the hangar and sealed the entrance. Recently someone rediscovered its location and was able to get a glimpse of several fighters still inside.

Fact: Confidential.

Status: TIGHAR's services engaged. Investigation in process.

#### THE LOST ZEROES

Rumor: On a Pacific island is a recently discovered cave once used as a secret hangar by the Japanese. It contains a number of undamaged Zeroes.

Fact: The island was the site of one of the Pacific war's bloodiest assaults. U.S. efforts to take the island's air strip were plagued by Japanese forces defending from a network of caves left by pre-war mining operations. A post-war inventory of scrap is alleged to have included a detailed description of intact aircraft in a cave. The inventory has been lost.

Status: Available.

#### HELLCATS AND CATALINAS

Rumor: A Pacific island, uninhabited save for a U.S. weather station, still has a Quonset hut hangar containing six F6Fs and two PBYs.

Fact: The island is on the map. That's all we know so far.

Status: Available.

## OPERATION BARNSTORMER

Listed here are rare aircraft and components located by TIGHAR and known to be for sale. Write or call for further details.

- Wright J-6 and Hamilton Standard Ground Adjustable prop for Fairchild K-R 34.
- Wright R1820-34 for Brewster Buffalo.
- Beech AT-11 minus engines and instruments, stored inside, excellent condition.

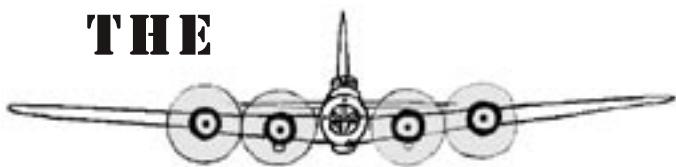
TIGHAR has several well-documented P-47 crash sites in the Eastern U.S. and is seeking interested Jug owners to fund expeditions to evaluate and recover components.

The following aircraft were listed in the winter newsletter. We are still accepting bids in an effort to persuade the owner to sell:

- OX-5 powered Curtiss Robin
- Wright J-5 powered Curtiss Robin
- Wright J-6 powered Fairchild K-R 34
- Original Curtiss Junior
- Aeronca C-3
- Two Waco UPF-7s
- Fairchild PT-19
- Fairchild PT-23

The aircraft are disassembled but generally complete.

# THE



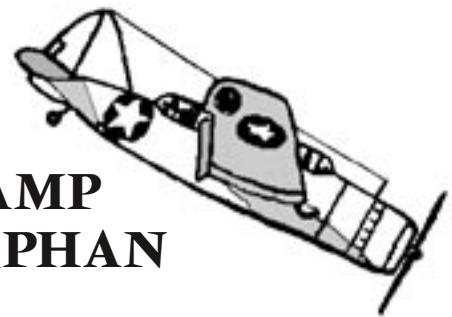
## AGAIAMBO E

In the last issue of TIGHAR TRACKS, we reported on the world's last restorable B-17E, resting in a swamp in New Guinea. Since then, our research has brought to light many interesting details and disproved some common misconceptions. We have confirmed that the aircraft serial number is 41-2446, not 41-2442 as previously reported. She came off the assembly line December 6, 1941, and went from Seattle to the Sacramento Air Depot on December 8--so, contrary to rumor, she was definitely not one of the Pearl Harbor B-17s. She actually arrived in Hawaii in January. In February she returned to Hamilton Field and the Depot, and then was flown back to Hawaii the same month. Immediately going to Australia, she participated in the first raid on Rabaul. During the fight her gunners downed two Japanese Zeros, but the aircraft took hits in her fuel tanks, leading to an out-of-fuel landing in the Agaiambo Swamp.

TIGHAR has been investigating the difficulties inherent in recovering an aircraft as large and as far way as the E. Two different problems come up: the normal one of current ownership, and the special one of transportation. The government of Papua New Guinea is happy to have anyone recover aircraft--at a price. The price is a restored aircraft for the New Guinea Air Museum of a type which actually served on or over New Guinea in WWII. (Anyone have a B-25 they're not using?) Transportation is a two-step process. First the aircraft must be recovered from the swamp. A heavy-lift helicopter appears to be the only answer. Naturally, the less disassembly required, the better--so, the bigger the helicopter, the better. Once deposited on its gear, probably on a barge on the nearest protected water, immediate preservation steps could be taken and the aircraft prepared for the second step: shipment home. Surface transportation seems to be the most desirable at this time. The chord of a B-17 wing is so wide at the root that it won't even fit in a C-5. Again, minimum disassembly in the field is the object.

The first step, of course, is an investigative expedition to confirm the aircraft's condition and work out the logistical problems. The step before the first step is raising the funds. We estimate it will cost \$20,000 to go out and evaluate the job. Members who can help us find sponsors for this project are urged to contact Ric Gillespie or Pat Thrasher at TIGHAR headquarters. Sincere thanks go out to Glen Speith at Boeing, and Mike Leister at Dover AFB for their invaluable research assistance.

## THE SWAMP ORPHAN



Last issue's Rumor Mill contained a brief piece entitled Buccaneer of the Dismal Swamp. The rumor was that a Brewster Buccaneer rests deep in the Great Dismal Swamp southwest of Norfolk, Virginia, largely intact but very difficult to reach. Our research has uncovered a fascinating story.

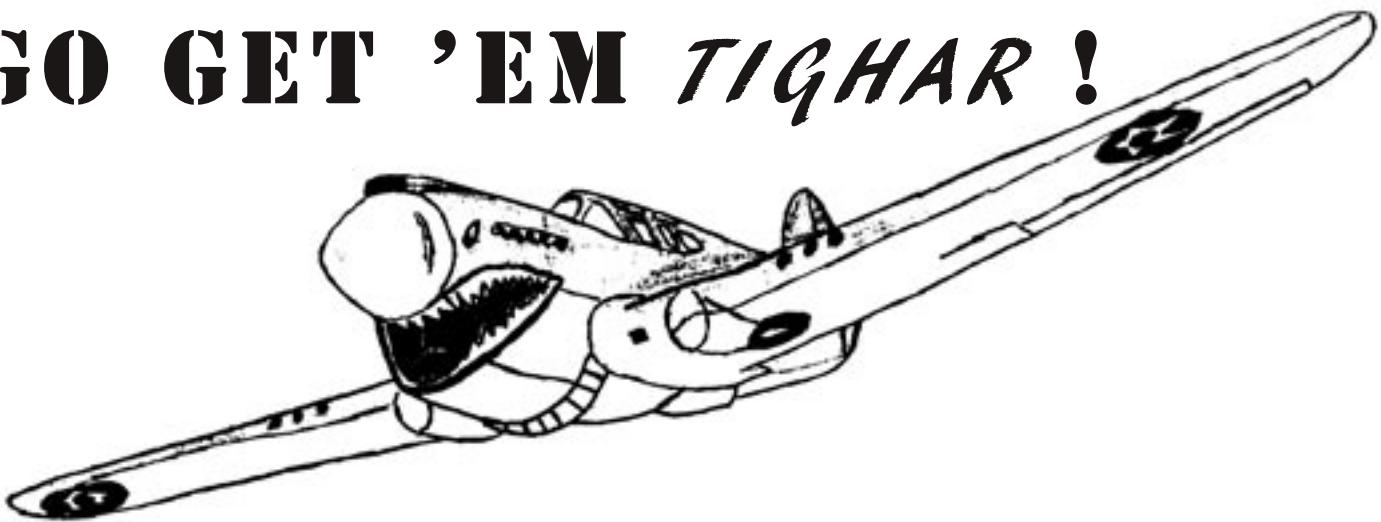
The Brewster Buccaneer, big brother to the stubby Buffalo fighter, never actually saw combat service in WWII. In 1940 the Dutch ordered 162 for its East Indian Air Force, but by the time they were built the colonies they were to protect were in Japanese hands. In 1943 these orphans, their instrument panels still inscribed in Dutch, went to the U.S. Marines at Cherry Point, North Carolina as trainers. At the end of the war all were either scrapped or dumped at sea. Today a group at Johnsville Naval Air Station is attempting to piece together at least one static airplane from scavenged parts.

The trail of our Swamp Orphan is twisted and overgrown, but enticing. The first revelation was that it's not in the Dismal Swamp at all but in the Holly Shelters Swamp north of Wilmington, North Carolina. We found a former Marine who had actually visited the wreck in 1970. At that time Marine helicopter units from Cherry Point used the aircraft as the goal in practice search missions. Don Aydelette was lowered onto the aircraft to cut back the underbrush and daub red paint on the wings and tail to make it more visible. The instrument panel had been stripped and the fabric control surfaces had rotted away, but apart from a bent wing tip the aircraft was intact. Don circled an area on the map where he recalled the airplane lay.

In April we conducted an aerial survey to try to locate the airplane. We discovered that today much of the area is under cultivation and other large sections have been burned over. Checking with Marine helicopter pilots at nearby New River MCAS we learned that an aircraft had been recovered from the swamp about three years ago for the Marine Air Museum at Quantico. Further research showed that aircraft to be an O-47, not a Buccaneer.

So--what happened to the Buccaneer? Was it plowed under? Burned over? Or is it still there, hiding beneath the underbrush? The next step is to find it on old aerial photography, pin point its location, and see what that exact point looks like today. As always, time and money are the limiting factors. Any members wishing to volunteer either for this project should let us know.

# GO GET 'EM *TIGHAR* !



## Expedition Update:

Project Midnight Ghost  
Northeastern Maine

Search expeditions to be mounted as soon as Air Force mission is flown. Anticipate fall of 1985.

Brewster Buccaneer  
North Carolina

Provided aerial survey confirms aircraft location, expect expedition in September.

Agaiambo E  
Papua New Guinea

Evaluative expedition awaiting funding.

*The International Group for*

**TIGHAR**

*Historic Aircraft Recovery*

**SUMMIT AIRPARK**  
**P.O. BOX 424**  
**MIDDLETOWN, DELAWARE**  
**19709 U.S.A.**