

Dissent Into the Maelstrom

You don't solve a fifty-five year old mystery that has turned into a mini-industry without generating some controversy, and the flak from the various Earhart camps is already so thick "you could get out and walk on it." Here's a sampler:

Elgen Long, a retired airline pilot who is convinced Earhart crashed at sea not far from Howland Island has, for many years, been trying to fund a deep water search. To refute TIGHAR's contention that Artifact 2-2-V-1 is from the Earhart plane, he enlisted two structural engineers and an Electra owner. They examined photographs of the artifact (willingly provided by TIGHAR), looked at the belly of a Lockheed 10A in Oakland, California, and decided that 2-2-V-1 "could not have come from a Lockheed 10."

The crux of the question is how NR16020 was repaired after Earhart's March 20, 1937 groundloop in Hawaii. Lockheed Engineering Orders describing the repairs include no drawings; and photos with sufficient detail apparently do not exist. Those repairs left the belly of Earhart's airplane different from all other Electras, but no one can say with certainty just how it looked. Retired Lockheed shop foreman Herman Stevens, who spent 37 years implementing such Engineering Orders, says that the rivet pattern on Artifact 2-2-V-1 conforms exactly to "the only way you could do it" according to the old and obsolete Lockheed Design Standards he was familiar with.

Frank Schelling, who is head of the P-3 Aircraft Structures Branch at the Naval Aviation Depot in Alameda, spoke to LIFE Magazine for Elgen Long. His opinions appear in a sidebar to the Earhart article in their April issue. Schelling's statements amount to "That's not the way I would do the repairs." (A point-by-point rebuttal is available from TIGHAR on request.) Long also got an opinion from a metallurgist on the way the aluminum failed. What he said agrees entirely with TIGHAR's and the NTSB's assessment.

Fred Goerner wrote *The Search For Amelia Earhart*, the 1966 best seller that portrayed Amelia and Fred as spies who died at the hands of the Japanese on Saipan. In a February Associated Press wire story he is quoted as saying, "Gillespie and TIGHAR are slicing the baloney a little thicker this year. Finding a piece of metal on one of those islands is no trick at all. ... It's just another step in the aggrandizement of Gillespie and the TIGHAR organization."

Air Classics magazine seems to be on some sort of campaign to discredit TIGHAR, and apparently we've got somebody so upset that they're willing to risk doing time for mail fraud to attack TIGHAR's credibility (see "Mailbox," p. 8, and "An Open Letter," pp. 10 & 11).

It's a shame to have to devote time and space to dealing with this kind of stuff but the alternative seems to be to either let falsehoods go unchallenged or just make sure we never upset anybody with the truth. If we did either of those things TIGHAR would be unworthy of your support.

