NAVAL ENGAGEMENT

On April 28, 1993, as part of the Annual Meeting and Seminar of the U.S. Naval Institute at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, a panel of six experts discussed and debated the fate of Amelia Earhart before a near-capacity audience at the Academy’s Mahan Hall auditorium. It had been agreed that at the conclusion of the panel discussion each panelist would go on record with an opinion as to whether or not TIGHAR’s conclusions regarding the Earhart flight are substantiated by the evidence gathered to date.

Because the volume of evidence to be dealt with was far too great to be presented in the two hours allotted, the panelists were provided with a variety of study materials well in advance of the event. TIGHAR sent each panelist the 7th Edition of the Earhart Project book and copies of the 31 historical documents and laboratory reports upon which our conclusions are based. They also received material sent by Colorado businessman William Prymak, president of the Amelia Earhart Society, who expressed “considerable dismay that the Naval Institute has afforded Mr. Richard Gillespie of TIGHAR yet another soapbox on which to expand and perpetuate his ridiculous and mendacious claims…. ” Following his rejection for the 1989 TIGHAR Earhart Project team, Mr. Prymak became convinced that Earhart was captured by the Japanese. In addition, each panelist received a packet of information from California author/historian Carol Osborne asserting “To date nothing relating to Amelia Earhart, Fred Noonan or the plane has been found.” Ms. Osborne’s biography of Earhart, published in 1987, endorses the conclusion that the flight ended at Nikumaroro. Dr. Crouch and Mr. Vaeth voted no, maintaining that Earhart had probably gone down at sea. All were in agreement that the panelists were being asked to make a judgement based upon inaccurate information. Without exactly waiting for orders, he steamed up to the podium and loosed a devastating salvo of documented fact. Crouch, it turned out, had loaded his guns with the poorly researched generalizations and misrepresentations provided by Carol Osborne – his earlier broadside had been fired with dud ammunition.

By this time the two hours were nearly up and moderator Jeanne Latter, an actress who does a one-woman Amelia Earhart show, started to ask for the panelists’ verdicts on TIGHAR’s evidence. No reply had been made to Tom Crouch’s fusillade. Was TIGHAR out of action – dead in the water? Gillespie interrupted with an objection that the panelists were being asked to make a judgement based upon inaccurate information. Without exactly waiting for orders, he steamed up to the podium and loosed a devastating salvo of documented fact. Crouch, it turned out, had loaded his guns with the poorly researched generalizations and misrepresentations provided by Carol Osborne – his earlier broadside had been fired with dud ammunition. Suddenly on the defensive and taking hits, Tom gallantly returned fire. “Come on, Ric! Those shoes could have come from any one of the Coast Guard guys.” “Sure. Any one of’em who wore women’s shoes” (laughter from the audience).

Eventually Ms. Latter regained control of the proceedings and asked the panelists for their votes. Was TIGHAR’s conclusion that Earhart and Noonan landed at Nikumaroro substantiated by the available evidence? Adm. Foley, Prof. Peattie, Nakajima-san, and, of course, Gillespie voted yes. Dr. Crouch and Mr. Vaeth voted no, maintaining that Earhart had probably gone down at sea. All were in agreement that there had been no spy mission and no conspiracy. Final score: Niku 4, Pacific Ocean 2, Japan 0.

All vessels engaged in this action returned safely to their respective ports.