postal rate for non-profit organizations – bulk rate third class. The savings are significant: eighteen cents for a *TIGHAR Tracks* and a few stuffers, as opposed to ninety-eight cents. The down side is it will take longer to reach you – possibly as much as three weeks if you live in a very small town in a very remote location. We have arranged for any mail we send out third class to be forwarded to you if you have moved; however, this would be a good time for you to check your mailing label and make sure we have the correct address. Also, if you know your nine-digit ZIP Code, we should have that – it really helps speed your important mail to you.

A few of our members will continue to get their mail via first class delivery. All members with APO or FPO addresses, or any member whom we know is actually residing outside of the U.S. in spite of a U.S. address, will find first class postage on their mail. This should help ease loss problems. Of course, non-U.S. mail must go first class, and we always send it air mail.

Please let us know if you are having problems getting your TIGHAR mail, or if any portion of your address is incorrect or missing. We want to reach you!

## Cole Palen Dies

*TIGHAR* notes with regret the death of Cole Palen, founder of the Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome, on December 15. His airshow, operating out of a grass field in Rhinebeck, New York, was a classic of its type – the evil “Black Baron” pitted against the sterling “Percy Goodfellow” in mock battles against a backdrop of World War I sets. In full costume, and using period cars as well as period aircraft (many replicas and a few extensively reconditioned planes), the show provided a taste of the past and a roaring good time for a generation of aficionados. He also established a museum on the site where he exhibited some rare and unusual items from aviation’s history. No news has been released as to the future of the air show or the museum.

Palen died in his sleep at his winter home in Florida. The cause of death was not immediately known. He was 68. Our condolences to his family and friends on this untimely loss.

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We had great hopes for this show. At last, an Earhart biography produced for public television in the terse, here’s-the-way-it-really-was, PBS style. Previewers gushed about how the program was “a neat bookend for last season’s documentary on Charles Lindbergh. Both are fine biographical portraits of enigmatic idols and both illuminate the aviator behind the myth” (Martin Zimmerman, *L.A. Times*, Oct. 27, 1993).

At the opening of the show series host David McCullough explained, in the measured cadences which have made him the very voice of reason to millions of PBS viewers, that the program would not attempt to deal with the various theories concerning Earhart’s disappearance, some of which are “highly bizarre and based on pure conjecture.” (Right on, Dave.) He then broke the news that Earhart was “not the best of pilots” (good, scratch one myth) and that she became so caught up in the need to set new records that “by the time of her final flight she was trapped.” Huh? And then it started. After a promising first 30 seconds the American Experience biography of Amelia Earhart stalled, spun and crashed in a jumble of falsehood, distortion and rumor-mongering.

It became clear early on that the producers had adopted a revisionist agenda about Earhart – that she was an exhibitionist of limited ability who became the victim of her own unlimited ambition – and were out to make their case unhindered by journalistic ethics. Case in point: We are shown a photo of Amelia standing on the roof of a tall building and told that she was kicked out of finishing school for walking on a window ledge in her nightgown. Not only is the story false but we can’t even find a reference for it as a rumor. Earhart voluntarily resigned from Philadelphia’s Ogontz School in the first weeks of 1918 and went to Toronto where she became a nurse’s aid treating men wounded in the war. Her decision, based on moral conviction, is well documented, well known, and says a great deal about who she was and how she thought. The photograph shown on
the American Experience was taken at least a year later when she was a premed student at Columbia University.

Such factual and visual misrepresentation is endemic in the program. The Fokker “Friendship” with Earhart as passenger struggles aloft from what we’re told is Boston Harbor but is really Trepassey Bay, Newfoundland. Then author Doris Rich (Amelia Earhart, a Biography, Smithsonian Press, 1989) tells us that the flight left from Nova Scotia (what the heck – all those Canadian places are alike, aren’t they?). For Earhart’s 1932 solo transatlantic hop we’re told that she flew from New Jersey to Ireland, while the film shows her takeoff from Harbour Grace, Newfoundland. No one mentions that Bernt Balchen flew her Vega the first thousand miles to Newfoundland, nor is it mentioned that her intended destination was Paris, not Ireland.

But it is in the program’s representation of Earhart’s final flight that history suffers most. Chronology is mangled for the sake of creating the desired story. We learn that in April and May of 1937, while the Electra was being repaired for the second world flight attempt, Earhart was preoccupied with supervising the building of her lavish house in Hollywood (which had been completed in 1935) and with campaigning for FDR (who had been re-elected the previous November). We’re told that when Earhart and Putnam break off their association with technical advisor Paul Mantz all of the planning responsibilities fall on George Putnam who “knows nothing about flying” (except for what he may have picked up in the last nine years of managing his wife’s other flights). Gore Vidal confides to us that, by this time, Amelia was “certainly sick of G.P.” He also tells of being present at the New York Tribune offices when his father and Putnam received a phone call from Amelia in Lae in which she said she was having “personnel problems” which Vidal says was a code that meant Noonan was drinking. (Putnam was in San Francisco, not New York, at the time. There was no telephone service to Lae, New Guinea. Gore Vidal was eleven years old in 1937.)

In the end, Earhart’s disappearance (the subject Dave said they weren’t going to get into) is laid to her “totally run down” condition (myth), a radio communications failure attributable solely to Earhart’s request of an inappropriate frequency (not true), and, besides, “celestial navigation wouldn’t help because the location of Howland Island on her charts was off by five and a half miles” (a truly ridiculous statement).

How does something like this happen? We know this much. Although Tom Crouch, Chairman of Aeronautics at the Smithsonian’s National Air & Space Museum is listed as the show’s primary historical consultant, he never saw the script nor did he see the show before it aired. His input consisted entirely of a couple of hours of conversation with the producers. During the research phase the show’s co-producer, Jane Feinberg, contacted TIGHAR for help. We provided copies of the 7th Edition of the Project Book and the Companion (free of charge, after Feinberg said their budget couldn’t handle the $150 contribution we ask from TIGHAR members). We also put her in touch with Russ Matthews (TIGHAR #0509CE) who did much of the film research for Untold Stories: The Search For Amelia Earhart. In short, there is no question that the American Experience had access to accurate, well-documented historical resources. They could have told the truth and they chose not to. Next time you sit down to watch a PBS documentary enjoy the show, but remember – it’s only television.

Many TIGHAR members recently noted a short press item announcing that “Papua New Guinea’s war museum will send a search team to a remote jungle to look for what may be the wreckage of the plane Amelia Earhart was flying when she disappeared.” The team will travel to East New Britain, an island northwest of the mainland, where an engine has been found. It was first discovered by an Australian Army patrol in 1944.” Worth checking out? We don’t think so, and our reasons for discounting what others apparently see as a promising lead may provide some insight into how TIGHAR decides when and when not to mount an expedition.

First, as usual, the media have the facts wrong. There is no war museum in Papua New Guinea. The museum referred to is probably the Modern History Branch of the National Museum and Art Gallery. East New Britain is, of course, not an island but rather a district on the large island of New Britain. The engine was found not in 1944 but on April 17, 1945. The newspaper story gives the impression that the engine or wreckage has been seen since then. That is not the case.

TIGHAR has been aware of this story since May of 1991 when its originator, Donald A. Angwin of Perth, Australia, first wrote to us. We interviewed Mr. Angwin by phone on May 10, 1991. According to Mr. Angwin, he was one of a patrol of 20 soldiers from D Company, 11th Australian Infantry Battalion, which departed Kalai Mission at Wide Bay, New Britain on the morning of 15 April 1945. The patrol area was on the eastern tip of New Britain which is dominated by the port of Rabaul, a major Japanese base throughout the war. At approximately 1300 hours on the third day, the patrol came across a large aircraft engine imbedded in the mud of the jungle floor. Lt. Kenneth Backhouse...