

LOCKHEEDS, LOGOS, AND LEGS

by Frank C. Lombardo, TIGHAR #1806
Ocala, Florida

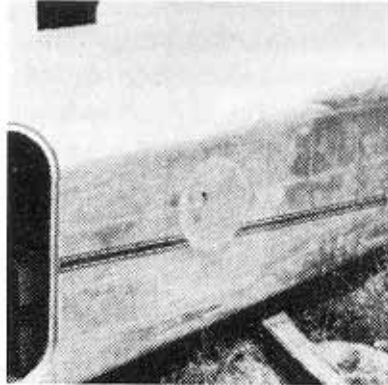


IN THE MARCH 1994 issue of *Air Classics* magazine, there appears on page nine a photo of a stricken Lockheed L12A, with accompanying comment by Mr. Joe Gervais. Some arbitrary statements are made by the writer which should have been researched more thoroughly before unloading them on the public. Gervais says, “The incident in the photo occurred about two weeks before [Amelia Earhart’s] departure for Miami, Florida.” He also sees Amelia’s pant leg departing from the bottom left corner of the photo, inferring her presence from an assumption that the man standing in that corner is George Putnam. The entire photo, uncropped, also appears in the March 1967 issue of *Air Classics* with the caption, “Amelia Earhart escaped injury in this pile-up off the end of Lockheed’s runway at Burbank, Calif. Shortly after this photo was made, Earhart and Noonan disappeared on their Round the World flight in the mid-Pacific, May 20—July 3, 1937.”



The crashed Lockheed 12. Note “mystery man” with his back to the camera at bottom left, and a leg disappearing from view beside him.

NOTICE IN THE PICTURE that there has been an attempt by the developer to airbrush or otherwise obscure something that was painted on the side of the fuselage aft of the cabin door. That “something” was a logo with the name “Rosalie” painted inside a circle. This aircraft (NC17342) was used in a 1937 MGM



Detail of rubbed-out logo. The erasure was clearly made during the developing process, as the brush marks do not follow the curvature of the aircraft.

motion picture called *Rosalie*. The film had a total production time of 69 days. Shooting started in New York on August 30th, 1937,¹ and moved to Burbank, California, after September 3rd, 1937.² The production was finished on November 6th, 1937.³ This means that the aircraft with its freshly painted logo (right) had to be available for filming in Burbank between September 3rd and November 6th, sixty-five days or more after Amelia’s disappearance. In the film, the registration number of the L12A can clearly be seen as NC17342, not X17342.

Other clues which help narrow the window of time in which this photo could have been taken can be found in the clothing of the people. Notice the preponderance of jackets, sweaters, and long sleeved shirts and the long coat

worn by the figure next to the very tall man. Only one person in the photo appears to be wearing summer-type clothing. This would tend to indicate that the day was cooler rather than warmer. All observations taken by weather station WBAS at Union Air Terminal for the year 1937 show that the average coldest mid-day temperatures (65.5°) were in November and December. In May the average midday temperatures were at 74.3°, not really comfortable for heavy coats and winter-type police uniforms. The average daytime temperatures in September and October varied in the 85-90° range.⁴

The weather and the presence of the film logo give us a not-earlier-than date for the photo of November 6, 1937.

In the March 1994 *Air Classics* mention of this photo, the writer suggests that this was a ground loop accident. Based on the photograph, a ground loop is unlikely. Ground loops usually occur



This is a still shot from the film Rosalie on a television screen, but it still clearly shows the “Rosalie” logo. Elsewhere in the film the tail number of the aircraft is clearly visible. Photo provided by Frank Lombardo.

¹ *The Hollywood Reporter*, August 30, 1937.

² *The Hollywood Reporter*, September 3, 1937.

³ *The American Film Institute Catalog*, p. 1830; entry #F3.3834.

⁴ Original monthly record of six-hourly observations at Burbank, California, months of May - December, 1937.

off some portion of the runway. This ship came through the chain link fence at the airport boundary almost directly in line with and beyond the runway. It hit, and dragged a post (now lying under the aircraft) with its right wing, which turned the aircraft almost parallel with the dirt road. The aircraft was still rolling on its wheels, with the port propeller turning but not pulling power, when it came to rest. There are no signs of ruts, trenches, or other ground scars behind or beside the aircraft before impact with the mound of dirt it is resting against. The gear apparently collapsed on impact with the mound. The most likely accident scenario to produce this result is brake failure on landing or engine failure/aborted takeoff.

The film *Flying Blind*, filmed at the same airport (Burbank) in 1941, shows that surrounding conditions on the approach to the airport have not changed materially from the background visible in the photograph of the Lockheed 12. One might therefore speculate that this accident could have occurred as late as 1941, although there is no direct evidence to indicate that this in fact did happen. However, late 1941 can reasonably serve as a closing bracket on possible dates for this photo, as the war changed so much so quickly shortly thereafter.

The ownership and use of this aircraft probably account for the X registration shown in the photo. The Lang family owned Las Vegas Gas and Lang Transportation. Their businesses had addresses in both Los Angeles and Las Vegas. Lockheed 12A, c/n 1216, was purchased by Lang Transportation in late 1936.⁵ Las Vegas Gas at that time was experiment-

ing with a device shaped like a torpedo that was tethered behind and below an aircraft in flight. It contained super-sensitive instruments that determined the conditions of the strata of varying terrain for future oil and gas exploration. The external instrument mount would have required an Experimental designation.⁶

There is no record nor any suggestion that George Putnam was involved in any way with the film *Rosalie*, the Langs, or any of their commercial ventures. In the months and years immediately following the disappearance of AE, Putnam was in financial difficulties, and was in no position to invest in, or involve himself in, capital-intensive commercial operations. There is nothing that would place him at Burbank airport, at the site of a crashed Lockheed 12, months if not years after Earhart's disappearance – nothing but the over-active imagination of a writer who lets speculation run ahead of documentation.



⁶ Corporate documents for Las Vegas Gas Co., archived by the State of Nevada.

⁵ René J. Francillon, *Lockheed Aircraft Since 1913*. Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1982, p. 500.

TIGHAR welcomes submissions to *TIGHAR Tracks* from members. Articles should be at a minimum typed, preferably on disc (Mac or IBM, M/S Word preferred, but any ASCII text format will do; please include paper output as well). If typed, please double space. Articles should be factual, footnoted, and accompanied by a complete bibliography. All facts and references will be checked, so no fudging. Photographs are a big plus. Photos must be available for reproduction – no copyright materials, please, unless you own the copyright. Photos will be returned. Payment is a byline. Call TIGHAR for further information or to suggest article ideas.

—The Editors