

# THE NOONAN PROJECT



Several separate threads of investigation by TIGHAR members around the U.S. and around the world have come together to focus on the other aviation pioneer who mysteriously disappeared over the Central Pacific on July 2, 1937. Here's an overview of the latest results.

## Chasing the Bones

In February, Kenton Spading (TIGHAR #1382CE) succeeded in tracking down a 1941 report by the principal of the Central Medical School in Suva, Fiji which sheds more light on the bones found on Nikumaroro the previous year. Contrary to the initial opinion expressed by Dr. Lindsey Isaac that the individual was an elderly Polynesian (see *TIGHAR Tracks* Vol. 13, Nos. 2&3, "The Tarawa File"), Dr. D.

W. Hoodless concluded that the bones were those of a middle-aged male of European or mixed-race extraction. That description is consistent with Fred Noonan. However, he also felt that the subject was of relatively short, stocky build. Noonan was tall and thin. Fortunately, Dr. Hoodless included with his report the notes and measurements upon which he based his conclusions. These are being re-examined by forensic anthropologist Dr. Karen Ramey Burns (TIGHAR #2071) and the measurements are being applied to revised formulae which may confirm or contradict Dr. Hoodless's findings.

Of course, our first concern is to find out whether the bones may still exist. The report suggested that they may have gone to the University of Sydney, but inquiries there by Australian TIGHAR David Kelly (#2092) have turned up no indication that that happened. Kenton Spading is looking into the possibility that they were sent to England and

Report on portion of a human skeleton.

I have today examined a collection of bones forming part of a human skeleton. These bones were delivered to me in a closed wooden box by Mr. P. D. Macdonald of the Western Pacific High Commission.

2...The bones included:- (1) a skull with the right zygoma and malar bones broken off; (2) mandible with only four teeth in position; (3) part of the right scapula; (4) the first thoracic vertebra; (5) portion of a rib (? 2nd right rib); (6) left humerus; (7) right radius; (8) right innominate bone; (9) right femur; (10) left femur; (11) right tibia; (12) right fibula; and (13) the right scaphoid bone of the foot.

3...From this list it is seen that less than half of the total skeleton is available for examination.

4...All these bones are very weather-beaten and have been exposed to the open air for a considerable time. Except in one or two small areas all traces of muscular attachments and the various ridges and prominences have been obliterated.

5...By taking measurements of the length of the femur, tibia and the humerus I estimate that these bones belonged to a skeleton of total height of 5 feet 5 1/2 inches approximately.

6...From the half sub-pubic angle of the right innominate bone, the "set" of the two femora, and the ratio of the circumferences of the long bones to their individual lengths it may be definitely stated that the skeleton is that of a MALE.

7...Owing to the weather-beaten condition of all the bones it is impossible to be dogmatic in regard to the age of the person at the time of death, but I am of the opinion that he was not less than 45 years of age and that probably he was older: say between 45 and 55 years.

8...I am not prepared to give an opinion on the race or nationality of this skeleton, except to state that it is probably not that of a pure South Sea Islander—Micronesian or Polynesian. It could be that of a short, stocky, muscular European, or even a half-caste, or person of mixed European descent.

9...If further details are necessary I am prepared to take detailed and exact measurements of the principal bones in this collection, and to work out the various indices (e.g. the platymeric index for the femur or the cneimic index for the tibia) but if such a detailed report is required the obvious course to adopt would be to submit these bones to the Anthropological Dept of the Sydney University where Professor Elkin would be only too pleased to make a further report.

*L. W. Hoodless*  
Principal,  
Central Medical School  
Suva.

4th April, 1941.

1	Orbital width	
2	Orbital height	38.5mm
	Orbital index = $\frac{OH \times 100}{OW}$	$\frac{38.5}{33.5} = 87.0$
		This indicates a European - (Polynesians are about 87.0)
3	Skull length	192 mm
4	Breadth	137 mm
	Cephalic index = $\frac{B \times 100}{L}$	$\frac{137}{192} = 71.3$
		This indicates also a European
5	Karl Pearson's formula for stature	
	$S = 70.641 + 2.804 \times H$	
	Number is 324	
6	$S = 78.64 + 2.376 \times T$	∴ height is 163.406 cm = 5 ft 4.3 in
	Number is 372	
7	$S = 89.225 + 3.271 \times R$	∴ height is 167.051 cm = 5 ft 5.7 in
	Number is 345	
	Average of these three measurements	∴ height is 170.064 = 5 ft 6.5 in
		∴ 5 ft 5.5 inches

*L. W. Hoodless*  
4th April 1941

may be among the records of the Western Pacific High Commission. Through dogged research, Kristin Tague (TIGHAR 0905CE) has learned that although the Central Medical School once had “bones galore” which were used in the teaching of anatomy, a change to “problem-based learning” in 1991 prompted a house cleaning. The only bones there now are artificial. Kris is trying to determine how and where the disposal of the bones took place.

## Sons and Daughters of Eve

Should we be so fortunate as to eventually relocate the bones found on Nikumaroro in 1940, or find more which may still be there, we’ll need samples of mitochondrial DNA from both the Earhart and Noonan families so that comparisons can be made. We must have mitochondrial DNA because that is the only kind expected to have survived in 61 year-old bones. This hardy form of DNA is passed exclusively through the female because the male’s mtDNA resides in the tail of the sperm which, of course, never enters the egg. That means we need living, female line relatives of both Fred and AE. Amelia is no problem. Her sister’s daughter could be a source.

Fred is a problem. At present we know of no living relative except an alleged male cousin. Surprisingly little documentable information is available on Frederick J. Noonan and most of the brief biographical sketches of him in books about Earhart are little more than folklore. Rising to the challenge, several subscribers to TIGHAR’s on-line Amelia Earhart Search Forum have begun trying to track down a source of mtDNA for Fred. Sandy Campbell (TIGHAR #2110) leads a growing research group which includes Jackie Ferrari (TIGHAR #2091), Don Jordan (TIGHAR #2109), Jerry Hamilton (TIGHAR #2128), Dick Pingrey (TIGHAR #0908C), and Fred Madio (TIGHAR #2042). Their efforts necessarily involve filling in the many blanks in our knowledge of the largely neglected and often maligned other half of the 1937 world flight team. The information they are uncovering presents a rather different picture from the Noonan of legend.

## The Real Fred Noonan

It has traditionally been held that Frederick J. Noonan was born in Chicago in 1894, but if that is true, the fact somehow escaped the notice of the 1900 U.S. Census. Sandy Campbell found a Fred Noonan born in Warren Co., Illinois in 1899, but his middle initial was C. A birth certificate uncovered by Jackie Ferrari of Fifeshire, Scotland now leads us to suspect that Earhart’s navigator is the Frederick Joseph Noonan born July 14, 1891 in Norwich,

England, to Joseph and Clara Greenfield Noonan. Joe Noonan was born in Roscommon, Ireland.

The Noonan Project team has also established that Fred married his first wife, Josie M. Sullivan, on July 11, 1927 in Jackson, Mississippi and was divorced from her in Juarez, Mexico on March 3, 1937. That’s just ten days before it was first announced that he had joined Earhart’s team for the first world flight attempt which departed on March 17, 1937. That endeavor ended on March 20th with the crackup at Luke Field in Hawaii. On March 27th, two days after the world flight team had arrived back in California aboard the Matson liner S.S. *Malolo*, Fred married Mary Beatrice Martinelli (née Passadori) in Yuma, Arizona.

No contemporaneous source has yet been found to support allegations that Fred Noonan had a drinking problem. Stories abound, but there is no hard evidence. No letter, diary or memorandum has surfaced to explain Fred’s departure from his illustrious career at Pan American, or even pin down the date, which seems to have been sometime in early 1937. On April 4th, Fred and Mary Bea were involved in a head-on collision car accident near Fresno. Fred skinned his hand, Mary Bea was cut on the knee and scalp, and the driver of the other car and the infant with her were “cut and bruised but not seriously hurt” according to the April 5, 1937 *Oakland Tribune*. Fred was cited for driving in the wrong lane, but there was no mention of alcohol. In his 1966 best-seller, *The Search For Amelia Earhart*, Fred Goerner alleges that “a notation at the bottom of the ticket said: No injuries. Driver had been drinking.” But there were injuries. Mary Bea, in fact, spent some time in the hospital. Did Goerner see the notation or only hear about it? Does it still exist?

The known events in Fred Noonan’s life in March of 1937 certainly invite speculation. Having recently left a distinguished position with Pan American, he ends a 10 year marriage and signs on with the Earhart



Burbank, May 20, 1937. The unpublicized departure of the second world flight attempt. AE is in conference near the tail of the airplane. Fred unloads the trunk of his car while Mary Bea looks on. She will never see him again. Carter-Johnson Collection.

world flight. When that enterprise ends in disaster, he remarries in what must have been a spur-of-the-moment wedding. This is not the happy-go-lucky, boozy Irishman of the Earhart myth. There is much more we need to learn about Mr. Noonan.

## The Pensacola Ludolph

Yet another avenue of inquiry provides a possible link between Noonan and Nikumaroro. Among the objects found with the bones in 1940 was a sextant box. In a telegram dated 23 September 1940 (see *TIGHAR Tracks* Vol. 13, Nos. 2&3, "The Tarawa File") it is described this way:

Sextant box has two numbers on it. 3500 (stencilled) and 1542—sextant being old fashioned and probably painted with black enamel.

Hoping that the numbers and description might provide a clue to the box's origin, researchers and sextant experts in the U.S. (Peter Ifland, TIGHAR #2058), Great Britain (David Charlwood, TIGHAR #1978) and Europe (Lou Schoonbrood, TIGHAR #1198) collectively examined something over 500 sextants and boxes in various collections. No luck. Although virtually all sextants came in protective boxes, none of those examined had numbers stencilled or written on them. Military instruments often have a small metal plaque nailed or screwed to the box lid on which numbers are inscribed. Many sextants, both civilian and military, are painted with black enamel. It looked like the sextant box was a dead end.

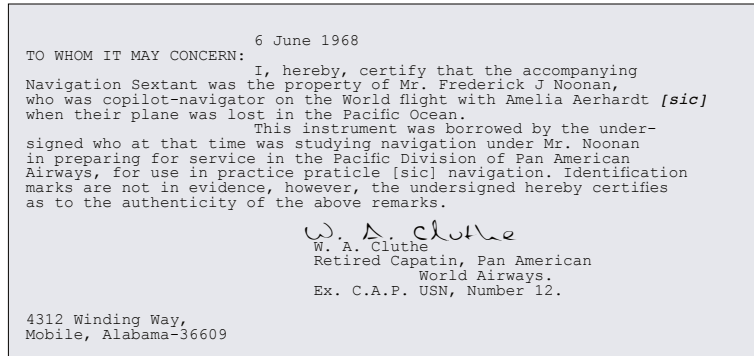
Help came from an unexpected quarter. After reading about the sextant box in *TIGHAR Tracks*, officials at the National Museum of Naval Aviation in Pensacola, Florida contacted us to say that they have in their collection an "old fashioned" sextant, painted in black enamel, and manufactured in 1919 by W. Ludolph GmbH of Bremerhaven, Germany. Some numbers are hand-written on its wooden box. On the bottom is 3547 under which is written 173. On the front face is 116 in a similar style.

Although the numbers are hand-written rather than stencilled, this is the first box we have seen with any numbers at all on the outside, and the 3547 seems

to resonate nicely with the 3500 on the Nikumaroro box.

But what is most interesting is the certification which accompanies the instrument:

Oddly, the numbers on the box bear no apparent relationship to the serial number on the instrument (XIX 1090). Are they, perhaps, part of some kind of



inventory system? Are the sextant boxes of Pensacola and Nikumaroro both part of that system? Ludolph sextants were highly prized as among the finest in the world, but this is not an aviation instrument. Why would Noonan, a professional air navigator, have an "old fashioned" nautical sextant? Fred himself provides the answer in a letter to Commander P. V. H. Weems of the Weems School of Navigation. In describing the techniques he used to navigate the 1935 Pan Am China Clipper flight, Noonan says,

"Two sextants were carried. A Pioneer bubble octant and a mariner's sextant. The former was used for all sights; the latter as a preventer."

Did Fred Noonan, the master navigator, perhaps have a collection of fine nautical sextants? If not, how likely is it that he loaned his only sextant—a beautiful Ludolph—to a student and didn't bother to get it back when he left Pan Am? Could the sextant box found on Nikumaroro in 1940 have been that of Noonan's "preventer"? And what happened to the sextant itself? Is it still somewhere on Nikumaroro? These are questions which, until a few months ago, we didn't even know enough to ask. Further research may provide answers and, just as important, more questions.



The Pensacola  
Ludolph box.

