In the weeks leading up to the expedition there has been a veritable feeding frenzy of media attention focused on TIGHAR, the Space Imaging satellite photo, and the possibility that the Earhart mystery may be about to be solved. That possibility, of course, is just as real as it has been prior to each of TIGHAR’s previous five trips to the island. We couldn’t do all we have to do to put together one of these expeditions if we didn’t believe we have a shot at finding that elusive “smoking gun” that will be accepted as conclusive proof that the lost Earhart/Noonan flight ended at Nikumaroro. But, hope as we might for a dramatic discovery, we also recognize that it is far more likely that nothing of the sort will happen.

Archeology is a plodding science, once described in a memorable Calvin & Hobbes comic strip as “the most mind numbing job on the planet.” TIGHAR’s discoveries about the disappearance of Amelia Earhart and Fred Noonan—and there have been many—have not come in the form of Indiana Jones style partings of the bushes but in quiet moments of study and analysis.

We’ll consider the expedition to be a success if we are able to gather the information needed to test the hypotheses we have formulated, regardless of whether the results ultimately prove to be positive or negative. We’ll feel like we’ve done a good job if we can do that without hurting anyone. We’ll consider ourselves extremely fortunate if we come back from this expedition with a few promising bits and pieces of this and that which, when subjected to further research and testing, move us a few more steps closer to the answer to what really happened out there. But, as always, we’ll be hoping for that whiff of gunsmoke.

“The Treasure Map” article in the June issue of TIGHAR Tracks ended with an assurance that “...even if someone with lots of money and no ethics were convinced that we finally had the answer (to the whereabouts of the Earhart wreckage), it would be extremely difficult to get there ahead of us.” True enough, but what if a lowly ocean-going salvage tug just happened to be trying to recover a grounded fishing boat at McKean Island 60 miles away, and what if the captain saw our “Treasure Map” article (which is also posted on the TIGHAR website), and what if the captain read that comment and said to himself “We’ll just see about that.”

Captain Jürgen Ruh has neither a lot of money nor does he seem to be at all unethical, but he does enjoy a challenge and he is, after all, a salvager by trade. Having had no luck with the fishing boat at McKean Island he stopped by Nikumaroro on his way home and put three divers in the water for about 30 minutes along the reef edge north of the shipwreck. They didn’t find anything but they did recover a piece of metal debris from up on the reef flat. Jürgen emailed a photo of the piece to us along with a description of what they had done, where they had looked, and what they had found and not found. We, of course, expressed our regret that he had chosen to interfere with an archaeological site and pointed out that, had he actually found and recovered aircraft wreckage, important information would unquestionably have been lost.

In the end, no harm was done. The recovered object is quite obviously a piece of shipwreck debris and Jürgen, having made his point, is hoping that we’ll call on him should we ever need the capabilities of a salvage tug—but the incident does point up how complete the worldwide communications revolution has been and teaches us not to make assumptions about the remoteness of Nikumaroro.

Jürgen’s fruitless underwater inspection of

---

“In the moment that the connection is made, in that synaptic spasm when the thought drives through the red fuse, is our keenest pleasure.”

—Thomas Harris
the reef edge north of the shipwreck would seem to reduce the possibility that there is anything of interest present. On the other hand, he didn’t find anything that explains the anomaly we see in the satellite photo and our search plan for the expedition remains unchanged. We may not find anything either, but we’ll look harder than he did.

The piece of iron or steel debris recovered by the salvage tug is about 2.6 meters (8.5 feet) long and about .88 meters (2.8 feet) wide. It’s probably a piece of topside bulwark plating from the S.S. Norwich City. It is certainly not aircraft wreckage. Sketch courtesy White, Young & Williams, Cairns, Australia.

Order Form For Grid Map

Full color, 18 x 24 inches, featuring the number/letter grid superimposed on the satellite photo taken by Spacelming. A deal at $25 (add $5 for airmail postage overseas), sent in a tube. Suitable for framing or the refrigerator door. All reports from the island will be keyed to this map, and published daily on TIGHAR’s website. The reports will also be published for the entire membership as the primary subject of September’s TIGHAR Tracks. Order yours today and don’t miss a thing!

Name

Address

Daytime Telephone Email

VISA or MasterCard # Expiration Date

Check enclosed

Send to: TIGHAR · 2812 Fawkes Dr · Wilmington, DE · 19808 · USA or fax a credit card order to (302) 994-7945