

A New Search Effort Begins

In 1988, **The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery (TIGHAR)** opened its own investigation into the Earhart mystery. TIGHAR's hypothesis was that stronger than normal winds had caused Earhart's plane to drift off course so that it ended up south of Howland Island. When the island was not sighted visually, and when radio bearings could not be obtained from the *Itasca*, Earhart and Noonan had turned southeast, flying on a course of 157 degrees towards the Phoenix Island Group, hence the "We are on the line 157 337" message received during Earhart's last transmission.

In this hypothesis, Earhart and Noonan eventually reached Gardner Island, made a forced landing on its smooth, flat coral reef, and after attempting to send radio distress calls, the two waded ashore and survived for a time as castaways. Left unprotected on the reef, her plane was eventually broken up by wave action and swept out into deep water.

To prove this hypothesis TIGHAR's network of volunteer investigators began seeking and re-examing historical records to look for facts that would support a Gardner Island landing. Among the documents they eventually uncovered were the Freidell and Lambrecht reports of the air search of Gardner Island, the radio logs of the *Itasca*; Betty Klenck's notebook; transcripts of Gallagher's radio messages about finding the bones on Gardner Island, and Dr.

Hoodless' official report with detailed measurements of the skull and bones that Gallagher had found.

TIGHAR researchers journeyed to Suva in an attempt to locate the partial skeleton and other artifacts recovered on Gardner Island, but, as of this writing, the whereabouts of these items remains unknown. TIGHAR also sponsored several scientific expeditions to Gardner/Nikumaroro Island to search for identifiable pieces of Earhart's plane and for personal items that can be linked to Earhart and Noonan.

These expeditions conducted archaeological surveys in a manner similar to those being conducted at military crash sites in Vietnam to locate and identify the remains of U.S. aircrews still officially listed as "Missing in Action." While a number of artifacts have been recovered, none of these have proven to be the "smoking gun" needed to resolve the Earhart mystery once and for all. However, more expeditions are planned and archival research is on-going. With each new piece of information that comes to light, we move that much closer to learning what really happened to the world's most famous aviatrix and her navigator on July 2, 1937.

Suggested Reading

By far, the best account of the radio messages associated with the Earhart mystery is contained in *Finding Amelia – the True Story of the Earhart Disappearance* by Ric Gillespie and published in 2006 by the Naval Institute Press,

Annapolis, Md. In addition to a well-researched, well-written text, the book comes with a DVD containing over 5,000 historical messages, telegrams, letters, maps, radio log pages, relevant pages from Betty's notebook, etc.

Those interested in learning more about the scientific search methods that are being used to help solve the Earhart mystery should read *Amelia Earhart's Shoes*, by Thomas King, Randall Jacobson, Karen Burns and Kenton Spading, and published 2004 by Altamira Press.

Additional articles about Amelia Earhart can be found on-line at TIGHAR's *Earhart Project* website:

<http://www.tighar.org/Projects/Earhart/AEdescr.html>

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Using scientific methodology, an ongoing series of archaeological surveys is being conducted on Nikumaroro Island in search of evidence that Earhart and Noonan survived there for a time as castaways.