



## **WHO TOOK THE ELECTRA?**

**By Bob Wheeler & Fred Nicely**

The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery (TIGHAR) is planning an expedition to Nikumaroro, dubbed Niku VII. We wish them much success and sincerely hope they find the Electra and clear up this 75 year old mystery. We would be less than honest if we didn't add that we don't think they will.

Somewhere along the line circumstantial evidence pointed to Amelia and Fred's presence on Gardner Island. Evidence also determined they had no way of getting off the island under their own power. Consequently, since the aircraft wasn't discovered on July 9, 1937 by the *USS Colorado's* search planes, TIGHAR reached the conclusion that **THEY MUST HAVE DIED THERE AND THE AIRCRAFT WAS WASHED OFF THE REEF INTO DEEP WATER.**

The possibility that they were taken from the island has been "debunked." We put debunked in quotes for a good reason. TIGHAR's website presents a research bulletin by Bob Brandenburg, on June 22, 2007 titled "Bombing the Bridge to the Marshalls." Brandenburg goes to great length to prove that the assumptions made by Charles N. Hill in an unpublished 1996 paper titled *RIDGE TO THE MARSHALLS: The Earhart Flight to the Rising Sun* are false. Hill contends that she ditched her aircraft near the Marshall Islands and sent radio signals from her floating plane for several days afterward. He also states that the signals received by Pan Am in Hawaii were in error by 35.2 degrees because their receivers weren't calibrated in the southwest sector.

### **From the Marshalls to Gardner Island**

We applaud Brandenburg's effort! Figuratively speaking, he did bomb the bridge to the Marshalls by logically disproving Hill's conjectures. We question the use of his paper by TIGHAR. Richard Gillespie, Executive Director of TIGHAR, is using it to disprove the theory that the Japanese (or anyone else) kidnapped Amelia, Fred and the Electra.

Brandenburg only presented evidence to disprove the theory that she landed in the Marshalls. We agree with that assumption whole-heartedly. Amelia didn't land in the Marshalls. The closest island in the Marshalls to her last assumed position is over 900 miles west northwest. If she had decided to turn around and fly back west the Gilberts (just over 600 miles away) would have been the most logical choice. Yet TIGHAR hasn't presented even a plausible explanation as to why she couldn't have been secretly taken from Gardner Island. As a matter of fact, they don't even entertain the remote possibility in any of their presentations.

We will take a page from Brandenburg's dissertation and look at the facts. Oops, there are none! No real facts that show she landed on Gardner Island. But, what we do have is a great deal of excellent detective work, thanks to TIGHAR. And now we have a very supportable theory that she did LAND on Gardner Island and sent radio signals for four or five days *after* she LANDED – and not ditched the Electra. We are in full agreement with TIGHAR up to and including the early morning of the 7<sup>th</sup> of July. There have been extensive studies on the Post Loss radio signals received by different people around the world and it seems that she did send radio messages until the early morning of the July 7<sup>th</sup>. She couldn't have transmitted for any length of time if she had been floating as she had to have made a wheels-down landing.

The search planes from the *USS Colorado* arrived at between 8:00 and 9:00 a.m. local time (1930 to 2030 GMT). In the words of the senior aviator on the mission, LT John O. Lambrecht, "Here, signs of recent habitation were clearly visible but repeated circling and zooming failed to elicit any answering wave from possible inhabitants and it was finally taken for granted none were there." TIGHAR contends that it was because they were already dead and couldn't respond. That is entirely possible, BUT another possibility also exists.

### **Fear of muddying the waters**

They simply weren't there, as Lambrecht stated. Why isn't this equally logical possibility entertained? We can only guess that someone doesn't want to muddy the waters. The person who donated money for Niku I thru VII might not have donated to the cause if there were another equally plausible theory: there were no bodies or a Lockheed 10E Electra to be found at Nikumaroro Island!

TIGHAR's contention is that all documents dealing with the Earhart mystery have been made available to the public. They say there is no official admission of a conspiracy or cover-up, which we grant is true. We need only point to the CIA's Project *MK Ultra*. It was a project the CIA ran from the early 50's till the late 60's. It was an illegal human experimentation program to study methods of mind control. CIA Director Richard Helms ordered all *MK Ultra* documents destroyed in 1973.

The Rockefeller and Church Investigations had to rely on sworn testimony and a few documents that slipped through the cracks and weren't destroyed. Later, in 1977, 20,000 documents were uncovered and the case reopened. This was an operation involving large numbers of people and thousands of documents – and they almost got away with the cover-up. If Earhart and Noonan were, and we only say IF THEY WERE, involved in a secret mission it would have been known to a very small number of people and most likely there wouldn't have been much in writing. Many individuals have come forward with testimony relating to Amelia and Fred's disappearance and it has been set aside as unsupportable. The

Rockefeller and Church investigations, which uncovered the *MK Ultra* project, relied heavily on sworn testimony.

We can be fairly certain that the *Electra* was landed on a dry reef near the wrecked freighter *SS Norwich City*. From a study of the tide tables presented on TIGHAR's Website we also see that the maximum tide height for the island was 47 to 57 inches on July 7<sup>th</sup> at 5:47 a.m. to 7:07 a.m. local time at Gardner. The last transmission that was likely sent by *Amelia* was heard at 1:00 a.m. on the morning of July 7<sup>th</sup>. The *Electra* had sustained high tides twice a day in the 4 to 5 foot range from 1:30 p.m. the day of their arrival until the search planes from the *USS Colorado* arrived. Deck logs of ships involved in the search show no signs of heavy seas or a storm in the vicinity from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> of July. Only rain squalls were noted in the area. Assuming the *Electra's* fuel tanks were completely empty, the aircraft would have weighed approximately 7650 pounds. With the fuel tanks empty the aircraft could have weighed up to 9600 pounds and still floated like a cork. Why then did it suddenly roll or get swept over the edge of the reef and sank out of sight of the search planes? If it were swept off the reef it had to have floated off, and if it floated off, how did it get so far away from the island in two days?

The search planes from the *USS Colorado* arrived at the island, according to TIGHAR, at high tide. Yet a review of their own tide tables shows the tide was between five and nine inches. An observation reported by Lambrecht in his narrative notes, "At the western end of the island a tramp steamer (of about 4000 tons) bore mute evidence of unlighted and poorly charted 'Rocks and Shoals'. She lay high and almost dry head onto the coral beach with her back broken in two places." What did he mean by almost dry? It is very difficult to imagine that a 57 inch rise in the tide would float the *Electra* off the reef. If the aircraft did float off the reef it would have been held at the reef's edge until the tide went out and then the current would have carried it less than 20 miles ( half a mile an hour for 39 hours) west southwest to southwest of the island.

It is also difficult to imagine that the three search planes wouldn't have spotted a floating plane 20 miles from the island, especially since the visibility on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July was 40 miles. After all, they were looking for a floating airplane. Lambrecht also stated that they spotted occasional breakers from Carondelet Reef when they were a good ten miles away. The reef was completely submerged under 10 to 20 feet of water. If they could spot a submerged reef so easily, wouldn't a floating plane have been apparent?

### **A difficult conclusion impossible to logically support!**

We believe TIGHAR's conclusion that the aircraft was washed off the reef and sank is very difficult, if not impossible, to logically support. We do, however, wholeheartedly support their conclusion that Earhart did land on Gardner Island and was there until at least early the morning of July 7<sup>th</sup>. We agree with Lambrecht's narrative that no one was on the island and the *Electra* was also not present.

We also would like to address at this time the infamous landing gear that has been splashed all over the news lately. The Maude/Bevington expedition landed on Gardner Island at 8:00 a.m. October 13, 1937 and tied their boat to the stern of the wrecked freighter, *SS Norwich City*, where it remained moored during their entire stay. After breakfast, Bevington records in

his diary that he walked easily to the shore and later around the island. They were on the island for at least two days (54 hours) and left after noon on October 15<sup>th</sup>. Neither Maude, Bevington nor any of the natives with them noticed landing gear from a Lockheed Electra lying on the reef when it was dry! Is that plausible?

Now we have a picture, taken by Bevington, which has been closely examined recently by Jeff Glickmann, a photo analyst. He proclaimed the object sticking out of the water in the photo is possibly a landing gear from an Electra. Let's say the Maude/Bevington Expedition saw the landing gear, shrugged their shoulders and said, "It's part of an airplane." Not a big deal. We see that sort of thing all the time. I think you get our point. The expedition wrote meticulously about everything on the island, even to the mullet and octopi in the hold of the *SS Norwich City*. Would it be so difficult to believe that a landing gear from an airplane might have been of some note? WE DON'T THINK SO!

In conclusion, we contend that Amelia Earhart made a somewhat bumpy, but wheels down landing on Gardner Island between 9:00 and 10:00 a.m. on the morning of July 2, 1937 with 20 to 60 gallons of fuel aboard. She made radio calls until very early the morning of the July 7<sup>th</sup>. After that, between daybreak of July 7<sup>th</sup> and nightfall of July 8<sup>th</sup>, Amelia, Fred and the Electra were removed from the island by persons or forces unknown. There are logical conclusions that can be drawn, but they require further investigation and explanation. The investigation of Amelia Earhart, her navigator Fred Noonan and Lockheed Electra NR 16020 needs to be broad and all- encompassing. We can't afford to throw out any possibility that has a shred of merit.

**THAT INCLUDES TESTIMONY BY INDIVIDUALS WITH FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE.**