

95D-HQ-1334954

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

FEDERAL BUREAU
OF INVESTIGATION
HEADQUARTERS

FBI - CENTRAL RECORDS CENTER

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2812 Fawkes Drive • Wilmington, Delaware 19808 • USA
(302) 994-4410 • Fax (302) 994-7945

*International Group for
Historic Aircraft Recovery*

010223012

February 15, 2001

Thomas T. Kubic
Dep. Asst. Dir.
Rm 3012
Criminal Div.
FBI
9th. St. & Pennsylvania Ave.
Wash. DC 20503

Missing Persons - VIO

Amelia Earhart Disappearance - Rem

Dear Tom,

For the record, TIGHAR (pronounced tiger) is the acronym for The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery. We're a nonprofit 501 (c)(3) tax exempt historical and educational foundation based in Wilmington, Delaware. Our investigation of the Earhart disappearance began in 1988.

The enclosed button - TIGHAR Artifact 2-3-W-5 - could be a key piece of evidence in that investigation.

Our basic question is whether the dark stain on the button's surface might be organic material due to the button having been in contact with decaying flesh. We really have no expectation that DNA can be extracted from such a degraded deposit. Besides, the button has been handled by many people since its recovery.

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Here's a brief rundown on what we know and what we suspect:

The Pacific island where the button was found - Nikumaroro (formerly known as Gardner Island) - was considered by the U.S. Navy, at the time of Earhart's disappearance in July 1937, to be the most likely place for the lost flight to have landed. An aerial search of the atoll one week after

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the disappearance revealed "clear signs of recent habitation" but no airplane or people were seen and the searchers moved on, not realizing that the island had been uninhabited since 1892.

In 1939 the British set out to colonize the island with natives from the overpopulated Gilbert Islands. A year later, in 1940, a native work party cutting trees on a remote part of the island came upon a human skull which they buried. When a British administrator arrived a few months later he heard of the discovery and ordered a search of the area. The search revealed a crude campsite where a castaway had clearly tried, but failed, to survive. There were some dead birds, a dead turtle, the remains of a fire, and - under a nearby tree - a partial human skeleton including the mandible that matched the skull (which was exhumed). Also at the site were a few artifacts including the remains of a woman's shoe and a box which was judged to have once contained a sextant. The British administrator suspected that he had found Amelia Earhart and so informed his superiors on the island of Fiji.

The British authorities in Fiji ordered the bones and artifacts sent there and the entire matter kept secret (we have all of the official British correspondence on this). The bones were examined and measured by a physician in Fiji and judged to be those of a "short, stocky European or mixed-race male." The British dropped the investigation and the matter was largely forgotten. We don't know what became of the bones but we do have the measurements taken by the doctor. Three years ago, forensic anthropologists Karen Burns PhD at the University of Georgia, Athens; and Richard Jantz PhD at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville independently evaluated the measurements and concluded that the remains were most likely those of a white female of northern European descent who stood about 5 feet 7 inches tall. That's a pretty good description of Amelia Earhart.

In five archaeological search expeditions to the island we have found a number of artifacts which, although none is diagnostic, appear to be consistent with components of the type of airplane Earhart was flying and the shoes she is known to have been wearing.

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The button was found in 1996 in an area we now believe to be that in which the bones were found in 1940. It seems a bit large for a shirt button and is more consistent with a trouser button. The native laborers on the island often wore shorts fastened with buttons, but the British supply records indicate that the buttons were made of bone.

An examination of this button by archaeologist James Matthews of Fort Walton Beach, FL concluded, by a "hot needle test", that it is probably Bakelite. The button does not seem to match any known WWII military design. The button may have been on clothing worn by the castaway whom we know died on the island and whom we suspect died near where the button was found.

We'll be returning to the island in August of this year for more search operations. If the dark stain on the button is due to contact with rotting flesh, the possibility that it is from the dead castaway would seem to increase. That would justify an intensive search of the area for more evidence. If we have the right area, there is a hole nearby which just may be where the skull was dug up and, if so, that hole may still contain a tooth or two from the skull. As you know, a tooth can be a good source of mtDNA. Earhart had a sister (now dead) whose daughter (Amelia's niece) lives in Silverspring, MD, so we do have a source to match against should we be so fortunate as to recover DNA.

There is, of course, much more to the story. You'll find volumes of material about our twelve year (to date) investigation on our website at www.tighar.org.

We really appreciate any help you can provide. Please don't hesitate to call (320/994-4410) or email (Tigharic@aol.com) with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Richard E. Gillespie
Executive Director





FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20535

To: Richard E. Gillespie
Executive Director
The International Group for
Historic Aircraft Recovery
2812 Fawkes Drive
Wilmington, Delaware 19808

Date: May 7, 2001

Case ID No.: 95D-HQ-1334954 - 2

Lab No.: 010223012 MQ BO

Reference: Your letter dated February 15, 2001

Your No.:

Title: UNSUB;
AMELIA EARHART - VICTIM;
MISSING PERSONS

Date specimens received: February 23, 2001

Specimens:

Q1 Button (your number Artifact 2-3-W-5)

NE1 "TIGHAR TRACKS" Journal, Vol. 15, 1999

The results of the serology examinations are included in this report. The mitochondrial DNA examinations are continuing and you will subsequently be advised concerning the results and the disposition of Q1 and NE1.

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Hand-delivered
to R. Gillespie
5/7/01



FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20535

Report of Examination

Examiner Name:



Date: May 1, 2001

Unit: DNA Analysis I

Phone No.: 202-324-4409

Case ID No.: 95D-HQ-1334954

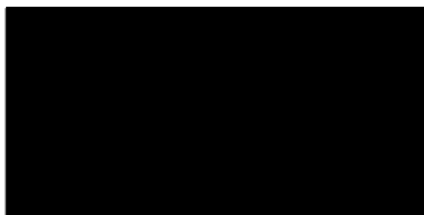
Lab No.: 010223012 MQ BO

Results of Examinations:

Specimen Q1 was examined for the presence of blood; however, none was found.

No other serological examinations were conducted.

Reviewer:



Date:

May 2, 01



FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20535

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To: Richard E. Gillespie
Executive Director
The International Group for
Historic Aircraft Recovery
2812 Fawkes Drive
Wilmington, Delaware 19808

Date: October 24, 2001

Case ID No.: 95D-HQ-1334954 -3
Lab No.: 010223012 MQ BO

Reference: Your letter dated February 15, 2001

Your No.:

Title: UNSUB;
AMELIA EARHART - VICTIM;
MISSING PERSONS

Date specimens received: February 23, 2001

This report supplements and completes FBI Laboratory report dated May 7, 2001 (FBI Laboratory number 010223012 MQ BO). Please refer to that report for a complete listing of the submitted items.

The following additional specimen was identified:

Q1.1 Swab from button

The results of the mitochondrial DNA examinations are included in this report. All requested examinations have been completed.

The remaining processed DNA from specimen Q1.1 is being returned under separate cover. Specimen Q1 was returned to you by personal delivery on May 7, 2001. The processed DNA can be found in a package marked "PROCESSED DNA SAMPLES: SHOULD BE REFRIGERATED/FROZEN." It is recommended that these samples be stored in a refrigerator/freezer and isolated from evidence that has not been examined.

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10/24/01
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FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20535

Report of Examination

Examiner Name:



Date: October 24, 2001

Unit:

DNA Analysis II

Phone No.: 202-324-1265

Case ID No.:

95D-HQ-1334954

Lab No.: 010223012 MQ BO

Results of Examinations:

A mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) sequence was obtained from the Q1.1 swab taken from the Q1 button. The sequence from this sample showed the presence of multiple ambiguous nucleotide positions and thus was not suitable for comparison purposes.

Reviewer:



Date: 10-24-01