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Overdue Investigations Into Popular Beliefs

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Megan Greer

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Professor Grimland

Amelia Earhart, Castaway

Amelia Earhart is the most known American aviatrix of the 1920's-1930's. Earhart was admired for many courageous aviation feats and awards. She is best known, however, for July 2, 1937, the day she, her aviator Fred Noonan, and the Lockheed Electra 10E disappeared. Earhart and Noonan were flying the equator, and the plane was running low on fuel, so the pair landed on water. The Electra was not built to land on water. Earhart made several distress calls for a few days, then silence. **PAUSE.** Jerry Adler who wrote "The Lady Vanishes" for the Smithsonian in 2015 stated, "He (Ric Gillespie) also cites dozens of messages, from Earhart, that were heard around the Pacific and as far away as Florida for five days after she disappeared." After covering hundreds of miles, searching by plane and boats, nothing was found until 1940. In that year, many artifacts were found on a small island, uninhabited except by birds and crabs, called Nikumaroro. Items such as parts of the Electra, American female wingtip shoes (shoes aviators would wear on wings of planes or during flight) and a partial skeleton of a female. Despite all the other theories of her demise, the artifacts found emphatically prove, that Amelia Earhart died in no other way but as a castaway.

Ric Gillespie has been heading the search to find Amelia and the Electra since 1989. Jerry Adler added, "Gillespie, a former pilot and aircraft-accident investigator...runs an organization called The International Group for Historical Aircraft Recovery (TIGHAR)."

Gillespie found a piece of aluminum sheet in 1991 on Nikumaroro. Jerry Adler also mentioned, “In late October, after seizing a chance to compare his aluminum sheet against an Electra under restoration in Kansas, he announced the rivet holes and other features were the equivalent of ‘a fingerprint’ establishing that it had come from Earhart’s plane.” The Electra had a rough first attempt on take-off a month before the actual flight took place. The belly of the plane was damaged and parts of the “skin” of the plane had to be replaced. The pieces replaced did not have the serial number of the plane, but had the same rivet holes placements as the Electra. After looking deeper into the artifact, Gillespie contacted a prominent metallurgist, “Thomas Eagar of MIT, who concluded that ‘the preponderance of the evidence indicates you have a true Amelia Earhart artifact.’ ” Ric Gillespie. Interview, November 24, 2016, the Founder of TIGHAR. The parts of the plane were just small artifacts compared to what else was found.

Along with the plane parts, the fragmented sole of a shoe was found. This shoe piece is proof that Amelia died on Nikumaroro. The sole was 277 millimeters long and around 10.9 inches (close to Earhart’s size). The shoe was made in America by Bilt-Rite and had a replacement heel attached at some point. The sole was from a blucher-style oxford shoe, typically worn when working on planes or flying. In their book *Amelia Earhart’s Shoes: Is the Mystery Solved?* from 2001, King, Jacobson, et al state, “Comparing pictures taken during the World Flight with those taken earlier in Earhart’s flying career, it looks like sometime before the World Flight began, Earhart had had oxfords re-heeled, ten days before take-off from Lae show clearly that the heel of at least one shoe is lighter-colored at the bottom, suggesting a replacement heel.” The photographic evidence is proof Earhart was in these shoes prior to take-off. In 1937, there were not many manufacturers of shoes built for aviators. Aviators typically

wore shoes one size larger because flying at 10,000 feet gets quite cold, so a size above what Earhart would normally wear makes sense to fit thick socks to keep the feet warm during flight.

Alternate theories of the disappearance include a reported sighting by local residents of the Marianas (near Saipan) of a tall blonde woman and large blonde man. Residents stated the pair were apprehended by Japanese soldiers and executed on the spot. These two people were described as Amelia Earhart and Fred Noonan. According to Susan Wels's book *Amelia Earhart: The Thrill of It*, published in 2009 denies these claims, "... separate investigations by United Press and U.S. Army Intelligence found no evidence that Amelia had been captured by the Japanese." Another prevailing theory still lingering is the Electra crashed in the middle of the Pacific and not near any land, thereby leaving no evidence or trace of the plane and passengers. A theory that surfaced in 1987 states Earhart died in Spain under an assumed name. The woman assumed to be Earhart had aviation experience and set records across the South Atlantic. Yet all these theories have no hard evidence or proof. All the evidence that has been found on the island of Nikumaroro, is the REAL truth and proof of what happened to Amelia Earhart.

In 1940, a British expedition discovered human remains on Nikumaroro. In Susan Wels book, during this search, "a campsite and some scattered bones, along with evidence of a campfire, bird and turtle remains." Gillespie states, Noonan and Earhart could have managed for some time on the island living off the sea life but not for too long with no source of fresh water. Also according to Wels, the leader of the British expedition in 1940, Gerald Gallagher, "suspected the remains could be Earhart's, so he shipped the bones and artifacts to British Headquarters in Fiji for 'strict secret' examination. The remains were examined, notated and never seen again. In 1998, forensic investigators reanalyzed the notes and found them consistent with a white female of northern European extraction who was about five feet seven inches tall."

Earhart was five foot seven inches. In 2015, a Forensic Anthropologist was brought in by Gillespie; the Anthropologist measured a photo of Amelia Earhart with the measurements from the notes from the “strict secret examination” performed in 1940 and concluded the bones are Earhart’s. The measurements are forensic and scientific evidence of Earhart’s dismal fate. In 2007, Ric Gillespie returned to the site where prior researchers had found the partial skeleton. Susan Wels also mentioned, “A more detailed examination of the site found additional artifacts, including a piece of a woman’s powder compact, a civilian zipper, and the bottom of a broken hand-lotion bottle, all manufactured in the U.S. and dating from the mid-1930’s.” If this wasn’t convincing enough, Gillespie’s team, revealed that the series of numbers on the sextant box found with the bones in 1940 match those on a type of sextant that Noonan was known to have used. A sextant is a doubly reflective navigational instrument used to measure the angle between any two visible objects. Gillespie stands by these findings and says they are based on historic, archaeological, and forensic evidence. The discovery of all these artifacts, in the middle of the Pacific, female bones on an uninhabited island, in the late 1930’s means this IS Amelia Earhart.

Amelia’s disappearance has captured the imagination of conspiracy theorists for 79 years but the evidence doesn’t lie. The artifacts tell a factual story of what happened on the island Nikumaroro. Those important artifacts such as the “skin” of the Electra, the sole of a shoe usually used by aviators and female bones validate, Earhart died as a castaway. She continued to live heroically and alone, for some time on that island, under horrid circumstances until Amelia succumbed to the lack of water and surrounding elements. It is rumored that Earhart could have endured the surroundings for a few weeks or possibly up to a month but THAT will always be the mystery of Amelia Earhart. Finally with sufficient evidence, the mystery surrounding Amelia Earhart, Fred Noonan and the Electra is solved. Amelia Earhart died a castaway.

Amelia Earhart, the castaway

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