

# What happened to Amelia Earhart

## Satellite imagery from The DigitalGlobe Foundation aids in the expedition for the aviation pioneer's remains

Near the end of her historic flight around the globe in 1937, Amelia Earhart vanished mysteriously over the Pacific Ocean. U.S. Navy rescue missions never found a trace of Earhart, her navigator Fred Noonan or her plane. Competing theories speculate that Earhart crashed into the Pacific Ocean or, alternatively, that she crash landed and later perished on a small Pacific island. Testing the hypothesis that Earhart and Noonan landed and eventually died on Nikumaroro Island, the International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery (TIGHAR) in July 2012 conducted its tenth expedition to the uninhabited coral atoll in the Republic of Kiribati, this time to conduct an underwater expedition to search for the ill-fated Lockheed Electra plane. The expedition discovered a deep underwater debris field of man-made equipment.

*"We have man-made objects in a debris field in the place where we'd expect to find it if our theory on the airplane is correct."*

—RIC GILLESPIE, TIGHAR DIRECTOR

Before setting foot on Nikumaroro Island, TIGHAR turned to the DigitalGlobe Foundation for two high-resolution GeoEye-1 satellite images of the suspected crash site area. The imagery played a critical role in the planning and management phases of the expedition. Using the satellite images, the TIGHAR research team accurately defined the search field off the western end of the island and developed the search methodology that guided the mission.

Over the course of TIGHAR's 25 years of research, the impression of what happened to Amelia Earhart has changed and evolved many times as new information has been uncovered and old theories have been laid to rest. Whether the debris discovered by TIGHAR belongs to that of Earhart's plane is still uncertain—the goal of the TIGHAR mission was to photograph, not recover the evidence—the expedition nevertheless ushered an important new chapter in the search for the famous aviator's remains and her aircraft. The next expedition, planned for summer of 2014, will carry out deep water exploration using remote sensing vehicles or manned submersibles, a shallow water search by scuba divers and onshore archaeological operations. A grid map based on The DigitalGlobe Foundation imagery is part of a Niku VIII Search Reference Kit that will play a crucial role in the planning and management of that expedition.



DigitalGlobe satellite image of Nikumaroro Island



Center left: Ric Gillespie, Center right: Hillary Clinton



Amelia Earhart in 1931



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