

## **Nikumaroro – Amelia Earhart’s Grave?**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

The mystery surrounding the fate of Amelia Earhart has endured for over eighty years. In her attempt to circumnavigate the Earth by air, Earhart disappeared on July 2, 1937, somewhere in the Pacific Ocean amidst the thousands of tiny islands known as Oceania. We know she was trying to find tiny Howland Island to refuel but may have been hundreds of miles off-course. Attempts at radio communication between the U.S. Coast Guard ship stationed at Howland Island and Earhart’s aircraft proved unsuccessful in what is thought to be the plane’s final hours. Many hypotheses have emerged over the years, including one that suggests Earhart and her co-pilot, Fred Noonan may have either landed or crash-landed on Nikumaroro, then called Gardner Island.

### **The Gardner Island Theory**

According to the Gardner Island Theory, Amelia and Noonan would have flown south after failing to find Howland. The theory posits that before they ran out of gas, they would have flown over Gardner Island, one of a group of islands known as the Phoenix Islands, which are part of the Republic of Kiribati today. A week after Earhart’s disappearance, U.S. Navy planes searched the island. Although they found signs of recent habitation, they found no signs of Earhart or Noonan. In 1941, however British researchers on Gardner Island found a skeleton. They determined, however, that it belonged to a 5’5” male. Unfortunately, the bones have since been lost. In 1998, scientists analyzing the original measurement data from the 1941 skeleton, found that it more likely belonged to a tall, white female of European ancestry, raising the possibility that the lost skeleton could have been Earhart. In 2015, another study refuted the 1998 findings and concluded that the original analysis was more likely to be accurate. In 2018, however, an additional study conducted by forensic anthropologist Richard Jantz determined that Earhart’s bone measurements more closely matched those from the Gardner Island skeleton than 99% percent of people who would have lived during Earhart’s time. It’s important to note that these findings are based on estimations taken from photographs rather than from the actual bones.

### **TIGHAR**

The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery (TIGHAR) has sent several expeditions to Nikumaroro in the last few decades. They hypothesized that Earhart and Noonan landed on a coral reef and died on the island. TIGHAR scientists and anthropologists have discovered numerous artifacts including tools, metal scraps and parts which may have been from an aircraft, and a curious fragment of Plexiglas that is said to be similar to the Plexiglas used in Earhart’s Electra aircraft. Despite the compelling findings, all evidence remains circumstantial and no “smoking gun” has been discovered.

- 1. Which of the following is a fact about the disappearance of Amelia Earhart?**
  - A. Her skeleton was found on Gardner Island
  - B. Her aircraft crash-landed on some island in the Pacific Ocean
  - C. The skeleton found on Gardner Island belonged to a tall woman
  - D. Amelia Earhart and Fred Noonan were supposed to land on Howland Island
  
- 2. Which of the following best describes descriptions of the Gardner Island skeleton?**
  - A. It has been proven that it belonged to a man
  - B. It has been proven that it belonged to a woman
  - C. The gender of the Gardner Island skeleton remains uncertain
  - D. The measurements of the Gardner Island skeleton are based on the actual bones
  
- 3. Which of the following is a hypothesis?**
  - A. Fred Noonan served as Amelia Earhart's co-pilot
  - B. Fred Noonan and Amelia Earhart crash-landed on Gardner Island
  - C. Comprehensive investigations into the fate of Amelia Earhart have been largely unsuccessful
  - D. Scientists from TIGHAR have found compelling artifacts on Nikumaroro that warrant further study
  
- 4. Which two terms are used interchangeably?**
  - A. Fred Noonan and Amelia Earhart
  - B. Nikumaroro and Gardner Island
  - C. TIGHAR and Richard Jantz
  - D. Male and female
  
- 5. Why is it difficult to make determinations about the 1941 skeleton of Gardner Island?**
  - A. The skeleton is very old
  - B. The skeleton no longer exists
  - C. Scientists have failed to agree about its gender
  - D. It was impossible to tell how tall Amelia Earhart was
  
- 6. Which of the following best describes the role of anthropologists in the disappearance of Amelia Earhart?**
  - A. To help piece together American history
  - B. To help discover and find meaning in ancient fossils
  - C. To see if information can be learned from the discovery and study of artifacts
  - D. To learn more about Nikumaroro and its inhabitants
  
- 7. Which of the following would serve as a "smoking gun" in this case?**
  - A. A scrap of metal that matched common aircrafts in the 1930s
  - B. A glass bottle that was known to have been produced in America
  - C. Hair samples that were traced to the DNA of Fred Noonan
  - D. Samples of rusted engine parts that may have come from Earhart's plane or similar planes