

# Earhart didn't die in a crash, investigator says

BY CLEVE R. WOOTSON JR.  
THE WASHINGTON POST

As America endured the drab years of the Great Depression, Amelia Earhart's exploits were a bright spot.

She broke gender barriers by completing solo flights most male pilots hadn't accomplished and traveled the country speaking of women's empowerment and the glorious promise of air travel.

Then, she vanished.

Her mysterious disappearance over the Pacific Ocean in 1937 has vexed historians and fueled conspiracy theories for decades. Earhart was declared dead after the U.S. government concluded that she crashed somewhere in the Pacific, her plane sinking to the seabed as she tried to become the first woman to circle the globe.

But an alternate theory of what became of Earhart and her navigator, Fred Noonan, has recently resurfaced in the news.

Ric Gillespie, the director of the International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery, thinks Earhart spent her last days as a castaway on a desolate Pacific island.

Stranded after a crash-landing, Gillespie believes, Earhart used the radio from her damaged plane to call for help for nearly a week

before the tide pulled the craft into the sea.

Gillespie, a pilot and accident investigator, has made 11 expeditions to Gardner Island, in the Western Pacific. He's trying to raise money for a 12th to support this theory — and maybe find Earhart's plane.

He posted a video presentation about the Gardner Island theory on YouTube last month and recently touted "New Research, New Evidence, New Understanding."

But, he said: "We've been testing this hypothesis for 28 years. ... This supposed new theory is actually the oldest theory."

"We found a tremendous amount of support for it," Gillespie added.

Some of that support comes from Earhart's radio signals seeking help, which investigators say most likely emanated from an area near Gardner Island, Gillespie said.

And a 1937 British expedition exploring the island for settlement snapped a photo of what Gillespie said shows part of the landing gear from Earhart's plane sticking out of a reef.

"On an uninhabited island, there shouldn't be anything sticking up out of the water," Gillespie said.

Adding to the body of evidence, Gillespie said, the radio in Earhart's plane could not work if it had been in the water as suspected; yet she sent out radio signals for nearly a week after

apparently crashing.

"Earhart made a relatively safe landing at Gardner Island and sent radio distress calls for six days," Gillespie said in the YouTube presentation. "There are 47 messages heard by professional radio operators that appear to be credible."

In 1928, Earhart became the first woman to fly alone across the Atlantic Ocean. Nine years later, she sought to fly around the world. But she encountered trouble somewhere over the Pacific.

Some think Earhart's Lockheed Model 10 Electra ran out of fuel and plummeted into the Pacific. Others say she and navigator Noonan were captured by the Japanese, who thought they were spies.

But Gillespie thinks Earhart and Noonan made it to the ground injured but intact.

They were looking to refuel at Howland Island, halfway between Hawaii and Australia, but strong winds had thrown them off course, and nighttime navigation was impeded by an overcast sky, Gillespie said.

Gillespie said he thinks that as the plane's fuel tanks emptied, Earhart and Noonan spied a landing spot on Gardner Island, now called Nikumaroro, about 400 miles south of Howland. The coral atoll has a wide reef that is dry at low tide — a serviceable landing strip.

Gillespie said he thinks the landing was rough but survivable. Earhart had minor

injuries; Noonan's were worse, based on Earhart's alleged radio calls, which TIGHAR has studied.

(Gillespie and his wife are the only paid members of the Pennsylvania-based group, although he says TIGHAR has a team of experts and more than 1,000 members.)

And the airplane still had fuel — not enough to get anywhere, but enough to power the plane's battery and work the radio, Gillespie said. He and others at TIGHAR researched how much fuel the plane could carry, then calculated how much the engines had consumed before Earhart's distress calls.

"She's out there calling for help," Gillespie said, adding that radio operators he talked to — and others written about in published reports — felt certain they were listening to Earhart. "They recognize her voice. There's no doubt in their mind."

As evidence, Gillespie cites an interview with Betty Clank, a ham radio operator in Florida who claimed to have heard Earhart and was put in contact with TIGHAR.

"What she heard is not just a woman calling for help, there was a man with her and he seemed to be out of his head," Gillespie said. "And he was grabbing the mic. The whole thing reads like a 911 call."

The half-hour presentation shows the depth of TIGHAR's research on Earhart's final flight. There are topographical maps of the

seabed around Gardner Island, details about the paths of radio signals, even calculations about air speed and fuel burn.

In their expeditions, TIGHAR members think they have found other evidence of Earhart's final days.

According to the Times of London:

"His group has found improvised tools, shoe remains and aircraft wreckage, as well as pieces of a pocket knife, bits of makeup and bone fragments. Mr. Gillespie said that credible radio operators recognized Earhart's weak voice in a message about six hours after she went missing. She said that she was injured but not as badly as Noonan.

"A Texas housewife also heard her pleas on short-wave radio. In Florida a young radio listener grabbed a notebook and began to transcribe a "very confusing" distress call that may have referenced a shipwreck on the island."

TIGHAR posted its conclusions about Earhart's demise on its website.

"Earhart (and possibly Noonan) lived for a time as castaways on the waterless atoll, relying on rain squalls for drinking water," the site says. "They caught and cooked small fish, seabirds, turtles and clams. Amelia died at a makeshift campsite on the island's southeast end. Noonan's fate is unknown."

Their plane was washed

into the Pacific, TIGHAR claims. During a previous expedition, Gillespie says the group found a piece of what appears to be the Electra.

"Whatever remains of the Electra lies in deep water off the island's west end," he said.

Gillespie's Gardner Island theory has its critics, though.

"This group (TIGHAR) comes out every year or two with this info or something like it, show us the proof please!" one tweeted.

Elgen Long, a Navy combat veteran and an expert on Earhart's disappearance, wrote a book saying her plane crashed into the Pacific and sank.

The metal piece was from a different kind of plane, he told National Geographic.

Long criticized Gillespie in 2014, telling The Washington Post's Justin Wm. Moyer: "You'll never convince true believers that they aren't right. You're just confusing them with facts."

But Gillespie, who has referred to Long as "the patron saint of 'crashed and sank,'" told The Post that scientific discovery has never been linear.

"This is what science really is like," he said. "You develop a hypothesis. You see if it's wrong. It's failure after failure after success after failure. If you do it right, you do make progress. ... I am passionate about figuring stuff out. I'm an investigator, a detective at heart."

## Mom hopes film will inspire others

Biopic examines life of Reuters photojournalist

BY ALASTAIR SHARP  
REUTERS

TORONTO — The mother of a Reuters photojournalist killed in Somalia in 1993 wants a film about her son's life to empower others to strive to change the world.

"My great desire is that this film will be a spark to ignite a movement of young people and the young-at-heart to believe they have a role to play in changing the world around them," said Kathy Eldon, mother of Dan Eldon and the film's producer.

"The Journey Is The Destination," which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival on Wednesday, chronicles the final three years of Dan Eldon's life during which he fell in love, raised money for refugees, drove across Africa to deliver it and became a photojournalist.

"The Eldon family are miraculous to me," said director Bronwen Hughes. "They have taken this story of their son and transformed it into a movement for global



MARK BLINCH | REUTERS

Actor Ben Schnetzer arrives on the red carpet for the film "The Journey is the Destination" during the 41st Toronto International Film Festival in Toronto, Canada, on Wednesday. Schnetzer portrays Reuters photojournalist Dan Eldon, who was killed in Somalia in 1993.

positive change."

The British-American photographer joined journalists on an assignment to cover a civil war and famine in Somalia and the UN-mandated and U.S.-led mission to secure humanitarian relief.

After scores of civilians were killed and wounded in a U.S. bombing that was targeting Somali warlords, journalists documenting the

aftermath were attacked by a mob. Eldon and three other journalists were killed. He was 22.

Kathy and Dan's sister Amy founded the Creative Visions Foundation after Eldon's death to build on the efforts of other activists using media and art to cause social change.

The film drew heavily on journals Eldon kept, a col-

lection of which his family published after his death.

"Dan had left us a visual map to the way to tell his story and I determined that had to be the visual language for the film," Hughes said.

The film, which does not yet have distribution, stars Ben Schnetzer as Dan, Maria Bello as Kathy, and Kelly Macdonald as Amy.

## World's oldest man finally will have bar mitzvah

Kristal survived Auschwitz death camp

BY JULIE ZAUZMER  
THE WASHINGTON POST

In 1916, Israel Kristal was a motherless Jewish child whose father was away fighting in World War I and would soon be killed in action.

He turned 13 without celebrating his bar mitzvah.

A century later, Kristal will finally get the chance.

Kristal, who is the oldest man in the world, according to Guinness World Records, turns 113 on Thursday. His daughter, Shulimath Kristal Kuperstoch, told the DTA news agency that his family is planning a bar mitzvah for him, and about 100 relatives will attend. "We will bless him, we will dance with him, we will be happy," she said.

Born in what is now Poland, Kristal has survived 113 years of Jewish history. He was in his 30s when the Nazis invaded, and he was imprisoned with his wife and two children in the Lodz ghetto and then at Auschwitz. His wife and children died.

Speaking about the hor-

ror of Auschwitz, he once told Ha'aretz, "Two books could be written about a single day there."

He moved to Israel in 1950 and now lives in Haifa. He remarried and had two children, and is now a grandfather and great-grandfather.

He has maintained his faith throughout his life, she said. Talking to the Jerusalem Post about her father surviving the Holocaust, she said, "He believes he was saved because that's what God wanted."

As for himself, Kristal said in March when he was named the world's oldest man, "I believe that everything is determined from above and we shall never know the reasons why. There have been smarter, stronger and better-looking men . . . who are no longer alive. All that is left for us to do is to keep on working as hard as we can and rebuild what is lost."

And, after 113 years, to celebrate a century-delayed milestone.

## Google a part of African-American history museum

BY STEVEN OVERLY  
AND PEGGY MCGLONE  
THE WASHINGTON POST

Lonnie G. Bunch III traveled to Google's Mountain View, California, headquarters a little more than a year ago to meet with leaders of the Black Googler Network, an employee group. The director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, which was then under construction, wanted to tap their technical expertise.

"He made the simple request: 'However you can, help me make this museum redefine what it means to be a museum in the modern age and be at the cusp of innovation,'" said Travis McPhail, a Google Maps software engineer.

McPhail was inspired.

Google employees have since been developing interactive-display technology that will allow visitors to examine artifacts from all angles using 3-D scans that they access through their smartphone's Web browser. Their phone will also serve up relevant multimedia content, such as text or video, that better explains the artifacts

and their significance to African-American history.

McPhail said that the technology aims to solve a persistent challenge for museums: only a fraction of their artifacts are on display at any one time. Historic objects must be specially handled and maintained, making it difficult for the museum to put out too many at once. There is also finite physical space.

The technology eliminates those limitations.

"I thought we should be able to add tech to this story and scale up the number of artifacts that would tell a historical story," McPhail said. "We should be able to do that in a way where visitors really can get a sense of how these objects played a part in history."

The African-America history museum is set to open Sept. 24, but the Google display is not expected until next spring.

Representatives from the museum did not respond to a request for comment.

This isn't Google's first museum project. The Google Cultural Institute works with museums and historic sites to integrate interactive

technology into their exhibits and enhance the experience for visitors and reach those who may not be able to travel to a physical location.

Earlier this week, the company unveiled an online exhibit called Natural History that uses virtual reality, online video and photos about dinosaurs and other prehistoric creatures to bring "an extinct world back to life."

### First public program

A screening of the acclaimed TV drama, "Underground" will officially open the Oprah Winfrey Theater of the National Museum of African American History and Culture on Sept. 26, officials said Thursday.

The original series airs on WGN America. The screening will be followed by a panel discussion with co-creator and writer Misha Green and cast members Alano Miller (Cato), Amirah Vann (Ernestine), Jessica de Gouw (Elizabeth Hawkes), and Aisha Hinds (Harriet Tubman). The museum's associate director Red Ellis will moderate. The screening begins at 7 p.m.

The series depicts the

lives of enslaved people who risked death to reach freedom on the Underground Railroad. In its premiere season, it was among the top cable dramas, and it has been screened at the White House, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and the National Civil Rights Museum. The second season is scheduled to air in early 2017.

The museum features artifacts representing Tubman, probably the most famous underground railroad operator. Tubman will have a central role in the upcoming season.

The museum plans to host musical performances, screenings and discussions in the 350-seat venue. Author Heather Ann Thompson will discuss her upcoming book, "Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and its Legacy," and Ohio State University professor Hassan Jeffries will interview acclaimed photographer Stephen Shames, and Black Panther founder Bobby Seales about their upcoming book, "Power to the People: The World of the Black Panthers."

## African-American museum remains a construction zone

BY PEGGY MCGLONE  
THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — With only days until it opens, the National Museum of African American History and Culture is still far from the finish line.

Long lines at security, elevators and escalators that didn't work and closed-off galleries marred the Smithsonian museum's debut during a media open house Wednesday morning that drew more than 500 visitors. It was the first of several events scheduled in advance of the museum's formal dedication Sept. 24.

President Barack Obama is to attend the dedication ceremony that morning, the highlight of an opening weekend that also includes an outdoor festival. Officials have extended the museum's hours to accommodate the anticipated crowds. The number of media members invited to the open house Wednesday exceeded the seating available for the opening remarks. Some 60 video cameras were set up in the Oprah Winfrey Theater,

where Smithsonian Secretary David J. Skorton and the museum's founding director, Lonnie G. Bunch III, spoke. Almost half of the attendees were unable to get into the theater, which seats 350.

Bunch was unconcerned about the chaos around him. "We are so ready it's ridiculous," he said. "We have 10 days. It's a piece of cake."

Skorton expressed the same confidence even as he passed construction workers on ladders and the roped-off entrance to the Contemplative Court.

"We have 10 more days — and 10 more nights," he said.

They will need every second. Crews were installing a large-scale Richard Hunt sculpture in the main entrance hall, and others were painting walls and hanging lights as members of the media arrived in the morning. Lines through the security checkpoint were long until a second entrance was opened. A Smithsonian spokeswoman said that five security stations will be available for opening weekend.