

Hillary Clinton to Look into Earhart Mystery Today

(AP) WASHINGTON - Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is wading into one of the 20th century's most enduring mysteries: the fate of American aviator and Atchison native Amelia Earhart, who went missing without a trace over the South Pacific 75 years ago.

Clinton will meet Tuesday with historians and scientists from The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery, which is launching a new search in June for the wreckage of Earhart's Lockheed Electra plane off the remote island of Nikumaroro, in what is now the Pacific nation of Kiribati. Earhart and her navigator Fred Noonan disappeared July 2, 1937, while flying from New Guinea to Howland Island. Searches at the time uncovered nothing.

The group believes Earhart and Noonan may have managed to land on the island, then known as Gardner Island, and survived for a short time. Other historians believe they crashed into the ocean. But conspiracy theories, including claims that they were U.S. government agents captured by the Japanese before the Second World War, abound despite having been largely debunked.

One senior U.S. official said a new analysis of a contemporary photo of a portion of the island shows what some people believe could be a strut and wheel of the plane protruding from the water. The administration takes no position on the purported evidence and acknowledges there is fierce debate on the subject.

The expedition will coincide with the 75th anniversary of Earhart's departure on the ill-fated attempt to become the first woman to fly around the world. Previous visits to the island by the group have recovered artifacts that could have belonged to Earhart and Noonan and suggest they might have lived for days or weeks after landing on a reef.

State Department officials say Clinton will use Tuesday's event to lend her high profile to the search while also lauding Earhart's legacy as a pioneer for women and a model of American courage. She will also note the Obama administration's keen interest in the Pacific.

The State Department and other U.S. government agencies supported Earhart and her goal. The State Department obtained flight clearances from the countries in which she stopped and coordinated the search effort with foreign governments.