

One Last Big Trip



Amelia Earhart was born in 1897 and grew up to be one of America's most famous aviators. At the age of 24, she started flying lessons and told her instructor, "My life will not be complete unless I own my own plane."

For a year, Amelia worked hard at a variety of jobs and managed to save enough money to buy her own aeroplane. In those days, women had not yet been given the right to vote, and having careers of any kind was still frowned upon. But Amelia Earhart was not one to be discouraged by the restrictions that women had to endure.

In 1928, Amelia became the first woman to fly across the Atlantic when she co-piloted a plane with Wilmer Stultz. In 1930, she set the speed record for women (290km per hr) and, a year later, became the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic. The public loved Lady Lindy*, as they called her, and there was great interest when she decided to fly around the globe at its widest point, the equator. This, she said, would be her "last big trip", and so, tragically, it proved to be.

The first three-quarters of the flight passed without incident. On 2 July 1937, Amelia embarked, with her navigator Frederick Noonan, on one of the most difficult stages of the journey – a flight of over 4,000km from New Guinea to tiny Howland Island in the middle of the Pacific. Amelia never made it to Howland Island. After 22 hours of continuous flying, coastguards at Howland Island received a radio message from Earhart in a shrill and panicky voice, "We are flying at an altitude of three hundred metres, only one half hour of fuel left." She was never seen again.

Nobody knows for sure what became of Amelia Earhart and Frederick Noonan, as neither their bodies nor their plane were ever recovered. Some think that they crash-landed on a desert island and died of exposure.

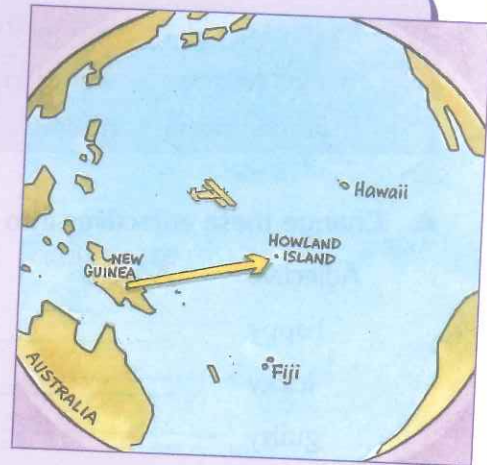
In 1992, a cigarette-lighter dating from the 1930s and part of a size 9 shoe (Earhart wore size 9) were found on an island near Howland Island, and the mystery was reopened. Who knows but perhaps, one day, we will find out exactly what happened to the world's most celebrated female aviator, Amelia Earhart.

* Charles Lindbergh, or Lindy as his adoring fans called him, was the most celebrated male aviator of the time. That is why they called Amelia Earhart "Lady Lindy".

Question Time

A

1. What is an aviator?
2. In what year was Amelia Earhart born?
3. What age was she when she took her first flying lesson?
4. What speed record did Amelia set in 1930?
5. In what year did she first fly solo across the Atlantic?
6. What was her "last big trip" going to be?
7. Who was her navigator on that trip?
8. How far was it from New Guinea to Howland Island?
9. What was she affectionately called by the American public?
10. What significant finds were made in 1992?



B

1. Why was Amelia's ambition to be a pilot frowned on at the time?
2. What is the widest point of the Earth?
3. What age was Amelia at the time of her disappearance?
4. Why was she nicknamed "Lady Lindy"?
5. Why is there still speculation about Amelia Earhart's final hours?
6. What do you think happened on that final flight?
Give reasons for your answer.
7. Put these words in sentences to show their meanings.

aviator restriction solo tragedy altitude

8. Why were the 1992 finds linked to Amelia Earhart's disappearance?
9. Do you think we will ever find out exactly what happened to Amelia Earhart and Frederick Noonan on that last, fatal trip?
Give a reason for your answer.

Think and Talk

1. Why, do you think, do people strive to be the first to do things (climb mountains, walk on the Moon, sail single-handedly around the world in a bathtub...) even if it means putting their lives in danger? What is the attraction?
Write what you think.
2. You are flying solo across the Atlantic. It is foggy, and you have lost your bearings. Your radio is broken. You have ten minutes of fuel left! You are beginning to panic! Talk or write about it.

