

AMELIA EARHART ESSAY

Charting the Skies for Women

Amelia Earhart is known today for her vast accomplishments in the world of aviation as the first woman pilot to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean, Pacific Ocean, and beyond. Amelia was a self-determined and ambitious young woman with a deep passion for aeronautics and adventure. Her drive for going farther and farther into the record books, set her apart from the typical woman of the early 20th century. By the time she was in her 30's, she had already flown across the Atlantic ocean, breaking the stereotype of a common woman across the universe. Amelia's spirit and love for her calling resulted in her mark in today's history books, and her ever enchanting story of adventure across the skies of the cosmos.

Amelia Mary Earhart was born on July 24, 1897 on her grandparents' farm in Atchison Kansas. She was the oldest of two girls born to Amy and Edwin Earhart. She and her sister Muriel were given a life of great wealth and prosperity by attending elite private schools and supplied with many gifts by their wealthy grandparents. Edwin and Amy moved to Des Moines Iowa in 1905 to start a life for their own in the railroad business, and left the girls on the farm until 1908. Edwin was promoted in 1909, and greatly improved the financial situation of the Earhart family, but at this time, Edwin also became a heavy drinker. This prompted Amy to take the girls away from their father's destructive behavior in 1914 and move in with friends in Chicago, where the girls finished out their upper level education at Hyde Park High School. As a young girl, Amelia was a tomboy. She climbed trees, hunted rats with a rifle, and kept a scrapbook of prestigious women that worked in male dominated fields. Before entering college, Amelia trained as a nurse in Toronto, and served as a military nurse in a hospital until the Armistice in 1918. In the fall of 1919, Amelia started college at Columbia University and enrolled as a premed major. Amelia left college in 1920 to join her reunited parents in California where she first became interested in aviation during a stunt-flying exhibition. In 1921, Amelia had her first flying lesson with a female instructor named Anita Snook at Kinner Field. Ever since her first lesson, Amelia became hooked with flying, and even purchased her first plane which she named "The Canary." Amelia used her plane in October of 1922 to set the first woman's world record of flying at an altitude of 14,000 feet. After moving to Boston in 1925, Amelia joined the Denison House in Boston as a social worker and also joined the Boston Chapter of the National Aeronautic Association to build an airport to market Kinner planes.

In April of 1928, Amelia got a phone call asking if she wanted to be the first woman to fly across the Atlantic. She was asked to join copilots Wilmer Stulz and Louis E. Gordon on a voyage from Trepassey Harbor Newfoundland to Burry Port Wales on June 17, 1928. The coordinator of this project was publicist George P. Putnam, who at the time was married, but had strong feelings towards Amelia. The trip made headlines around the world, and Amelia was thrown a reception held by President Calvin Coolidge at the White House after she got back. Amelia then went on to be appointed the Assistant to the General Traffic Manager at TWA, and then later organized a cross-country air race for women called The Cleveland Woman's Air Derby, or "Powder-Puff Derby." She also organized a woman's pilot organization called the "Ninety-Nines." During this time, her relationship with George Putnam grew, and his wife divorced him in 1929 with suspicions to the budding romance between Amelia and her husband. Amelia and Putnam were later married on February 7, 1931 after several engagement attempts on Putnam's part. On May 20, 1932, with collaboration with Putnam, Amelia began a journey across the Atlantic solo in her Lockheed-Vega, to become the first woman ever to fly to across the Atlantic twice, and solo. She departed from Harbour Grace, Newfoundland, and landed in Londonderry Northern Ireland. She also set the record for the shortest time traveling that sort of distance. When Amelia returned from Great Britain, she became an instant celebrity. She received a gold medal from the National Geographic Society presented by president Herbert Hoover. Amelia also received the Distinguished Flying Cross, awarded to her by Congress. Amelia's success in her earlier flights also gave her courage to take on more and more feats, such as becoming the first person, let alone woman, to fly solo across the Pacific from Hawaii to California on January 11, 1935. Later that year, Amelia was also the first person to fly from Mexico City to Newark. These huge accomplishments gave Amelia the fuel for her biggest idea yet: to become the first woman ever to circumnavigate around the globe by plane.

After a first botched attempt in 1935, Amelia and her flying partner/navigator Fred Noonan departed from Miami Florida on June 1937 to fly around the world bound for California. On June 29, they landed in Lae, New Guinea, which was only 7,000 miles away from their final destination. Navigation became difficult to their next destination: Howland Island, located 2,556 miles from Lae in the Mid-Pacific. The U. S. coast guard set up a radio contact named Itasca to track Amelia and Noonan during their last stretch of their journey. They left Lae on July 2, and throughout the night the Itasca lost track of the airplane. In desperate attempts to find the plane, Itasca relayed to Amelia and Noonan to reveal their whereabouts, and at 8:44 am, the last report from Amelia was made stating that they were "on the line of position 157-337."* Amelia and Noonan were never heard from or seen again. Rescue efforts went to effect shortly thereafter. It became the most extensive sea/air search in history, with about \$4 million spent. After searching for 2 and half weeks, on July 19, 1937, the US government called off the search. Amelia's husband George continued to search for his estranged wife for months thereafter, but in October, he too let Amelia rest wherever she may be. In 1938, a lighthouse off the coast of Howland Island was made in memory of Amelia Earhart.

Many theories exist on whatever happened to Amelia Earhart and her companion Fred Noonan on that last fateful voyage. Some of these theories include that she was a captured spy, that she lived in the Pacific on a remote island years after her disappearance, and that she was brutally murdered by some Pacific island natives. "The Earhart Project" was even launched in 1988 to investigate further the mystery of Amelia's vanishing. Whatever is thought to believe that happened to Amelia Earhart, one thing is evident. She was a bold, daring woman of spirit and finesse, that broke countless barriers for the worlds of both aviation and of women in society. Amelia had great courage and stamina, and loved every minute of her wild and unconventional lifestyle as a woman pilot until her very (uncertain) end. She will forever live as a legacy throughout the world as the woman who opened the skies to the boundaries of the female nature, and forever changed the creation of aviation as we know it.