

Queen of the Air

By Hwa Shi-Hsia

Her last words were “281 north
Howland - call KHAQQ - beyond north ...
won’t hold with us much longer ...
above water ... shut off.”

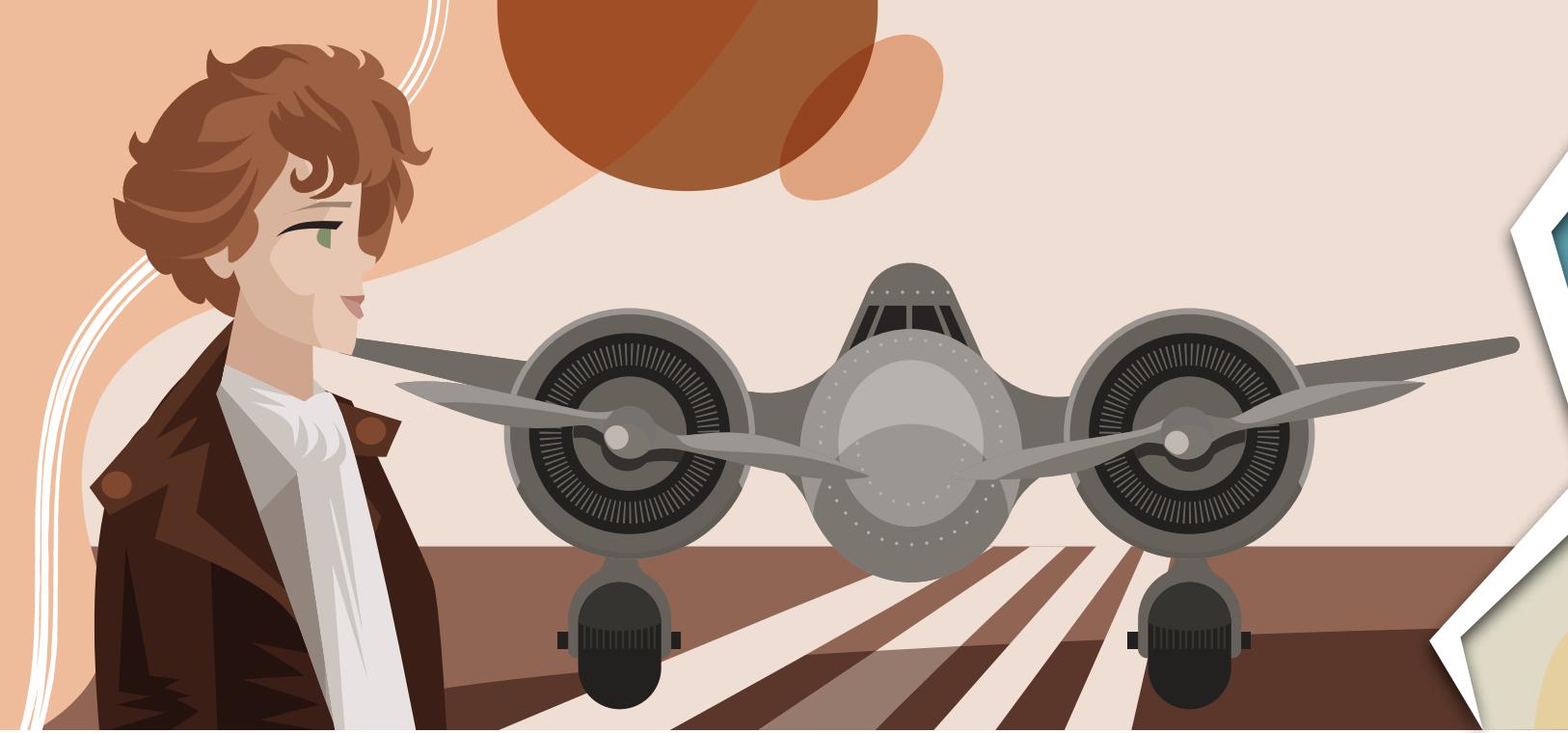
What happened to Amelia Earhart, one of the
rare female pilots of her time?

- 1 Celebrity disappearances tend to capture the public imagination. The official search and rescue efforts can drag on for months, and theories and speculation for decades longer.
- 5 One of the most famous disappearances of the early twentieth century was that of Amelia Earhart, lost on her attempt to be the first female pilot to ¹circumnavigate the world.

Unlike many American parents at the turn of the twentieth century, their mother did not believe that little girls should be kept indoors with tea sets and dolls.

Young Amelia, nicknamed Meely, and 2 her sister Muriel were adventurous children 10 who loved exploring the outdoors and playing with animals, footballs and guns. Unlike many American parents at the turn of the twentieth century, their mother did not believe that little girls should be kept indoors with tea sets and 15 dolls.

As a young woman during the First World 3 War, Earhart served as a nurse’s aide in Toronto, Canada, taking care of returning soldiers in a military hospital. Witnessing the agony 20 of men suffering from physical wounds, as



well as shell-shock or what is now known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), made her a ²pacifist. She herself was struck down by the Spanish flu pandemic, which caused her chronic ³sinusitis that required several operations. On the bright side, one of her friends in Toronto was a Royal Flying Corps officer who gave her a chance to spend some time in the airfield and look at the planes up close.

4 Aeroplanes stayed on her mind after her return to the United States. She frequented air shows and finally managed to save enough money to pay for flying lessons. Her first teacher was Neta Snook, one of the first women in Canada to get a pilot's licence. In 1921, at age 24, Earhart obtained her own licence. She worked as a teacher and a social worker while pursuing her passion of flying in her spare time.

5 Earhart's initiation into fame came when a wealthy woman, Amy Guest, decided to sponsor the first woman to fly across the Atlantic. She asked a publisher, George Putnam, to find a suitable female who would be competent in an aeroplane, and they recruited Earhart. The plane was actually piloted by a man,

Wilmer Stultz, but even as a passenger, flying from Canada to Britain was far more hazardous and uncomfortable than it is now. Earhart gained ⁵⁰ wide publicity and was even labelled 'Lady Lindy' after the famous aviator Charles Lindbergh.

6 Over the next few years, Earhart obtained a marketing job with Transcontinental Air Transport and raced in the first Women's Air Derby. ⁵⁵ Itching to break a record on her own account, Earhart had her plane upgraded with larger fuel tanks and navigation instruments, and finally made her solo transatlantic flight in May 1932. The gasoline gauge broke and leaked all over, ⁶⁰ and ice covered the wings and instruments, forcing her to land in a field in Ireland instead of reaching Paris as planned. A surprised farm-hand asked, "Have you flown far?" and the strange pilot replied, "From America." ⁶⁵

...she encouraged readers to "Try flying yourself!" and predicted that in the future, women would be working in aviation, airports and aircraft design in various roles.



7 Earhart was conscious of being a role model as an aviatrix, as the rare female pilots were then called. Cosmopolitan, a women's magazine, appointed her as a guest editor on aviation; she encouraged readers to "Try flying yourself!" and predicted that in the future, women would be working in aviation, airports and aircraft design in various roles. She was a founding member of the Ninety-Nines, an association for female pilots which still exists today.

8 In 1936, Earhart started planning her round-the-world flight. If she had succeeded, it would have been the longest circumnavigation to date because she planned to go around the equator while others had gone around at higher latitudes. She and her navigator Fred Noonan left Miami on 1st June, 1937 in a custom-built Lockheed Electra.

9 Earhart and Noonan flew along the coast of South America, across Africa, India, and through Southeast Asia. They ran into some technical problems in Surabaya and had to fly back to Bandung for repairs, but then continued on through Australia. They last departed from Lae in New Guinea for Howard Island, a tiny coral island in the vast Pacific Ocean, between Australia and Hawaii.

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This was long before the invention of the Global Positioning System (GPS) we have now, when even an inexpensive phone can receive satellite signals and ⁴triangulate its ₉₅ position. Instead, the United States Coast Guard provided a ⁵cutter, the Itasca, waiting at Howland Island and transmitting a radio signal to act as a ⁶beacon to home in on. However, as ₁₀₀ they approached Howland, Earhart was unable to determine the direction of the signal. One horrified radio operator described "sweating blood" as they realised their equipment ₁₀₅ was incompatible with Earhart's. Her last few transmissions said that they were flying along a north-south line trying to find Howland, and running out of fuel.

110



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11 Most experts believe that the Electra simply crashed and sank in the ocean. The remains of Earhart and Noonan, as well as the plane were never identified; a skeleton found on another island in 1940 turned out to be a short man
115 rather than a woman's. Despite her tragic ending, Amelia Earhart continues to inspire and captivate aerospace fans, especially girls and women.



In the article, it was mentioned that Amelia Earhart's mother 'did not believe that little girls should be kept indoors with tea sets and dolls'. How significant a role does upbringing play in debunking gender stereotypes?

Word Bank:

1 **circumnavigate:**

sail or travel all the way around (something, especially the world)

2 **pacifist:**

a person who believes that war and violence are unjustifiable

3 **sinusitis:**

an inflammation or swelling of the tissue lining the sinuses (the spaces behind the face that lead to the nasal cavity), causing an infection

4 **triangulate:**

measure and map (an area) by the use of triangles with a known base length and base angles

5 **cutter (boat):**

a light, fast coastal patrol boat

6 **beacon:**

a light or other visible object serving as a signal, warning or guide at sea or on an airfield

References

1. This day in history, July 02 1937: Amelia Earhart disappears, from History Channel, 9 February 2010.
2. Amelia : the centennial biography of an aviation pioneer, retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/ameliacentennial0000gold>, 20 July 2020.
3. On Amelia Earhart: The aviatrix as American dandy, from Michigan Quarterly Review, Winter 2000.

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METACOGNITIVE check POINT

How well do you understand what you have read thus far?

Are there any aspects that seem confusing to you?