

Amelia Earhart

Aviation pioneer (1898-1937)

There are few figures of the 20th century that can capture the imagination like Amelia Earhart. From her daring flight across the Atlantic to her mysterious disappearance over the Pacific, Amelia Earhart was an enigma, a truly free spirit.

America's famous aviatrix Amelia Mary Earhart was born on July 24, 1897 at her grandparents' home in Atchison, Kansas. Amelia Earhart was the first child born to Edwin Stanton and Amy Otis Earhart on July 24, 1897, in Atchison, Kansas. Amelia and her sister, Muriel, who was born three years later, had a difficult childhood. Their father was an alcoholic and because he often lost jobs, the family traveled a great deal.

After graduating from high school, Amelia planned to attend college, but her plans were put on hold after she met four wounded World War I veterans on the street. Hearing

their plight moved Amelia to become involved in the nursing field.

Amelia enjoyed watching airplane stunt shows, which were quite popular during the 1920s. One day, after taking a ten minute plane ride, Amelia knew she had to learn to fly. Ten hours of instruction and several crashes later, Amelia was ready to fly solo. She made her first solo flight in 1921.

During the 1920s, Amelia lived with her mother and sister in Boston and taught at Denison House. Flying was merely a hobby for her at that time. However, in 1928, Amelia received a call from Captain Hilton H. Railey asking her to join pilots Wilmer Stultz and Louis Gordon on a flight from America to England. Although she was only a passenger, on June 17-18, 1928, Amelia became the first woman to cross the Atlantic via airplane. Amelia's 1928 flight brought her tremendous publicity, and she subsequently endeavored to justify this renown. On May 20-21, 1932, Amelia

crossed the Atlantic solo, establishing a new transatlantic crossing record of 13 hours, 30 minutes. Amelia was celebrated throughout Europe and the United States and received a medal from President Herbert Hoover. Several years later, Amelia became the first woman to successfully complete the hazardous flight from Hawaii to California.

In June 1937, Amelia began what was to be her final flight. Amelia and navigator Fred Noonan set out in a twin-engine Lockheed Electra in an attempt to fly around the world. However, after departing Lae, New Guinea for Howland Island, the U.S. Coast Guard lost contact with the plane. They received a final message on July 2 at 8:45 a.m., and Amelia's tone was described as frantic. The United States Navy searched extensively but never found a trace of the aviators or the plane. The mysterious disappearance of Earhart and her plane has raised much speculation throughout the years. However, none of the many

theories for her disappearance have ever been confirmed. In 1939, Earhart's husband published a biography entitled *Soaring Wings*, in tribute to Amelia.

Some thoughts from Amelia Earhart:

“Courage is the price that Life exacts for granting peace. / The soul that knows it not, knows no release/ From little things: / Knows not the livid loneliness of fear, / Nor mountain heights where bitter joy can hear. / The sound of wings.”

- Amelia Earhart, in Helen Ferris, ed., *Five Girls Who Dared* (1931)

“Please know I am quite aware of the hazards. I want to do it because I want to do it. Women must try to do things as men have tried. When they fail, their failure must be but a challenge to others.”

- Amelia Earhart, letter to husband George P. Putnam before a risky flight, *Last Flight* (1937)

Some works that tell more about the life of Amelia Earhart include:

- *Amelia Earhart: Young Air Pioneer* by Jane Moore Howe

- *Amelia Earhart : Courage in the Sky (Women of Our Time)*

- *I Was Amelia Earhart : A Novel (Vintage Contemporaries)* by Jane Mendelsohn

- *Amelia: The Centennial Biography of an Aviation Pioneer* by Donald M. Goldstein

You can visit Amelia's birthplace in Kansas, see her battered leather jacket at Purdue University, or view her medals at the National Air and Space Museum if you want to really get a feel for this magnificent woman.

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