



Amelia

by Linda Baxter

"Women must try to do things as men have tried. When they fail, their failure must be but a challenge to others." (Amelia Earhart)

Amelia Earhart was born in 1897, in Kansas, USA. Even as a child she didn't behave in a conventionally 'feminine' way. She climbed trees and hunted rats with her rifle - but she wasn't particularly interested in flying. She saw her first plane when she was 10, and wasn't impressed at all. But she was very interested in newspaper reports about women who were successful in male-dominated professions, such as engineering, law and management. She cut them out and kept them.



During the First World War she worked as a nursing assistant in a military hospital, and later started to study medicine at university. Then, in 1920, Amelia's life changed. She went to an aviation fair with her father and had a 10-minute flight in a plane. That was it. As soon as the plane left the ground, Amelia knew that she had to fly.

So Amelia found herself a female flying teacher and started to learn to fly. She took all sorts of odd jobs to pay for the lessons, and also saved and borrowed enough money to buy a second-hand plane. It was bright yellow and she called it 'Canary'. In 1922 she took 'Canary' up to a height of 14,000 feet, breaking the women's altitude record.

In 1928, Amelia was working as a social worker in Boston when she received an amazing phone call inviting her to join pilot Wilmer Stultz on a flight across the Atlantic. The man who organised the flight was the American publisher, George Putnam. Amelia's official title was 'commander' but she herself said that she was just a passenger. But she was still the first woman passenger to fly across the Atlantic. She became famous, wrote a book about the crossing (called '20 Hours, 40 minutes') and travelled around the country giving lectures. George Putnam was like a manager to her, and she eventually married him in 1931.



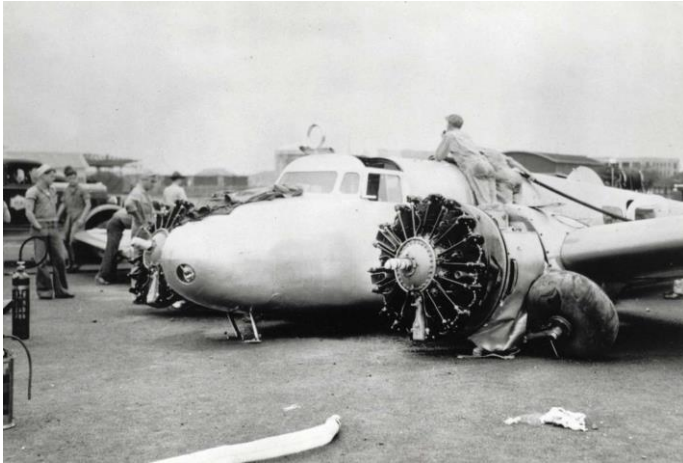
Then, in 1932, Amelia flew solo across the Atlantic, something that only one person, Lindbergh, had ever done before. Because of bad weather, she was forced to land in the middle of a field in Ireland, frightening the cows. She broke several records with this flight: the first woman to make the solo crossing, the only person to make the crossing twice, the longest non-stop distance for a woman and the shortest time for the flight.

Now she was really famous. She was given the Distinguished Flying Cross (another first for a woman), wrote another book, and continued to lecture. She also designed a flying suit for women, and went on to design other clothes for women who led active lives.



Amelia continued to break all sorts of aviation records over the next few years. But not everyone was comfortable with the idea of a woman living the kind of life that Amelia led. One newspaper article about her finished with the question "But can she bake a cake?"

When she was nearly 40, Amelia decided that she was ready for a final challenge - to be the first woman to fly around the world. Her first attempt was unsuccessful (the plane was damaged) but she tried again in June 1937, with her navigator, Fred Noonan. She had decided that this was going to be her last long-distance 'record breaking' flight.



Everything went smoothly and they landed in New Guinea in July. The next stage was from New Guinea to Howland Island, a tiny spot of land in the Pacific Ocean. But in mid flight the plane, navigator and pilot simply disappeared in the bad weather.

A rescue search was started immediately but nothing was found. The United States government spent \$4 million looking for Amelia, which makes it the most expensive air and sea search in history. A lighthouse was built on Howland Island in her memory.

Amelia always knew that what she did was dangerous and that every flight could be her last. She left a letter for her husband saying that she knew the dangers, but she wanted to do what she did. People today are still speculating about what might have happened to Amelia and Fred Noonan. There are even theories that they might have landed on an unknown island and lived for many more years. Whatever happened, Amelia Earhart is remembered as a brave pioneer for both aviation and for women.

