

Unit 12: Earhart Mystery

Narrator: Over 11,000 kilometers of empty ocean lie between Amelia Earhart and her attempt to be the first person to fly around the world following the Equator. She and her guide, Fred Noonan, take off from New Guinea and head for Howland Island, a tiny island in the middle of the Pacific. It was the last time anyone would see her.

After search efforts by the U.S. Navy found nothing, they concluded that Earhart ran out of gas and crashed in the open ocean near Howland Island. They believe her plane is laying thousands of kilometers down on the ocean floor.

While many accept this, there is no significant evidence to prove it. Some people have other ideas about what might have happened to Amelia Earhart. Some investigators imagine something very different taking place in the plane after Earhart's last radio message.

One idea is that Earhart decided not to continue looking for Howland Island. With only several hours of gas left in her tanks, they believe she flew to another island called Gardner Island (now known as Nikumaroro). As she approached, she landed on a reef and then went to the island. Earhart and Noonan waited for help to come, but with no water, died of thirst.

Another idea is that Earhart changed her route, taking a completely different path to the Marshall Islands—a group of islands that, in 1937, were controlled by the Japanese. It may sound like a Hollywood movie, but the idea that Earhart was taken prisoner by the Japanese is supported by many people who claimed to have seen the two captured American flyers. They believe that Earhart and Noonan both died while being held by the Japanese.

Yet another idea is that Amelia Earhart's disappearance in 1937 was not an accident. Some believe she was actually an American spy. Earhart's mission? To pretend she was having problems with her plane, so she would then have to fly to the Marshall Islands. Why? To give the U.S. Navy a reason to search Japanese waters in the Pacific.

Interestingly, just days after Earhart disappeared, the United States asked Japan if they could search the Marshall Islands. The Japanese said no.

One of the strangest ideas about what happened to Earhart was that she survived the war and returned to the United States to live the life of a New Jersey housewife by the name of Irene Bolam.

The mystery of Earhart's final flight has led to many different ideas of what really happened to the famous pilot. Will we ever really know what happened? It may be doubtful, but what is certain is people will continue to try to find answers.

Before leaving on this adventure, Earhart had told her friends that this would be her last big flight. She also left the world with these words: Find me if you can—and we've been hunting for her ever since.