

Amelia Lost: The Life and Disappearance of Amelia Earhart

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Featured in the upcoming National Geographic documentary, Expedition Amelia! This is a critically acclaimed look at the life, disappearance, and search for the legendary aviatrix, Amelia Earhart.

On May 21, 1937, the most famous female pilot of all time, Amelia Earhart, set out to do the impossible: circumnavigate the globe at its widest point--27,000 miles in all. Just six weeks later, she disappeared over the Pacific Ocean. Eighty years have passed since that fateful flight; and still, Amelia's plane has never been found. Discover the thrilling life and tragic end of America's most famous trailblazing flier with this impeccably researched and masterfully crafted book from acclaimed author Candace Fleming.

A New York Times Notable Book of the Year

Named a Best Book of the Year by:

The Washington Post
School Library Journal
Kirkus Reviews

CANDACE FLEMING is the prolific author of *The Family Romanov*, which received 6 starred reviews and was a Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Kirkus Reviews, School Library Journal, and Publishers Weekly Best Book of the Year. She also wrote *The Great and Only Barnum*, a YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction nominee and a Publishers Weekly and Booklist Best Book; *The Lincolns: A Scrapbook Look at Abraham and Mary*, a Boston Globe-Horn Book Award recipient; *Our Eleanor*, an ALA Best Book for Young Adults; and *Ben Franklin's Almanac*, a James Madison Honor Book. She is also the author of many highly acclaimed picture books. ON THE MORNING OF JULY 2, 1937, the coast guard cutter *Itasca* drifted on the Pacific Ocean, waiting... listening...

Hundreds of miles to the west, the famous female pilot Amelia Earhart was winging her way toward Howland Island—a narrow spit of coral sand just to the west of the ship. On this tiny dot of land, a handful of laborers had hastily built a runway just for Earhart, because she needed a place to land and refuel during the last leg of her around-the-world flight.

But finding Howland Island from the air was a difficult task. Only two miles long and a half mile wide, Howland sits in the middle of the vast Pacific Ocean. "Only the most highly skilled and experienced fliers could ever have spotted it," remarked one sailor aboard *Itasca*.

This was the reason the cutter was standing by. The crew hoped to help Earhart by making the island easier to spot. At midnight, searchlights had been switched on, serving as a beacon for the plane in case it picked up a tailwind and arrived early. At dawn, the ship's boilers had taken over, belching out thick black clouds of smoke as a visual signal.

Meanwhile, the ship's radio stood ready to send and receive messages. Chief Radioman Leo Bellarts himself had checked to make sure the transmitters and receivers were working properly. Earlier it had been agreed that Earhart would send her radio call letters—KHAQQ—and any other necessary flight information on 3105 kilocycles (similar to a radio channel). In this way, plane and ship hoped to stay in contact. But *Itasca* didn't hear from Earhart until 2:45 a.m. "Cloudy and overcast," she calmly reported. The rest of her message was lost in static.

For the past several hours *Itasca* had been sending Earhart the Morse code letter "A"—another aid to help guide her to the island. But if she heard this signal, she didn't respond

to it.

Around four a.m. a radioman from the coast guard's San Francisco division sent a message to Itasca. "Have you established contact with the plane yet?" he asked.

"[We've] heard her," replied Radioman Third Class Thomas O'Hare, "but don't know if she hears us."

Itasca went on sending and listening. Just before five a.m. they heard Earhart again. "Partly cloudy," she reported before her voice was once again lost in static.

Tense, Bellarts leaned closer to his radio set. For more than an hour, he and the other radiomen heard only the scratching of empty air waves. Then-

6:14 a.m.: "ITASCA, THIS IS KHAQQ. . . . WANT BEARING. . . . WILL WHISTLE IN MIKE."

Earhart then announced she was about two hundred miles away and started whistling into her radio's microphone.

Itasca's crew was surprised. The ship did have a direction finder that could pick up radio signals and determine where they were coming from. But their finder was unable to pick up the radio frequency Earhart was broadcasting on. Now, as she whistled into her mike, they realized the horrible truth—they could not help her! Remembered Leo Bellarts, "I was sitting there sweating blood because I couldn't do a darn thing about it."

Then Earhart stopped transmitting. For thirty minutes, radio operators tried making contact with her. Then, suddenly, she was back on the air, stronger than ever.

6:45 a.m.: "PLEASE TAKE BEARING ON US. . . . I WILL MAKE NOISE IN MIKE. . . . ABOUT ONE HUNDRED MILES OUT."

What could Itasca's crew do? For nearly an hour, radiomen frantically sent signals and messages, praying she could hear them. Crew members knew the plane had been aloft for nineteen hours now, and Earhart's fuel was running low. Along the ship's deck and on Howland Island itself, sailors gazed upward, their ears straining for the distant rumble of plane engines. "It was past dawn and the sky was partly cloudy," remembered one crew member. "The Itasca . . . [sent] out huge clouds of smoke while we lined the runway and sat out in lifeboats and the official greeters waited anxiously at the reception spot. All eyes gazed fondly, proudly, eagerly over the horizon. We believed we were about to see history in the making—the first woman to fly around the world, but she didn't come, and she didn't come."

And then her voice broke through the static.

7:42 a.m.: "WE MUST BE ON YOU, BUT CANNOT SEE YOU. GAS IS RUNNING LOW. BEEN UNABLE TO REACH YOU BY RADIO. WE ARE FLYING AT AN ALTITUDE OF 1,000 FEET."

Earhart's radio signal was so strong, Bellarts believed she had to be directly overhead. He stepped out of the radio room and listened, convinced he would hear a plane motor any second. He didn't.

7:58 a.m.: "KHAQQ CALLING ITASCA. WE ARE LISTENING BUT CANNOT HEAR YOU. . . ."

Bellarts knew this meant trouble. By now Earhart should have reached the island. But obviously she could see neither Howland nor the ship with its billowing smoke. This could mean only one thing-Amelia Earhart was lost.

8:00 a.m.: "KHAQQ CALLING ITASCA. WE RECEIVED YOUR SIGNALS BUT UNABLE TO GET A MINIMUM. PLEASE TAKE BEARING ON US AND ANSWER ON 3105. . . ."

Bellarts now knew with certainty that there was something wrong with Earhart's radio. She still did not know that they could not get a bearing on 3105 kilocycles. All they could do was go on sending radio signals. "We were trying everything," Bellarts later said. "We tried stuff that actually is not in the log. . . . Really, I mean it. We was frantic."

Then-forty-five anxious minutes later-she was back:

8:45 a.m.: "WE ARE ON LINE 157-337. WE WILL REPEAT MESSAGE. . . . WE ARE RUNNING ON LINE NORTH AND SOUTH."

The fear in Earhart's voice made Leo Bellarts's skin prickle. "I'm telling you, it sounded as if she would have broken out in a scream. . . . She was just about ready to break into tears and go into hysterics. . . . I'll never forget it."

Seconds turned to minutes. Minutes became an hour. But the sky above Howland Island remained empty.

And in the radio room, Leo Bellarts and the other crew members sat listening to the "mournful sound of that static."

Where, they wondered, was Amelia Earhart?

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