

QUEEN OF THE AIR

*Amelia Earhart: first woman
to fly solo across the Atlantic.
Born – 24 July 1897
Disappeared – 2 July 1937*



Amelia Earhart, an American, experienced her first close encounter with an aeroplane at the Iowa State Fair. She was ten years old and described it as: ‘... a thing of rusty wire and wood and not at all interesting.’

Almost ten years later, while at a stunt-flying exhibition, an airborne pilot spotted Amelia and a friend, standing away from the rest of the crowd. He swooped down towards them, possibly hoping to make them run, but Amelia stood her ground. Later in life, she said: ‘I did not understand it at the time, but I believe that little red airplane [aeroplane] said something to me as it swished by.’

On 28 December 1920, pilot Frank Hawks took her up in an aeroplane for the first time. ‘By the time I had got two or three hundred feet off the ground, I knew I had to fly.’

As a child, Amelia stayed with her grandmother during school term. In spite of her grandmother’s disapproval – common in those days – Amelia spent much of her time outdoors, climbing trees, riding imaginary horses and hunting. Later, in high school, she was described as:

A.E. – the girl in brown who walks alone.

On 3 January 1921, she took her first flying lesson. She worked hard for six months and saved enough money to buy her first, small aircraft: a two-seater biplane painted bright yellow, which she called *The Canary*.

A few years later, she was invited to join two other pilots to fly across the Atlantic. They left Newfoundland and landed in Wales 21 hours later. She became an international celebrity.

Then a new secret project presented itself – the opportunity to fly the same route completely single-handed. The news soon got out and on 20 May, 1932, she took off for Paris, but icy conditions and strong winds forced her to land in a farmer’s field in Londonderry, Ireland. At a time when even a car was a novelty, one can only imagine how excited the local people must have felt to see her land her plane.

Approaching her 40th birthday, she decided to be the first woman to fly round the world. By 29 June 1937, with her navigator, Fred Noonan, she reached New Guinea, having completed 22,000 of the 29,000 mile journey. A few days later, running into cloud and heavy rain, and with broken and irregular radio guidance from a ship in the area, her last message was: ‘We must be on you, but we cannot see you. Fuel is running low. Been unable to reach you by radio. We are flying at 1,000 feet. We are running north and south.’ Nothing more was heard from her.

Now use evidence from the text to answer the following questions.

- 1** What, in the introduction to the text, suggests that we don't know precisely when Amelia Earhart died.

- 2** Amelia wasn't impressed when she first had a close-up view of an aeroplane. How do we know?

- 3** What experience, described by Amelia, tells you that, even as a child, she was brave and not easily scared?

- 4** Why might her grandmother have disapproved of Amelia spending so much of her time outdoors?

- 5** How do we know Amelia had trouble making friends at school?

- 6** What phrase tells you that her second Atlantic crossing was done on her own?

- 7** Why would the local people in Ireland be so excited about Amelia landing there?

- 8** What made flying so difficult on the last leg of the round-the-world flight?
