

An excerpt from...

## Amelia Earhart

### The Legend of the Lost Aviator

By Shelley Tanaka

#### The Last Flight Part 2

Repairing the Electra was the least of her problems. The entire trip had to be planned again. Fuel, oil, spare parts, and mechanics had to be reassigned. Permission to land at foreign airports had to be reapplied for. More money-a lot more money-had to be raised to pay for it all.

Amelia decided to reverse the direction of the original flight. After all, she told the press, the world was the same distance around, whether you flew from west to east or from east to west. And flying west to east meant she could test out her rebuilt plane over land before crossing water.

Amelia and her crew finally left Oakland for the second time on May 21. At Tuscon, Arizona, the left engine burst into flames, though the fire was put out before it could spread. They flew in to a sandstorm near El Paso, Texas.

Still, Amelia was happy. She was certain the worst was behind her.

This time she was flying with one navigator-Fred Noonan, one of the best in the business. At a stop on the north coast of Venezuela, they were served an elaborate luncheon right in the hangar, a wild orchid corsage pinned to her crumpled flying shirt. At every stop she and Fred were fed generously and given food for the flight. They had to be careful not to gain weight. Six extra pounds would mean leaving behind a gallon of precious fuel!

Above South America, she flew over jungle for the first time-nothing but solid forest for hundreds of miles. It was beautiful, but this was the worst place to be if she had to make an emergency landing. She knew of pilots who had been pancaked onto the tightly packed treetops and then climbed down to the forest floor, but she didn't want to be one of them.

With so much to look at, it was sometimes hard to pay attention to what she called her "knitting" the horizon and her instruments. Both she and Fred were so busy that they crossed the equator without noticing.

Fred had even brought along a thermos of cold water to throw on Amelia to mark the occasion!

By June 7 they reached the edge of Brazil, and it was time to cross the Atlantic. At first the flight was uneventful. Then the heavens seemed to open as rain pounded the plane. Amelia could almost feel the weight of it on the roof of the cockpit. The rainwater mixed with the oil thrown back from the propellers, splashing the windows with brown muck. The gasoline fumes in the plane made her feel sick.

It was a great relief when they finally caught sight of the African coast, thirteen hours after leaving South America.

"Last week, home. Yesterday, South America. Today, Africa."

At each stop on her route she met with the same routine. The instant the plane landed, the doors were flung open and the cockpit was invaded by attendants with spray guns. They would give the plane-and Amelia & Fred- a vigorous disinfecting to kill any germs or disease-carrying insects.

Then mechanics got to work on the plane. Usually at least one part or system malfunctioned after several hours of flight. The Electra was treated like a prize racehorse, every inch carefully examined before being scrubbed with soap & water and refueled.

Meanwhile, Amelia and Fred would have their papers checked by health and customs officials. Amelia would write up an account of the trip so far and send it home. Then she would be entertained by local dignitaries until she could politely get away. She would not change her clothes and fall into bed, exhausted. Often she returned to the airport before dawn for a test flight or early takeoff before the heat of the day set in.

Amelia dodged tornadoes and sandstorms as she made her way across Africa. She even flew past Timbuktu, the famed outpost at the edge of the Sahara where caravans once brought gold, ivory, salt-and salves-to be shipped down the Niger River to the sea.

Then there was the difficulty of flying in the extreme heat-something Amelia decided should be avoided by other humans and machines. By afternoon the metal plane was too hot to touch, and the cockpit was sweltering. More important, hot air was thin and lacked lifting power, and it was rougher to fly in.

At last, on June 13, they came to the end of the continent. The city of Massawa, on the coast of the Red Sea, was 100 degrees the evening they arrived, but Amelia didn't mind. She'd soon be on her way again. She had made it over three continents. Her round-the-world flight was almost half over.