

An excerpt from...

Amelia Earhart

The Legend of the Lost Aviator

By Shelley Tanaka

The Last Flight Part 3

Two weeks later, Amelia was in Lae, New Guinea, on the edge of the Pacific Ocean. She had flown three-quarters of the way around the planet, and each day she had seen more of the world than most people see in their entire lives.

In central India she had flown through a sandstorm, where jagged mountain peaks poked up through the swirling sand like "sharks through a yellow sea." After that, they hit monsoon rains so thick it was like flying through a solid wall of water. The rain came down so hard that it beat patches of paint off the wings of the plane.

Across Asia she had flown over rice paddies that looked like Christmas packages. Everything was so beautiful it was hard to pay attention to her instruments.

Now there was just one more ocean to cross-the mighty Pacific, the biggest one of all. For eighteen hours she and Fred would fly over open water until they reached Howland Island-a tiny speck in the middle of the South Pacific.

This would be the longest stretch yet-2,556 miles-and they would need all the fuel they could carry. The plane had never been heavier, even though Amelia and Fred had removed every spare ounce of weight, including flares and smoke bombs, spare parts, clothes, and tools.

At 10 o'clock on the morning of July 2, Amelia climbed on to the wing behind Fred and they lowered themselves through the hatch. Then she started the engines, using more power than usual to push the heavy plane to the end of the long runway.

She turned the plane around and pushed the throttles forward. The Electra lumbered down the grassy stretch, faster and faster.

Just fifty yards before the runway ended the plane finally left the ground and soared out over the water.

All she had to do now was cross one more ocean and get home safely.

Near Howland Island, a Coast Guard cutter waited for Amelia Earhart to arrive from New Guinea. All night the ship's radio operators had frantically tried to communicate with her. But messages from her plane had been choppy, and her voice had been drowned by static. More worrying, she had not acknowledged any of the ship's own messages, and there was no way of knowing whether she had even received them.

A welcome party scanned the horizon waiting for the sight and sound of a plane. The minutes and hours ticked by as Amelia's scheduled landing time came and went.

She never arrived.

The United States government immediately launched a massive search, at a cost of \$4 million. For the next two weeks dozens of boats and planes crisscrossed 250,000 square miles of ocean looking for the lost Electra.

They found nothing.