



American Heroes

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Amelia Earhart (Library of Congress)

Amelia Earhart

"Courage is the price that life exacts for granting peace. The soul that knows it not, knows no release from little things. . . ."

Aviator

By being the first woman to fly across the Atlantic and by establishing numerous other flying records, Earhart helped to promote commercial aviation and advance the cause of women in aviation.

Born: July 24, 1897; Atchison, Kansas

Died: July 2?, 1937; Near Howland Island in the Pacific Ocean

Also Known As: Amelia Mary Earhart (full name); Lady Lindy (nickname)

Areas of Achievement: Aviation; women's rights

Early Life

Amelia Earhart (eh-MEEL-yeh EHR-hahrt), the daughter of Amy Otis and Edwin Stanton Earhart, was born in the home of her maternal grandparents in Atchison, Kansas. Her grandfather was Alfred G. Otis, a pioneer Atchison settler who became a prominent lawyer, banker, and federal district court judge. Her father worked for a railroad as an attorney and claims agent.

Earhart's early childhood was spent in Kansas City, Kansas, where she and her younger sister learned to ride horseback. When her father accepted a job in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1905, Earhart and her sister remained for a year in Atchison, where she later recalled, "There were regular games and school and mud-ball fights, picnics, and exploring raids up and down the bluffs of the Missouri River." After joining her father in Des Moines, Earhart attended school and began reading the books that further encouraged her spirit of adventure. Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and William Makepeace Thackeray were her favorite authors,

and she and her sister made up imaginary journeys while they played in an abandoned carriage.

When her father went to work for the Great Northern railroad, the Earharts moved to St. Paul, Minnesota, but Edwin's alcoholism grew worse and her mother took her daughters to Chicago, where Earhart was graduated from Hyde Park High School in June, 1916. She attended the Ogontz School in Rydal, Pennsylvania, then went to Toronto, Canada, where her sister was in school. In Toronto, she saw wounded veterans of World War I and became a Red Cross volunteer. She worked at Spadina Military Hospital, where she came to know and admire the young flyers of the Royal Flying Corps. In 1918, she was ill with pneumonia and went to live with her sister in Northampton, Massachusetts. While her sister was enrolled at Smith College, Earhart took a course in automobile repair. In 1919, she moved to New York City to study medicine at Columbia University but left after a year to join her parents in Los Angeles.

The aviation industry was just beginning to develop in Southern California, and Earhart was attracted to the air shows and flying demonstrations at local airports. She took her first airplane ride from the Glendale airport and soon convinced her parents to help her take flying lessons with a pioneer woman pilot, Neta Snook. In June, 1921, Earhart made her first solo flight in a Kinner Airster. One year later, she had saved two thousand dollars to buy a three-cylinder Kinner Canary, a plane in which she set a woman's altitude record of fourteen thousand feet. Her career as a pilot was launched.

Life's Work

Even in 1922, however, flying was expensive, and paid employment for women in aviation was limited. When her parents were divorced, Earhart sold her plane and returned to Massachusetts, where she taught English to immigrants and became a social worker at Denison House, a Boston settlement. She was able to combine her interests in social work and aviation, on one occasion flying over Boston and dropping leaflets announcing a Denison House street fair and on another, judging a model airplane contest for the National Playground Association.

In 1928, she was selected by the publisher George P. Putnam to fly with pilot Wilmer Stutz and mechanic Lou Gordon in a Fokker trimotor across the Atlantic. The plane, named *Friendship*, had been purchased from the explorer Richard Byrd by Amy Phipps Guest, an American flying enthusiast who had married and settled in England. When Guest was unable to make the flight herself, she asked Putnam to find a young woman to represent her in the promotion of women in aviation. On June 3, *Friendship* left Boston for Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Trepassy, Newfoundland. Delayed by bad weather for several days, the plane left Trepassy on June 17 and landed the following day at Burry Port, Wales. Earhart was given a hero's welcome on her return to New York.

Because her flight came only a little more than a year after the solo flight by Charles A. Lindbergh, and because of her tall, slender build and short, blonde hair, she was nicknamed Lady Lindy, but she preferred to be called "AE." Within a few months Putnam rushed her account of the flight, *Twenty Hours Forty Minutes* (1928), into print. The book is part autobiography, part journal of the flight, and part advocacy of