

# Australian Air-Ferry

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## October Newsletter

### Skydive Saipan

On a recent trip to Saipan we uncovered an interesting new dimension to the disappearance of Amelia Earhart in the 1930s, this tale accuses Amelia Earhart of espionage. It's a spy story that lands Amelia in prison on Saipan.

Australian Air Ferry was asked to move an XL 750 Pacific Aerospace Corp (PAC) aircraft, from their factory in Hamilton New Zealand to Saipan, where it would be used to run parachuters out of Guam and Saipan.

Skydive Saipan is a well-established business that caters mostly for Japanese tourist who frequent the area. It's a short few hours in a 747 from Tokyo and the Japanese flock to the picturesque islands for their holidays.



**Jumpers away in Saipan with Tinian Island Airport in the Background (The airport used to launch the Enola Gay with its deadly nuclear cargo destined for Hiroshima)**

We arrived in Hamilton late in the evening and spent the next day readying the aircraft for our first leg to Brisbane.

The next morning we're met by freezing conditions, the ground is covered with a frost that looks more like a thin cover of snow.

Both the pilot and co-pilot are heavily rugged, gloves, head cover and big coats. This proves to be grossly insufficient as we head out over the Tasman Sea.

Once established at our cruising altitude we commenced discussions about the lack of heating in the aircraft. The skydiving operations in the equatorial region of Saipan did not require heating, so the aircraft is not fitted with one. Meanwhile the outside air temp is well below zero and all of our cloths weren't nearly enough. We're longing for the warmth of Brisbane's sunny afternoons and looking forward to thawing out once we've arrived.

This leg will take several hours, and the cold seems to soak deeper and deeper as the hours drag slowly by.



**From 14,000 feet Saipan looks like a very small island, you wouldn't want to get the wind wrong, or you'd miss the island all together.**

One night in Brisbane and we're up very early in the morning for our next destination, Cairns. Once again it's just after day-break and despite the early hour it's much warmer. We plan to clear customs and head towards Madang New Guinea the same day.

We managed to get over the top of New Guinea's mountainous region in the mid afternoon and land in Madang well before dark. New Guinea has the most unpredictable weather in the world, and we're cautious as we approach and make the decision to proceed, most days the winds from either direction blowing straight up these massive mountains simply cause very unpleasant flying conditions.

The Madang resort is situated in a small but picturesque cove on New Guinea's north coast. It's looking a little dated now, but the diving and fishing in this area still attract tourists from all over the world.

After a night in the resort we headed for Saipan, we'd made the decision to head directly to Saipan, rather than track by Truk, north-east or north-west via Guam. Guam to Saipan is approximately 100nm so there's not much point tracking via Guam.

The weather was perfect for our flight and despite some earlier HF radio problems we managed to relax and find some small islands in this part of the world that have never been inhabited. There were very small islands with three or four trees and nothing for hundreds of miles in any direction. Sometimes there's a cluster of small islands, but no sign of life at all.



**PAC 750 powered by PT-6, world's first purpose built parachuting aircraft**

Several hours later we arrive in Saipan, it's extremely humid and luckily it's late in the day so after removing some equipment from the aircraft we headed for the air-conditioned accommodation.

As the sun sets over the Pacific we find ourselves sitting at a table on the beach, yes they put all the tables and chairs on the beach and staff run around bare footed taking orders and serving drinks.

Despite the enticement to stay, we're of to bed early, we've got a Bandeirante that's making the return journey the next day.

## **Amelia Earharts Disappearance**

The route taken north from New Guinea was similar to that traveled by the famous aviatrix Amelia Earhart.

On July 1, 1937, the famous aviatrix Amelia Earhart and her navigator, Fred Noonan, disappeared somewhere in the vicinity of the Phoenix Islands southwest of the Hawaiian Islands. Many theories abound and those familiar with Saipan know that some believe she was eventually found by the Japanese and brought to Saipan.

The Japanese have consistently denied having any knowledge of the fate of Amelia Earhart. Some have theorized that she may have been engaged in espionage for the United States in an attempt to learn more about military activities in the Japanese Mandated Islands of Micronesia, particularly in the vicinity of Truk which was believed at the time to be the site of a Japanese naval base. The theory rests upon the last message ever received from Earhart by the U. S. Coast Guard Cutter Itasca and whether or not the information received was a compass heading or a sun line.

She radioed, "We are on a position 157 degrees - 337 degrees, we will repeat this message on 6210 kilocycles. We are running north and south." The entire theory rests on two of several radio messages transmitted from her aircraft that provided flight information to the Itasca.

One message, a position fix five hours after her departure from Lae, New Guinea and a second message radioing either a heading on a compass or a sun line as she neared her destination.

For almost sixty years her disappearance has been a riddle wrapped in an enigma.

Although it has been consistently denied by the United States Government, there must have been several high ranking officers within the American naval establishment who saw in Earhart's plan for a flight around the world a golden opportunity to reconnoitre the developments being carried out within the Truk Lagoon by the Imperial Japanese Navy.

The mysterious disappearance of Amelia Earhart (Mrs. George P. Putnam) and her navigator, Fred Noonan, (previously a Pan American Airways navigator), along with their Lockheed Electra -10 after the aircraft left Lae, the capital of the Australian Mandated Territory of New Guinea, is a puzzle that remains fascinating.

It is not known if American intelligence officers ever bothered to read the annual reports the Japanese were required to submit to the League of Nations in the late thirties on their activities in the islands. If the United States authorities analysed such reports they must have become curious as to the purpose of the imports of certain commodities listed in the

statistical tables of the Annual Reports for 1936 -'37 which included 3.8 million tons of rice, (enough to feed a huge naval establishment).

Did knowledge of these increasing imports prompt General Henry "Hap" Arnold, Army Air Corps Chief, to attempt to find out what had been taking place within the Japanese Mandated Islands beyond their wall of secrecy by ordering the flight of two B -24's to reconnoitre the area barely two weeks before the outbreak of war in the Pacific and attempt to learn what Earhart failed to do 4 years and 5 months earlier?

While the buildup of Truk as a great Gunko, (naval base) had been kept a closely guarded secret, US naval vessels were prohibited by the Japanese from entering the harbours of the Mandated Islands.

By 1937, American naval authorities were becoming increasingly apprehensive of Japan's rearmament and the growing belligerency of its military. So much so that on Thanksgiving Day in 1941, (two weeks before the attack on Pearl Harbor) General Arnold ordered two B-24 aircraft stationed in San Francisco to fly to Manila. While enroute they were ordered to fly over Jaluit in the Marshall Islands and Truk in the Eastern Caroline Islands to photograph the naval installations there and attempt to find out what had been taking place at these locations within the Japanese Mandated Islands.

Did the American military's curiosity about these islands prompt an earlier (1937) request of Amelia Earhart to also attempt to fly over the same islands for the same purpose but from a different direction? Did she do so? The only serious problem with such a supposition is that a position report received from Earhart while in flight occurred at 5:20 pm (Lae time) and indicated her position at 04 degrees - 33 ' south latitude by 159 degrees - 06' east longitude, a fix which would place the aircraft in the vicinity of Nukumanu Island, northeast of Bougainville and in the area where it should have been assuming the original flight plan was being followed.

This fix would place the aircraft on a track from Lae to Howland Island some 742 nautical miles or about one third the distances between the two points which are separated by 2,227 nautical miles. This radioed position is southeast of Truk and almost due south of Ponape (Senyavin Island, now Pohnpei) and north of Guadalcanal.

That the transmission was picked up in Lae is strange indeed, since the Electra's radio range was said to be not much more than 400 miles. If this was in fact true - how is it that the signal was picked up from almost twice the distance? Was it a hoax? Was it a deceptive position directed to confuse any Japanese radioman at Truk who might have been monitoring the much publicized flight path (presumed to be from Lae to Howland) and the radio frequency of 6210 KHz? If so, the report was received at Truk only a short time before the aircraft could have roared over the encircling reef at Truk to carry out its assignment of aerial espionage before turning east to fly toward Jaluit and beyond the International Date Line thence south east to Howland.

To intentionally radio a false position with the objective of disguising one's true position is a classic technique of deception. Had the Japanese been monitoring the radio at Truk they could have plotted her position as a result of those coordinates and assumed she was outside the boundary of the Mandated Islands when in reality she could have been only an hour or so flying time south of Truk bearing down on the Japanese anchorage. Then zoom over the lagoon with enough light to observe the base before turning to fly east into the cover of the advancing evening darkness.

On July 2, 1937, Earhart departed Lae, New Guinea with Howland Island, as her destination 2,227 n. miles distant on an azimuth of 79.8 degrees - almost due east. The aircraft was to rendezvous with the U. S. Coast Guard Cutter Itasca which had been assigned by the U. S. Government to provide weather information and a directional beacon signal.

Howland is a low island with the highest point not ten feet above sea level. It is located at 00 degrees- 48' north latitude- 176 degrees - 38' west longitude, a mere dot on a Pacific chart.

It is interesting to note that on May 11, 1935, Fred Noonan replied to a letter from Navy Lt. Commander, P. V. H. Weems, an authority on aerial navigation, in which Noonan wrote about certain equipment for the planned flight. He stated, "For reasons which I am certain you can understand, we are not permitted to discuss the particulars of the flight for dissemination among the general public."

For some time the aircraft identified as King - How - Able - Queen - Queen had been trying to communicate by radio with the American vessel.

However, some of the signals received by the Itasca, and there were several, were at times either inaudible or incomprehensible. As the ship waited at Howland its radio crackled shortly after 8 am, July 1st, with a woman's voice. "We are on the line of position 157 degrees - 337 degrees - we will repeat this message on 6210 kilocycles wait listening on 6210 kilocycles - we are running north and south." This was the last message received by the Itasca from Earhart.

For sixteen days thereafter eight United States Navy ships and sixty four aircraft scanned 138,000 square miles of the Pacific for some evidence of the aircraft with the registry number 16020 and its crew of two. Nothing was found.

Flying a heading of 79.8 (2) degrees in a north-easterly direction would result in approaching Howland from the southwest. Flying a heading of 157 degrees (if this was in fact a compass heading rather than a sun line) would result in approaching the island from a northwestern direction. The question to be posed being - what would one have to do to approach Howland on a heading of 157 from the northwest? Could it be possible that Earhart, on a secret mission for the U. S. military, flew north from Lae over the Truk Lagoon to observe the installations and then anticipate a change in heading over Eten Island in the lagoon which would take her east over Jaluit in the Marshall Islands and

then continue to fly east and cross the International Date Line to approach Howland from the northwest on a compass course of 157 degrees? If she did - then she was engaged in espionage - about that there can be no doubt. The distance in nautical miles from Lae to Truk is 888; from Truk to Jaluit - 1,063; and from Jaluit to Howland (via Great Circle) - 878 n. mi.

The total distance is 2,829 nm as compared with 2,227 nm when flying direct from Lae. The most direct route (Great Circle) from Jaluit to Howland is on a heading of 109.9 degrees for 878 n. miles. However, this route, while shorter, would require her to be in Japanese airspace and over several populated islands in the Marshalls for a longer period of time which would afford the Japanese more time for interception should the flight be discovered.

Even so the cover of darkness would provide added safety. Did she maintain an easterly heading of 090 degrees after passing over Jaluit to reach a (critical) point for a turn on the "western" side of the Dateline then turn southwest on 157 degrees to reach Howland? The precise turning point on the US side of the Dateline would be critical. If flying short - or flying beyond this critical point - a heading of 157 could still be flown - but the island would be missed in the empty expanse of the Pacific.

You could depart Lae for Howland on a heading of 79.8 degrees (the direct route), and without a functioning auto-pilot, drift off course either to the north or south of the intended track and fly to a point southeast or northwest of Howland then turn the aircraft to 157 degrees or its reciprocal of 337 degrees either before or beyond the critical point in this area and miss the island. It is also quite possible that the islands were not accurately plotted on the charts of the period which could account for a navigational error at the desired destination of the flight.

She departed Lae at a time selected to result in arrival at Howland after sunrise so she'd be able to see the island and the crude, unlighted airstrip during daylight.

The United States Government certainly will never admit she was engaged in espionage if in fact that was the case since the country was not at war at the time and the Japanese have nothing to gain by admitting any knowledge of the fate of the two aviators.

Forty years after the disappearance of Amelia Earhart, four Chamorro women were interviewed on Saipan by a Catholic Priest in November 1977.

Their names have been intentionally omitted for obvious reasons. Their comments and recollections of the late thirties were provided to a US Navy Admiral on Guam for forwarding to Washington. Summarizing the interviews, one woman stated that when she was a young girl, sometime around 1937 or '38, a foreign woman, thin in stature with brown hair - cut short similar to that of a man, would sometimes pass her house and on one occasion, looked "sickly" with one side of her body and one hand burned. The foreign woman, with whom the Chamorro lady could not communicate as she did not speak English at the time, was believed to be staying in a nearby building referred to by

the local people as a hotel. This woman gave a ring with a “white” stone in it along with some pleasant smelling balsam to the young Chamorro girl.

Later, two Chamorro girls were asked to make two wreaths and, when asked why - the girls were told that the “American” had died of “amoeba” (dysentery or diarrhea).

The Chamorro woman related that when the foreign woman was alive she was guarded. The other Chamorro woman recalled that as a child she remembered hearing that a plane had crashed “southwest of us” and the pilot was a woman. The Chamorro recalled that the Japanese were ‘very startled’ because she was piloting the plane.

Still another Chamorro woman, when interviewed stated, “it could be 1939 or something like that when I first heard there was a woman spy who came to Saipan but they said she was most likely killed. But I did hear that an American woman was caught spying”. Still another Chamorro woman when interviewed recalled, “hearing about a plane that crashed, the topic of conversation in Saipan. I remembered going to church, I wanted to light a candle for my husband because a battleship was scheduled to come into port about 10 o’clock in the morning.

The plane was exhibited and that was when the Japanese made an announcement to all the people that those who wanted to see an airplane may come and see it. That was the year 1937 or 1938.”

If the signals heard by Radio Nauru, Wake, Midway and Makapu Point originated from the Electra then it could be assumed that Earhart did not crash in the sea but on an island since sea water would have rendered the Electra’s radio inoperable. Being on land and having been heard by Radio Nauru it may be surmised that she survived a crash landing and was alive, and with the aircraft, until 0948 (GMT) July 5, 1937. If so, this was the last signal ever received.

The possibility cannot be ignored that Earhart flew off course, strayed into air space over the Japanese Mandated Islands, ran out of fuel and was picked up by the Japanese and taken to Saipan. If, on a heading from Lae of 79.8 degrees, it is possible that position report of 157 - 337 degrees is a navigation sun line. If so, the Truk theory may be incorrect.

Since the departure from Lae, Amelia Earhart was in flight 20 hours and 15 minutes with 30 minutes of fuel remaining. It is not known for certain if she flew the Lae - Truk - Jaluit route, (2,829 n. miles) or the direct Lae - Howland route, (2,227 n. miles). The difference between the two is 602 nm.

The former route would require an average ground speed (gs) of 140 mph while the latter would require an average ground speed of 110 nmph.

Many bizarre stories have been advanced surrounding her disappearance. Among the strangest stories includes that of a United States soldier stationed on Saipan in 1944-’45

who claims to have seen the Lockheed Electra destroyed by American military in a damaged Japanese aircraft hanger at As Lito Field.

Still another intriguing story concerns that of a bottle with its cork sealed with wax which washed ashore on the coast of France in October, 1938 with a note inside. The French language message stated that the writer had been a prisoner of the Japanese on Jaluit where he claims to have seen Amelia Earhart and a male individual, both of whom were being held on the atoll for alleged spying on Japanese installations. The writer of the note stated he had been placed on a Japanese vessel bound for Europe and would throw the bottle overboard when the ship neared port.

This message is in the US National Archives in Washington after having been given to American authorities at the US Embassy in Paris. Earhart's position report at 0720 hours GMT of 04 degrees - 33 minutes south by 159 degrees 06 minutes east results in an approximate estimated time of arrival in the vicinity of Howland at approximately 2005 hours GMT or two hours later than originally anticipated.

The Northern Mariana Islands were not a permanent legal possession of Japan at the time of the war as it had only been entrusted to Japan under a mandate by a group of countries through their organization - the League of Nations. Therefore, the United States could not strip territory from defeated Japan at the conclusion of the hostilities since the islands were never recognized as permanent legal possession of Japan in the first place. On July 1947 the area was recognized as a Trust Territory by the United Nations. The United States Navy, and later the Department of Interior, became the administrator under a Trusteeship Agreement with the United Nations Organization, the successor to the League of Nations.

In 1952, upon signing the Treaty of Peace in San Francisco, Japan legally gave up all claims in the mandated islands formerly provided by the League of Nations and acknowledged the United Nations Agreement establishing the Trust Territory Of The Pacific Islands with the United States as the administering authority.

The reconstruction of the economy of Saipan after the war was long in occurring with the result that the area was the last of the former battlefields of World War Two to recover from the devastation.

This process did not really start until around 1978 some 33 years after the termination of World War two.

Thanks to Mr. William H. Stewart for providing the information used in these pages.  
<http://www.cnmi-guide.com/history/>

## **Saipan History**

Japan withdrew from the League of Nations in 1935 after it had virtually annexed the Islands into the Empire.

By 1936 a thriving fishing industry had developed as well as a sugar industry which occupied 68 percent of the arable land on Saipan, 80 percent on Tinian and 33 percent on Rota.

The resident population grew to 23,800 on Saipan (of which only 3,222 were originally from the islands); 1,530 on Tinian (25 Chamorros) and 5,600 on Rota (791 Chamorros). By the time the dark clouds of war had gathered over the western Pacific, some 29,692 Japanese military personnel were garrisoned on Saipan.

The islands were assaulted by American forces on June 15, 1944 and one of the most hotly contested battles of the entire war was fought on its sandy beaches and mountainous terrain. American forces gained control of the island on July 1944 and the construction of bases and airfields began.

It was from such airfield on Tinian Island that the first nuclear weapon was dropped on Hiroshima by the B -29 aircraft Enola Gay hastening the end of hostilities. The airfields on Tinian which in 1945 were the busiest in the world are now largely abandoned.

### **Air Pacific Commence Services to Christmas Island**



Mid October Air Pacific Fiji Airlines commenced a 737 service to Christmas Island – and Australian Air Ferry co-incidentally witnessed their first service to the small atoll.

Christmas Island is situated 02 degrees north of the equator, due south of the Hawaii Islands.

Air Pacific run their 737 from Fiji to Christmas and then onto Honolulu, and then it does the same on a return flight to Fiji.

This service now makes it possible for Australians to venture to Christmas for some of the best fishing in the world. Bris/Syd/Mlb to Fiji with connection to Christmas.

The service replaces a G1 that was coming from Honolulu once a week, the new service lands four times weekly, twice from either direction.



### Surplus Equipment

We have a 406 Mhz (digital) PLB locator beacon for sale, this is the latest in search and rescue niceties, it transmits your lat/long via satellite to NOAA every few minutes for 24 hours. We'll sell it near-new to you for \$950 Australian dollars and you can register it to your own person / organization. A must have for bush walkers and outback Australia flights.

We also have a black and white Lowrance 1000 GPS available for \$1,150 Australian. They're equipped with a pacific international database, and have seen very little service. We've also got a six-man life raft that has all sorts of inclusions, never used. Talk to Darren Gibson about these items.

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