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Pers. Earhart, Amelia

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Amelia Earhart's Secret

THE SEARCH FOR AMELIA EARHART By Fred Goerner. 328 pages. Illustrated. Doubleday, \$5.95.

It seems incredible, but for 30 years, or ever since her mysterious disappearance in the Pacific while on a 'round-the-world flight in July, 1937, the United States Government has known what happened to Amelia Earhart. The famed aviatrix, first woman to fly the Atlantic solo and darling of this country and the world, suffered the fate of a spy at the hands of the Japanese in those pre-Pearl Harbor days of turmoil and suspicion, and a tight-lipped security has kept the fact concealed ever since.

This book is the record of a six-year investigation by Mr. Goerner, a CBS radio broadcaster in San Francisco, who became intrigued with the story and from 1960 to 1966 performed one of the most remarkable "detective" exploits on record. It is explosive, and I predict will lead to a congressional inquiry as to why those in authority in several departments elected to keep secret the facts which would have cleared the air and done justice to the memory of the intrepid Amelia and her navigator, Cmdr. Fred J. Noonan.

The electrical atmosphere of the period will be well recalled by many of us. Aviation was still a brave and wonderful thing, Mr. Lindbergh had just made

his epochal flight when Miss Earhart flew the Atlantic alone in 1928 and received the Distinguished Flying Medal at a joint session of Congress. There was a White House dinner and foreign honors galore. In 1931 she married publisher George P. Putnam, a promoter de luxe, and when news got about of the proposed globe-encircling flight there was a fever of public excitement. In her Lockheed Electra the adventure began May 20, 1937, and in late June she and Noonan had reached New Guinea and were ready for the long over-water Pacific segment.

Bodies Recovered In 1944

On the morning of July 2 they took off from Lae, bound for Howland Island, a tiny landfall in the Western Pacific Marianas, with precautions for safety and careful supervision ordered by President Roosevelt. It was 2,500 miles over open water, with Howland in the neighborhood of the Marshall and Caroline islands, mandated to Japan and convenient for the Hawaiian adventure to come in 1941. We wanted more information about what was going on in these locations but the ticklish international situation prevented any overt moves. Particularly were we interested in Japanese Truk, the "Gibraltar of the Pacific," with its airfields and repair docks.

There was spotty and unsatis-

factory radio communication with the plane, indicating that the flyers were lost and short of fuel. Nothing more was heard, and for the next 30 days the largest and most expensive search in history was conducted over 262,000 square miles of the Pacific Ocean. What actually happened was that Earhart and Noonan had changed course and flown over Truk, finally coming down on Mill Atoll in the southeastern Marshalls, where they were nabbed by the Japanese and later conveyed to Saipan, a military headquarters island near Guam in the Carolines. The official verdict was "lost at sea," and for months the country talked of little else than the fate of the beloved "Lady Lindy."

The doleful fate of a captured spy is that your country can do nothing to help, and so it was that the two were executed (Amelia is rumored to have died of dysentery, though this seems unlikely). They were buried in Saipan, and the bodies recovered in 1944, at the time of the American invasion. Japan disclaimed any knowledge of the affair, although documentary proof in all phases of the saga and the statements of those involved uncovered by Mr. Goerner appear to be conclusive.

An Exciting Tale

Goerner started on the trail in 1960, when a native woman living in California, Mrs. Akiyama, said that she had seen the flyers as prisoners in Saipan. He made four trips to Guam and Saipan in the next five years and his experiences form an exciting tale of derring-do and a remarkable perseverance. But in Washington and elsewhere in the country he found a wall of silence and a display of shoulder-shrugging that he couldn't break down even with the help of the late Admiral Nimitz.

Some responsibility goes to those in high places too, it would seem, and a general air of conspiracy seems to have hovered over the State Department, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the Central Intelligence Agency (Goerner's discovery of a Nationalist Chinese spy school on Saipan was a factor), and assorted other centers of Federal power.

It is a puzzling hash of governmental policy and method, and not too happy a disclosure. Mr. Goerner has performed a good service in bringing it out in the open.

G. H. POWDER.



Amelia Earhart and her navigator, Fred Noonan, in Batavia on one of their last stops before they were forced down and captured by the Japanese.