

# How Did Amelia Earhart Sleep While Flying Around the World?

*By Paige Towers • June 29, 2016 at 12:32pm*

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Amelia Earhart — the infamous pilot, public speaker, champion of women's rights and wearer of awesome pants — disappeared on July 2nd, 1937 during an attempted aroundtheflight. In the 79 years that have since passed, Earhart's life story has been as standard a history lesson as George Washington's crossing of the Delaware or mythological chopping of that cherry tree. But one aspect of Earhart's life generally left uncovered is this: how was she able to sleep during those wickedlong flights across the Atlantic and beyond?

Not admitting to any weakness was a theme in Earhart's life, a fact which likely perhaps contributes to why there isn't much documentation on the amount of rest she logged. In 1928, Earhart was a passenger on a flight across the Atlantic, which took 15 hours and 40 minutes. She was the first woman to have ever taken part in such a journey and, considering she was tucked away in the back of the plane for the duration of

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the flight, one would think she napped for a bit. But as Candace Fleming

, author of “Amelia Lost: The Life and Disappearance of Amelia Earhart” states, “She never admitted to napping if she did on the 1928 trip.”

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Embarrassed about the attention she received for having been what she thought of as a ‘token female passenger’ in 1928, Earhart maintained a tough exterior when she finally was able to take off on her first solo transatlantic flight in 1932. At 14 hours and 56 minutes, that flight was shorter than the first, but she wouldn’t have had been able to rest for even a wink: the trip was highly stressful with icy conditions, wind and even a small mechanical fire.

Yet, skipping sleep was not an option during Earhart’s fatal attempt at an aroundtheworld flight 1937. Earhart and her copilot, Fred Noonan, would sleep at prearranged rest houses in India, Burma, Siam, the Dutch East Indies and elsewhere when they landed. Those pit stops, however, didn’t make up for the incredibly long distances they covered during each leg of the flight, some of which were 20 hours long.

Amelia in the cockpit; via Wikimedia Commons

As Fleming states: “She claimed, of course, that she never left the plane controls when flying, that Noonan always remained in back. We know this isn't true, but it's typical of Amelia to say something like that. She didn't want people to think that a man was actually doing the work.”

Even if Earhart was able to nap while in the air, sleep would have been infrequent and interrupted. In a 2010 documentary from PBS on the pilot, Doris Rich

— an Earhart biographer — remarked on the fact that before the last and fatal 18hour leg of her ambitious flight, Earhart was heavily fatigued. Rich stated:

*By the time Amelia arrived in Lae, which was almost threequarters of her entire journey, she had been flying for more than 40 days. She'd had five hours of sleep a night. She had had stomach attacks and more and more attacks of diarrhea. She was totally, totally run down, but so hopeful by then that perhaps if she could just make it to Howland, everything would be all right.*

Whether sleep deprivation was partially responsible for Earhart and Noonan's eventual demise is up for debate. What we do know is that, compared to today's pilots, whose sleep is regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration

, Earhart and other aviators of the time not only risked their lives in shaky, early model airplanes, but also sacrificed any semblance of healthy sleep. (Arguably, flight crews still

do not always get enough sleep,

although steps are being taken to ensure better rest periods between flights and cockpit naps.)

What's the one thing that hasn't changed since Earhart's era? The bad airplane food.

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As Earhart remarked during an interview with Heinz radio

that occurred sometime between 1935-1937, she mostly subsisted on cans of tomato juice, which she usually opened with an ice pick (!!!) and drank through a straw. She also occasionally splurged on raisins, malted milk balls, squares of chocolate or — in lieu of today's standard package of minipretzels — a

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hardboiled egg. At least she didn't have to suffer through a Salisbury steak.

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