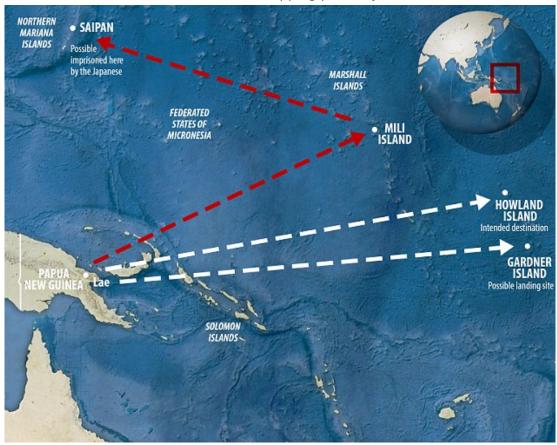




A small speck of land in the Marshall Islands, known as the Mili Atoll, is part of the Amelia Earhart story. Let's examine why.

Mili was not part of Amelia's flight plan as she and Fred Noonan left Lea (in Papua New Guinea) on July 2, 1937. It is northwest of Howland Island, Earhart's intended stopping point, by about 760 miles.



When they disappeared, Amelia and Fred were flying the hardest part of their nearly 30,000-mile journey around the world. Their twin-engine Lockheed Electra had enough fuel to stay airborne for about twenty hours. They were heading for an airstrip, on Howland, which had been specially constructed for their flight.



What did the pair encounter during that leg of their trip? For one thing, a storm ... causing them to fly higher, to an altitude of 10,000 feet. Reaching that higher altitude would have cost them more fuel than they'd anticipated. And ... for another thing ... they would have been approaching Howland during, and after, daybreak. That means they would have been staring into the rising sun.

In 1937, flyers did not have the kind of instruments pilots rely on today. Fred Noonan was known for his great navigational skills, mostly relying on the sun and the sightings of stars to chart a course, but Howland is just a speck of land in a vast ocean.

Then there were the radio-transmission problems which Amelia and Fred encountered on the Lea-to-Howland leg of their trip. The crew aboard the *Itasca*—a US Coast Guard cutter stopped at Howland "to serve as a radio beacon and plane guard for Earhart's flight to Howland"—could hear Amelia, but she could not hear them.

Itasca's crew knew that Amelia's plane was getting closer to Howland when her radio transmissions became clearer. When her signal was particularly strong, the ship's radio operator raced to the ship's deck to search the sky above. He was utterly sure that the plane was overhead.

But the radio operator didn't see any plane over the ship—or anywhere else—and the flyers did not see *Itasca*.

As Amelia tried to make contact with the ship, her voice—according to *Itasca's* commander, Warner Thompson—was becoming strained. <u>She radioed</u>:

We must be on you but cannot see you.

Then Amelia told Itasca:

Gas is running low.

Leo Bellarts, *Itasca's* Chief Radioman, later talked about the sound of Amelia's voice as she realized she wasn't finding Howland Island, or the ship, and was running out of fuel. He said that during her last transmission Amelia sounded a "frantic note" and that there was "near hysteria in her voice."



Bellarts believes that Amelia and Fred ran out of fuel and had to ditch in the ocean within 100 miles of Howland Island. The water's depth, at that point in the Pacific, is around 18,000 feet.

So ... how is it that Mili plays any role in Amelia's story? Because people who lived there, at the time, said they saw her—reporting that they'd seen Amelia's plane crash-land at the northwestern part of Mili Atoll.

Jororo Alibar and his friend were teenagers in July of 1937, living in the Marshall Islands. They were interviewed years later by Vincent Loomis, a former U.S. Air Force C-47 pilot, for his 1985 book <u>Amelia Earhart: The Final Story</u>. The boys had an interesting tale about what they'd seen one summer day while fishing near Mili Atoll.

Before the war, they saw a plane land on a reef about 200 feet offshore Barre Island. Two people got out of the plane. The boys thought they were both men. They saw the two people, from the plane, working with a "yellow boat which grew." In that "yellow boat," they paddled to shore.

Loomis writes:

Jororo and Lijon, only teenagers, were frightened, crouching in the tiriki, the dense undergrowth, not quite knowing what to do.

Some Japanese arrived soon after. They questioned the two people, then slapped them. When one of the flyers screamed, the boys realized that she was a woman.

The boys remained hidden, watching in silence, since "they knew the Japanese would have killed them for what they had witnessed."

Another individual, who also claims to have seen Amelia, was Bilimon Amaron—a sixteen-year-old medical corpsman. He was called aboard a Japanese cargo ship, the *Koshu Maru*, in July of 1937, when the ship arrived at <u>Jaluit Atoll</u>. He treated two people—a male and a female—whom he later identified as Earhart and Noonan. He learned that the *Koshu* had picked-up these two people near Mili:

The crew of the ship said they picked them [two Caucasians, a male and a female] up between the Gilbert Islands and Mili Island, on a small atoll. We treated the man – I personally did.

The wound on the front side of the head was not very serious, but the wound around the knee was kind of a four-inch cut, inflamed, slightly bleeding; it was infected and had been open for quite a long time. I could not stitch it but used Paraply on the knee. The head wound required only a bandage. The Japanese on board told me that they had run out of fuel and came down near Mili; the man hurt himself when the plane landed.









Later, in 1984, Bilimon provided additional information when he was interviewed about the treatment he'd provided in 1937:

...Bilimon Amaron recalled that the Japanese navy had been taking an exercise in the area at the time of the crash. The crewmen of the cargo ship were military, not civilian, he remembered, and there were guards aboard as well. The wounded man and the woman were not being treated as spies, however.

In fact, Amaron found nothing memorable about the event except the race of the marooned pair. He saw no other Caucasians in the Marshalls during those years. At the time, he had never heard of Amelia Earhart. Only much later did he recognize her and Noonan from photographs and realize what he had actually seen that day. (For quoted passages, see Lost Star: The Search for Amelia Earhart, by Randall Brink, at page 154.)

But how could Earhart have flown to Mili when she was already running out of fuel as she neared Howland? According to a theory, based on the total amount of fuel she had onboard her Lockheed Electra, Fred and Amelia could have flown another four hours (if they couldn't find Howland). Her fallback plan—if she couldn't locate Howland—was to turn west and head toward the Gilbert Islands. She was sure she could find a beach, on one of those islands, to land her plane.

Did she do that? If so ... how could it be that she found Mili (which is part of the Marshalls, not the Gilberts)? Perhaps—continues the theory—she didn't find Howland because she was too far north. Then ... if she turned west (as she planned to do if she didn't see Howland), the first piece of land she might have seen was Mili Atoll.

Recently, a photograph maintained at the U.S. National Archives—originating in a file kept at the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI)—has come to light. <u>The photo</u> depicts a cargo ship <u>at Jaluit</u>, an atoll in the Pacific, which is part of the Marshall Islands. <u>Jaluit is just west of Mili</u>.

The picture also shows several people on a dock, near the ship. Researchers believe two of the people on the Jaluit dock are Amelia Earhart and Fred Noonan. The researchers also believe that the object being towed behind the ship is Earhart's plane.

From Mili and then Jaluit—so the story goes—Earhart and Noonan were ultimately sent to Saipan where they died as captives of the Japanese (whose <u>military forces seized Nanking</u>, then the capital of the Republic of China, near the end of 1937). There is even a witness who says that Amelia and Fred crash-landed their plane directly at Saipan.

Saw Amelia Earhart Crash



On July 1, 1937, Amelia Earhart, at 39 America's most famous aviatrix, disappeared without trace while on the last lap of a round-the-world flight.

Accompanied by her navigator, Capt. Fred J. Noonan, she had set out from the East In-

dies toward Howland Island in the West Pacific. It has been variously speculated that they perished at sea, were made prisoners of the Japanese, were cast away on an undiscovered island, even that they are still living in Japan under assumed names!

Now an eyewitness claims that Amelia Earhart and Fred Noonan were shot by the Japanese as spies in her native Saipan. Mrs. Josephine Blanco Akiyama, who was 11 years old when she witnessed Miss Earhart's crash landing on the beach of her homeland, taught school and worked as a dental assistant for the U.S. Navy in Saipan before she came to the United States three years ago. She now lives in San Mateo; Calif., with her husband and eight-year-old son.

SAW AMELIA EARHART crash on Saipan in the summer of 1937. I know that Miss Earhart and her navigator, Fred Noonan, were executed as spies by the Japanese a few days later. Crash on Saipan

By MRS. JOSEPHINE BLANCO AKIYAMA

Just 23 years after her disappearance, an eyewitness gives this exclusive report on the fate of America's most famous aviatrix trousers and a light shirt with short sleeves,

I could tell that both were terribly exhausted. But they didn't appear to be hurt. Nor were their clothes torn.

When I saw my brother-in-law a few minutes later, I tried to tell him what had happened. There were so many people around that I didn't dare speak up. But I did tell my parents as soon as I got home.

I can still hear their reaction. "Don't tell anyone, Josephine, or we'll all be in serious trouble," my father pleaded.

"We might get shot," my mother cried out. "Forget what you saw!"

They were scared. All of us on Saipan were scared, for we had come under Japanese control when the island became its mandate shortly after World War I and was turned into an important naval base. Before, it had belonged to Germany and before that to Spain.

I was born there and, like most natives, was taught early to respect, obey, and fear the Japanese. At least the military. Socially, we got along quite well with them, and there were many intermarriages. My own family was so prominent that whenever a Japanese dignitary came to Saipan, he would be taken to our house for a native meal.

What did Leo Bellarts, *Itasca's* Chief Radioman, make of these claims? In a <u>November 1961 letter</u>, which he <u>wrote to Fred Goerner of KCBS</u>, Bellarts observes (among other things):

...I was one of the very few people that heard the last message from the Earhart plane. I was the Chief Radioman on the USCG Itasca at Howland Island during her ill-fated trip. Having heard practically every transmission she made from about 0200 till her crash when she was very loud and clear, I can assure you that she crashed very near Howland Island. The only island near Howland that it would have been possible for her to land would have been Baker Island and she didn't land there.

Considering the increase in her signal strength from her first to her last transmission there leaves no doubt in my mind that she now rests peacefully on the bottom of the sea, no farther than 100 miles from Howland. If you could have heard the last transmission, the frantic note and near hysteria in her voice you also would be convinced of her fate but not on Saipan.

I firmly believe that she died a hero in the public eye and that is the way I believe that she would like it to be.

Conflicting stories, like these, have kept the mystery of Amelia's disappearance alive for more than eight decades.

Credits:

Aerial image of Mili Atoll, part of the Marshall Islands.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Mili-Atoll-Did-Amelia-Earhart-Crash-Here-

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Mili-Atoll-Did-Amelia-Earhart-Crash-Here-

Media Stream



Amelia Earhart Intended Flight Plan

Image online via Daily Mail.

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Leo Bellarts Chief Radioman on Itasca

Image of Leo Bellarts onboard the Itasca—taken at an unknown time of day on July 2, 1937—is online courtesy David Bellarts (Leo's son). Photographer unnamed. Public Domain.

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Amelia Earhart Claimed Landing at Mili Atoll

Marshall Island commemorative stamps from 1987, marking the 50th anniversary of Earhart and Noonan's reported landing at Mili Atoll. Public domain.

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