

Latest search for Amelia Earhart plane comes up empty: NYT

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The mystery continues.

The latest hunt for the remains of the plane of Amelia Earhart, the famed American aviatrix who disappeared over the Pacific in 1937, has turned up nothing.

The New York Times reported Tuesday that an extensive search conducted by a team led by Robert Ballard, discoverer of the wreckage of the Titanic, had not turned up any evidence of Earhart's aircraft.

The National Geographic Channel, which sponsored the expedition, is to air a documentary about the search on Sunday.

Earhart went missing while on a pioneering round-the-world flight with navigator Fred Noonan.

Her disappearance is one of the most tantalizing mysteries in aviation lore, fascinating historians for decades and spawning books, movies and theories galore.

The prevailing belief is that Earhart, 39, and Noonan, 44, ran out of fuel and ditched their twin-engine Lockheed Electra in the Pacific near remote Howland Island while on one of the final legs of their epic journey.

One of the most popular theories is that Earhart and Noonan crash-

landed on uninhabited Gardner Island, now known as Nikumaroro, part of the Republic of Kiribati, where she survived briefly as a castaway.

The Times said Ballard and his team conducted a two-week search around Nikumaroro in August, using the state-of-the-art research vessel E/V Nautilus, underwater submersibles and aerial drones.

Despite not finding a single piece of Earhart's Lockheed Electra, Ballard told the newspaper he remains confident it will eventually be discovered.

"This plane exists," Ballard said. "It's not the Loch Ness monster, and it's going to be found.

"I'm not giving up," he said.

Earhart, who won fame in 1932 as the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic, took off on May 20, 1937 from Oakland, California, hoping to become the first woman to fly around the world.

She and Noonan vanished on July 2, 1937 after taking off from Lae, Papua New Guinea, on a challenging 2,500-mile (4,000-kilometer) flight to refuel on Howland Island, a speck of a US territory between Australia and Hawaii.

They never made it.

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