

Kahunas---Yesterday and Today

By Henry E. Dougherty



Ancient Hawaiian temple and gods, in a day when kahunas were plentiful and powerful

ON MARCH 20, 1937, Amelia Earhart, famous flier, attempted to take off from the army runway on Ford Island for Howland Island. She blew a tire, the wheels were wrenched, a wing dipped to the ground, and the machine was so badly damaged that the take-off from Ford Island never materialized.

The plane was returned to its manufacturer in California. Miss Earhart then decided to fly eastward around the world instead of westward. Howland Island was still on her list as one of the mileposts.

On July 2, in the small hours of the night, Miss Earhart's flying laboratory, speeding from Lae, New Guinea, for Howland Island, became silent—and from that moment until now, nothing has ever been heard of her or of F. J. Noonan, her navigator.

Naturally one of the biggest stories of that year, or any other year—a famous woman flying around the world, to appear without a trace.

As we all know, the United States navy, with battleship and aircraft carrier, planes, destroyers and the coast guard cutters, covered thousands of square miles in the vicinity of Howland, days on end, searching for the "trace" that would reveal the presence of Miss Earhart, her plane or her navigator.

On July 19 came a dispatch from Washington which said the U.S. Navy on that date was "writing off the search." Its planes had scanned wide spaces of South Seas' water, had flown over many islands and island groups; its ships had visited harbors and the open sea; the radio had called constantly and continuously; no trace had been found of the fliers, and the navy gave up the quest.

It has often been remarked that Miss Earhart met with mishaps only when she was taking off on that lap to Howland Island. Which revives a conversation I heard that year between two well known Hawaiians, and which I heard repeated only a few weeks ago.

What I am about to write here has no basis of fact, so far as one's daily routine is concerned, and it has no basis of fact so far as scientific investigation of Howland Island is concerned. There is a general belief, however, according to my Hawaiian acquaintances, that Miss Earhart's landing on Howland island "was thwarted under the spell of a *kahuna*."

Why? Say these Hawaiians: "Howland Island was a burying ground of the ancient Polynesians. When men died aboard the giant outriggers, en route from Hawaii to some other islands, or from some other islands

to Hawaii, with Howland in between, Howland became the graveyard of the departed.

"Howland is sacred ground. There are Hawaiians who do not want their ancestral dead disturbed. They do not want the United States to make a flying field of the island. They didn't want Amelia Earhart to land there. They had no ill feeling for Miss Earhart. They wished her no harm. They only wanted her to pass by Howland—land somewhere else—and so someone *kahuna*ed her flights."

So goes the story. It fits in with the actual flight facts, at any rate. But was Howland island a burial ground? The question has never been fully answered by those who are familiar with the island.

Joseph S. Emerson, writing of Hawaiian *kahunas* some years ago, listed some of them as follows:

Kahuna Kalai Wai, the canoe builder.

Kahuna Kilo Hoku, the star gazer, who without any maps or charts or instruments of precision, directed his course in long voyages, by observing the stars.

Kahuna Kalai le Kuku, maker of the *kapa* beater, a domestic tool that was a great necessity.

Kahuna Lapaa, the medicine man, the best informed man in the community in an ignorant age and among primitive people. He possessed a useful knowledge of the healing properties of plants.

Kahuna Pule, the praying *kahuna*, or the name given by the Hawaiians to all ministers, Christian or otherwise.

*Kahuna Po'iuhan*e, exponent of the black art, or teacher of spirits.

Kahuna Anaana, general name for one who prays a person to death.

There are others, Mr. Emerson observes, adding: "The word *kahuna*, in its various dialectic modifications, is found all through the different sections of the Polynesian race and is not limited to the people of Hawaii. It means an expert, one skilled in any of the arts or wise in any of the sciences, a member of a learned fraternity."

Skipping all others and coming to the gentleman whose business it was to pray his fellowman to death, we'll quote again from Mr. Emerson's observations: "As an essential preliminary he first secures a bit of the intended victim's clothing, or a little of his hair, or a portion of his finger nail, or his spittle, or anything emanating from his person. This is called *maunu* or bait, which serves as a connection between the victim and the *kahuna*. It is also necessary that the proposed victim should be informed of the fact that he is being prayed to death. Terror seizes upon the poor fellow who believes that his fate is settled if he cannot secure another more powerful *kahuna* to defeat the one who is working his ruin.

"The great thing in the *kahuna's* success is to get the reputation of having *mana* or occult power.

"Of the various and numerous class of beings whom the *kahuna* can summon to his aid we'll mention two, the *Aumakua*s, or ancestral gods, and the *Unihipili*, or personal god. The important distinction between an



Amelia Earhart, lost in round-the-world flight

Unihipili and an *Aumakua* is this: the *Unihipili* is created, as it were by, and becomes the slave of, a single *kahuna*, who has the entire responsibility for its feeding and growth.

"The *Aumakua*, on the contrary, may have a host of worshipers, and usually enters into intimate and often pleasant relations with the clan or the class that acknowledges it as one of their gods. Since it is assured of always having a number of devotees to give it the required *hoomanamana*, it is not driven to desperation, as is an *Unihipili*, by the neglect of a single worshiper."

Just what class of *kahuna* entered the scene in the case of Howland Island, our Hawaiian friends do not state. Theirs is the bald suggestion, supported by their belief, that failure of Miss Earhart to reach Howland Island was the work of *kahunas*.

Other explanations of the same failure have related to lack of gasoline, possibility that the navigation instruments did not function, or the possibility of some human frailty that caused the plane to slip into the ocean. The *kahuna* story, perhaps, is as good as any until the real story is unearthed—if ever.

THANKSGIVING DAY

By Marge' Lally

*Thanksgiving Day in Blue Hawaii,
Land of Sunshine and trade'wind breeze.
At sunrise, all over these islands,
You'll find every nationality — on bended knees,
Giving thanks for this PARADISE.
Thanks for the mighty Pacific
With waters as warm as a shower,
Thanks for the coral sands
On which to draw pictures — by the hour
— Or strum the uke, for a spell,
As we watch the surf-riders glide in
— Or listen to the strange tales the waves tell
At sundown, on Thanksgiving Day.*