

ARWG March Diversity Message

AT AROUND NOON on the 5 September 1936, a pair of fishermen came across a woman floundering her way through a bog in Cape Breton, on the eastern shores of Nova Scotia. In the background somewhere was her single-engined Percival Vega Gull aircraft, its nose buried deep in the moss and the peat and its tail sticking in the air. Blood streamed down the woman's face and black peat went up to the waist of her formerly white overalls: 'I'm Mrs Markham,' she told them. 'I've just flown from England.'

Taken to a local farmhouse, the aviator asked for a cup of tea and for a phone. She was directed to 'a little cubicle that housed an ancient telephone' built on the rocks, 'put there in case of shipwrecks,' she recalled. Over the line she told the operator: 'I would like the airport notified and could you also ask someone to send a taxi for me?'

Beryl Markham, 33, had just succeeded in becoming the first person to fly non-stop, solo, from Europe to North America. She was also the first woman to fly east-west non-stop, solo across the Atlantic. Heading against the wind and into uncertain weather, it was an audacious achievement, but because she had not reached her intended destination – New York City – she initially considered herself a failure.

Within hours, however, she realized that the world saw it differently. The feat placed her alongside the greats of the golden age of aviation, not least Charles Lindbergh – the first person to fly the Atlantic solo – or Amelia Earhart, the first woman to fly the Atlantic (she went east-west, like Lindburgh, with the prevailing winds) or indeed Britain's Amy Johnson, the first woman to fly solo from Britain to Australia in 1930.

Congratulations flooded in from around the world. Earhart told the New York Times: 'I'm delighted beyond words that Mrs Markham should have succeeded in her exploit and has conquered the Atlantic. It was a great flight.' And a day later Markham arrived in New York where she was feted and given a hero's welcome – including a motorcade through the city and a suite at the Ritz-Carlton. 'America,' she pronounced, 'is jolly grand.'



You guessed it, this month is Women's History Month, an annual observance to highlight the contributions of women to events in history and contemporary society. Thank you Major Maranda Leeper for sharing Beryl Markham's story with me. In the United States, Women's History Month traces its beginnings back to the first International Women's Day in 1911.

If you aren't familiar with Louise McPhetridge Thaden, an Arkansas Aviator, her story is detailed in the book she wrote herself: *High, Wide and Frightened*. You can also read about her story here:

<https://armoneyandpolitics.com/the-aviator-louise-thaden-arkansas-amelia-earhart-blazed-trails-for-female-pilots/>

Other Diversity events in March:

Ramadan – March 10 – April 9

International Day to Combat Islamophobia – March 15

Neurodiversity Celebration Week – March 18 – 24

Easter – March 31

International Transgender Day of Visibility – March 31

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