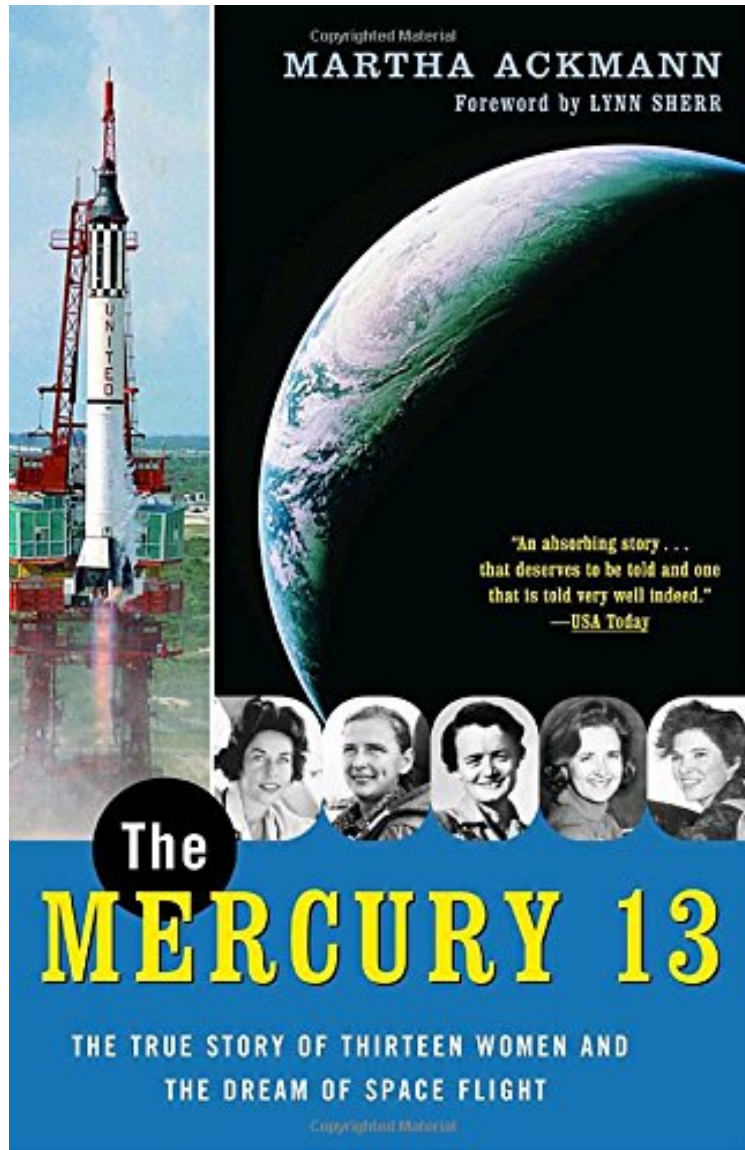


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The Mercury 13: The True Story of Thirteen Women and the Dream of Space Flight

Martha Ackmann

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Martha Ackmann : The Mercury 13: The True Story of Thirteen Women and the Dream of Space Flight before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Mercury 13: The True Story of Thirteen Women and the Dream of Space Flight:

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For readers of *The Astronaut Wives Club*, *The Mercury 13* reveals the little-known true story of the remarkable women who trained for NASA space flight. In 1961, just as NASA launched its first man into space, a group of women underwent secret testing in the hopes of becoming America's first female astronauts. They passed the same battery of tests at the legendary Lovelace Foundation as did the Mercury 7 astronauts, but they were summarily dismissed by the boys club at NASA and on Capitol Hill. The USSR sent its first woman into space in 1963; the United States did not follow suit for another twenty years. For the first time, Martha Ackmann tells the story of the dramatic events surrounding these thirteen remarkable women, all crackerjack pilots and patriots who sometimes sacrificed jobs and marriages for a chance to participate in America's space race against the Soviet Union. In addition to talking extensively to these women, Ackmann interviewed Chuck Yeager, John Glenn, Scott Carpenter, and others at NASA and in the White House with firsthand knowledge of the program, and includes here never-before-seen photographs of the Mercury 13 passing their Lovelace tests. Despite the crushing disappointment of watching their dreams being derailed, the Mercury 13 went on to extraordinary achievement in their lives: Jerrie Cobb, who began flying when she was so small she had to sit on pillows to see out of the cockpit, dedicated her life to flying solo missions to the Amazon rain forest; Wally Funk, who talked her way into the Lovelace trials, went on to become one of the first female FAA investigators; Janey Hart, mother of eight and, at age forty, the oldest astronaut candidate, had the political savvy to steer the women through congressional hearings and later helped found the National Organization for Women. A provocative tribute to these extraordinary women, *The Mercury 13* is an unforgettable story of determination, resilience, and inextinguishable hope. From the Hardcover edition.

From Publishers Weekly In dynamic prose, Ackmann, senior lecturer in women's studies at Mount Holyoke College, relates the story of 13 female pilots who fought to become part of the nation's space program at its inception. Their tale is uplifting, a narrative of their dedication—perhaps obsession might be a better word—and sacrifice in an attempt to aid the nation in the space race against the Soviets and to experience the thrill of space flight. The story is also a depressing indictment of the rampant sexism that kept them from achieving their goal and kept the country from making productive use of their considerable talents. These 13 women, among the most accomplished pilots in the world at the time, went through many of the same challenging, even excruciating tests undergone by NASA's original seven male astronauts but, unlike the latter, the women did so in relative obscurity and often against the express wishes of all arms of the nascent space program. That each woman passed all the tests, often with scores exceeding those of the males, carried absolutely no weight with an entrenched bureaucracy. Ackmann has done a magnificent job of gathering information, conducting interviews and weaving the strands into an utterly compelling book that deserves to be widely read well beyond the circles of the usual readers about the space program. 16 pages of photos not seen by PW. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. From School Library Journal Adult/High School—In the early days of the space race, women were barred from U.S. astronaut training, but some questioned the wisdom of this policy. At the Lovelace Foundation, in a secret "girl astronaut program," a select group of female pilots underwent the same comprehensive battery of psychological and physical tests required of male candidates. Now known as the Mercury 13, these women had many aviation honors, interesting lives, and (as shown in several well-chosen black-and-white photographs) great charm. Most made crushing sacrifices to prove they had "the will, the ability and the courage" to fly in space but, despite their resounding success, received no recognition. This account finds dramatic structure in the divergent personal and political paths of two of the century's greatest female pilots, Jerrie Cobb and Jackie Cochran. Cobb, the first to be chosen for testing, helped pick subsequent participants and ultimately became a champion of their cause in the political arena. The older and more influential Cochran had opened doors to female pilots in the past, but effectively opposed female participation in the space program. Once the battle was lost in Congress, it was another 40 years before a woman finally commanded a space flight. *Mercury 13* is both an outstanding work of research and an exceptionally readable and well-told story. Readers will gain new perspectives on space, medicine, women, and American culture, and will appreciate the magnitude of what was lost when the women were grounded. Christine C. Menefee, Fairfax County Public Library, VA Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist In the annals of this country's space program, the names of the original, legendary "Mercury 7" astronauts—Alan Shepard, John Glenn, and the rest—have achieved iconic status, while another group of pilots, eventually called the "Mercury 13," have languished in obscurity. The difference between the two has everything to do with issues of gender and the discriminatory attitudes that were endemic during the early 1960s, and nothing to do with their qualifications or expertise. In a long overdue group portrait, Ackmann reveals the previously unrecognized contributions of these 13 courageous women pilots, whose ambition and determination to become a part of the burgeoning space program were as fervent as that of their male counterparts, but who were denied access to the prerequisite training, testing, and preparation necessary to achieve their goals, simply because they were women. Ackmann's engrossing examination of

the early days of the aerospace industry delivers both a stinging indictment of an intolerant society and a stirring endorsement of women whose valor and dedication remain inspirational. Carol Haggas Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved