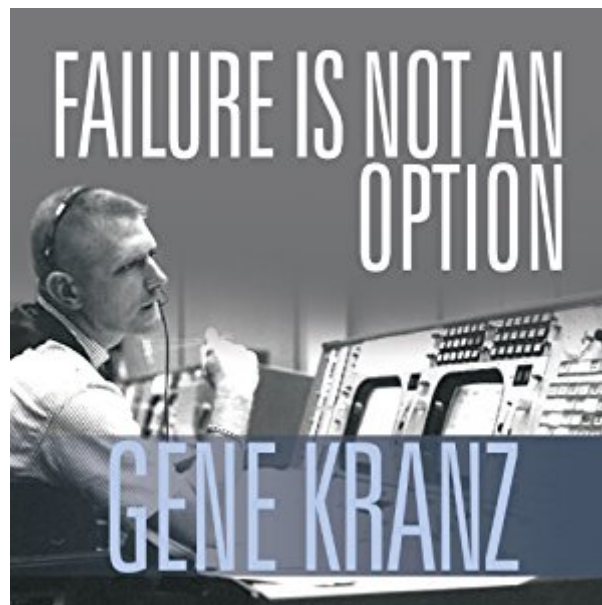




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Failure Is Not An Option: Mission Control From Mercury To Apollo 13 And Beyond



Synopsis

Gene Kranz was present at the creation of America's manned space program and was a key player in it for three decades. As a flight director in NASA's Mission Control, Kranz witnessed firsthand the making of history. He participated in the space program from the early days of the Mercury program to the last Apollo mission, and beyond. He endured the disastrous first years when rockets blew up and the United States seemed to fall further behind the Soviet Union in the space race. He helped to launch Alan Shepard and John Glenn, then assumed the flight director's role in the Gemini program, which he guided to fruition. With his teammates, he accepted the challenge to carry out President John F. Kennedy's commitment to land a man on the moon before the end of the 1960s. Kranz was flight director for both Apollo 11, the mission in which Neil Armstrong fulfilled President Kennedy's pledge, and Apollo 13. He headed the Tiger Team that had to figure out how to bring the three Apollo 13 astronauts safely back to Earth. (In the film *Apollo 13*, Kranz was played by the actor Ed Harris, who earned an Academy Award nomination for his performance.) In *Failure Is Not an Option*, Gene Kranz recounts these thrilling historic events and offers new information about the famous flights. What appeared as nearly flawless missions to the moon were, in fact, a series of hair-raising near misses. When the space technology failed, as it sometimes did, the controllers' only recourse was to rely on their skills and those of their teammates. Kranz takes us inside Mission Control and introduces us to some of the whiz kids - still in their twenties, only a few years out of college - who had to figure it all out as they went along, creating a great and daring enterprise. He reveals behind-the-scenes details to demonstrate the leadership, discipline, trust, and teamwork that made the space program a success.

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Customer Reviews

Gene Kranz is HILARIOUS!!! His telling of the early Space Program, and the people involved is VERY informative and shows not just what was shown to the public at the time, but an excellent 'Behind the Curtain' of what it took to get off the ground with NASA!! HIGHLY recommend this book to anyone that wants to know the Space Program in the United States went from President Kennedy's promise, to KEEPING that promise!!

As I work in aerospace operations, this was right up my alley! It was a bit of affirmation that I am doing a job I love even though it requires crazy travel and hours, my experience is easy compared to Mercury through Apollo. Highly recommend for technical folks that might be looking for some problem solving motivation.

Growing up as a kid watching the Gemini and Apollo missions is what first sparked my interest in science and engineering. The other kids wanted to be astronauts; I wanted to be one of the engineers in Mission Control, ideally the flight director. Astronauts went into space once, twice if they were lucky. The engineers in Mission Control got to go on each one (or so it seemed). I wanted to know what it was like to ride into space with a headset, an oscilloscope and a chart recorder. Having to make life and death decisions in seconds or fractions thereof. Gene Kranz's book has finally given me that ride. Kranz tells of space exploration from the controllers viewpoint. And what a view it is, from the 4" flight of Mercury-Redstone 1, to the first Moon landing with Apollo 11 and the death defying flight of Apollo 13 Kranz allows us to live the adventure that he and his fellow controllers lived. The computers of the day were too big to place in the spacecraft. The computers controlling the craft were in Houston and a successful mission meant relaying results and limited code from Houston to the craft and vice versa. Poor decisions could mean a failed mission or worse, dead astronauts. The pressure these men lived under was tremendous but they took it on willingly as they believed in the cause set for them by President Kennedy - To place a man on the moon before the end of the decade. They worked 12 & 16 hour shifts, lived at the Johnson Space Center during missions, skipped vacations for years leading up to that first moon landing. Kranz tells of how the pressure could take a toll on the controllers and their families but the mission always came first. Mission training for both controllers and astronauts began months before the actual mission.

Simulations were run to anticipate common and not so common emergencies. And they were run again and again until the right solutions came almost automatically. Much of the pressure would be blown off at informal beer laden mission debriefs at a local Biergarten in Webster or by various physical activities. In Kranz's case he took up judo with a couple of other controllers to help blow off steam. Kranz is quite humble about his own role as flight director for Gemini and Apollo. While a believer in strong leadership, his concept of that is someone who provides his team with clear goals and objectives, the tools needed and then gets out of their way. Kranz truly believes in teamwork freely acknowledging that any and all success he had with NASA was due to excellent collaboration of a complex team of astronauts, controllers, contractors and administrators and the support provided by his wife Marta and his Catholic Faith. So why only 4 stars? Let's face it, Kranz writes like he talks - in the short clipped speech of an engineer or better yet a flight director. To be honest, it's more like hearing him telling stories while sharing a beer. Still let's face it, he lacks the eloquence of Tom Wolfe in *The Right Stuff*. There are times I was aching for him to broaden the tale and give us more of the back story. However, except in rare occasions, if Kranz didn't experience it, he doesn't write about it. I was almost shocked that he doesn't tell the story of Alan Shepard needing to urinate after being locked up in Mercury-Freedom 7 for over 4 hours prior to launch. I would have loved to know how the controllers reacted to that request. There had to be a lot of scrambling, and contradicting opinions floating about on that one (they finally told Shepard to go ahead and go in his suit). Still there are times when Kranz rises to the occasion. His description of Armstrong and Aldrin's descent to the lunar surface was riveting. I was right there in Mission Control, holding my breath with the other controllers only letting go when Neil had placed the LEM down with only 17s of fuel remaining. In the end, it's a great read by a great and humble man.

Good history of the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo programs, from a key player. I appreciated how Kranz explains technical terms and doesn't leave us to guess what he's talking about. I wish he'd do an updated epilogue and give his thoughts on the new direction of space exploration, with SpaceX and its reusable rockets, and its goal to land on Mars.

Gene Kranz is one of those people "who were there" and helped to write the history. That itself is the reason why to read this book and it is a must for all of you who are interested in history of the space program. The book covers the Mercury to Apollo period of US space program during which Kranz served as a flight director. I expected more of a technical insight into NASA mission control business of that era but - and here comes the important part - the limited portion of technical details

is compensated more than sufficiently by expression of the passion shared by all people involved in the program at that time. Truth of the matter is, that passion was (due to my opinion) the most important thing on America's ladder to the Moon. It is very inspiring book, sometimes I felt the goosebumps when I realized how much is this passion missing in today's world. Although it is a cliché, when I was reading this book I had to ask "where the world could be, if all the people think and work in the same way as those Americans did back in that time". So, read it. Probably you won't become an expert on 50's and 60's mission control but you will have a lot to think about. For me, it is a mark of a really good book.

Gene Kranz's memoir is gripping, entertaining, enlightening, exciting, amusing, and depressing. I use the last adjective only because of the inevitable, unfulfilled longing Kranz expresses for America's return to the enterprise of space exploration. If you are old enough to remember Apollo 11 on TV, or you have any interest in space exploration's history or future, you will not be able to put this book down.

Did you grow up glued to a black and white TV watching your heroes, our first Astronauts, like I did? This book tells much of the "back-story" including how we got there, and the few things we know of that went wrong, and some things that almost went really bad that we never really heard about, like Apollo 11 almost crashing to the moon instead of landing as planned. and some other quiet "close-calls" that could have changed everything. If you liked the movie "Apollo 13" with its emphasis on the true behind-the-scenes engineering and technical teamwork that kept everyone alive, this book details that and other events it without getting too technical - it keeps things on a "spaceflight for non-science majors basis. Thank you, Gene Kranz and those who labored on these projects, you guys are heroes also!

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