



## Flight: My Life in Mission Control

*Christopher Kraft*

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## Flight: My Life in Mission Control Christopher Kraft

In his **New York Times** bestseller, Chris Kraft delivers an unforgettable account of his life in Mission Control. The first NASA flight director, Kraft emerged from boyhood in small-town America to become a visionary who played an integral role in what would become the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. It's all here, from the legendary Mercury missions that first sent Americans into space through the Gemini and Apollo missions that landed them on the moon. The great heroes of space are here, too—Alan Shepard, John Glenn, Neil Armstrong, Jim Lovell, and Buzz Aldrin—leading the space race that would change the course of U.S. history.

From NASA's infancy to its greatest triumphs . . . from the calculated gambles to the near disasters to the pure luck that accompanied each mission, Flight relives the spellbinding events that captured the imagination of the world. It is a stirring tribute to the U.S. space program and to the men who risked their lives to take America on a flight into the unknown—from the man who was there for it all.

"A highly readable memoir." (**The New York Times Book Review**)

"A rewarding look at the brief, shining moment when space pathfinders held sway over space warriors." (**The Washington Post**)

## Flight: My Life in Mission Control Details

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## From Reader Review Flight: My Life in Mission Control for online ebook

### **Sarah says**

Now felt like the right time for me to read this book, since you could make an argument that Chris Kraft basically invented the job I recently started. And it was interesting for me to go back to the very beginning of the U.S. space program, and especially to get more details on Mercury and Gemini. I know the history of Apollo in a fair bit of depth, largely due to the class I took on it at MIT, but I enjoyed reading a deeply involved insider's perspective on the programs that preceded it. I appreciated that Kraft made a good effort to recount Mercury stories in particular as they stood on their own, without shoehorning them into some greater Apollo narrative, although it's obviously impossible to avoid that entirely now that we're all sitting on the other side of the space race. Kraft was most hands-on during Mercury, though, since he moved into management roles later, so he provided more of the sorts of details I was after from that earliest program. Many things have changed between then and now, of course, but there are also many things large and small that persist right up to today!

Kraft's personality also tends to shine through in his book - he strikes me as the prototypical old-school aerospace engineer. His writing is straightforward and unadorned, though I can't quite say it's just-the-facts, because Kraft certainly makes no bones about giving his opinions! You can easily tell whether he likes someone, respects them in spite of some personal friction, or just thinks they're a useless screwup. I guess that's the personal touch you get with an autobiography as opposed to a straight-up history. Anyway, I'm interested to continue on and read some other takes on Mission Control, particularly Gene Kranz's *Failure is not an Option: Mission Control From Mercury to Apollo 13 and Beyond*, for the sake of comparison.

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### **Rick Denatale says**

I've read a LOT of memoirs from the early U.S. Space Program.

It's clear that there was a bit of a division between Kraft and his flight controllers and the astronaut corps.

Kraft had his heroes and villains among the astronauts, among the latter was definitely Scott Carpenter, if you read "Flight" you should also read Carpenter's "For Spacious Skies" to get the other view. I think that Kraft was the astronauts as people who should just follow the dictates of "Flight", which many of the astronauts had a hard time with. Another example of this was his decision to delay telling John Glenn about the indication on the ground that his landing bag had deployed, over the objectives of capsule communicator (and astronaut) Alan Shepard.

You'll see Craft's view of Kraft's less favored astronauts reflected in books like Gene Kranz's "Failure is not an option", while the astronauts didn't see it that way.

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### **Scott Foshee says**

**Intensely Interesting, Salty Account of the U.S. Space Program from its Beginnings Through Apollo**

## **and Beyond**

Chris Kraft pens a very interesting account of his life and his work with NACA (the forerunner to NASA), NASA, his work in aeronautical research, and his rise to NASA flight Director and beyond to director of the Manned Spacecraft Center. Kraft essentially invented mission control for the U.S. Space Program. Kraft was flight director for some of mankind's greatest adventures, and he states, "...while the mission is under way, I'm Flight. And Flight is God."

A memoir by an engineer could tend to be dry, but Chris Kraft keeps things lively. He has a tough job on his hands juggling roomfuls of Type A personalities and monster egos (including his own), but somehow manages to help build a winning formula from the ground up.

I particularly enjoyed Section III: the Gemini Missions. Although Gemini often seems to be overlooked in the rush to the Apollo program and the moon, Gemini laid the scientific groundwork for later successes. Highlights include the first American spacewalk by Ed White on Gemini 4, the two week endurance flight of Frank Borman and Jim Lovell aboard Gemini 7 (where they also act as a rendezvous target for Gemini 6A), and Gemini 8, where Neil Armstrong and Dave Scott very nearly die. Kraft takes us on a guided tour behind the scenes of each mission and we end up appreciating the people as well as the science behind everything all the more.

Kraft peppers his memoir with personal comments and opinions, which make "Flight" especially interesting. Kraft praises many, especially the incomparable Bob Gilruth. . "No man of space did more or received less credit than Robert R. Gilruth.... Why no monument to [him] yet exists is beyond my understanding." Chris Kraft is a man who also holds grudges, however. Kraft goes into his personal dislike for Wernher von Braun. "In many ways, von Braun followed his own agenda and always seemed rankled that he couldn't run the whole show." Kraft points out that von Braun had very little to do with the Gemini missions, although he does give him credit for his work and vision on the Saturn V rocket used in the Apollo program. More notably, Kraft repeatedly attacks Mercury astronaut Scott Carpenter for his performance in the Aurora 7 spacecraft. Alan Shepherd, the Capcom for Carpenter's flight, also relates the difficulties of dealing with Carpenter while in orbit in Neal Thompson's biography "Light This Candle," but Kraft seems to make the whole thing against Carpenter personal. Kraft effectively prevented Carpenter from ever flying in space again and even says, "Scott Carpenter was our bad example. He had slipped through the process without a college degree and virtually no test pilot experience."

Controversy aside, "Flight" is an intensely interesting, salty account of the U.S. Space Program from its beginnings through Apollo and beyond. It is well written and brings life to the science, technology, and the people of the U.S. Space Program from behind closed doors. "Flight" should be at or near the top of any space buff's list of books to read (along with Andrew Chaikin's "A Man on the Moon," "Carrying the Fire: An Astronaut's Journeys" by Michael Collins, and "Lost Moon" (Apollo 13) by Jim Lovell).

Special note: one additional tidbit I personally found interesting was that one of the reporters Chris Kraft mentions as covering the space program, Martin Caidin, wrote the novel which was turned into one of my favorite television series of my youth, "The Six Million Dollar Man."

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**Valerie says**

I didn't grow up during the space race. Everything I know about it comes from the movies Apollo 13 and October Sky, and what my dad tells me. I randomly decided to read this book because it seemed interesting. It became my very favorite biography. I just finished reading it again - this time with my husband.

The book is written by Christopher Kraft. He was NASA's first flight director (in the movie Apollo 13 Gene Kranz is the flight director - if that helps). He was with NASA before they even had the word astronaut. He vividly describes the challenges that they faced in trying to get man into space - let alone the moon.

The best part of the book is the way he pulls no punches when describing certain decisions and events. My husband and I often laughed out loud at the way he would describe a failed procedure. We could tell that he really cared about doing everything correctly and safely, and he often got frustrated with the people who didn't feel the same way.

All the "famous" (meaning people I've heard of) NASA people are discussed, and Kraft's perspective is, as with everything else, entertaining. He didn't particularly like Werner Von Braun, he had personality conflicts with John Glenn even before NASA, he helped decide that Neil Armstrong should be the first man on the moon, etc. He also spends a considerable amount of time giving credit to all the unsung heroes of the space program. He especially highlights the contributions of his mentor and boss, Bob Gilruth. The book is in someways a biography for Gilruth as much as Kraft.

I am very interested in operations management so this book was a treasure trove of how to solve problems. He talks about the things they learned along the way - NASA's successes and the failures. He goes into detail about the way they continued their successes and learned from the failures.

The book is really reader friendly. Kraft brings the details of rocket science down to a level where anyone can understand.

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### **Julie says**

This is one of the better behind the scenes narratives about the Space Race and the birth of NASA. What really impressed me was Chris Kraft discussing his early days as an aeronautical engineer and the amount of pure mathematics he was required to do, with a slide rule as they had no calculators or computers in the 1940s. I found it interesting a few pages later when he discussed his move to the brand new NASA and what was appealing was that he'd be able to get back to engineering and away from all of the mathematics! This all led to a long conversation with my father who has a degree in civil engineering and a career as a plant engineer. He wonders how many of today's engineers would be able to "do" engineering the old school way without computers and calculators. It's an interesting question.

I also liked how Kraft didn't pull punches when discussing personalities or his own shortcomings. I didn't feel as if he was constantly trying to present himself in a favorable light.

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### **Velimir Randic says**

An excellent look at America's space program by one of the principal contributors, Chris Kraft, NASA's first flight director and man on the scene for all the important Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo flights. Kraft doesn't

pull any punches about the Apollo 1 fire, misbehaviour in the astronaut corps, and the unfulfilled promise of lunar exploration after Nixon cancelled the last three missions. A remarkable memoir of America's finest hour.

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### **Dorian D-W says**

Chris Kraft's memoirs covers the early history of NASA from someone directly responsible for getting so much of the manned space program done, but still close to the management and bureaucratic side of the agency. As such it gives a fairly unique perspective that's both technical, looking at how NASA solved their constant challenges being pioneers in spaceflight, and political, acclaiming and critiquing the management side.

If you're interested in space history this is a must read from an often-overlooked central figure of the US manned space program. It can be a bit dry at parts, but is full of great behind the scenes details of what went on in mission control and behind the scenes. Kraft tells it as he remembers, and isn't afraid to call out those he feels did more harm than good. The book is full of his passion for what he sees as America's finest hour, and highly critical of what NASA has lost since the end of the Apollo program.

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### **Glennclick says**

Of all the biographies and autobiographies I've read about NASA/Apollo people, this is my favorite so far. Chris Kraft was NASA's original flight director—the one who runs the show in mission control during missions. In fact, he led the effort to create mission control and all of the policies and procedures that make it what it is today. Read this if you want details behind the legendary events and people of NASA's race to the moon. Kraft was an integral part of the process from pre-NASA days through the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo programs and beyond. The book was published in 2001, after many other books by and about Apollo people, and I was fascinated when Kraft addressed discrepancies among the various accounts of key events. See, we Apollo geeks always wanna know how it REALLY went down. No doubt, Kraft displays the Saturn V-sized ego that most of his colleagues shared (and probably needed to succeed in that fish bowl). But he also gets across how humbling this great adventure was, and the wonder of it all. James Shefter, a veteran journalist who covered NASA and mission control for many years, did an excellent job of turning this memoir into a solid piece of writing.

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### **Stan McCown says**

For anyone who has read about or remembers the U.S. space program, or wishes to become familiar with it in retrospect, this book is a must. Chris Kraft was the man behind the early launches, not just from a console in a block house but in the planning and the training of crews, and this account is the ultimate insider's story. Kraft clears up a number of questions and controversies about the events that made up the manned space program, and in a refreshing, frank way, he holds nothing back in extolling or criticizing the people he knew, worked with, and directed, and some of his opinions are surprising. Even those who believe they know the history of the manned space program well will find much to appreciate in this work.

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### **Joan says**

For all those who sat up and watched Neil Armstrong walk on the Moon. Readable and utterly enthralling.

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### **Mumbler says**

Kraft did a great job... and not just on the book. :)

I don't think it's as classic a book as Chaikin's *\_A Man On The Moon\_*. On the other hand, it's just as essential, if you have any interest in space flight. I loved hearing about the origins of the space program. I wouldn't minimize the astronauts' role, but there's so much more. Any one book, including this, can only show a tiny fraction of something as big as Apollo. But it's hard to think of a more essential perspective than Mission Control's.

And it certainly is well written.

I came out liking and admiring Kraft. Delighted that at the moment in 2016, he and Gene Kranz are still alive. Kranz's book should be my next on this topic.

For context, it's probably good to read this before *\_A Man On The Moon\_*. But however you go about it, I can't recommend that book strongly enough.

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### **Jon Cotton says**

This book, "Flight", and Gene Kranz's "Failure is Not an Option" are now two of my most treasured books. Stunning how it took me ~17 years to discover them. Man in space is incredible. Getting to the moon, incredible. Landing six times, incredible. Humans leaving our world, landing on another, then returning safely is just mind boggling. Doing it all from nothing within 11 years is astounding.

Watch Apollo 13 the movie and think about how that really happened. That's a taste. That was only one mission. Kraft was there for all of them. I'll read astronaut biographies next, but reading this from Kraft who invented Mission Control and was there leading Mercury, Gemini and Apollo is a very precious perspective.

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### **Rod Pyle says**

You don't know the space race until you read Chris Kraft...

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### **Annie says**

Such an engaging book. Kraft is a wonderful story teller. His story is inspiring and it's amazing to see the impact he had on history. True American legend and hero.

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### **Sarah Eckert says**

I think Joy gave this book to me. Great book! Recommended for anyone interested in space, the space program and NASA in particular. Really gives a behind the scenes look at one of the most noticeable roles in NASA Mission Control: The Flight Director, or "Flight."

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### **Adam Mills says**

First rate narrative of the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo missions from the man who was the original Flight Controller. Chris Kraft was in at the formation of Nasa from the Space Task Group under Bob Gilruth in 1958 and was the designer of Mission Control, its functions and procedures. He later became the Flight Operations Director and then towards the end of Apollo the head of the Manned Spacecraft Centre at Houston. The descriptions and inside information on the early missions is fascinating in its detailed depiction of the problems encountered on almost every mission, problems which had life or death consequences for the astronauts concerned. He does not hold back on criticism of the US government with regards to its commitment to space exploration and budget cuts nor on individuals within Nasa including the astronauts themselves. One of the best books on the US space programme up to the end of Apollo.

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### **K De says**

This autobiography by Christopher Kraft is concise and matter of fact about the his life and his career in NASA. There are many interesting vignettes he writes about during the time before NASA and during his years in NASA. The largest part of the autobiography is about his time during the creation of manned space flight and the space race against the USSR. It was a blazing time for space and technology that was a national challenge set forth by President Kennedy.

I found it fascinating to look behind the scenes look into how this nation's scientists, engineers answered the challenges versus the public view by newspapers, television, and NASA public relations.

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### **Pamela says**

Chris Kraft's autobiography, from his humble childhood beginnings through his career in Mission Control was quite insightful and fairly well-written. I found Kraft's assisted writing to be personable and intelligent without getting too technical. Moreover, he really made me think . . .

It's quite phenomenal, really, how in a mere ten-year period America went from testing airplanes and theoretical rocketry to walking on the moon. Much of what was physically and technologically required for such a massive endeavor hadn't been put through the gauntlet let alone invented yet: compact/powerful computers, heat-resistant plastics and hardware and spacesuits, satellites communications, off-sight medical

monitoring, zero gravity simulators.... Everything had to be imagined, created, funded, and constructed from the ground up – including NASA itself.

There has been much debate over the years as to whether or not vast fortunes spent on space travel were dollars well spent. In which, Kraft is very passionate about the subject. One has to at least recognize the phenomenal advancements created specifically for space travel did indeed advance all of America individually and corporately: technologically, scientifically, medically, industrially, and patriotically; with many upper and lower level jobs created accordingly. Would we be as technologically advanced today without President Kennedy's push for the moon? Maybe. Maybe not.

“Flight” wasn't the most pizzazz-wowing biography I've ever read. But it did hold my interest and stimulate my thought-processes. Plus I found Kraft to be an affable straightforward guy; not a limelight egotist – as some in the space industry have been known to be. And despite being a bit wordy and despite lacking photographs, other than just of the author (big bummer) I thought it was a worthwhile, informative and enjoyable four-star read.

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### **Andrew says**

Not just an insider's account but one of the core team who grew and led the moonshot from it's beginnings. Of course there is enough swagger and ego, and a handful of people who get scarred. Yet it's astounding to see the raw attitude and personality of one of the people who drove success on the ground. Two interesting elements are how much of the Apollo programme was built on the earlier expertise with aircraft testing as much as with Mercury and Gemini, and with having a clear vision of the requirements and resources to implement them. Absolutely worth reading.

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### **Alysia says**

Excellent book about the space program. Chris Kraft was at the right place to experience some of the best of America's space program. This book is well written and explains, not just the events, but his thoughts and decision making process on many key decisions. While reading it, you feel like you are there also. This is one of the few books that covers the Mercury and Gemini space programs in detail by someone who was there. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn about the space program. Another great thing about this book is that it is written in a conversational style and not overly technical like other books I have read about the space program. This makes the book a good one to read, even for people that don't have tons of technical knowledge.

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