Failure Is Not an Option: Mission Control from Mercury to Apollo 13 and Beyond by Gene Kranz

An Insiders View Of The Culture Of Mission Control

In 1957, the Russians launched Sputnik and the ensuing space race. Three years later, Gene Kranz left his aircraft testing job to join NASA and champion the American cause. What he found was an embryonic department run by whiz kids (such as himself), sharp engineers and technicians who had to create the Mercury mission rules and procedure from the ground up. As he says, Since there were no books written on the actual methodology of space flight, we had to write them as we went along. Kranz was part of the mission control team that, in January 1961, launched a chimpanzee into space and successfully retrieved him, and made Alan Shepard the first American in space in May 1961. Just two months later they launched Gus Grissom for a space orbit, John Glenn orbited Earth three times in February 1962, and in May of 1963 Gordon Cooper completed the final Project Mercury launch with 22 Earth orbits. And through them all, and the many Apollo missions that followed, Gene Kranz was one of the integral inside men--one of those who bore the responsibility for the Apollo 1 tragedy, and the leader of the tiger team that saved the Apollo 13 astronauts. Moviegoers know Gene Kranz through Ed Harriss Oscar-nominated portrayal of him in Apollo 13, but Kranz provides a more detailed insiders perspective in his book Failure Is Not an Option. You see NASA through his eyes, from its primitive days when he first joined up, through the 1993 shuttle mission to repair the Hubble Space Telescope, his last mission control project. His memoir, however, is not high literature. Kranz has many accomplishments and honors to his credit, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, but this is his first book, and hes not a polished author. There are, perhaps, more behind-the-scenes details and more paragraphs devoted to what Cape Canaveral looked like than the general public demands. If, however, you have a long-standing fascination with aeronautics, if you watched Apollo 13 and wanted more, Failure Is Not an Option will fill the bill. --Stephanie Gold
My Personal Review:
Gene Kranz was a flight director for most of the U.S. manned space program, and was on duty for some of the most critical events - including the first moon landing, and, of course the Apollo 13 accident.
In Failure Is Not an Option, Kranz tells the story of Mission Control from the beginning (he wrote some of the initial procedures manuals) through the Space Shuttle program. He shows how the ground controllers developed into a team, not only with each other, but with the astronauts on board the spacecraft.
Kranz may not be the most polished writer, but this is a first-person account from someone who helped make history. One of the things I really liked about the book is that Kranz not only took detailed notes during the missions (that was his first flight assignment), but he held on to them and used them to provide a more detailed account than I have seen before of the key missions from the perspective of Mission Control. He doesn't pull punches, and he's not afraid to admit mistakes, and this gives this book an air of honesty that you don't always find in an autobiography.

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