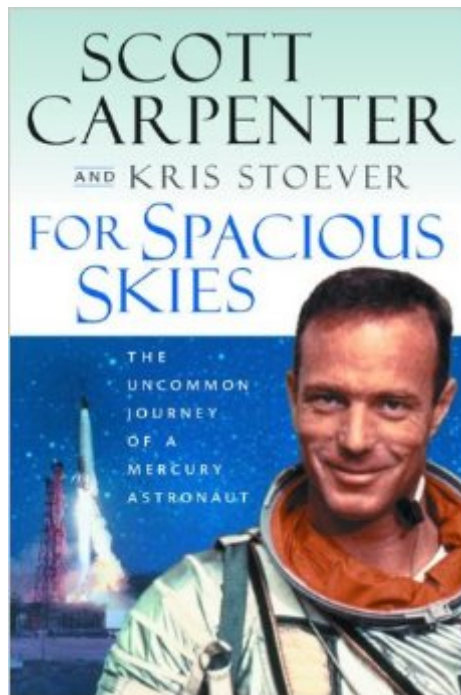


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For Spacious Skies: The Uncommon Journey Of A Mercury Astronaut



Synopsis

Coming from a family of early Colorado pioneers, astronaut Scott Carpenter grew up with a vibrant frontier tradition of exploration. He went on to become one of seven Project Mercury astronauts to take part in America's burgeoning space program in the 1960s. Here he writes of the pioneering science, training, and biomedicine of early space flight and tells the heart-stopping tale of his famous spaceflight aboard Aurora 7. Carpenter also shares a family story of tenderness and fortitude. Raised by his grandparents in Boulder, Colorado, while his mother lay sick for years with tuberculosis, Carpenter witnessed bravery, love, sacrifice, and endurance that prepared him for life as a Navy pilot during two wars, service to country as a Mercury astronaut, and finally as a pioneering underwater explorer. Written with his daughter, Kris Stoeber, *For Spacious Skies* tells a wonderful American family story filled with never-before-told insider tales from the earliest days of NASA and, for the first time ever, Carpenter's own account of his controversial flight and splashdown.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Scott Carpenter's autobiography, written with his daughter, Kris Stoeber, is the last, long awaited testament from the Mercury astronauts. Along with Deke Slayton's and Mike Cassutt's "Deke!", it is possibly the most informative of these remembrances. The book is more accurately detailed than "Schirra's Space", better grounded in facts than Shepard's "Moon Shot", more interactive than John Glenn's memoir, and ...uh...let's say, far surpasses Cooper's "Keeping Faith". Carpenter's book is

footnoted throughout, and the authors have made many references to other credible manuscripts to support their recollections of the time. Personal recollections from Gene Kranz are referenced at least once, and both John Glenn and Wally Schirra proofread the manuscript prior to publication. Scott Carpenter's life has been overall, a great experience tinged with personal losses. His parents lived apart, his mother suffered from t.b., his father's approval always needed to be earned. Marriage's have brought the promise of secure relationships, but have not lasted over time. One senses the deepest loss in his relationship with Rene, who documented much of his personal history and the contemporary truths of the Mercury years. The overall sense is that two sharply intellectual adults somehow outgrew each other, when they still complimented the other so well. Rene's journals, it is revealed, provided Tom Wolfe with a great deal of his impressions for "The Right Stuff", some of which was re-written as "the wrong stuff" according to Carpenter and Stoeber. Of course, the real meat of the book is Scott's recollection of the mission of "Aurora 7", and the keen disappointment in having to displace Deke Slayton in what should have been his moment of glory. How does one enjoy his own great moment in the gloomy pallor of a friend's defeat? Nobody liked what happened to Deke, nobody, including Scott and back up pilot Schirra, liked the reassignments. Management was blindsided by John Glenn's super-celebrity power, fresh and wieldy. Scott Carpenter was thrust into a crammed flight plan, a management team which was waiting to pounce upon any perceived "screw ups", and a spacecraft with serious mechanical flaws, which began to appear at launch. Did Scott Carpenter "malfunction", as Chris Kraft contends in an entire chapter of his own book? Scott readily admits trying to squeeze every science minute he could from the flight, and making that his priority. Voice recordings and bio-med data show that the pilot was aware of the situation he was in during re-entry. The fact that he brought his spacecraft back intact is cited as evidence of a pilot in control. Kraft gets his well-earned respect too, but the feisty nature of the flight controller is referred to again and again. And while Carpenter did not fly again, the choice appears to have been his own, and not one imposed upon him. Readers will have to divine that truth for themselves. Overall the authors have attempted to remain measured, objective, and fair in dealing with Carpenter's contemporaries. "For Spacious Skies" is imperative reading for space historians. It is candid, tells much about the elite group of men and women who found themselves cultivated by the Kennedy White House, and thrust into the glory years of space flight. The extra effort in backing up statements with other records and recollections sets this book apart from similar astronaut biographies. Well done.

My interest in manned spacecraft was first piqued by the much-delayed Mercury flight of John

Glenn, and I followed the subsequent 1962 mission of Scott Carpenter aboard his Aurora 7 spacecraft with even greater enthusiasm. As the decades passed and other Mercury astronauts wrote their autobiographies, I began to wonder if Scott Carpenter was ever going to tell his story, which I have always found to be far more exciting and multi-dimensional than those told by most of his colleagues. I was certainly not disappointed. "For Spacious Skies" is a truly wonderful and well written book, and gives an enjoyable background to a man about whom there has often been much speculation and interest - particularly in recent years when a certain NASA flight controller decided to vent his spleen on Carpenter and his Mercury mission in his own memoirs. This book is, in part, an obvious response to this criticism, and certainly clears the decks in many ways. Better written and far more readable than most of the other Mercury Seven astronaut biographies, this is a touching and often dramatic account of the life of a man who is regarded as one of the true pioneers and adventurers of spaceflight. Dealt many poor hands in life, he nevertheless seized his opportunities when they came along, and his resolve comes through loud and clear in this book. While many space enthusiasts and historians know that Scott Carpenter's story will, sadly, never be free of the controversies that attend his life and his single Mercury orbital mission, his flight should nevertheless be remembered as a very important and major contribution to the state of spaceflight knowledge in those early days, when brave men rode rockets that had a worrying reputation for blowing up. He and his co-author daughter Kris have now set the record straight on those controversies with the same intensity, determination and focus that characterized his time as an astronaut, and later as an aquanaut researcher in the service of his nation. No collection of astronaut autobiographies and biographies could ever be considered complete without this wonderful, evocative and powerful book.

Scott Carpenter has the worst reputation of the Mercury Seven. Chris Kraft's book "Flight" dedicates a complete chapter to attacking Carpenter. Using numerous footnotes, the book references many NASA reports which cite a mechanical failure which nearly doomed his mission. The book seems to be a family history written by Carpenter's daughter, Kris Stoeber. Thus, the reader must adjust to reading about Carpenter in the third person. Carpenter does take over in the chapters about his flight, writing in the first person. Adding to the difficulty reading the book, the writers assume that the reader can keep track of the year different events happened. However, the story is not chronological, so one must guess at the year when significant events (child birth, transfer to a new Navy base) occur. Too bad this book did not do a better job of completing the timeline for the reader. Particularly surprising is how Carpenter's last three marriages are summarized in a 6-line paragraph on the

second to last page. I recommend reading this book if you want to hear Carpenter's view of his flight. But be prepared for a bumpy ride, as the book is not pulled together into the consistent story one would expect.

I love reading about flying in space. And this book by a real hero is good. But not great. It is mostly written by his daughter, in the third person. You don't get that 'up close' feel. You get slightly dry text. I did learn about an amazing time, an amazing journey, but would have liked a little more. If you love this subject, then this is a must have book. But if are new to reading about the early space program, there are better books to start with. Follow some of the links, search a little, and then come back and get this book if you are hooked.

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