

**JERALDINE  
“JERRIE” ANN  
COBB  
1931-2019**



**RIGHT  
STUFF  
BUT WRONG  
SEX**

In the early 1960's, the Mercury Seven astronauts made history. Why were Jerrie Cobb and her fellow Mercury Thirteen pilot-astronauts denied their chance, after undergoing the same screening process as the Mercury Men?

Jeraldine “Jerrie” Cobb was born in March 1931 in Norman. At seventeen, she received a private pilot’s license. By eighteen, she received her commercial pilot’s license and was a certified ground instructor with ratings in civil air regulations, navigation, meteorology, and engines.

In 1953, Jerrie joined Jack Ford’s airplane delivery service to supply planes to the Peruvian Air Force, a dangerous, long distance flight over jungles, shark-filled waters and Andean peaks. They were engaged for two years until he died in an aircraft explosion over the Pacific. Jerrie returned to her family in Ponca City, and set new international records for speed, distance, and absolute altitude.

Cobb was praised in 1959 by NASA officials on national television, and was told she would be the first woman in space. In 1960, she was invited to undergo the same physical testing developed for NASA’s first astronauts. It was announced at a 1960 conference in Stockholm, Sweden that she passed the tests, and more women were recruited to take them.

In 1962, Cobb testified in Congress about women astronauts. The hearings were mostly derogatory jokes by men, including John Glenn. Although she successfully completed all three stages of physical and psychological evaluation, ranking in the top 2% of all astronaut candidates of both genders, she was unable to rally support to add women to the astronaut program.

NASA’s requirement that astronauts be military test pilots eliminated all women, and the Mercury Thirteen program disbanded. A few months later, Russia sent Valentina Tereshkova into space. It would be nineteen years before a woman flew in space again, and 32 years before Eileen Collins would command a space mission. At Collins' invitation, eight of the eleven surviving Mercury Thirteen astronauts attended her first launch.

For the next 34 years Cobb’s missionary work in the Amazon jungles was honored by the Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, France, and Peru governments. In her autobiography, Cobb described how she danced on the wings of her plane in the Amazon moonlight, when learning via radio that Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin had landed on the moon.

In 1981, she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for her humanitarian work. But she still dreamed of space travel. Cobb saw her opportunity in 1999 when NASA announced that 78-year-old John Glenn was going into space to study weightlessness and aging. The National Organization of Women launched a campaign. "It’s time for NASA to put Jerrie Cobb in space. Sexism was the only thing that kept Jerrie out of space in the 60s." NASA refused again!

Cobb died in Florida at age 88 in March 2019, without ever accomplishing her dream. Jerrie Cobb was an inspiration to women everywhere as she proved that women are just as qualified to explore the stars.