

271 Space Blues

Jerrie Cobb spent her early years becoming an avid and accomplished aviator. In her 20s, she delivered military fighters and bombers to air forces around the globe. She set world records for nonstop long-distance flight, speed, and altitude with lightweight aircraft, and was the first woman to fly in the Paris Air Show.

Cobb, appointed as a consultant to the NASA space program, successfully completed all three stages of training used to choose the first seven Mercury astronauts. Although she ranked in the top 2%, she was not selected.

A year later, she was called to testify in Congress about the potential role of women in space. At the hearing, astronaut John Glenn slammed the door shut, declaring, “The men go off and fight the wars and fly the airplanes and come back and help design and build and test them. . . . The fact that women are not in this field is a fact of our social order.”

Only a few months later, in June 1963, the Soviet Union sent the first woman into space.

Disappointed but undaunted, Cobb turned her ambitions to humanitarian causes, flying food, medicine, and clothing to indigenous tribes in the Amazon. In her 2019 obituary, the *New York Times* wrote: “Ms. Cobb remained fascinated by space travel. On July 20, 1969, she listened on the radio as Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the moon. Alone in the Amazon, she danced on the wings of her plane in the moonlight.”