

The Phases of Frank

by Glen E. Swanson

Countdown: An Autobiography
by Frank Borman with Robert J. Serling
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Anytime a former astronaut decides to turn author and commit his or her memories to print, a receptive audience is almost assured. And as astronaut biographies go, this one is no disappointment.

Former astronaut-turned-airline executive Frank Borman, with the able assistance of best-selling novelist Robert J. Serling (*The President's Plane is Missing*), gives us a masterful account of a career that covers some 30 years of aviation and space history. Beginning with his formative years as a West Point cadet, Borman quickly goes on to distinguish himself as a teacher, fighter pilot, astronaut, goodwill ambassador and airline president.

From the beginning, Borman displays an aggression and impatience that underlies a single-minded dedication that helped to sustain him through each career move: "I was the most impatient and outspoken of

them all. I had a very simple code: If you can't do the job, get the hell out of my way so I can do mine."

Such a can-do attitude played an important role in his decision to forego a promising career with the Air Force when NASA began accepting candidates for its Gemini and Apollo programs. Borman applied and was accepted.

Borman earned his astronaut wings as commander of Gemini 7 and was selected to command Apollo 8 in December 1968. Apollo 8 marked the first time that humans would travel beyond the gravitational influence of the Earth to fly around the Moon. Borman writes of the event: "I was absolutely awestruck, not so much at what we had accomplished but at what had made the accomplishment possible. A machine produced by more than 300,000 Americans was circling the Moon with three human beings aboard for the first time in history. And the enormity of this achievement was in direct proportion to the enormity of the consequences if the machine and its attendant computers hadn't worked perfectly."

Following Apollo 8, Borman left NASA to pursue another career. But first he answers the call to serve as a NASA liaison with the White House during the Apollo 11 period.

Borman is not reluctant to offer critical assessment of today's space program. He writes that NASA has lost the nationalistic fervor that once existed during the "golden days" of America's space program. He also laments that the earlier can-do attitude of NASA has given way to "sloppy design," "bungled planning," "poor

leadership" and a "misguided emphasis on public relations," writing that the "whole Shuttle program came too soon" and that "space is for professionals, not passengers."

Several months prior to his Apollo 8 mission, Borman was approached by Eastern to serve on the airline's advisory council. He was asked to join the company as vice president for operations in July 1970, and five years later he was appointed president.

Beset by a \$1 billion deficit, executive deadwood, high labor costs, low employee morale and divided management, Borman began to pick up the pieces of the nation's fourth largest airline. He met with some degree of success. For four consecutive years, Eastern enjoyed the most profitable period in its history. But this success was short-lived.

As Borman explains, Eastern had allowed the unions to manipulate it into becoming the highest-cost carrier in the industry. Borman writes incisively about Eastern's management versus labor struggle that eventually led to its 1986 demise and sale to Texas Air.

Frank Borman has produced a compelling and authoritative account of a life filled with the "right stuff." As the 20th anniversary of other Apollo missions approaches, I hope other astronauts will tell their stories. But for now, you can count on this book for an excellent read. ☆

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