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Forever Young: A Life Of Adventure In Air And Space



Synopsis

He walked on the Moon. He flew six space missions in three different programs--more than any other human. He served with NASA for more than four decades. His peers called him the "astronaut's astronaut." Enthusiasts of space exploration have long waited for John Young to tell the story of his two Gemini flights, his two Apollo missions, the first-ever Space Shuttle flight, and the first Spacelab mission. *Forever Young* delivers all that and more: Young's personal journey from engineering graduate to fighter pilot, to test pilot, to astronaut, to high NASA official, to clear-headed predictor of the fate of Planet Earth. Young, with the assistance of internationally distinguished aerospace historian James Hansen, recounts the great episodes of his amazing flying career in fascinating detail and with wry humor. He portrays astronauts as ordinary human beings and NASA as an institution with the same ups and downs as other major bureaucracies. He frankly discusses the risks of space travel, including what went wrong with the Challenger and Columbia shuttles. *Forever Young* is one of the last memoirs produced by an early American astronaut. It is the first memoir written by a chief of the NASA astronaut corps. Young's experiences and candor make this book indispensable to everyone interested in the U.S. space program.

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Customer Reviews

I will start by apologising for the length of this review, but "FOREVER YOUNG" is more than just another biography/ space book, it is an historical document, the collected thoughts of by far the most experienced human space voyager. As such it represents essential reading for anyone interested in human spaceflight engineering or history. Whether or not one agrees with the author, his views are the product of far greater first hand experience of human space exploration, in both operational and management roles, than that of any other human being that has so far lived. I have both the hard back and Kindle editions. The quality, quantity, presentation and range of illustrations provided in both leaves a lot to be desired. However, apart from the personal pictures, these are available from other sources. The Kindle edition is good, but the index is basically useless. The book itself is not for novices. Nor, contrary to what readers may expect from the expansion of the title "a life of adventure in air and space", is it a book of "boys own" adventure stories. A level of knowledge of engineering, piloting, space history and astronomy is assumed. If the reader lacks basic knowledge in any of these areas then portions of this book will be confusing or even incomprehensible. Thankfully the author covers the full span of his career, unlike many other astronaut biographies. However, the result has been that some areas receive a very thin treatment indeed, this book could easily have been twice as long to do them all justice. This brings me to the book's most serious problem, it is literally riddled with errors, far too numerous to recount in any detail. Whether these are merely the result of appalling proof reading, I cannot say. They range from easily spotted typos, for example the statement in the foreword that Mr. Young commanded Apollo 15 (it was Apollo 16), through the obviously wrong but requiring more investigation. Did VA-216 fly A-1/ AD-4 Skyraiders or A-4 Skyhawks? The answer is both, but the reference in the book should be to the A-4 Skyhawk. Or the probably wrong - but perhaps it's an obscure new term ("delta feed", do you mean "delta V"?), to the perplexing (Gemini X "we were standing on our seats in the cockpit", no they weren't, only Mr Collins was, which the author obviously knows, so why does it appear?). To photographically provable nonsense (LM-4 had no landing gear - er, yes it did). I could go on for hours but you get the idea. "FOREVER YOUNG" may yet form the basis of a space geek "spot the mistake" game. One problem is that if you don't know your stuff you may come away with some very funny ideas, and considering their apparent source, you'd be within your rights to be pretty adamant that they were correct. In the future the book will be viewed as a primary source, and

Space history doesn't need this. I really hope that subsequent editions correct the litany of errors. The other effect for me was that it made me wary of much of the rest of the content, if the simple stuff is so riddled with mistakes, how accurate is the rest? Next, the style, this book reads in many ways more like a collection of notes (or, considering the author's professional style, memos). It is quite annoyingly repetitive, some points are made well out of chronological sequence without specifically saying so. At other times explanations are lacking to the point of being obscure. The author insists on quoting burn times, delta Vs, orbiter touch down sink rates etc at almost every opportunity when these add absolutely nothing to his tale. If he felt that their inclusion was important then by all means include them in an appendix for those who haven't read the mission reports or programme summaries produced by NASA. Meanwhile, in many instances the author neglects discussing the reasons or his thoughts about the events being mentioned. Here's one example, taken from Mr Young's first voyage to the Moon on Apollo 10: "I controlled the firing of the service propulsion system, which accelerated us to 2,960 feet per second and placed us in a lunar orbit of 59.6 by 169.1 nautical miles above the Moon's surface. We did additional maneuvers to get our orbit to 61.2 by 60 nautical miles." Well firstly that should be decelerated, and I think a quick explanation of why they didn't aim for an exact circular 60 nautical mile orbit would be in order - (since he considers a precise listing of orbital parameters to be worth while, why not explain, not all readers will know this). Not to mention that a little more description of what it was like to enter lunar orbit for his first time would have hardly gone amiss. Or from that same voyage, how's this for a description of reaching the fastest speed ever by any humans: "I was in the commander's seat operating the entry. We were on automatic and came in at a speed of 36,315 feet per second - a little over 24,760 miles per hour - which proved to be the fastest entry of any Apollo spacecraft . . . Our guidance system commanded full 'lift-up' through peak acceleration, which was 6.8g. When the forces backed off to 5.8g, the spacecraft rolled to 90 degrees . . ." You might as well just read the mission report or technical crew debriefing. Why the fast return? How did it feel, noisy, rough? What could you see? Did anyone say anything? In fact, in general Mr Young's descriptions of his six space missions are disappointingly bland. Of course, many other astronaut autobiographies suffer from the same problem. As a final word about style, be sure to also read the 'notes' section at the back, much of which should, I feel, have been incorporated in the main text. Every now and again we are offered a glimpse of Mr Young's famous insights and sense of humour. Talking about Apollo 16: "The hardest part of all human extravehicular activity on the Moon was getting back into the lunar module". Or awaiting the first space shuttle launch: "I was also thinking about what a grand time it would be if Crip and I used those ejection seats just to fly through the 5,000 Å Å F plumes of the solid rocket

motors!" I just wish there were more. As an autobiography the book is useful in filling out the blanks in Mr. Young's non-space flight career, although again he misses the opportunity to really involve the reader. So what's it like when the canopy comes off your F-8 at around 500 knots? I still don't know, but at least I now know that it happened. No opinion on the introduction of the mirror landing sight and angled deck to naval aviation? On the personal side it is pretty tight lipped, although we now know about his mother's unfortunate illness. We get one line on his first marriage "it was a mismatch from the beginning". Whilst wholly in keeping with Mr. Young's character, I feel this limits the book's wider appeal. In discussing his career after his final space flight the author is more passionate and you get more of an insight into what drives him. The discussion of some of the space shuttle's problems is illuminating, although considering the constant inadequate funding and safety issues I cannot concur with his conclusion that the programme could have gone on until 2030. His discussion of the NEO threat is interesting and I wholeheartedly agree, I hope that he continues to push for action, preferably on an international basis - it is not a problem for Americans alone. In his thinking about how we can all make the next trip forward, Mr Young makes a powerful case for a return to the Moon, with more passion and logic than some of the common "space mining" etc suggestions of past decades. He gives a modern rationale of the need for exploration, far more useful than Mr Mallory's much quoted exasperated retort to a journalist (which is now mistakenly thought of as the reason by many people). Overall this is by no means the waste of reader's time that, for example the late Mr Cooper's and Mr Shepard's books represent. It is not the essential "personnel file" that Mr Hansen's biography of the late Mr Armstrong provided us with. Nor is it the riveting first person view of space flight provided by Mr Collins and Mr Worden. What it is to me is essential but flawed reading - badly in need of a corrected and revised second edition. Perhaps there is a market for a "FOREVER YOUNG" study guide, correcting errors and explaining the details. (A paperback edition containing many corrections has since been released. Unfortunately it is still far from problem free, however, I recommend that version over the hardback). My star rating for the book is an average of my view of it's importance (5), and its quality as literature (3). Mr Young was born just one month after Mr. Armstrong. In view of the latter's recent demise, I'm just glad that we got this book at all. Traditionally large numbers of people have managed to get stirred up about various problems, for example nuclear weapons and global warming. However, they've all missed the big picture so I'll leave you with a final thought from the author who, until now has "been everywhere, done everything and said very little": "Single planet species don't last."

I've been greatly looking forward to this book. John Young has had an amazing career in Nasa and

having read all the astronaut autobiographies from the era I was looking forward to hearing his views on a great many things. Unfortunately the book is a great disappointment. My problems with the book are not the errors which have been specifically covered in other reviews. The problem is it's not really an autobiography. The book is more of a technical retrospective on the missions Young was on. Young's life as an astronaut, his training and relationships with his fellow astronauts is secondary at best. For example his first mission was the first Gemini mission with Mercury veteran Gus Grissom. I really wanted to hear from Young about Gus. How they got along and worked together. How and why Young got assigned as the first of his astronaut class to such an important mission. Unfortunately we hear none of that. What we get is a technical diatribe about his mission. This Young does over and over in terms of every one of his missions. They are described coldly with little insight into the men he works with. It would be one thing if this book was suppose to cover the technical aspects of Gemini or Apollo but it's suppose to be an autobiography. We're reading the book because we want to know about John Young and his experiences from a personal perspective. The technical points of these missions are covered in other books and generally done much better than they are here. As it is Young's descriptions of the missions are impersonal at best. Many times he will use acronyms or abbreviations without explaining what they mean. For example he might make reference to the LPN without telling the reader that LPN stands for lunar portable magnetometer. If you didn't know that already you'd not be sure what he's talking about. The book finally goes off the deep end in the last chapters where Young goes on a very long technical diatribe about the Space Shuttle. Again it would be fascinating to hear his views on this era but instead mostly we get technical descriptions about how the shuttle works which again is covered better in other books. In the end I found this to be an extremely disappointing book. Many books by astronauts such as Mike Collins, Gene Cernan and Deke Slayton are fascinating reads that are not only entertaining but important references on the era. Unfortunately Young's is of little value as it adds nothing from a personal perspective nor does it work as a technical book on Gemini, Apollo or the Space Shuttle which 80% of the book tries to be.

I have nothing but respect for John Young. He has been a hero of mine since childhood. However, this book is so full of errors that it's virtually unreadable. I'm a bit of a space freak, so the errors jumped off the page at me. But I feel bad for anybody who reads it without realizing that virtually every page has a significant technical or historical error. I could forgive this if the book wasn't trying so hard to be precise. For example, an engine burn was described as having a duration of 331 seconds. That sort of precision (as opposed to saying five and a half minutes) implies that the book

is technically accurate and factual. The error that I found most galling (so much so that I stopped reading and wrote this review) was when it was stated that on its fatal mission, Columbia docked with the International Space Station (ISS). This never happened, Columbia's orbit was incompatible with ISS rendezvous. Since Mr. Young's passion was crew safety, I am sure he knew better. This is sloppy transcription and editing, and the result of Mr. Young collaborating with people who lack the necessary technical background. This book was published two years ago, so there is no excuse for the errors being present in the Kindle edition I purchased in 2014.

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