



## Geraldyn ("Jerrie") M. Cobb

Born in Norman, Oklahoma born March 5, 1931. She was also part of the "Mercury 13," a group of women who underwent some of the same physiological screening tests as the original Mercury Seven astronauts as part of a private, non-NASA program.

Early life Cobb is the daughter of Lt. Col. William H. Cobb and Helena Butler Stone Cobb. As a child growing up in Oklahoma, Cobb took to aviation at an early age, with her pilot father's encouragement. Cobb first flew in a plane at age twelve, in her father's open cockpit 1936 Waco biplane. At 16, she was barnstorming around the Great Plains in a Piper J-3 Cub, dropping leaflets over little towns announcing the arrival of circuses. Sleeping under the Cub's wing at night helped scrape together money for fuel to practice her flying by giving rides. By the age of 17, while a student at Oklahoma City Classen High School, Cobb had earned her private pilot's license. She received her commercial pilot's license a year later.

Record-setting career by age 19, Cobb was teaching men to fly. At 21, she was delivering military fighters and four-engine bombers to foreign Air Forces worldwide. Cobb had a three-year romance with airplane delivery business owner and veteran World War II pilot Jack Ford, whom she met in Miami, FL while working at a maintenance hangar. They were engaged for two years, but the relationship ended tragically with the explosion of his airplane over the Pacific.

Facing sexual discrimination and the return of many qualified male pilots after World War II, she had to take on less sought after jobs, such as patrolling pipelines and crop dusting. Regardless, she went on to earn her Multi-Engine, Instrument, Flight Instructor, and Ground Instructor ratings as well as her Airline Transport license.

Cobb went on to set new world records for speed, distance, and absolute altitude while still in her twenties. When she became the first woman to fly in the world's largest air exposition, the Salon Aeronautique International in Paris, her fellow airmen then named her Pilot of the Year and awarded her the Amelia Earhart Gold Medal of Achievement. Life Magazine named her one of the nine women of the "100 most important young people in the United States."

To save for money to buy a surplus World War II Fairchild PT-23, and a chance to be self-employed, Cobb played women's softball on a semi-professional team, the Oklahoma City Queens.

By 1959 (age 28) she was a pilot and manager for Aero Design and Engineering Company, which also made the Aero Commander aircraft she used in her record making feats, and was one of the few women executives in aviation. By 1960, she had 7,000 hours of flying time and held 3 world aviation records: the 1959 world record for nonstop long-distance flight, the 1959 world light plane speed record, and a 1960 world altitude record for lightweight aircraft of 37,010 ft. In May 1961, NASA Administrator James Webb appointed Cobb as a consultant to the NASA space program.

Medical Testing Main article: Mercury 13

Although she successfully completed all three stages of physical and psychological evaluation that were used in choosing the first seven Mercury astronauts, this was not an official NASA program and she was unable to rally support in Congress for adding women to the astronaut program based solely on their gender. At the time, Cobb had already flown 64 types of propeller aircraft, although had made only one flight, in the back seat, of a jet fighter. She had also set world records for speed, distance and absolute altitude.

In 1963, Cobb was called to testify at a Congressional hearing about women astronauts. Astronaut John Glenn states at the hearing "men go off and fight the wars and fly the airplanes," and women are not astronauts because of our social order. Only a few months later, the Soviet Union would send the first women into space.

Cobb argued, along with other Mercury 13 participants, to be allowed to train alongside the men. However, at the time NASA requirements for entry into the astronaut program were that a pilot be a military test pilot, experienced at high speed military test flying, and have an engineering background enabling the pilot to take over controls in the event it became necessary. An exception was not made for Cobb.[6] Executive Assistant to Vice President Lyndon Johnson, Liz Carpenter, drafted a letter to NASA

administrator James E. Webb questioning these requirements, but Johnson did not send the letter, instead writing across it, "Let's stop this now!"

Later in life Cobb then began over 30 years of missionary work in South America, performing humanitarian flying, i.e., transporting supplies to indigenous tribes, and surveying new air routes to remote areas. Cobb has been honored by the Brazilian, Colombian, Ecuadorian, French, and Peruvian Governments. In 1981 she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for her humanitarian work.

In 1999, Cobb was the subject of a National Organization for Women campaign to send her to space (like Senator John Glenn) to investigate the effects of aging. The effort was unsuccessful.

She has received numerous aviation honors, including the Harmon Trophy and the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale's Gold Wings Award.

## Awards

Amelia Earhart Gold Medal of Achievement

Named Woman of the Year in Aviation

Amelia Earhart Memorial Award {cn}

Named Pilot of the Year by the National Pilots Association

Fourth American to be awarded Gold Wings of the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale, Paris, France

Named Captain of Achievement by International Academy of Achievement

Served five years as a consultant to the Federal Aviation Administration

Honored by the government of Ecuador for pioneering new air routes over the Andes Mountains and Andes jungle

1973 Awarded Harmon International Trophy for "The World's Best Woman Pilot" by President Richard Nixon at a White House ceremony.

Inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame as "the Most Outstanding Aviatrix in the US

Received Pioneer Woman Award for her "courageous frontier spirit" flying all over the Amazon jungle serving primitive Indian tribes

1979 Bishop Wright Air Industry Award for her "humanitarian contributions to modern aviation".

2000 Inducted into "Women in Aviation International Pioneer Hall of Fame".

2007 Honorary Doctor of Science degree from University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh.