



We Have Capture: Tom Stafford and the Space Race

Tom Stafford, Thomas P. Stafford, Michael Cassutt

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What an amazing career. Tom Stafford attained the highest speed ever reached by a test pilot (28,547 mph), carried a cosmonaut's coffin with Soviet Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, led the team that designed the sequence of missions leading to the original lunar landing, and drafted the original specifications for the B-2 stealth bomber on a piece of hotel stationery. But his crowning achievement was surely his role as America's unofficial space ambassador to the Soviet Union during the darkest days of the Cold War.

In this lively memoir written with Michael Cassutt, Stafford begins by recounting his early successes as a test pilot, Gemini and Apollo astronaut, and USAF general. As President Nixon's stand-in at the 1971 Soviet funeral for three cosmonauts, he opened the door to the possibility of cooperation in space between Russians and Americans. Stafford's Apollo-Soyuz team was the first group of Americans to work at the cosmonaut training center, and also the first to visit Baikonur, the top-secret Soviet launch center, in 1974. His 17 July 1975 "handshake in space" with Soviet commander Alexei Leonov (who became a lifelong friend) proved to the world that the two opposing countries could indeed work successfully together.

Stafford has continued in this leadership role right up to the present, participating in designing and evaluating the Space Shuttle, Mir, and the International Space Station. He is truly an American hero who personifies the broadest spirit of exploration and cooperation.

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