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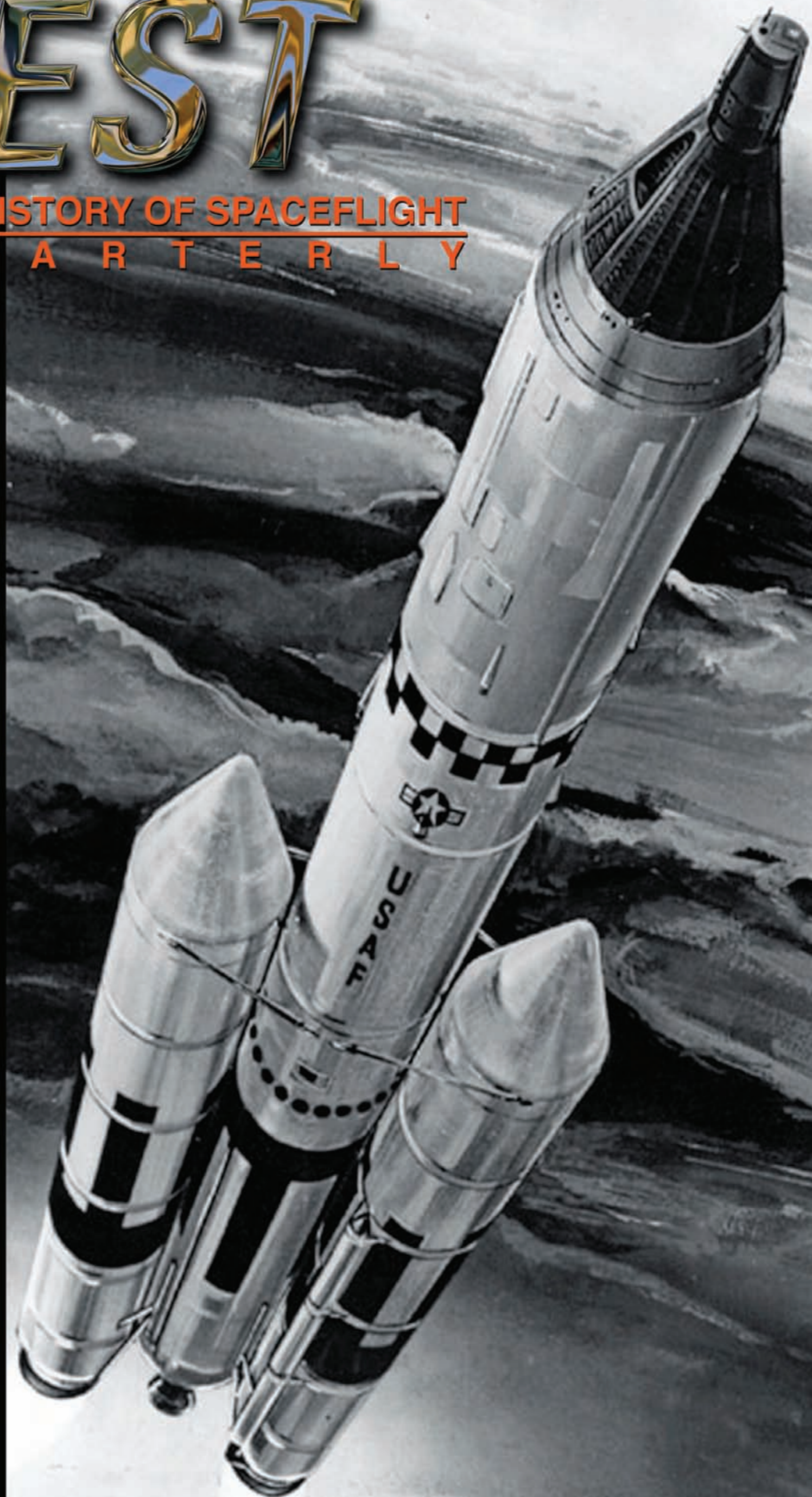
THE HISTORY OF SPACEFLIGHT
QUARTERLY

**THIRTY DAYS IN A MOL:
BIOMEDICALLY-RELEVANT
ASPECTS OF A
RECONNAISSANCE MISSION
INFERRED FROM
ORBITAL PARAMETERS**

**UNEQUAL PARTNERS:
CANADIAN, JAPANESE, AND
AMERICAN SPACE PROGRAMS**

**THE EARLY BIRD DECISION:
50 YEARS LATER**

**AN INTERVIEW WITH
DONALD H. PETERSON:
MOL AND STS-6 ASTRONAUT**



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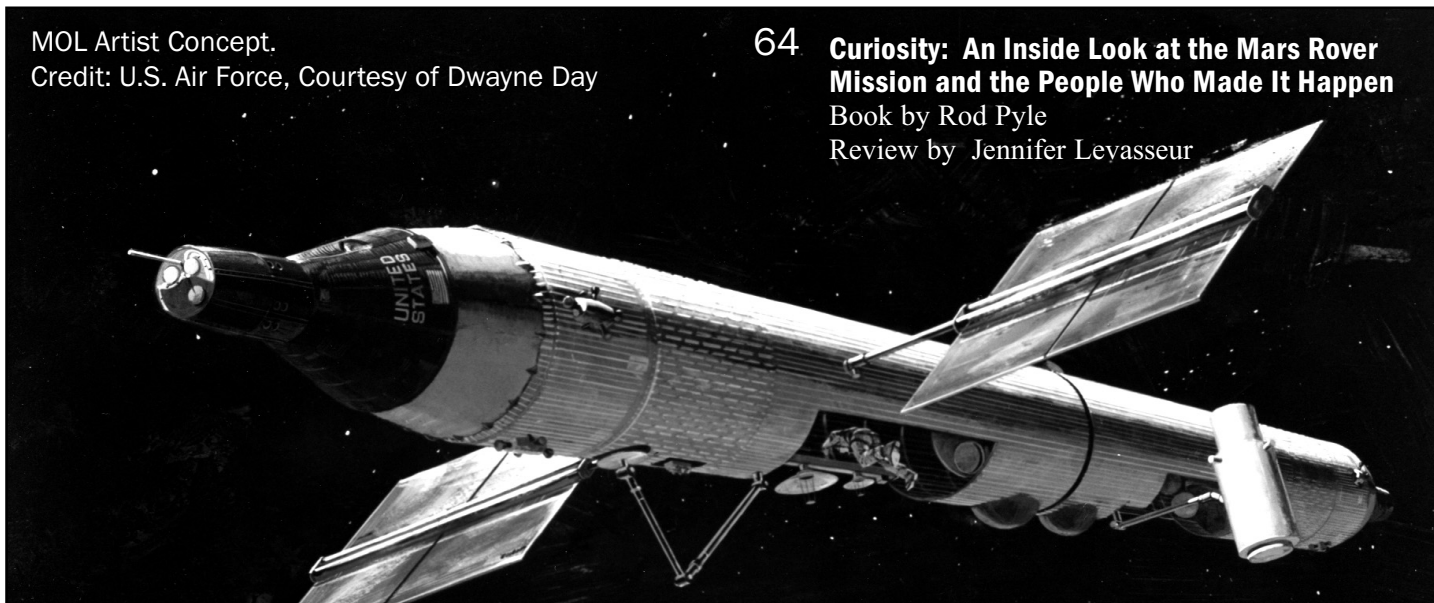
Artist concept of a launch of the Manned Orbiting Laboratory (MOL) using a Titan rocket.

Credit: U.S. Air Force

MOL Artist Concept.
Credit: U.S. Air Force, Courtesy of Dwayne Day

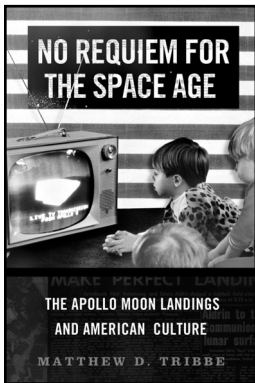
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BOOK REVIEWS

NO REQUIEM FOR THE SPACE AGE: THE APOLLO MOON LANDINGS AND AMERICAN CULTURE



By Matthew D. Tribbe

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America's human lunar adventure lasted exactly four years: from *Apollo 8*'s launch on 21 December 1968, to *Apollo 17*'s splashdown on 19 December 1972. Since then, no human has been more than about 400 miles (640 km) from the Earth. The primary reason why those daring expeditions were so short-lived is well-known to the readers of this journal: the public and the politicians quickly lost interest—if they were not already hostile—once the crew of *Apollo 11* achieved President John F. Kennedy's goal. The media's soaring—and in Matthew Tribbe's jaundiced view—empty and platitudinous rhetoric about the first landing evaporated almost instantly. By the time *Apollo 12* landed in November 1969, the majority of the American public was asking why we were doing it again. Of course, barely half of those surveyed in opinion polls at the time of the first landing supported it, and as Roger Launius' work has revealed, in almost every survey during the 1960s more than half of those polled opposed spending billions on lunar exploration. So it was not as if Apollo enjoyed the massive public support that some space enthusiasts and NASA staff later fantasized into existence.*

Tribbe's *No Requiem for the Space Age* is a stimulating intellectual and cultural history of why Apollo's time had already passed by the time Armstrong and Aldrin set foot on the Moon. (Full disclosure: Tribbe was a fellow at the National Air and Space Museum, and I am thanked, along with Launius and other colleagues, in the Acknowledgments.) His core thesis is that the "technocratic rationalism" that reigned in American public discourse and culture during the early space race had already begun losing its grip in the later 1960s, to be replaced by a "neo-romanticism" that rose to a peak in the 1970s. Science and technology were widely criticized or rejected in favor of a whole spectrum of beliefs: from environmental romanticism to colorful superstition to ecstatic religion. Belief in progress wavered, or sometimes even collapsed, in the face of the failures of the technocratic elite in Vietnam, the cities and

elsewhere. Pessimism and anger were the national moods of an American society riven by ideological and cultural disagreements.

Tribbe's chapters discuss the immediate reception of *Apollo 11*, Norman Mailer's tortured book about it, the critical thoughts of intellectuals like Lewis Mumford, Erich Fromm and Paul Tillich, the failure of the Moon landings to fulfill the Cold War promise of lasting victory and a substitute for war, the gulf between the "straights" and the counterculture over the program, and the later missions against the backdrop of the neo-romantic 1970s. It is a rather depressing picture, and Tribbe's tone of negativity about Apollo (occasionally broken by concessions to its success and its impact on space science and the environmental movement) can irritate. But the fundamental argument is correct, even if his emphasis on public support for technocratic rationalism and the space program before 1967 sometimes seems like a straw man—it underplays the complexities of that period.

Tribbe is also a bit less original than he thinks he is. The book is clearly the child of Walter McDougall's *...The Heavens and the Earth* (a critique of technocracy), and Roger Launius' articles have anticipated some of what he says (they are noted in his bibliography). Yet, in the end I have to conclude that *No Requiem for the Space Age* is an important work for both space history and American cultural history. American political, intellectual and cultural historians have often treated Apollo as a footnote to the period, or ignored it altogether, while some space historians and advocates have indulged a romantic nostalgia (at times I have felt the same temptation). Reading this book immerses one in the atmosphere of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which is not always pleasant. I recommend it as a contribution and as a corrective.

Michael J. Neufeld
National Air and Space Museum
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, DC

* Roger D. Launius, "Public Opinion Polls and Perceptions of US Human Spaceflight," *Space Policy* 19 (2003), 163-75.

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