

# Booklist

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## ★ **Grace Hopper and the Invention of the Information Age.**

Beyer, Kurt W. (Author)

Sep 2009. 380 p. MIT, hardcover, \$27.95. (9780262013109). 004.092.

Grace Hopper was the queen of computer programming; no, make that the admiral. Innovative, inquisitive, and up for any intellectual challenge, she was the first woman to earn a Ph.D. in mathematics at Yale.

Stifled by her marriage and tenured position at Vassar College, Hopper enlisted immediately after Pearl Harbor, completed naval officer training, and was assigned to the Harvard Computational Laboratory to work on the enormous (8 feet high, 3 feet wide, 51 feet long) Mark I computer with Howard Aitken. Her destiny was set. Military protocol shielded her from sexism, while her commanding problem-solving skills, prankish humor, and gift for orchestrating collaborative efforts enabled her to elevate the fledging practice of “coding” to the art of programming. Beyer cogently and enthusiastically explains Hopper’s pioneering breakthroughs in documentation, memory, and machine-to-machine communication, and he chronicles how she wrote the first computer manual, spearheaded the formulation of a common computer language (COBOL), and, in the private sector, tirelessly pursued her “vision of a democratic information age.” Hopper’s world-altering achievements came at a price, but she kept working until her death at 86 in 1992. Bravo to Beyer for unearthing the fascinating, many-faceted history (including priceless photographs) of a phenomenal technology we take for granted and for portraying a woman of astonishing powers.

— *Donna Seaman*