

In 1959, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) selected the first American astronauts, the pioneers of America's first manned space program known as Project *Mercury*. They were all military test pilots – four Naval Aviators and three Air Force pilots. These *Mercury Seven* electrified the country with their personalities, professional qualities and courage and remain the most respected and well known of any astronauts to have ventured into space.

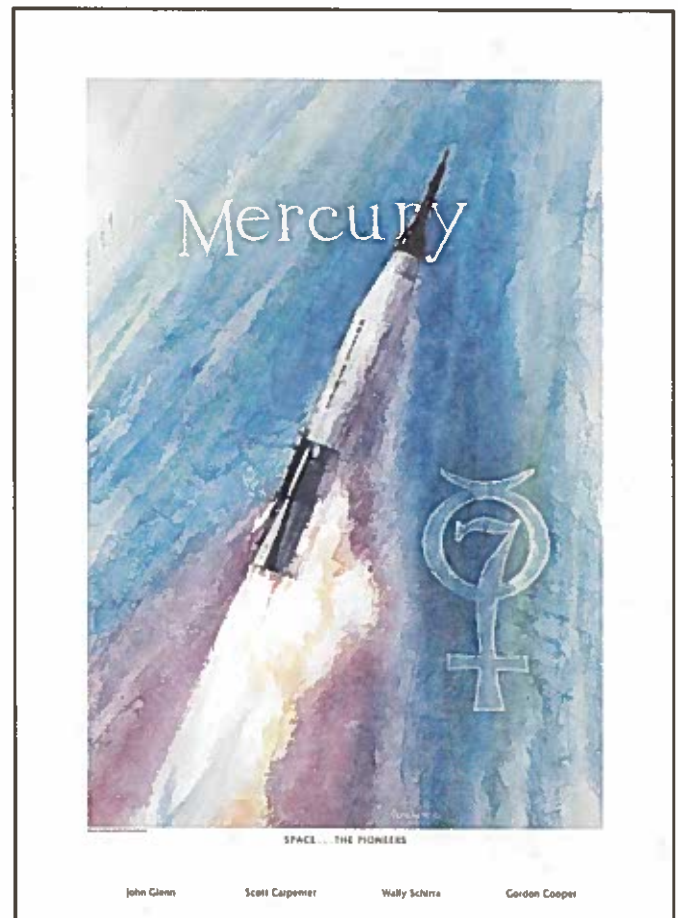
Naval Aviator Alan Shepard was the first American in space and remained with the program to fly to the moon in 1971 as commander of *Apollo 14*. He died in 1998. Gus Grissom flew the second *Mercury* mission and lost his life in a tragic fire during a launch pad test of the *Apollo* spacecraft on 27 January 1967. Donald "Deke" Slayton, the only one of the seven to not go into space in Project *Mercury*, served as Director of Flight Crew Operations for NASA and finally went into space during the 1975 *Apollo-Soyuz* mission during which U.S. and Soviet spacecraft docked and operated jointly in orbit. He died in 1993.

All four of the surviving *Mercury Seven* astronauts have signed this print, which depicts the *Atlas* rocket on which they blasted into orbit. John Glenn, a Marine Corps aviator, flew the third *Mercury* flight and first orbital mission. Naval Aviator Scott Carpenter logged the fourth *Mercury* flight, duplicating Glenn's three orbits of the earth and confirming the success of the *Atlas 6* rocket. Wally Schirra, also a Naval Aviator, was the fifth *Mercury* astronaut in space and was the only one of the seven to also fly in both the *Gemini* and *Apollo* programs. The final member of the *Mercury Seven* to venture into space, Air Force pilot Gordon Cooper completed twenty-two orbits on a flight lasting thirty-four hours. He also flew in Project *Gemini*.

The Project *Mercury* insignia visible in the painting combines the symbol for the element mercury, which is named after the planet and comes from the Latin "hydragyrum," meaning liquid silver, and the number seven for the *Mercury Seven* astronauts.

## Space ... The Pioneers

Watercolor by R.L. Rasmussen



*Space ... The Pioneers* has been limited to 300 signed and numbered prints plus 30 artist proofs.

This print is number AP 20/33.