



Colin Burgess

# Selecting the Mercury Seven

The Search for America's First Astronauts

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The names of the seven Mercury astronauts were announced in April 1959 amid a flurry of publicity and patriotism. This work provides biographical details of all thirty-two finalists for the seven coveted places as America's pioneering astronauts. All of the candidates were among the nation's elite pilots involved in testing new supersonic aircraft capabilities. Most had served as wartime fighter and bomber pilots; some were test pilots on top secret and sophisticated aviation projects, while others were fleet admirals, prisoners of war, and proposed pilots for spaceflight programs such as the Dyna-Soar (X-20). The names of all 32 finalists have been kept secret until very recently. "Selecting the Mercury Seven" also relates the history and difficulties behind the initial choice of candidates. The lives, motivations, military careers, and achievements of the unsuccessful twenty-five finalists are explored first in fully authorized biographies. Test pilots for the U.S. Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps, each man has a fascinating and very different story to tell. All thirty-two men had to endure meticulous, demeaning, and brutal week-long medical examinations at the Lovelace Clinic in New Mexico. This was followed by another torturous week at the Wright Aeromedical Laboratory in Ohio, where they were subjected to extreme fitness and physiological testing, the sole purpose of which was to sort out the Supermen from the near-supermen.

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