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 “hydargyrum,” meaning liquid silver, and the number seven for the Mercury Seven astronauts.

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

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