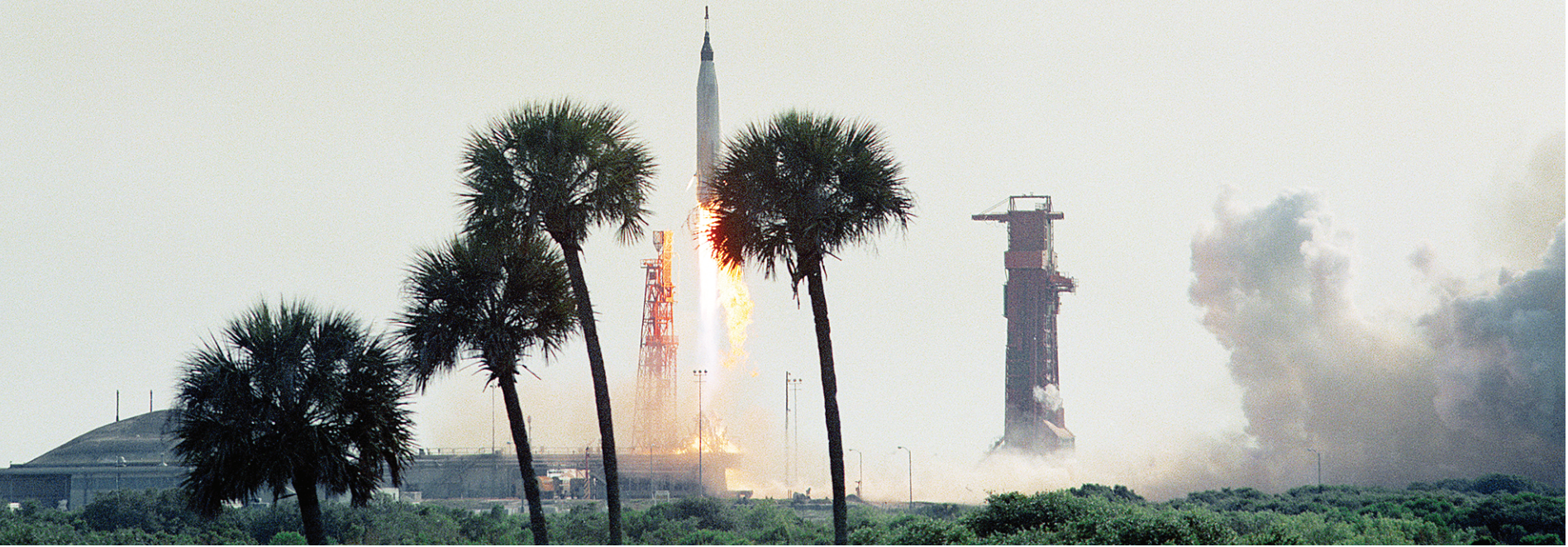


# GORDO'S FAITH

By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

On May 15, 1963 — 60 years ago — astronaut Leroy Gordon Cooper flew his spacecraft, Faith 7, into orbit as the sixth and final mission of NASA's first crewed space effort, Project Mercury. "Gordo" would circle the world at more than 17,500 mph for nearly a day and a half before returning to a pinpoint landing, just 4 miles from his recovery ship in the Pacific.

It would be a near-perfect finale for Project Mercury but it would be nearly another two years before NASA — feeling pressure from a string of successes by the Soviet space program — would get its next crewed project, the two-person Gemini spacecraft, off the ground.



## 34 HOURS IN EARTH ORBIT

The Soviet Union shocked the world — and especially the United States — by launching the world's first artificial satellite, Sputnik, in October 1957.

Part of the U.S. response was the creation of NASA in July 1958 and President Dwight D. Eisenhower's directive to put an American into orbit.

The Soviet Union would beat the U.S. to that goal as well, when Yuri Gagarin circled the Earth on April 12, 1961 — just three weeks before NASA was able to launch its first astronaut for a 15-minute suborbital test flight of its new Mercury spacecraft.

While the Soviets kept wowing the world with more space feats — the first person to spend more than a day in orbit, the first time two missions flew in space simultaneously and so on — NASA kept plugging away with its tiny, one-seat Mercury spacecraft while it compiled the technological knowledge and experience it needed for a two-seat spacecraft and the even larger vessels it would need to reach the moon before the end of the



Cooper was particularly proud of the extraordinarily clear photo of the Himalayas he made during orbit 9. He emerged tired but elated aboard the USS Kearsarge, 81 miles southwest of Midway Island in the Pacific Ocean, on May 16.

1960s.

After a number of test flights carrying scientific instruments and then chimpanzees, NASA successfully conducted two suborbital tests of its Mercury hardware. On Feb. 20, 1962,

John Glenn became the first American astronaut in orbit. Two more orbital Mercury flights would follow over the next eight months.

On May 15, 1963, Leroy Gordon Cooper — his astronaut colleagues

called him "Gordo" — flew into orbit for a marathon endurance effort: More than a day circling the Earth as a test of both astronaut and machine.

With so much time on his hands, Cooper conducted a number of experiments in the tiny Mercury cockpit and took photographs of Earth below him, including infrared weather photos.

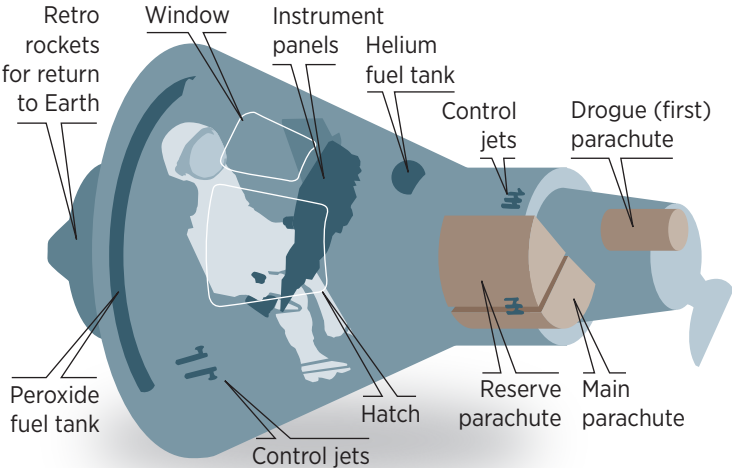
In addition, Cooper released a small sphere with strobe lights, becoming the first person to deploy a satellite in orbit. The next orbit, he was able to spot the lights.

Later still, Faith 7 developed a short circuit in some of its electrical systems. Cooper took over from his ship's automatic systems and reentered Earth's atmosphere under manual control. He landed within sight of his recovery ship.

A seventh Mercury mission had been planned in October 1963 to spend three days in orbit. After the success of Faith 7, NASA canceled that mission in order to focus its resources on the two-seat Gemini spacecraft.

## PROJECT MERCURY'S HARDWARE

The Mercury spacecraft — astronauts strongly disliked the word *capsule* — was tiny: Just 11.5 feet tall and 6.2 feet in diameter. Each astronaut had a custom-molded couch but couldn't get up or float around in the weightlessness of space.



For its suborbital flights, Mercury was sent aloft with modified U.S. Army Redstone rockets.

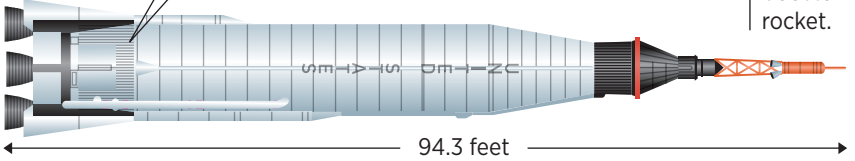
One engine burns for 2 minutes, 23.5 seconds



Escape system rocket fires to lift spacecraft to safety in case of a failure with the booster rocket.

Mercury was placed into orbit by the more powerful Atlas booster — modified from U.S. Air Force intercontinental ballistic missiles.

First stage burns for 5 minutes



## SIX CREWED MISSIONS OF PROJECT MERCURY

MAY 5, 1961

MR-3

Freedom 7

Astronaut:  
**Alan Shepard**



SUBORBITAL FLIGHT

Highest altitude:

**117 miles**

Maximum velocity:  
**5,134 mph**

Time aloft:  
**15 minutes, 22 seconds**

JULY 21, 1961

MR-4

Liberty Bell 7

Astronaut:  
**Virgil "Gus" Grissom**



SUBORBITAL FLIGHT

Highest altitude:

**118 miles**

Maximum velocity:  
**5,168 mph**

Time aloft:  
**15 minutes, 37 seconds**

FEB. 20, 1962

MA-6

Friendship 7

Astronaut:  
**John Glenn**



3 ORBITS

Highest altitude:

**162 miles**

Maximum velocity:  
**17,544 mph**

Time aloft:  
**4 hours, 55 minutes**

MAY 24, 1962

MA-7

Aurora 7

Astronaut:  
**Scott Carpenter**



3 ORBITS

Highest altitude:

**167 miles**

Maximum velocity:  
**17,549 mph**

Time aloft:  
**4 hours, 56 minutes**

OCT. 3, 1962

MA-8

Sigma 7

Astronaut:  
**Wally Schirra**



6 ORBITS

Highest altitude:

**176 miles**

Maximum velocity:  
**17,557 mph**

Time aloft:  
**9 hours, 13 minutes**

Time aloft:  
**34 hours, 20 minutes**

MAY 15-16, 1963



MA-9

Faith 7

Astronaut:  
**Gordon Cooper**

22 ORBITS

Highest altitude:

**166 miles**

Maximum velocity:  
**17,547 mph**