

## **The Selection of the Mercury Astronauts: Personal Recollections**

by Allen O. Gamble, Ph.D.

The selection of the first astronauts is only one episode in the long history leading up to manned space flight. So let us first place this half-year period I'm going to tell you about into historical perspective. Perhaps it all started with the invention of the rocket by the ancient Chinese. Not until then did the world have a propulsion device that could operate in a vacuum. Or perhaps the beginning was as recent as March 1926—the “Kitty Hawk” of rocketry—when Dr. Robert Goddard successfully fired the world's first liquid-fueled rocket. Only then did we have fully controllable rocket propulsion that could be shut off and reignited at will, and with high thrust per pound. These were necessary precursors of space flight.

But we all know that the real space age began on October 4, 1957, when Russia's Sputnik I became the first man-made object to orbit the earth. And on October 1, 1958, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) was established, one year after Sputnik startled the world and galvanized the United States into action. It was based on the old National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, or NACA. Only one week later, on October 7, NASA started a small man-in-space organization called the Space Task Group, located at the Langley Research Center near Norfolk, Virginia. Dr. Robert Gilruth became director of the Space Task Group, which later became the Manned Spacecraft Center based in Houston, Texas.

That same October and November, while many at the new space agency were being assigned to hardware projects like spacecraft, booster rockets, and communications, a few of us were assigned to work toward selecting the first humans to fly in space. The leader (and the first person assigned) was an engineer, Charles Donlan, who was assistant director of Project Mercury, NASA's first man-in-space project. The second was Warren North, a former NACA test pilot. I became the third the following day after returning to NASA from three years at the National Science Foundation. There I had been computerizing and expanding the National Register of Scientific and Technical Personnel.

Now I was once more NASA's manpower director, in charge of qualification requirements, recruiting, examining, performance evaluation, and training programs. This new assignment came as quite a surprise to me since I had known nothing about what was going on. In addition, there were three military officers assigned on temporary duty to NASA: Air Force flight surgeon Dr. Stanley White, Army flight surgeon Dr. William Augerson, and Navy psychologist Dr. Robert Voas. We six had continuous full-time jobs for five months on this project. Others worked with us from time to time as needed, including a high-level Special Committee on Life Science appointed in late November [1958].

### **What Do We Call Them?**

When we started the job, we had a sense of unreality. Here we were, about to take the first small steps by men that would eventually lead to what, years later, Neil Armstrong called “one giant

leap for mankind.” This was new, unexplored territory. We had to plow new ground, full of stumps and rocks, with few landmarks to guide us. Remember—this was two and one-half years before the first Russian, Yuri Gagarin, and the first American, Alan Shepard, would fly in space within three weeks of each other, on April 12 and May 5, 1961.

Oddly enough, one of the first hot issues was the names or terms. What should we call the men who would one day fly into space? At Langley Research Center on December 1, 1958, we brainstormed, and every name mentioned went up on the blackboard. Of course, somebody said “spaceman” and someone else said “superman” and still another said “space pilot.” But perhaps he would be a passenger instead of a pilot, so some wise guy proposed “man-in-a-can.” Other suggestions were made, some kidding and some serious. Then one of us came up with a solid suggestion, “Mercury,” which made sense. It referred not to the planet Mercury and not to the quicksilver metal mercury, but to the messenger of the Roman gods, who had wings on his heels and legendary speed of flight.

But someone had heard the word mentioned before, so he called Washington. Sure enough, only five days earlier, on November 26, NASA headquarters had officially adopted Project Mercury as the name of the first American manned spaceflight effort, but not yet used the term publicly or even told us. With our best name so far already taken, out came the dictionaries and thesauruses. Someone found that the term ‘aeronaut,’ referring to those who ride in balloons and other lighter-than-air vehicles, was derived from “sailor in the air.” From this we arrived at ‘astronaut,’ meaning “sailor among the stars.” We thought we had actually invented a new word, but it later turned up as having been used earlier, in 1929, probably in science fiction. In any event, the term *astronaut* rang true and was adopted.

The Soviets followed suit with ‘cosmonaut,’ meaning “sailor in the universe.” All the while we were debating the three really basic personnel questions of duties, qualifications, and recruiting. First, what would an astronaut actually do in space? A job analysis may be prosaic, but it is the only sound way to start determining what kind of person to select for a job. We had to start with a valid job description before we could start answering our second basic question: What should the qualification requirements be? At this point the only living things to fly in space had been seeds, fruit flies, several monkeys, and the dog named Laika. Would the first astronauts also be just passengers? If so, their only duties would be to survive, observe, and report, and thus they should be primarily selected to withstand the expected rigors of space.

But no one could tell us whether they would merely ride or have control like a pilot. The plans for the space capsule were still being debated. Our third key question was also a seemingly routine personnel matter: What would be the best recruiting sources? Here we were sure that the answer would be to recruit from the best talent in the nation, especially civilians. After all, the President and Congress had bypassed the military in setting up the ill-starred Project Vanguard. More recently, they had done likewise in establishing NASA itself as a civilian agency, to operate publicly rather than in secret, “for the benefit of all mankind.”

## **Help Wanted: “Forty Scientific Specialists to be Engaged on Special Research Projects”**

So early in December [1958] we drafted what was designed to be a public recruiting and examination announcement. We first titled it “Research Astronaut” and later “Aeronautical and Space Scientist, Astronaut.” These were not ordinary jobs, and they needed special exception from the usual Civil Service requirements. Also, it was obviously premature to make anything public as to our plans. So within the next few days we managed to get the Civil Service Commission to publish in the Federal Register an innocuous and brief authorization. It referred to a paragraph number in another document and simply said to add eleven words to that paragraph, “NASA: Forty scientific specialists to be engaged on special research projects.”

Since we had to hedge on the pilot-versus-passenger question, our draft announcement (which never was published) invited applications from a strange array of occupations. Listed were pilots, especially test pilots; crew members of experimental submarines; arctic and Antarctic explorers; parachute jumpers; mountain climbers; deep sea divers; and observers-under-test for extremes of environmental conditions such as acceleration, deceleration, zero gravity, high or low atmospheric pressures, variations in carbon dioxide and oxygen concentration, high and low ambient temperatures, etc. As you can see, our basic concern at this point was with the feared stresses and hazards of launch, space flight, and reentry. We were looking primarily for proven toughness. This draft also listed other requirements, including a college degree in science, engineering, or medicine. It was agreed to by all as the best we would do at the moment.

Five days later, on December 15, 1958, the policy question of passenger versus pilot was resolved. The astronauts would play an important role during even the first flights. They would monitor and adjust the cabin environment. They would operate the communications system. They would make physiological, astronomical, and meteorological observations that could not be made by instruments. Most important, they would be able to operate the reaction controls in space, and be capable of initiating descent from orbit. This was the key part—that the astronaut could take over control of the spacecraft itself. It was a major policy decision, strongly desired by the pilots and quite different from the original Soviet policy of having their cosmonauts ride as mere passengers. I think we must all agree that events have proven the wisdom of this American decision. Witness the several potential disasters averted by astronaut action, as well as manual docking, spacewalks, and the manned landings and operations on the moon.

The following day two more changes were made. One change was to give top preference to test pilots, especially those with high-altitude jet aircraft experience. The other was a proposal to ask aircraft companies and selected government agencies, both civilian and military to nominate their best men, and thus put their organizational reputations on the line as to the quality of their nominees. The big decision day was set for December 17, 1958, a meeting of all hands with NASA Administrator Dr. Keith Glennan. He was briefed in detail by various members of the group, agreed to everything as being sound and reasonable, and said that he would see the President in the next day or two.

All was going well. Our open, competitive examination announcement inviting civilians to apply, supplemented by nominations from agencies and companies, would soon be approved and published. But a few days later the picture suddenly changed. Dr. Glennan had seen and briefed President Eisenhower, who, I was told, vigorously scotched the idea of a public competition to select the first astronauts. As I heard it, his basic motivation was humiliation about Vanguard I, which on the previous December had failed ignominiously before the eyes of the world, after having been announced as intended to orbit the earth as the first U.S. satellite. This embarrassment had not been assuaged by the January success of Explorer I, nor by the eventual March success of Vanguard 11. Thus he rejected anything premature or unproven. He wanted to announce a successful fait accompli. Thus everything had to be kept under wraps, so that the astronauts could be presented publicly after they had already been selected. We had to limit our search to the military, and keep it secret.

So it was back to the drawing board. There was much debate and many proposals, among us and in our advisory committee, right through the Christmas holidays.

Actually, two big changes were taking place. One was dictated by the White House: secrecy of operations coupled with limitation of recruiting sources to the military. The other concerned the basic qualifications: what kind of man was now required in view of the newly established duties of the astronaut?

We decided that astronaut-candidates had to be pilots of high-performance jet aircraft. These were the reasons. First, such men were used to flying in the near vacuum of high altitudes, wearing full-pressure suits, including complete gloves, like astronauts would wear. Second, they had to have experienced high G forces of acceleration and deceleration during maneuvers, similar to the G forces of spaceflight launch and reentry. Third, they were accustomed to the numerous instruments and controls of a complex cockpit, which by now we knew would be true of a space capsule. We also decided that the candidates had to be test pilots of experimental jet aircraft. This was because it was now clear that these men would serve to help develop and constantly improve the spacecraft itself, from flight to flight. They would be a new breed, true spacecraft test pilots, evolved from the nearest existing equivalent—aircraft test pilots.

### **Duties and Qualifications**

By January 5, 1959, all the necessary decisions for our astronaut search had been made. The arguments were over, the gaps in information had been filled, the dust was settled. At last we knew what the duties and the qualifications were. The astronauts' duties were to be as follows, according to our final official list: To survive; that is, to demonstrate the ability of man to fly in space and to return safely.

- To perform; that is, to demonstrate man's capacity to act usefully under conditions of space flight.

- To serve as backup for the automatic controls and instrumentation; that is, to add reliability to the system, and take control if necessary or desirable.
- To serve as scientific observer; that is, to go beyond what instruments and satellites can report.
- To serve as an engineering observer and, acting as a true test pilot, to help improve the flight system and its components.

The qualification requirements were in two sets. The first set included those that were relatively easy to check from available records. They were:

- Age no more than 35. (A couple of weeks later we had to raise this to age 39 because we found that there were just not enough of the very best men who were that young but had all the education and experience we were looking for.)
- Height no more than five feet eleven inches. This requirement was set by the size of the space capsule.
- A college degree in engineering or science. We had no phrase “or equivalent” because we needed an easy “in-or-out” due to the hundreds of personnel records to be scanned.
- Minimum flight time 1500 hours, including substantial time in piloting high-performance jets.
- Graduate of a test pilot school.
- Test piloting experience with experimental aircraft, not just proving out production planes off the assembly line.
- Medical record showing no major physical, physiological, medical, or behavioral problems.
- Evidence of high-quality performance, such as high class standing in test-pilot school; complexity and power of experimental planes flown; selection for particularly difficult or hazardous assignments; record of combat missions (if any); awards and commendations; favorable remarks of superiors found in the records, etc.

The other requirements would have to await individual interviews and testing. They were:

- Top-flight physical condition.
- High intelligence.
- Capacity to withstand high levels of environmental stress; toughness; resilience.

- Perceptual and motor skills of a high order.
- Emotional and psychological stability; strong competitive drive, combined with a cooperative teamwork spirit; maturity; and a sense of humor—if detectable.
- Personable in appearance, manner, and speech.

### **“Merely Looking for Common, Ordinary Supermen”**

This was it. As someone commented (I think it was Air Force General Dan Flickinger, who worked with us), we were “merely looking for common, ordinary supermen.” There were some in our group, in the policy committee, and at high levels in NASA, who were still reluctant to limit the search to the military. One reason was the worldwide public relations aspect of selecting military men for a purely civilian assignment in a civilian agency, which could imply military objectives in a professed peaceful effort. The other reason was that we knew that some of the very best test pilots to be found anywhere were flying as civilians for the big aircraft companies and for NASA itself. But we had our orders, and of course we followed them. It turned out, however, that there were some real advantages in using military test pilots. First, the personnel and flight records were in Washington, available for examination and preliminary screening, which was not true of industry or civilian-agency test pilots.

Second, military officers were accustomed to secrecy and to following orders, so we could easily get them to Washington, D.C., or elsewhere with no reasons given, and we could expect compliance without leaks to the press from them or from their probably reluctant superiors. Third, the military test pilot schools, Air Force at Muroc and Navy at Patuxent, had strong curricula both ground-based and airborne, high standards for entrance, even higher standards for graduation, and good records of performance and achievement. And fourth, there was one more advantage that we ourselves did not realize until later. Being military, they would be accustomed to moving from one location to another with little warning, working long and unusual hours, and frequent absences from home. Thus we would have a homogeneous team, including their wives and families.

### **Phase I: Screening the Records**

We then fanned out in different directions for the first search and preliminary screening of records. Dr. Bob Voas, the Navy psychologist, and I, a Naval Reserve Officer, went to the Navy. Fortunately, BuPers had good punch-card records. But we didn’t quite trust the machine to do the screening for us. So we got a machine printout (from among 2,500 total naval pilots) of the entire record of every officer who had any test-pilot training or experience. Then we went through all those 818 records by hand. These were the results; and I can assure you that it didn’t go as fast as I can tell it, because the information was mostly in codes, and we examined each one twice. Of those 818, we threw out 494 who were not graduates of test-pilot school; 87 who were too old;

90 who were over 5 feet 11 inches tall; and 64 who lacked a bachelor's degree. This left 83. Then we pulled the 83 personnel and medical folders and went through them with care. We eliminated 32 as having insufficient or inappropriate flight training or experience, and 4 more due to medical or behavioral information in their folders. Thus we reduced the list to 47 Navy test pilots, all of whom appeared to be fully qualified on the basis of the information available.

I'm not likely to forget January 15 and 16. While Bob Voas and I had been working at Navy, Dr. Stan White and others had gone to the Air Force and found that their personnel records had not yet been fully automated. There were many hundreds of folders to go through. Meanwhile, Dr. Bill Augerson had been searching Army records, and I had personally searched in the Marine Corps. Also, each of us wanted the others to check his own judgments. So on the morning of the 15th the whole team, with a few others to help, assembled in the Pentagon. We worked all that day, all that night, and all the following day. The result was a total list of 110 men Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps, the first Astronaut-Candidates.

That number 110 eventually became known worldwide. The list did not, however, include any Army pilots, which later generated some bitter complaints. The answer was simple: no Army test pilots had the required high-performance, high-altitude jet plane experience, since they mostly flew low-level observation and support planes and helicopters. Incidentally, it was my good fortune to be the one to review the Marine Corps records. One man's record was exceptionally outstanding. This pilot had won the Distinguished Flying Cross five times and an Air Medal with 18 clusters for service in World War II and Korea. He had made a transcontinental speed record, and had flown some tricky experimental planes. He was such a good aeronautical engineer that he was serving on an NACA technical advisory subcommittee, and was teaching graduate courses at the University of Maryland. The only problem was he did not have the required college degree. His college education, in his second year, had been interrupted by World War II. Despite the lack of a degree (which he finished later), I believed his qualifications justified my decision not to automatically eliminate him. The other team members agreed that he should be kept in the running. His name was John Glenn.

### **The Briefing at the Pentagon**

We scheduled the 110 men to come into Washington on three successive Mondays in early February of 1959. The first group of 32 men arrived under secret orders early on February 2, not knowing why they were there, and assembled in a special room at the Pentagon. What a shock it must have been when they were told that they had a chance to be the first men to fly in space!

The technical leaders of NASA then briefed them in detail about Project Mercury, insofar as was known at that time. They were shown charts and slides and given technical facts about the rocket, the capsule, the planned flights, and the expected stresses and hazards. The men were allowed to ask questions and were given frank answers. After this briefing they had lunch in a private dining room, and were encouraged to discuss the project privately with each other as much as they wished. Then they came back in the afternoon, a few at a time, for individual brief

interviews. Here they had the opportunity to volunteer for competitive testing, or decline. We pledged, as government officials under oath, that a declination or the results of future testing would never enter their official records or be made public.

At these little private interviews, we found that those who declined gave a whole variety of reasons, but nearly all were career related. For example, two declined because they were scheduled to go to MIT, on full salary with tuition paid, to earn Ph.D.s. Three Navy officers were about to become squadron commanders, which was an honor, highly competitive, and hard to come by at the time. And so it went. One man, however, declined because he said both his parents had heart trouble and might not survive the news if he were selected to fly in space. The volunteers were told to come back the next day for interviews and written tests. They were also told to sleep on it, and that if at any point from that time forward they decided to withdraw, no record would be made. As a sidelight, some of us had bets on how many would volunteer. They ranged from 5 percent to 50 percent, but nobody won. Actually, over 75 percent of the candidates volunteered.

#### **Four Competitive Examinations at NASA HQ**

During the next few days each of the 32 candidates went through four stages of competitive examination, not in the same sequence because the four stages were underway simultaneously in different rooms at NASA Headquarters. The first stage was a technical interview with each candidate. This was conducted by a three-man NASA team composed of Donlan, North, and Gamble. Engineer Charles Donlan had on the table the thick specifications book from McDonnell Aircraft Co. for the proposed Mercury capsule, another thick book about the launch rocket, a world map of the planned orbital trajectories, and various charts and tables. Each man was shown all this, key features were pointed out, and all his questions were answered as well as we were able.

Next, Warren North, then chief of the Manned Space Flight Program at NASA Headquarters, quizzed the candidate in detail about his flight training and experience. And I, an industrial and organizational psychologist, asked a variety of questions. I'm sure that some of my questions must have seemed irrelevant, but they were designed to yield clues about personality traits and motivation. One purpose of these interviews was to satisfy each volunteer's genuine need for more information, since each knew he could still withdraw. But in addition, all three of us were looking for patterns and indicators in their questions, answers, and comments. Did they concentrate on safety devices and procedures? Or did they say, as several did, that they knew the excellent reputation of old NACA's engineers and laboratories, and had full faith that NASA would not launch them into space until there was a high probability of a safe launch and recovery? Did they make negative technical comments about the capsule and booster? Or did they say that it was too early to take seriously such tentative plans for future hardware, and then start asking questions about plans for the training program for astronauts?



Such patterns were quite revealing. Also revealing were their descriptions of close calls in combat or accidents, their hobbies, interests, ambitions, and a variety of other matters. One of the candidates said, "I'm sure that you're looking for good appearance and manner. You're not smart if you don't, because the day will come when some of us will be on live TV, warts and all, for the whole world to see." Another, when examining the orbital trajectories, realized that in an emergency he might land almost anywhere on earth, clad in his space suit. So tongue in cheek, he asked whether the astronaut training program would teach him to say in 89 languages, "Take me to your leader."

The second stage was a psychiatric evaluation. This was conducted by two psychiatrists, Dr. George Ruff and Dr. Edwin Levy, who were Air Force officers. Each recorded his independent conclusions, then they compared notes and reported to the committee. The third stage was a medical interview based on detailed review of the up-to-date medical records brought along by each candidate. This was done by Dr. Bill Augerson, the Army flight surgeon.

We were amused and slightly shocked by the fact that a few of the men were too tall, some of them by many inches. Later we discovered that height beyond the minimum is not critical in the military, even for pilots; and hence heights are not always recorded carefully. A clerk at a desk, we were told, might ask each man in a long line, without even looking up, "How tall are you?" and write down whatever was said, even if the man was kidding; thus an incorrect height could become virtually immortal in the records. Or the height could be misread or miscopied by someone along the line. In this way we lost several good competitors who appeared to be highly qualified and had volunteered, but could not sit in the capsule. The fourth stage was a set of three written tests selected and administered by Dr. Bob Voas, helped by other psychologists. He gave the Minnesota Engineering Analogies Test, the Doppelt Mathematical Reasoning test, and the Miller Analogies Test. The last named is a difficult test of logical reasoning ability, designed for university graduate students. Most of the men did quite well on all three tests, but with different patterns of scores.

The next Monday, February 9, the second batch of candidates arrived, to go through the same routine just described. This totaled 69 men of the 110 we planned to call into Washington. By the middle of this second week, Bob Voas and I worked late one night to tally up the results. We found that we had 32 well-qualified candidates who had passed every test, so far, with flying colors. Of the 69 who had reported, 16 had declined, 6 were found to be too tall, and another 15 had been eliminated by one or more of the tests. So we stopped right there and did not call in the third group, who had not ranked quite as high on their records anyway. We figured that with 32 men like this we could hardly go wrong. All we had to do now was pick the very best from among these excellent candidates. The next stages of testing proved us right. All 32 were in fact excellent, but of course to different degrees in their various capabilities.

### **Phases III and IV**

The next two stages of testing, which we called Phase III and Phase IV, were conducted outside Washington. I could not be there in person, only in spirit and by telephone, so I will be brief. But I was deeply involved as control center for who went where and when and as a channel for test data that came back through Washington and on to the Space Task Group at Langley. NASA wrote special-delivery, registered letters to the candidates at their homes, asking them to call to confirm their willingness to continue. The letters said that, if they were still volunteers, military orders to travel to the next testing location would be forthcoming. They were instructed to report to Albuquerque in slacks and sport shirts because a succession of men arriving in military uniforms might start tongues to wagging.

One interesting call I received was not from Lt. Malcolm Scott Carpenter, USN, but from Rene Carpenter, who called from their home in California. She said that her husband was away on a short cruise on the aircraft carrier *Hornet*, so she had taken the liberty of opening the letter. She was very enthusiastic and said, "We accept! You couldn't get a better man." Nearly two months later, when the seven first astronauts were introduced at their first press conference, each was asked why he volunteered. The question went down the line starting with Deke Slayton, and the last was Scott Carpenter. His answer was: "I didn't volunteer. My wife Rene did it for me."<sup>ii</sup>

A few days after Mrs. Carpenter's call, my telephone at home rang at about midnight. It was a person-to-person call from Scott, made from one of the Navy docks in San Diego. He said that his skipper, the captain of the carrier *Hornet*, had seen the orders for Scott to report on March 6 to the Lovelace Clinic in Albuquerque. But the captain wouldn't let him go because the ship was due to sail on a training cruise, and Scott was his air intelligence officer. I assured Scott that it would be taken care of immediately. So then and there, I called Admiral Arleigh Burke, Chief of Naval Operations, at his home and told him the story. I had awakened the Admiral out of a sound sleep, and he used some real sailor language, directed not at me but at that skipper, and said he would straighten him out right now. Some months later I received a photograph of Astronaut Carpenter inscribed, "To Dr. Gamble with warmest regards and thanks for the midnight phone call," signed M. Scott Carpenter. I also received autographed photographs from the other six astronauts, each to me by name. I prize these photographs very highly.

I won't go into the details of the rest of the story. Briefly, in Phase III the men went in small groups to the special clinic at the Lovelace Foundation in Albuquerque, where they were given for seven days and three nights probably the most exhaustive physical and physiological examinations ever given before then to obviously healthy men. For Phase IV, they went to the AeroMedical Laboratory at Wright Air Development Center, Dayton, for another week. There they were subjected to 11 strenuous stress tests—cold, heat, noise, vibration, centrifuge, and so on—and 21 additional psychological tests.

All the while, the test data were coming through Washington for Headquarters review and being forwarded to the Space Task Group down at Langley. Finally, on April 2, at a meeting at Langley, the seven first astronauts were selected: three from the Air Force, three from the Navy, and one Marine. A week later, on April 9, 1959, in the NASA auditorium on Lafayette Square that was

originally the carriage house of the old Dolley Madison home, the seven were introduced to the world. You all know their names: Scott Carpenter, Leroy [“Gordo”] Cooper, John Glenn, Gus Grissom, Wally Schirra, Alan Shepard, and Deke Slayton.

In conclusion, let me say that this experience was one of the highlights of my professional career. I have never worked with a finer group of men—the NASA and military men who were engaged in the selection process, the test-pilot astronaut candidates, and especially the seven selected to be the first Americans to fly into space. As I said earlier, we were plowing new ground, full of stumps and rocks, with few landmarks to guide us. At times we had felt that we were fumbling in the dark. But I think events have proved that we must have done something right!

Dr. Gamble was the manpower director at the NACA from 1948 to 1955 and again at NASA from 1958 to 1964. His first account of his role in Phases I and II of the 1959 Project Mercury selection process was published in 1961 and informed NASA’s first historical accounts of space medicine. The version provided here was written for a speech Dr. Gamble gave on March 10, 1971, to the Men’s Club of the United Methodist Church in Bethesda, Maryland. Dr. Gamble, who was born in 1910, died in 2001. We thank the Gamble family for kindly providing the Carpenters with this tribute to an important moment in manned spaceflight history.

#### **Notes**

1. It later came out that Carpenter lacked three credits (a course in heat transfer, or thermodynamics), required for an undergraduate engineering degree. But because he had been recruited, like Neil Armstrong, through the U.S. Navy’s Direct Procurement Program devised to identify aviation talent on college campuses, his automated Navy records showed he possessed a degree.
2. Transcripts of the April 9, 1959, press conference introducing the seven Mercury astronauts record that the room erupted in laughter at this self-deprecatory revelation. Carpenter’s tale, in addition to being funny, also succeeded in breaking the ice with the assembled journalists, who had been pursuing an earnest and slightly apprehensive line of questions about the reactions of “the wives.”