

Alan B. Shepard, Jr. (Mercury 3) Papers

COLL/704

.5 cubic feet

Updated by Roy Grossnick
April 2010

Archives Branch
Operational Archives Section
Naval History and Heritage Command
805 Kidder Breese Street SE
Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374

Records Relating to Mercury 3
and
Commander Alan B. Shepard, Jr., USN

1959-1961

0.5 cubic feet

Finding Aid prepared by
Wade Wyckoff
November 2000

Operational Archives Branch
Naval Historical Center
805 Kidder Breese Street SE
Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374

Historical Note

On 5 May 1961, Commander Alan B. Shepard, Jr. became the first American to go into space as he completed a flight reaching 116 miles high and 302 miles downrange from Cape Canaveral, Florida. The formal countdown for Mercury 3 began at 0830 (all times in Eastern Standard Time) on 4 May 1961. It was split into two parts, as experience showed it was preferable to run the countdown in two shorter segments allowing the launch crew some rest in between. All operations proceeded normally and were completed ahead of schedule. A build-in hold of approximately 15 hours was called at T-6 hours 30 minutes. During this time the various pyrotechnics were installed in the spacecraft and the hydrogen peroxide system was serviced.

The countdown resumed at 2330 on 4 May. A built-in hold of 1 hour took place at T-2 hours 20 minutes during which final preparation of the spacecraft was conducted. Shepard was transported to the Pad and the countdown continued, except for some minor holds, until T-15 minutes. At this time it was determined that photographic coverage of the launch and flight could not be obtained because of low clouds near the launch area. Weather forecasters predicted that visibility would improve rapidly within 20 to 45 minutes. During this time, one of the 400hz power inverters connected to the launch vehicle developed regulation problems. The count was reset to T-35 minutes and holding, and the clock restarted 86 minutes later following replacement of the inverter.

It was again necessary to hold the count at T-15 minutes for a final check of the real-time trajectory computer. The countdown then resumed and proceeded until liftoff at 0934. The capsule, *Freedom 7*, was recovered by an HUS-1 helicopter of HMR(L)-262 following splashdown in the Atlantic. The helicopter transported Shepard and the capsule to the carrier *Lake Champlain* (CVS-39).

Sources:

NASA Project Mercury Mission MR-3. Available online. November 2000.
<http://science.ksc.nasa.gov/history/mercury/mr-3/mr-3.html>

Grossnick, Roy A. *United States Naval Aviation 1910-1995*. Washington: Naval Historical Center, 1997.

Scope and Content Note

This collection contains miscellaneous records relating to the 5 May 1961 flight of Mercury 3 with astronaut Alan Shepard. The collection is arranged in four series.

Series I, Logs, consists mostly of aircraft navigation and radio logs. A group of logs recording the capsule recovery procedures is also present. They are arranged alphabetically by type.

Series II, Communications, holds correspondence regarding Shepard's flight and the Mercury project as a whole. Also included is a group of Navy and Joint Chiefs of Staff messages. This message traffic discusses the Soviet space program, coordinates events for the Mercury 3 launch, and congratulates Shepard on his achievement. Material in this series is arranged chronologically.

In Series III are several miscellaneous items, including three photographs showing Captain Ralph Weymouth and Rear Admiral George Koch on USS *Lake Champlain*, helicopters lifting off from USS *Valley Forge*, and Shepard with the Mercury capsule on *Lake Champlain*. Two issues of *Life* magazine with stories about Shepard and the Mercury flight are also found in this series.

The final series consists of maps and charts used during the flight of Mercury 3. These large oversize charts include a World Aeronautical Chart, five Mercury Test Flight Charts, two Air/Surface LORAN Navigation Charts, a U.S. Air Force Jet Navigation Chart, and a Continental Entry Chart. Several of these have tracking data and other information recorded in pencil.

Box and Folder List

Box 1

Series I: Logs, 1961

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------|
| 1. Check-off List | 1961 |
| 2. Narrative of Events | 1961 |
| 3. Navigator's Flight Records | 1961 |
| 4. Radio Logs | 1961 |
| 5. Recovery Control Logs | 1961 |
| 6. Running Logs | 1961 |

Series II: Communications, 1959-1961

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------|
| 7. Correspondence | 1959-1961 |
| 8. Message Traffic | 1961 |

Series III: Miscellaneous, 1961

9. Chart
10. Photographs
 - a. Captain Ralph Weymouth and Rear Admiral George Koch on USS *Lake Champlain*
 - b. Helicopters lifting off from USS *Valley Forge*
 - c. Shepard with Mercury capsule on *Lake Champlain*
11. Life magazine, 12 May 1961
12. Life magazine, 19 May 1961

Series IV: Maps (See Map Case 7, Drawer 4)

13. World Aeronautical Chart
14. Mercury Test Flight Chart (5)
15. Air/Surface LORAN Navigation Chart (2)
16. U.S. Air Force Jet Navigation Chart
17. Continental Entry Chart