



Freedom 7 capsule.

U.S. SPACE EXPLORATION: Freedom 7



Pilot Alan Shepard before liftoff.



Freedom 7 launches.



A helicopter recovers Shepard after splashdown.

Mercury-Redstone 3, known better by its military call sign, Freedom 7, was the first U.S. space mission to have a human on board. It was part of the Project Mercury space program.

Piloted by Alan Shepard, Freedom 7 launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida at 9:34 a.m. on May 5, 1961. Shepard became the first American in space. Three weeks earlier, the Soviet Union had launched a flight with Yuri Gagarin, who was the first person in space. Over 45 million people in the U.S. watched the Freedom 7 liftoff on television.

A rocket carried the Freedom 7 capsule with Shepard. During the liftoff, the rocket reached a speed of 5,134 miles an hour.

The goals of the mission were to test the manual controls and to observe the earth. Shepard completed both goals successfully.

The flight lasted 15 minutes. Freedom 7 traveled 303 miles and reached an altitude of 116 miles. As the capsule reentered the Earth's atmosphere, parachutes opened to slow down the capsule before it landed in the ocean, called the splashdown. Shepard left the capsule while it was floating in the water. A waiting helicopter from a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier lifted Shepard and flew him to the carrier.

Freedom 7 started a new time of space exploration for the U.S. Alan Shepard continued as an astronaut and in 1971 became the fifth person to walk on the moon.



Q&A

What year was the Freedom 7 mission? 1961

Who was the first person in space? Yuri Gagarin

Who was the first American in space? Alan Shepard

When a capsule reenters the Earth's atmosphere and it lands in the ocean, it is called the splashdown.

Mission Math

Number who watched the liftoff on television: over 45 million	Time of flight: 15 minutes
Number of miles flown: 303	Highest altitude: 116 miles