on April 9th 1959 NASA introduced to the world the original mercury 7 astronauts Gus Grissom scott Carpenter deke Slayton Gordon Cooper Alan Shepard Wally schirra and John Glenn were chosen from a pool of over 500 military test pilots to become the first group of astronauts to lead America into space under Project Mercury NASA celebrates the 50th anniversary of the mercury 7 astronauts