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Landing on Venus (Yes, way.) p. 66

Star Shooter

NASA'S FIRST PHOTOGRAPHER CREATED AN INTIMATE HISTORICAL RECORD.

_____ HE WAS WITH THE SPACE PROGRAM before the astronauts were—the official photographer of the Langley Research Center in 1958, when a brand new entity called the "Space Task Group" was created. In the early days of U.S. human spaceflight, William Paul Taub was like the local newspaper photographer in a small town that suddenly became the center of the universe. Everybody knew him, especially the Mercury astronauts, whom he photographed often. They were so accustomed to his presence that they appear unaware of him in these three photographs—portraits of the pre-great, going about the new business of space travel. Gus Grissom (below), in cufflinks and crew cut, is intent on a gimbaled training device designed to demonstrate how astronauts would regain attitude control should their spacecraft tumble. He's explaining the equipment to the young sons of his fellow astronauts. Note the upturned face of the smallest one, barely visible to Grissom's right. Bill Taub caught it: We were all that captivated by Mercury.

Extreme focus: John Glenn's crisp white shirt is sharp against a soft-focus control center (opposite, top). He's watching the unpiloted Mercury-Atlas 4 flight in September 1961, just months before he would climb aboard the *Friendship 7* spacecraft and ride an Atlas rocket on the same profile to orbit.

Laid-back Al Shepard (opposite, below), already aware that he would be the first American to ride a rocket to space, chats with ABC reporter Jules Bergman, who was at Cape Canaveral that day to film Shepard, Glenn, and Grissom after word leaked that one of them would get the nod. Taub, NASA's first photographer, by then knew that he was photographing America's first astronaut. ❑