

Astronaut Wally Schirra dies at 84

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Wally Schirra, the only astronaut to fly in the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo programs, has died at 84 in La Jolla, Calif.

Schirra's family reported he died Wednesday of natural causes, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration said Thursday.

Schirra was selected in 1959 as one of the original seven Mercury astronauts, and flew on the fifth Mercury mission in 1962. He commanded Gemini 6A three years later, a flight with Tom Stafford that made history as the first space rendezvous of two manned, maneuverable spacecraft.

Schirra commanded Apollo 7, the first manned Apollo flight, in 1968. He and crewmembers Walt Cunningham and Donn Eisele tested the Apollo systems and proved the craft was ready to take astronauts to the moon.

Schirra retired from NASA in 1969 and worked as a commentator with CBS from 1969 until 1975, teaming with veteran news anchor Walter Cronkite on the network's coverage of the U.S. space program.

Schirra was born in Hackensack, N.J., March 12, 1923. He graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1945.

He was a recipient of the U.S. Distinguished Service Medal and three Distinguished Flying Crosses.

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