

## The Story of the Virgil I. Grissom Memorial

The memorial is a tribute to a hometown hero, astronaut Virgil I. "Gus" Grissom. A native of Mitchell, Indiana, Grissom was a pioneer in the United States space program.

After the tragedy of Apollo 1, the Indiana General Assembly promptly enacted legislation to create the Grissom Memorial. Spring Mill State Park was selected as the location for the memorial due to its proximity to Mitchell and the availability of land.

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources sought a distinctive design to symbolize the desire to explore space. The Department insisted that all of the items in the memorial be actual artifacts or authentic representations of Grissom's life. The original exhibits are on loan from the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum and may be periodically replaced with new material.

The Grissom Memorial was officially dedicated on July 21, 1971, ten years after Grissom's first flight into space.

## The Virgil I. Grissom Memorial at Spring Mill State Park

The Virgil I. Grissom Memorial is intended to interest visitors of all ages in the successes and sacrifices of the early stages in America's space program.

Grissom was convinced that Man stood on the threshold of great, future adventures in space. He was determined that his beloved country, the United States of America, should remain the leader of this exploration.

After you visit the memorial, we hope that you will take time to see the other attractions at Spring Mill State Park.

Spring Mill State Park was established in 1927 and dedicated in 1930. The 1,319 acres include not only the Grissom Memorial but a restored Pioneer Village, Nature Center, three nature preserves (including virgin timber), the Twin Caves boat tours, and a pioneer cemetery.

The park also offers shaded hiking trails, secluded picnic areas, an Olympic-sized swimming pool, mountain bike trail, dirt jump park, and a large campground. Programming and special events are available throughout the year (including winter!).

The Spring Mill Inn offers comfortable, year-round accommodations. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner for all park guests is available in the Millstone Dining Room.

Spring Mill State Park  
P.O. Box 376  
Mitchell, Indiana 47446

Phone: 812-849-4129  
Fax: 812-849-4004



Interpretive Services  
State Parks and Reservoirs  
402 W. Washington St., Rm. W298  
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Spring Mill State Park

# Virgil I. Grissom MEMORIAL



## Honoring a Hometown Hero

Open Daily  
8:30am - 4:00pm

Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas  
and New Year's Day.

### Virgil I. Grissom Memorial

3333 Hwy. 60 East  
Mitchell, IN 47446

GPS Address: N 38 43.682, W 86 24.829



*"If we fall, let the  
world know that we  
died as test pilots in  
the risky business of  
exploring outer space"*

*Gus Grissom*



# The Gus Grissom Story

Virgil I. Grissom was born on April 3, 1926 in Mitchell, Indiana, the oldest of four children.

In 1944, he graduated from Mitchell High School. Motivated by a strong interest in technology and aircraft construction, he completed one year of pre-cadet training in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Grissom was inducted into the Air Corps in August 1944 and discharged in November with the rank of corporal.



Grissom went on to study at Purdue University, graduating in February 1950, with a degree in Mechanical Engineering.

He joined the United States Air Force and was commissioned a second lieutenant in March 1951. In December of that year, Grissom shipped overseas to fight in the Korean War.

Grissom flew 100 missions with the 334th Fighter Interceptor Squadron in less than six months, and received the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal.

When he returned from Korea, Grissom was assigned to the Air Force Institute of Technology at the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio. He then transferred to the Test Pilot School at Edwards Air Force Base in California. Grissom specialized in “checking-out” advanced-designed fighter planes; he logged more than 4600 hours as an airplane pilot - 3500 hours in jet aircraft.

In April 1959, the National Air and Space Administration (NASA) announced the selection of the country’s first seven astronauts. Virgil I. “Gus” Grissom was part of this elite group that would become known as the “Mercury 7.”

The goal of Project Mercury was to place a manned spacecraft in orbit and return that spacecraft safely to earth.

As part of Project Mercury, Virgil I. “Gus” Grissom became America’s second man in space on July 21, 1961, in a capsule named the “Liberty Bell 7.” A successful flight was followed by a dramatic ending when the capsule was lost at sea after splashdown. Although Grissom himself was safely retrieved from the water, the mishap forced NASA to rethink its recovery techniques.

Grissom’s next assignment was to oversee the design, and then to command, the first manned mission of the Gemini program. The two primary goals of the Gemini series were to launch a two-man capsule designed to maneuver and work in space, and to test plans, techniques, and equipment needed for a landing on the moon.

On March 23, 1965, the Gemini III launched with Grissom at the helm, in a capsule he christened the “Molly Brown.”



The flight lasted five hours and flew nearly 81,000 miles around the earth, completing three orbits. During the voyage, Grissom made history again as the first person to ever control and change the path of a spacecraft while in orbit.

The final steps needed to prepare for a successful, manned, lunar landing were undertaken during the Apollo program. The ultimate goal of Apollo was to launch a spacecraft on a path to the moon, using the weak lunar gravity to slingshot the spacecraft to the moon and then back to earth.



In February 1966, Virgil I. Grissom, Ed White, and Roger Chaffee were chosen as the crew for the Apollo I mission.

On January 27, 1967, during a test on the launch pad, a flash fire broke out inside the command module. Grissom, White, and Chaffee were trapped inside, unable to escape the blaze.

Virgil I. “Gus” Grissom, Mitchell’s hometown hero, was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

