



From the Armed Forces to the Moon: the ongoing link between military and astronauts

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The return of man to the Moon, led by the **Artemis** program, is often described as a technological challenge. Rockets, new-generation capsules, habitation modules. But behind this narrative lies a more concrete reality: **the people chosen to face space are, in most cases, military personnel**. It's not a suggestion, it's a fact.

Artemis II: who the astronauts really are

The crew of the Artemis II mission, the first with humans headed to the Moon after more than half a century, emblematically represents the profile required today to tackle deep space. Commander **Reid Wiseman** is an officer of the **United States Navy**, with a background as a military pilot. The same goes for pilot **Victor Glover**, also from the U.S. Navy and accustomed to operating in complex contexts. They are joined by **Jeremy Hansen**, an officer of the **Royal Canadian Air Force**, trained in aeronautics and operations.

Only **Christina Koch** represents a different path, with a primarily engineering and scientific background.

Three out of four thus come from the military world. It's not a detail, but a precise choice: when the mission requires autonomy, risk management, and decision-making ability in extreme environments, the operational background becomes a requirement, not an added value.

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Three of the four crew members of Artemis II come from the military world

Space as an operational theater

Operating beyond Earth's orbit means moving in an environment where **every mistake can have irreversible consequences**, where communications **are not immediate**, and where autonomy **is not a choice, but an absolute necessity**. In this context, every decision must be made with clarity, often without the possibility of direct support from Earth. It is a dimension that, in many respects, recalls that of a true **operational theater**.

The difference is only in the domain: no longer land, sea, or air, but space. The dynamics, however, remain surprisingly similar: **isolation, constant risk, total coordination, and immediate reaction to the unexpected**.

In such conditions, selection can only be oriented towards those who have already been trained to manage **uncertainty and pressure**. And it is precisely here that the continuity with the military world emerges, where these skills **are not theoretical, but are developed and tested every day in the field**.

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The Orion capsule, with the Artemis II crew on board, during the splashdown phase

The Italian model: Air Force at the forefront

Italy also follows this line. The most representative astronauts of recent years, such as **Samantha Cristoforetti** and **Luca Parmitano**, both come from the **Italian Air Force**.

Their path is not accidental: it originates in an environment where **discipline, continuous training, and risk management** are integral parts of the training. Operational experiences, the ability to work under pressure, and familiarity with complex contexts represent a

background that naturally transfers into space.

It is the concrete demonstration of how military training continues to represent **one of the most solid and reliable foundations** for tackling highly complex missions, where technical skills and human qualities must coexist without margin for error.

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Samantha Cristoforetti and Luca Parmitano in Italian Air Force pilot uniform

Paolo Nespoli: from Col Moschin to space

The most emblematic case remains that of **Paolo Nespoli**.

Before becoming an astronaut of the **European Space Agency**, Nespoli was a paratrooper and commando of the **9th Paratroopers Assault Regiment "Col Moschin"**.

A path that does not represent a deviation, but a continuity. The skills required of a commando, autonomy, endurance, the ability to operate in small teams in hostile environments, are the same that characterize the profile of a modern astronaut.

The link between special forces and space does not end with Nespoli. The **9th Paratroopers Assault Regiment "Col Moschin"** has participated in training activities involving astronauts from the **European Space Agency**.

These are not superficial collaborations, but a concrete transfer of skills. When preparing a man to operate **far from any support**, in conditions of **isolation, pressure, and high risk**, the principles remain the same, regardless of the operational context.

Whether it is the desert, the sea, or space, what matters is the ability to adapt, to maintain control, and to operate in small teams with **maximum efficiency and reliability**. The environment changes, but the approach does not.

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On the left Paolo Nespoli ESA Astronaut, on the right Paolo Nespoli Commando Officer of the 9th Col Moschin in the '80s

Towards the Moon: who will be next

As the Artemis missions progress, Europe will have an increasingly concrete role, and with it, Italy as well. But observing the selection criteria and current profiles, the direction is clear: **those who will return to the Moon will most likely be someone who has already demonstrated the ability to operate at the limit.**

The link between the military world and space exploration is not a relic of the past, but a necessity of the present.

The Moon is not just a destination. It is a hostile environment to be conquered.

And, once again, it will be men trained for this who will make the difference.