John Glenn Jr. Essay, Research Paper

John Herschel Glenn Jr. was born on July 18, 1921 in Cambridge, Ohio. He was named after his father John Glenn Sr. John Glenn Sr. had fought in France during World War I, and his hearing had been impaired as a result of the fighting. After the war he started a plumbing business and managed to make a comfortable living for himself and his family. John s mother Clara Sproat Glenn wanted a large family, two of her children died while they were infants. After John was born, the family adopted a young girl named Jean. Clara told her children that each person is placed on Earth for a purpose. Her strong sense of work and duty influenced John throughout his life. John s family life was strict but he enjoyed a happy and carefree childhood. He played stickball and hockey. People could see that John was a natural leader. He was involved with boy scouts in his community but since they moved they did not have a troop because his town was too small. John started a group of his own called Ohio Rangers.

John was always interested in airplanes. He read many aviation books and built small wooden models in his room. His childhood hero was Charles Lindbergh, who in 1927 became the first person to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. John and his father were invited by a friend to join Charles in a short airplane ride. After this experience John decided on a future career as a pilot.

In 1935 John entered New Concord High School. He earned high marks in all of his classes and lettered in football, basketball and tennis. While John was a little boy he had made friends with Annie Castor. Annie Castor in high school became his first high school sweetheart. After high school John and Annie both stayed home in New Concorde and attended Muskingum College, which John entered in the fall of 1939.

In 1939, when Hitler ordered the invasion of Poland, World War II began. John Glenn decided to follow in the footsteps of his father and great-grandfathers by defending his country. Glenn dropped out of college, enlisted in the Navy Air Corps, and was assigned to a naval air base in Corpus Christi, Texas in early 1942. Glenn began his own navy flight training in PBY seaplanes, designed to take off and land on water as well as dry ground. He practiced flying the planes, took classes in navigation and airborne weaponry, and patrolled the Gulf of Mexico for enemy submarines. After he finished his training, Glenn graduated as a lieutenant and was notified that he qualified for enlistment in the Marine Corps.

April 6, 1943 John married Anna Margaret Castor. A reception was held at the brides home followed an informal ceremony. A wedding photographer took pictures of John in his Marine uniform and Annie in a frilly white dress.

Glenn s first Marine Corps assignment was to Cherry Point, North Carolina. He looked forward to future training in combat planes-fighters and bombers. There were many more pilots than there were planes. Glenn got very little flying time. From Cherry Point, he was transferred to Camp Kearney, California. He was assigned to fly transport planes. From there, he was moved to El Centro Air Station in California. There he trained in fighter planes.

In February 1944, Glenn was shipped out on the cargo ship Santa Monica to Midway Island in the Pacific Ocean. This small island was located at the northwestern edge of the Hawaiian Islands, served as a U.S. air and submarine base. In June 1942, Midway had been the site of a huge naval battle, the first in history in which air power and aircraft carriers had played the most important role in the outcome. In the spring of 1944, Glenn flew patrol missions in the area, keeping lookout for Japanese ships, planes, and submarines. That summer John saw his first fighting in the Marshall Islands, located in the central Pacific Ocean. Suffering from heavy losses while trying to defeat the Japanese on the ground, U.S. commanders decided instead to bomb the enemy off the islands. Glenn flew dozens of bombing missions in Corsairs, attacking infantry and antiaircraft positions. He flew fast and low to avoid antiaircraft barrages at higher altitudes. August 6 and August 9, 1945 the United States dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cites of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. August 14, the war in the Pacific finally ended. At this point John had to some important decisions to make. He could retire from the military and return to Annie and his parents in New Concord. Since he had had a good stint as a military flier, Glenn had other options as well. He could fulfill his childhood dream of becoming a commercial airline pilot-or he could make the Marine Corps his career. John decided that he did not want to leave the excitement of military flying behind him. He knew that skilled pilots would be needed to test-fly new planes. He looked forward to the challenge and accepted an offer to stay in the Marine Corps.

In 1945, Annie had given birth to a son named David. On March 15, 1947, while John was stationed in Okinawa, Annie gave birth again to a daughter named Carolyn. They usually called Lyn. Although the birth itself went well, Annie contracted an infection and a life-threatening fever soon after she returned home. She then returned back to the hospital. John soon found out about Annie and her condition and got emergency medical leave and flew home. His trip home took him three days; by the time he got to the hospital Annie was too sick to recognize him. Annie eventually recovered after the medicine took effect. Glenn returned home in Okinawa and moved to the island of Guam, which served as a U.S. air and naval base. Glenn s family soon joined him.

After the war, Glenn rose in the ranks from lieutenant to captain to major. He continued to fly at bases in California, Maryland and the Pacific. He was assigned to Fighter Squadron 218 in northern China. In 1950, the United States found itself drawn directly into the Korean conflict. In February 1953, John Glenn was sent to Korea to join Marine Corps Fighter Squadron 311 at a base in Pohang Dong Ni. On July 12, 1953, Glenn scored his first victory in aerial dogfights by downing a MiG fighter, a plane manufactured by the Soviet Union. He shot down two more MIGs within the next two weeks before the war was ended by a cease-fire on July 27, 1953. During World War II and the Korean War, Glenn had flown a total of 149 missions. He had survived antiaircraft fire and one-on-one air combat without injury and had been awarded five Distinguished Flying Crosses for his skill.

During the Korean War, Glenn had flown the fastest, most advanced fighter planes the United States had in its arsenal. Like many other military pilots, Glenn realized the best way to get ahead and continue flying was to become a test pilot. He applied for an assignment to the Patuxent River Naval Air Station in Maryland. Glenn was accepted, but the program demanded advanced math skills and a basic knowledge of calculus, which Glenn had not studied in his two years at Muskingum College. He managed to master the math and graduate from Pax River as a marine test pilot in August 1954. The job of test pilots was to push the envelope in other words, take risks.

In 1956 he was transferred to a desk job at the Bureau of Naval Aeronautics in Washington, D.C., where he worked in the Fighter Design Branch. Glenn managed to get himself assigned to the project as the pilot. He named it Operation Bullet. Taking off from Los Alamitos Naval Air Station in California on July 16, 1957, Glenn flew a Crusader to an altitude of 50, 000 feet, almost ten miles high. He followed a course that took him east and north, directly over his hometown of New Concord. Glenn landed at Bennett Field in Brooklyn, New York, setting a new transcontinental speed record. Annie, David and Lyn were there to greet him. Overnight, Operation Bullet turned John from an unknown test pilot into an aviation hero.

NASA set a goal to put a man in space by the middle of 1960. The nation s future astronauts would be selected from the 540 military test pilots who were already flying at Pax River. The candidates could be no older than thirty-nine and no taller than five feet eleven inches. They had to have at least fifteen hundred hours of flight time, and they had to have a bachelor s degree-a requirement that disqualified Chuck Yaeger, the nation s most skilled test pilot. NASA s first astronauts would be used almost as lab animals. Major John Glenn, one of the first and most eager of the volunteers had heard about the program while working at the Bureau of Naval Aeronautics in Washington. Glenn was thirty-eight years old and knew he would have problems getting into the program. He was also six feet tall. He asked for recommendations for old commanding officers including Colonel Jake Dill at Pax River. He wanted to see that at least one Marine flier made the program; Dill went directly to NASA headquarters to insist that Glenn be accepted. Glenn, along with 109 other volunteers as Mercury candidates. NASA split the finalists into five groups of six and one group of two, and then moved them to the Lovelace Clinic in Albuquerque, New Mexico. There, a team of doctors put the candidates through a weeklong series of physical tests and ordeals, including sperm counts, strength and reflex tests, enemas, X rays, urinalysis, and blood tests. After this Glenn and the finalists went to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, near Dayton, Ohio for more intense tests. The testing went on for months. Finally, on April 9, 1959, NASA held a press conference to announce the final cut-the roster of seven men who would be the first Americans to fly into space and orbit the Earth. Wally Schirra, Scott Carpenter, Alan Shepard, Gus Grissom, Deke Slayton, Gordon Cooper, and John Glenn sat behind a long table and faced members of the media. Glenn had no problem dealing with the reporters or putting together quotable phrases for the media.

The Mercury Seven moved to the vicinity of Langley Air Force Base in Virginia, where NASA had set up its headquarters. John Glenn s realm was the interior design of the spacecraft itself-the controls, switches, and gauges to be used by the astronauts in flight. NASA was eager for launches to begin as soon as possible. The agency planned to make a series of sub orbital flights on a Redstone rocket in early 1960. NASA had scheduled the program to finish by the end of 1961. On July 29, 1960, a countdown began at Cape Canaveral for the launch of Mercury-Atlas 1. As the first Mercury flight carry a number, this launch signaled the end of the long period of testing and experimentation, and beginning of the program s official flights. One minute after the launch, at an altitude of 32,000 feet, the Atlas exploded. Glenn and the other astronauts went through more tough physical training.

Glenn knew that he was as qualified as anybody in the group to make the first flight. He was an excellent pilot, but he was also an ambitious climber who knew how to ingratiate himself with his superiors to get what he wanted. Glenn s worries about the peer vote were justified. The vote, held just before Christmas, went to Alan Shepard. On January 19, 1961, NASA announced the lineup for the first Mercury flight to the astronauts. Alan Shepard would ride the capsule; John Glenn and Gus Grisson would serve as his backups.

Shepard s flight, officially Mercury 3, was scheduled for May 2. Early that morning, he climbed into his pressure suit only to have the liftoff canceled due to bad weather. On the morning of May 5, 1961, workers moved the Redstone rocket and the Mercury capsule that Shepard had named Freedom 7 to the launch pad. Shepard climbed aboard to wait inside the capsule for four hours because a technical problem delayed the launch. Freedom 7 was launched and fifteen minutes after the launch, Shepard splashed down in the Atlantic Ocean, three hundred miles from the launch pad.

After Grisson s flight, NASA and John Glenn began preparing for another sub orbital mission. John Glenn would be aboard. Glenn s flight, officially named Mercury-Atlas 6, was scheduled for December 1961, but problems fitting the Mercury capsule atop the much larger Atlas booster delayed the launch. On January 16, 1962 problems with the propellant tanks caused another delay, and bad weather stopped the mission on January 23. Four days later, Glenn spent five hours suited up and ready inside the capsule, but heavy clouds over Cape Canaveral did not clear. The mission was postponed a total of ten times. On February 20, 1962, Glenn again prepared for the launch. The ninety-five foot Atlas rocket ignited and the Friendship 7 took off from Cape Canaveral. That Atlas lifted and turned toward the east, and the capsule began to shake and lurch as it approached the speed of sound. Glenn was weight-free of the force of gravity.

Glenn described the first orbital sunset seen by a U.S. astronaut: The speed at which the sun goes down is remarkable. The white line of the horizon, sandwiched between the black sky and dark earth, it s extremely bright as the sun sets. As the sun goes down a little bit more, the bottom layer becomes orange, and it fades into red and finally off into blues and black as you look farther up into space. Glenn had trouble with the spacecraft. Landing eight hundred miles southeast of Cape Canaveral and all the problems they had with the spacecraft everyone was fine. The flight of Friendship 7 was over.

After the flight of Friendship 7, Glenn and his family moved to Houston, Texas, where NASA had recently established the new Manned Spaceflight Center. As a ground controller, Glenn took part in the Mercury flights. But even while Glenn participated in the later Mercury flights, he had new careers and challenges on his mind. Glenn decided to run for the United States Senate. On January 17, three days before the Ohio Democratic convention, he announced his candidacy. On March 30, Glenn was not feeling well from his slip and fall accident that he dropped out of the race.

In October 1964, Glenn accepted an offer from the Royal Crown Cola Company to work as a vice president and serve on the board of directors. Within a short time, he was named president of Royal Crown International, the department that promoted and sold Royal Crown Cola outside the United States. Glenn also used contacts he had made in Florida to enter the hotel business. Glenn and his partner Landwirth were awarded the Orlando franchise and several others. In the mid-1960s, John Glenn grew wealthy within the space of just a few years-but he never forgot his ambition to serve in the United States Senate.

In 1968 while searching for another chance to enter the political arena, he seized an opportunity to join the presidential campaign of Robert Kennedy. Glenn learned from Kennedy how to organize a national campaign, raise money, and use the media. Glenn also realized that a Kennedy victory might well bring him appointment to a high federal office. Kennedy died from gunshots to the head. John had lost a close friend and an important political ally.

In 1970 Glenn announced his candidacy for the Senate. On May 5, Glenn won almost all of Ohio s rural counties, while his opponent won the much larger blocs of votes in Ohio s big cities, as well as the primary itself. He knew that his opportunity had slipped by again for Senate. Glenn joined the campaign of John Gilligan, who was running for Ohio governor. Despite the disappointments Glenn had he was looking forward to the 1974 election.

John Glenn joined ninety-nine other senators in the Ninety-fourth Congress, which began in January 1975. Glenn spent long hours in his Senate office, studying looks and papers on current issues, such as education, taxes, the military, and foreign affairs.

On July 12, Glenn appeared on national television to personally endorse the Democratic Party and its programs in Madison Square Garden in New York. He was there do deliver the most important speech of his career. Glenn talked about making government more responsive to the voters. Glenn continued his work in the Senate, supporting Carter s programs for the most part. The voters of Ohio were satisfied with the job Glenn was doing; they reelected him to the Senate in 1980. In the Senate race of 1980, John won an easy victory with sixty-nine percent of the vote. Glenn had also become a respected expert on nuclear arms control between the Soviet Union and the United States. In 1984, Glenn entered several primary elections for the Democratic presidential nomination. Suffering from his reputation as an honest, serious, but dull politician, Glenn dropped out of the race. Glenn won reelection in the Senate in 1986, with sixty-two percent of the Ohio vote. In 1992 Glenn was reelected but with only fifty-one percent of the vote. In February 1997 Glenn announced that he would not run for a fifth Senate term in the fall of 1998. He was in his mid-seventies by this time, and his thoughts were turning away from Washington, D.C., toward a possible return to space upon the shuttle Discovery.

In 1995, Glenn was taking a strong interest in the affairs of the elderly. He had noticed that the physical effects of aging parallel many of the effects of weightlessness and spaceflight. He proposed to NASA that he return to space to study those effects firsthand. NASA considered Glenn s request for more than a year. On January 16, 1998, NASA made the official announcement: John Glenn would be aboard Discovery.

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