



"Godspeed, John Glenn"

Last week a great American war hero died at the ripe old age of 95. Love of country led John Glenn to enlist in the Marine Corp. after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. He had a distinguished career as a Marine pilot during both World War II and Korea, but his greatest deeds of heroism were for still another war.

From the end of World War II until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, America was engaged in a fierce fight for the survival of freedom and Western civilization. The Cold War pitted the ideology of totalitarian Soviet Communism against the values of self determination and liberty championed by the United States of America and its allies. Although the European continent was strictly divided along a heavily armed border during this time, a shooting war never broke out there during the Cold War. Limited hostilities took place in Central America, but these were short-lived. In the Far East, there were Korea and Vietnam, but these involved China more than the Soviet Union. The battlefields of the Cold War turned out to be the minds of men, faith vs. atheism, technology, economics, the "arms race," and the "space race."

In 1957, the entire U.S. was terrified by the launching of a Soviet satellite called Sputnik. Did this portend the Soviet's circling the earth with threatening space weapons against which the U.S had no defense? America answered the Soviet space program with our own NASA program. Its early Mercury astronaut effort was intended to do more than simply imitate the Soviets. It was designed to demonstrate the superiority of a free society and to fend off the potential threat of Soviet global domination from space. 500 men applied to be the first American astronauts. Seven were determined to have "the right stuff." Among those seven was John Glenn. He became the third American in space and the first to orbit the earth.

John Glenn blasted off into history on the nose of an Atlas rocket on February 20, 1962. During Glenn's perilous five-hour trek,

he circled the earth three times strapped alone inside a space capsule, the *Friendship 7*. I remember when I saw this capsule on display at the Air and Space Museum in Washington D.C., I was startled by how little it was. It was about the same size as a compact car. What courage it must have taken to climb inside this tiny metal case and then be blasted into outer space! When time came for Glenn's reentry into earth's atmosphere, a warning sensor indicated that the capsule's heat shield was loose. If it came detached, Glenn would be consumed in a ball of fire. NASA's ground control decided to not jettison a retrorocket pack in hopes that it might protect the heat shield. The 17,000 mph reentry was much more violent than it otherwise would have been, but Glenn splashed down safely in the South Atlantic.

The ticker-tape parade down lower Broadway in New York City that followed Glenn's safe return not only celebrated this successful venture into space. It celebrated courage, boldness, self-sacrifice, and the potential of free men over that of the enslaved. Without firing a shot, John Glenn fought a victorious battle for liberty in the Cold War.

In his life, John Glenn was a devoted husband for 73 years. He served as a U.S. Senator from Ohio. He was a soldier, a fighter pilot, test pilot, astronaut, engineer, and hero. It is amazing to contemplate that John Glenn was born less than twenty years after two other Americans, the Wright brothers, first took flight on the North Carolina outer banks. His achievements are testimony to what men can do when blessed with liberty and guided by high ideals. As fellow astronaut Scott Carpenter was heard to say as Glenn launched into space, "Godspeed, John Glenn."