

The John Glenn Story – 1963

President Kennedy: There are milestones in human progress that mark recorded history. From my judgment, this nation's orbital pioneering in space is of such historic stature, representing as it does, a vast advancement that will profoundly influence the progress of all mankind. It signals also a call for alertness to our national opportunities and responsibilities. It requires physical and moral stamina to equal the stresses of these times and a willingness to meet the dangers and the challenges of the future. John Glenn throughout his life has eloquently portrayed these great qualities and is an inspiration to all Americans. This film, in paying tribute to John Glenn, also pays tribute to the best in American life.

[Introductory Music]

Narrator: New Concord, Ohio wasn't on many maps until February 20, 1962. It came to fame in a single day with an American adventure that history will call the John Glenn Story. Fashioned in the American image, this pleasant little city typifies a nation's ideal way of life. A man might make a good life here in the circle of family and friends. And a boy might let his imagination soar. [Music]

He might explore the wonders of the wide world all about him, life's simple mysteries. With bright discovery daily opening doors to knowledge, he can look away to distant places, to exciting adventures, hidden only by the horizon and the future. Like this boy, like boys everywhere, young John Glenn dreamed of the future as he looked to far away new frontiers – why he might even learn to fly. This town and these people, they knew John Glenn as a school boy, as a teenager, and as a neighbor. Like Mayor Taylor, they followed his career as he blazed a trail across the high sky.

Mayor Taylor: I watched John Glenn grow up from a freckle-faced red-headed lad into the man you all know today. John's youth and his life today are an example for all Americans to follow.

Narrator: New Concord High. Like these youngsters, John attended school here. His principle and teacher was Harford Steele.

Harford Steele: He was an excellent student, and he graduated with honors from our high school. I taught Johnny and hundreds of others that our democracy is a priceless heritage and that we should preserve, protect, and if at all possible make some contributions to it. He has made a significant contribution in his mission in space.

Narrator: And this fine new school in New Concord: it's the John Glenn High School, with its first graduating class receiving diplomas. Young John helped his father about this shop when he wasn't in school or acting as life guard in the summer at HI-Y Camp or at college. John went on to college at Muskingum right in New Concord. The high regard of the college is expressed by its president, Dr. Glenn McConagha.

Dr. Glenn McConagha: John's conquest of space has captured the hearts and the imagination of all Americans. So have his superb qualities of leadership, moral and physical strength, and emotional stability.

Narrator: John found time for athletics, winning four high school letters. Muskingum coach, Ed Sherman, recalls John Glenn's athletic record.

Ed Sherman: John played football right here on this field. He was captain of his high school team and played center for the college. He has proven the value of team work both as an athlete and later as an astronaut. Just like these boys, John took an active part in our physical fitness program. He proved that a good mind and a good body always go together.

Narrator: Campus discussions are inspired by the first orbital flight of an American.

Female Student 1: I think that John Glenn by his flight has given us an opportunity to see that, well, we have the chance to do something for our nation too. Maybe I'll even go somewhere sometime.

Male Student 1: We have the same opportunities that he had.

Male Student 2: Glenn proved by his flight that there are still many frontiers to be explored and conquered.

Female Student 2: And that just shows how very vital our education is if our future is to be "Go."

Narrator: Glenn always had a strong spiritual side as Dr. Charles Morehead recalls.

Dr. Charles Morehead: John Glenn attended Sunday school and services at this church when he was a boy like Randy Bradley here.

Narrator: Let's attend services for a moment at John Glenn's church. [Chorus singing]. John and Annie were married at this church by Dr. Henry Evans.

Dr. Henry Evans: They made a most handsome couple, John in his Marine uniform, Annie a beautiful, happy bride. They both recognize the importance of the spiritual things of life as well as the mental and physical.

Narrator: The trial is also great for those who wait, as recalled by Annie's parents Homer and Margaret Castor.

Margaret Castor: Johnny's orbital flight was a real test of courage for Annie too.

Homer Castor: She was a very brave girl.

Margaret Castor: Annie had complete faith in the space program just as she had confidence in everything Johnny set out to do.

Narrator: This house was home for John Glenn. John Glenn Senior and Mrs. Clara Glenn are gratefully proud of their son's accomplishments.

John Glenn, Senior: John was quite prepared for his orbital flight as were the other astronauts and the entire team.

Clara Glenn: In a way, John has been preparing all his life for his venture into space. As a small boy, his idea of a holiday was a visit to the airport. And when he grew up, it was no surprise to us when he decided to learn to fly.

Narrator: Flight commanded young John's major interest. He had to learn to fly. World War II interrupted college. He received his first flying lessons from pilot Harry Clever.

Harry Clever: This is John's flight record with my comment after his first flight, which was "eager to learn, relaxed, alert, and good coordination." He certainly has retained these flight qualities right into outer space.

[Music]

Narrator: Flight training at Pensacola and Corpus Christi – many aviators have won their wings here. Like these cadets, John went on to Corpus Christi, Texas to learn about airplanes and navigation – with time also for physical conditioning and sports, and for religious inspiration – like these naval aviators, to win his wings. The Navy's thorough training prepared Lieutenant John Glenn for wartime action in the South Pacific. Flying fifty-nine missions in Corsairs like these, he joined in blasting enemy targets. Until there was peace and Glenn returned to Corpus Christi as advanced flying instructor until – Korea. Major John Glenn came back to combat, to fly ninety missions, to shoot down three MiGs.

[Music]

Following Korea, John Glenn came home to flight test the supersonic F8U Crusader, to flash across the nation, to California, to New York, setting a supersonic speed record of 3 hours and 23 minutes. With experimental thrust towards speed and altitude, the limitations of time and distance were being brushed aside, as experimental planes like the X15, launched from its Air Force mother ship, rocket to record breaking altitudes and speeds. Unmanned experimental flights and orbits pressed onward until it was time for man to orbit. Until the word was "Go!" Chosen from many Americans who answered the president's call, these astronauts dedicated themselves to study, training, and physical conditioning – with Alan Shepard learning about weightlessness as it will be encountered in outer space, and Gus Grissom getting acquainted with the stress of greatly increased gravity, as Wally Schirra masters manual spacecraft control.

[Music]

Three years of engineering skill and scientific experimentation have gone into this historic Atlas launching. Its component parts have come from countless sources devised and fabricated by many thousands of technicians in hundreds of United States cities. And this – the motive power, carefully raised to position on its gantry – this, the Atlas, with power to develop 360,000 pounds of thrust, with capability to swiftly lift the spacecraft and its passenger as high as 160 miles to inject the spacecraft into orbit at 17,500 miles an hour. And now the word is "Go," as the spacecraft is lifted into its position atop the Atlas. This spacecraft, six feet across at its widest

heat shield end, ten feet tall, built to withstand heat shield temperatures of 3,000 degrees Fahrenheit as the wind rushes at more than nearly 15,000 miles an hour.

As the astronaut prepares for spaceflight, for adventure into outer space, Mercury control waits and watches with the Atlas standing ready to throb into life. Ready, Friendship 7 is ready, and so is John Glenn.

[Music]

At the gantry, elevators lift Glenn to the eleventh level, the spacecraft level. [Music] Glenn takes his place in Friendship 7, looking towards the unknown. Ready, Mercury Atlas is ready, and so is the astronaut. The countdown is underway at Cape Canaveral and all the world holds its breath, and all the world is witness.

CAPCOM: Central tower, Go... RF systems, Go... [overlapping system confirmations]... ready light is on... eject through the umbilical.

Male Voice: Godspeed John Glenn.

Capsule Communicator (CAPCOM): 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0.

John Glenn: Roger. The clock is operating. We're underway.

CAPCOM: Hear loud and clear.

John Glenn: Roger. We're programming in roll okay. Little bumpy along about here.

CAPCOM: Roger. Standby for 20 seconds.

John Glenn: Roger.

CAPCOM: 2, 1, mark.

John Glenn: Roger. Backup clock is started. Fuel 102 – 101, oxygen 78 – 100, amps 27...

CAPCOM: Roger. Loud and clear. Flight path 69.

John Glenn: Roger. Checks okay. Mine was 70 on your mark. Have some vibration area coming up here now... We're smoothing out some now, getting out of the vibration area.

CAPCOM: Roger. We're reading you loud and clear. Flight path looks good. Pitch 25. Standby for...

John Glenn: Roger. BECO, back to one and a quarter [g's]. The tower fired; I could not see the tower go. I saw the smoke go by the window.

CAPCOM: Roger. We confirm staging on TM.

John Glenn: Roger. One and a half g's.

CAPCOM: Friendship 7. Bermuda has you.

John Glenn: Roger. Bermuda, standby. This is Friendship 7... SECO, posigrades fired okay.

CAPCOM: Roger, stand...

John Glenn: Roger. Zero-g and I feel fine. Capsule is turning around. Oh, that view is tremendous!

CAPCOM: Roger. Turnaround has started.

John Glenn: Roger. Capsule turning around and I can see the booster during turnaround just a couple of hundred yards behind me. It was beautiful.

Narrator: The word is "Go" and John Glenn is "Go" and with him go all of mankind's dreams of someday touching the unobtainable stars. Under a tropic sun, the tracking ship Rose Knot waits and follows his course as he flashes towards the coast of Africa. To John Glenn belongs an awesome panorama of the Earth below. Beyond human sight, Friendship 7 makes a slow boat out of the sun as the spacecraft girdles the Earth every ninety minutes. Like a shooting start at five miles a second, 17,500 miles an hour, John Glenn streaks away from today into the night of tomorrow, racing towards the dawn of yesterday. As Glenn sights the light of Perth and Rockingham, as he flashes over Australia, across the Pacific, to contact waiting ground stations at Guaymas, Mexico. And California waits as the Friendship 7 streaks home to the land of its origin, an unseen comet lining across the United States in eight lightning minutes of flight. Completing three history making circuits of the globe, John Glenn fires retrorockets, to slow the spacecraft, to direct it back to Earth.

CAPCOM: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, fire.

John Glenn: Roger. Retros are firing.

CAPCOM: Sure, they be.

John Glenn: Are they ever. It feels like I'm going back toward Hawaii.

Narrator: Then the first ominous note, the first warning of possible disaster. A chilling signal flashes an indication that the capsule's heat shield may be loose. The astronaut might perish like an Earth-bound meteor in 3,000 degrees of reentry heat without the heat shield. Strapped over it, the retropack might hold it in place. Cape Canaveral makes the decision.

CAPCOM: ...Texas Cap Com, Friendship Seven. We are recommending that you leave the retropackage on through the entire reentry.

Narrator: And all the world listens in, stands still, and helplessly hopes Cape Control shows the way. Using fly-by-wire control for reentry, John Glenn rides his craft through the vastness of space towards the curving globe beneath, as science in its amazing exactness selects the

Caribbean, from all the oceans of the Earth, to receive Friendship 7 as it blazes into the Earth's atmosphere.

John Glenn: This is Friendship 7. A real fireball outside.

Narrator: A fireball, the fiberglass surface of the heat shield is starting to oblate, to melt and vaporize as the glowing electrically charged wake streams back to block off communication, as the Earth's atmosphere slows the capsule's descent.

John Glenn: Friendship 7... Drogue is out ... Coming down on 10, snorkels are open ... Main chute in on green. Chute is out, in reef condition at 10,800 feet and beautiful chute. Chute looks good. Rate of descent has gone to about 42 feet per second. The chute looks very good... Hello, Mercury Recovery, this is Friendship 7. Do you receive?

Mercury Recovery: Friendship 7, this is Steelhead. Be advised I have you visually.

John Glenn: Roger. What is your estimate on recovery time? Over.

Mercury Recovery: Estimate pickup now at 20 minutes. Over.

John Glenn: Landing Bag is on green... Friendship 7. Ready for impact; almost down... Here we go.

Mercury Recovery: Friendship 7, this is Steelhead. Hold you in the water. What is your condition? Over.

John Glenn: Roger. My condition okay. Does the capsule look like it's ok? Over.

Mercury Recovery: Capsule looks good from here. Over.

Narrator: Home to Earth comes the voyager, transported now to the aircraft carrier Randolph. In 4 hours and 56 minutes, John Glenn has streaked through three days and three nights and over 81,000 miles, never a journey so far, never a traveler so welcomed by the world.

[Music]

So brief a journey in time, so far the way, so long the hours for those who wait, as Annie Glenn has waited. As all the world has waited, to salute the Glenns with Vice President Lyndon Johnson. As the president of the United States arrives at Cape Canaveral, to be greeted with John and Annie Glenn, by the cheers of thrilled lines of proud Americans. In ceremonies at Mercury Control Center, President John F. Kennedy presents the NASA Distinguished Service Medal to astronaut John Glenn, as Annie and Lynn and David Glenn proudly share applause with the other astronauts and with the world. As John's parents learn first-hand about Friendship 7, as does Marine Corps Commandant General David M. Shoup and the president of the United States. And this rainy day in Washington is a happy day as the president and the astronaut arrive to drive through rain-washed, crowd-flooded streets to the White House for a reception as John and Annie Glenn, with Vice President Lyndon Johnson, greet distinguished guests including astronaut Alan Shepard. Godspeed John Glenn, Godspeed into the future. Into even

greater accomplishments, into the hearts of all Americans. Welcome to Washington, welcome back to this planet.

[Parade Music]

From the nation's capital, to the towers of Manhattan, to the ticker-tape parade of New York, cheering crowds roar a mighty welcome, shared by all Americans, by free people everywhere. And across the land, the scene is the same and the heart is the same as John Glenn comes home to New Concord, Ohio. At the Capitol there is an introduction by the Speaker of the House, the honorable John McCormack.

John McCormack: Members of the Congress, it is a privilege and I deem it a high honor, to present to you a brave and courageous American. A hero in World War II and in the Korean conflicts, who recently in a most notable manner added glory and prestige to our country, the first United States astronaut to have achieved orbital flight, Lieutenant Colonel John Herschel Glenn, United States Marine Corps. [Applause]

John Glenn: Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, members of the Congress, I am only too aware of the tremendous honor that's being shown us at this joint meeting of Congress today. This has been a great experience for all of us on the program and for all Americans I guess too. And I'm certainly glad to see that pride in our country and its accomplishments are not a thing of the past. [Applause] I know I still get a real hard to define feeling down inside when the flag goes by and I know all of you do too. [Applause] The launch itself was conducted openly and with the news media representatives from around the world in attendance. This is certainly in sharp contrast with similar programs conducted elsewhere in the world and elevates the peaceful intent of our program. Today I know that I seem to be standing alone on this great platform, just as I seemed to be alone in the cockpit of the Friendship 7 spacecraft. But I am not. There were with me then and with me now thousands of Americans and many hundreds of citizens of many countries around the world who contributed to this truly international undertaking voluntarily and in a spirit of cooperation and understanding. We are all proud to have been privileged to be part of this effort, to represent our country as we have. As our knowledge of this universe in which we live increases, may God grant us the wisdom and guidance to use it wisely. Thank you.

Narrator: And crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea. In the pattern of all our free American traditions, John Glenn's trail blazing venture into space has shown the way for human progress, for brotherhood around the world. His story speaks of people and places and industry, of the greatness that is America. It sings of the unselfish aims of a nation striving constantly for peace, directing all its power and persuasion toward the preservation of freedom. In its majesty and magnificence, this is the land. In all their historic greatness, these are the people. And the John Glenn Story is their story. It throbs with a nation's restless energy. It soars with the adventurous spirit of Americans everywhere. Across this vast spread land, in all its towns and cities, on all its far-flung farms and ranches, deep in its reaches of forest and plains, of winding roads and rivers, majestic mountains and lakes and sea-lashed shores, people turned their eyes and hearts toward the high sky, sending their hopes and prayers, riding through space with John Glenn in Friendship 7, as all the world watched and hoped, with mankind's wonderment about the universe finding an approach at last for fulfillment in the John Glenn Story.