

**Sent:** Friday, February 17, 2012 11:46 AM

**Subject:** Glenn's 50th Spaceflight Anniversary –  
Celebration and Amusement and Insights

1. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of John Glenn's Mercury orbital flight on February 20 is a worthy celebration, both for its symbolism of the US/USSR 'Space Race' that took us to the Moon in 1969, and a tribute to a genuinely decent, courageous, public-spirited citizen.
2. My special contribution to insights into Glenn's character is a story of his performance on his second space flight in 1998. Detailed below [paragraph 16], it showed him to be living up to the best American cultural norms of teamwork and goal-oriented commitment powered by personal dedication.
3. I have personal memories of the flight because I was a 17-year-old High School Senior who had been doing college interviews that January and February. Since I was already a dedicated 'space nut' I had to keep my transistor radio with me during campus visits around New York state, as several countdowns were scheduled and then scrubbed in that period. The launch occurred when I was in school in Kenmore [a suburb of Buffalo ], with a TV set in front of the classroom.
4. It's worth celebrating when anybody reaches the age of 90, too! Glenn, born in 1921, was ALMOST the 'firstborn of Earth to fly into space' – the human who was the first one born to later go into space. That's NOT the same as the OLDEST person to go into space [he is that], which depends on birth date and launch date. He was born in July 1921, and the only space traveler born earlier was the Russian cosmonaut Georgiy Beregovoy, born in April 1921, who made his first and only flight in 1968 at the age of 47. Beregovoy [a WW2 fighter pilot, who died in 1995] knew of, and was amused by, his status as 'firstborn space flier'. [http://www.spacefacts.de/bios/cosmonauts/english/beregovoy\\_georgi.htm](http://www.spacefacts.de/bios/cosmonauts/english/beregovoy_georgi.htm)
5. There's been a lot of nonsense about Glenn's second flight, STS-95,, on the shuttle – mostly from fellow-politicians such as Florida Senator Bill Nelson, who recently babbled on NASA TV that Bill Clinton had called on Glenn to make the flight to pioneer medical research for older Americans.
6. That had indeed been Glenn's intent, but while sincere, it turned out to be delusional. NASA later admitted that nothing useful had been learned by the experiments. See the story I wrote for UPI in early 2000, here: <http://www.jamesoberg.com/glenn.html>
7. NASA had really known this all along. In 1986, when another American in his 70's campaigned for a shuttle flight to research the effects of aging [with the blessing of the Reagan White House], NASA doctors thought the idea was idiotic and derided the proposal. But that was 1985, and 1998 was a different political regime. See discussion of "Doug Morrow", here: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/43861886/>
8. While campaigning for his flight in 1997-8, Glenn had artfully solidified his political alliances by making sure he had a strong handful of political IOUs from the White House. As co-chairman [with Republican Fred Thompson] of the Senate Intelligence Committee, he was instrumental in refusing to grant immunity to some witnesses the Republicans wanted to compel to testify regarding suspicious administration foreign affairs. Without immunity, the witnesses refused to testify, much to Thompson's disappointment.
9. Unlike the 'politicians in space' in 1985-6 [Jake Garn and Bill Nelson], Glenn did not take somebody else's seat on the 1998 shuttle mission. Garn had actually bumped a payload specialist named Greg Jarvis from the mission he was supposed to fly [with his corporation's payload] and Jarvis wound up getting a seat [with no payload] on Challenger, and was killed.
10. To space workers, Garn was a "humorless obsessive" who made the astronaut training program revolve around his own personal schedule, including [I was a direct eyewitness to this] holding up a mission simulation [and hundreds of support workers] to take a conference call from Bob Dole.
11. Bill Nelson was considered an "amiable dunce" who proved incapable of operating the simplest space hardware [such as a blood pressure cuff, or the food warmer] but always knew which cabin TV camera was active so he could pose in the background faking being busy.
12. Glenn was genuinely liked by all the space workers who encountered him in 1997-8, after they overcame their initial astonishment at the official blessing of the project.

13. But NASA was also aware that Glenn's "aging research" was a sham, and here's how they showed it: all science research team members on space missions had 'hot backups', people fully trained to step into the slot of a primary crewmember for medical or other emergencies, so the flight would not be delayed. They never bothered to pick or train such a backup for Glenn – had he developed medical issues in training [a not-implausible development considering his age] he would just have been dropped from the flight and the experiments cancelled. NASA flacks explained this glaring admission by just lying about the practice, saying that "lots of payload specialists have not had backups" – when in fact, every one of them did.

14. Glenn's Mercury-6 flight in 1962 also inadvertently pioneered a major theme still thriving to this day on YOUTUBE: "space UFOs". Glenn reported mysterious 'fireflies', which turned out to be ice flakes off of a cooling device, behaving in unearthly ways as they floated near his capsule. Search internet video for "space UFO" and you will get tens of thousands of hits of videos from shuttle missions showing the same effect – ice flakes off of various external vents – that are hailed by today's UFO buffs as proof of aliens observing our astronauts.

15. In 2001 on the TV show 'Frasier', Glenn took part in a spoof in which he secretly confessed to encountering terrifying space aliens. As should have been expected, UFO nuts have claimed the scripted satire is actually an authentic admission of truth: search "Glenn, UFO, Frasier", see <http://www.enterprisemission.com/glenn.htm> & <http://kaulapele.wordpress.com/2011/01/04/john-glenn-discloses-ufo-presence-on-2001-frasier-show-and-a-few-more-astronaut-ical-tales/>

16. This never-before-published story of Glenn's sense of duty and teamwork on STS-95 is heartwarming. I was first told the story by astronaut Steve Robinson at a reception at 'Space Center Houston' museum, and he later elaborated on it in an interview at the Johnson Space Center press office.

17. Robinson was the 'science officer' of the STS-95 mission and was coordinating the research activities of the crew. One day he met with Glenn to tell him about how all the daily medical readings were to be entered onto a laptop for compilation and transmission back down to Earth. Glenn cheerfully told Robinson that such computerized activities were a bit too challenging for an old man who was used to just writing things down, and he said he would leave it to "you youngsters" to play with such new-fangled gadgets.

18. Robinson told me how he was dismayed by this response, but took the chance of insisting. He told Glenn that all of the crew had to do it daily so the doctors on Earth would know the current health status of all the astronauts. Glenn, he told me, looked startled, but submissive. "OK" was all Robinson remembered him saying.

19. A week later, Robinson got a call from the astronaut training office responsible for the medical laptop. As he laughingly reconstructed the call, the trainers were asking him to "please call off the Senator" who was haunting their office unmercifully, requesting all training material and lessons on the laptop so he would be proficient in its use in space.

20. The amusing story is also a credit to Glenn's determination to carry out his duties on the mission, as directed by specialists he recognized were in charge. He [unlike Garn & Nelson] was not along for a joy ride.

21. Whatever the disappointing practical results of Glenn's presence on the shuttle flight, I'm reconciled to Glenn's participation as a 'lifetime achievement award'. It did excite the old folks, including my own mother, exactly Glenn's age. He didn't bump anybody else from the seat [the addition of a seventh crewman was made possible by a routine planning 'performance reserve' growth that allowed adding the weight of him, his seat, and his food at no sacrifice to other cargo].

22. So February 20 is worth celebrating