

The John H. Glenn, Jr.  
Oral History Project

Interview 1  
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at the John Glenn School of Public Affairs  
at The Ohio State University

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Interviewer

[Interview 1, Tape 1, Side A]

THOMAS: This is the first of a series of oral history interviews with Senator John Glenn. Today is March 7, 2008. This interview is taking place at the John Glenn School of Public Affairs at the Ohio State University. My name is Jeff Thomas. Senator Glenn, I would like to continue with the oral history sessions you conducted with Brien R. Williams back in 1996 and 1997. These interviews covered your childhood and military career, up through your posting as a test pilot at the Naval Air Test Center at Patuxent River, Maryland in the mid-1950s. After two years as a navy test pilot in November 1956 you were transferred to the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics in Washington, D.C. Was a two year stint as a test pilot the norm back then, or was there another reason for the transfer?

SEN. GLENN: No, normal was two to three years after you completed the test pilot school. That took six months. That was normal, as I recall. They had gotten in a position where they had plenty of pilots, and a two year assignment there was what was looked as sort of normal. Sometimes people extended it if they needed it for a

particular project. But I think the Navy and Marine Corps theory on it was, if you get those people through test work and do test work on the new airplanes, then go out to the squadrons. They were great to go out and be sort of instructors and carry the message out to the squadrons as these planes went into fleet use or Marine Corps use.

THOMAS: So the Navy and the Marine Corps tried to get as many pilots through the testing program as possible?

SEN. GLENN: It wasn't a mass thing. You're looking mainly for keeping the cadre of pilots there to do the work on new airplanes. And when I started there we had a whole batch of new airplanes. When I left there, there were not many new ones still coming out. So maybe the requirement for test pilots had gone down, but somewhere around two, two and a half years was the normal, with some exceptions.

THOMAS: Okay. What were your duties when you were transferred to the Bureau of Aeronautics? Was it quite a change?

SEN. GLENN: Yes, quite a change, from flying every day to driving an hour and 45 minutes to Washington every day was—we decided when I was transferred up there, that rather than moving our kids out of the good schools they were in down by Patuxent, that I would drive back and forth and we would keep living in the house we were in. Well, by the time I got to Washington, and it wasn't the day of the super highways and interstates, these were two lane roads, and I drove every day for the better part of three years. To drive to Washington and get parked and get to the office took about an hour and 45 minutes each day, and you had to hunt for

parking. So, I was hunting for a parking spot every morning along the area that's now where Watergate is in Washington. And it was built—anyway it was an hour and 45 minutes each way. It was an awful lot of driving. I'm glad that the gas price wasn't what it is now.

So the change of duties is what you asked, I guess. The change of duty was rather heavy because I had been flying every day at Patuxent in some of our newest airplanes. Now there I was in the Bureau of Aeronautics as what they call the desk officer. And that means as the desk officer you have certain projects that are your responsibility and some of the ones of my responsibility were ones I had been working on at Patuxent. The big difference was that at Patuxent if you saw a problem with an airplane, something that needed to be fixed, you recommended and got approved through your bosses there, an engineering change proposal. And these were way up, I think on the Crusader by the time I left there, we were up to, I think it was up to like 600 or 700 suggested ECP's, engineering change proposals.

Well, now here I was in the Bureau of Aeronautics having to pass on those things. So now I was in the position of having to toss these things out—very perplexing. You flew the airplane; you made the recommendations on the basis of what would make the airplane better without regard to what the cost would be. That wasn't our job. Now it was my job in the Bureau of Aeronautics, and so that became something different. So there were a lot of meetings and meetings and meetings with people from other branches in the Bureau of Aeronautics. I was in the fighter design branch as it was called then. Navy Captain Joe Smith headed

that up at that time, great guy. So that's who I was mainly working with. And there were a lot of trips back and forth to the Chance Vought factory in Dallas, in particular, some out to the west coast to the old Douglas aircraft plant out there, North American; Grumman, up on Long Island. Of airplanes I had flown, those were the ones I was now attending meetings on and trying to cost out these proposals and decide which ones we needed for safety or for actual combat capability, which ones would just be nice to have. And those were some big decision on those. It was a different kind of work. It was all paperwork. So I didn't enjoy it nearly as much as I had my previous assignment.

THOMAS: Was there a particular budget that you had to stay within for these proposals?

SEN. GLENN: Yes, these things came down from Congress, of course, and from the Defense Department, as to how much money was available for changes or fixes on the airplane. Occasionally you would have something that didn't fit. It was expensive enough it didn't fit within that budget. So then you had to go to meetings, get programs realigned and get new pots of money if you could from some other source. So it was a time—this time was very important because without the approval from the Bureau of Aeronautics and the assignment of money to the contractors to fix whatever the problem was—that's just what you had to do to make a fleet-ready airplane or a Marine-ready airplane.

THOMAS: While at the Bureau of Aeronautics, you conceived the idea of using the Navy's new F8U Crusader to break a transcontinental speed record that was then held by the U.S. Air Force. Can you give some background on the how and the why you came up with this idea?

SEN. GLENN: In the early days of aviation clear back to the Wright Brothers in Dayton, they were always looking for new firsts and new records. And I think that sort of carried over big time into the post-World War II days, the 50's, when we were getting a lot of brand new airplanes. There's a lot less emphasis on that sort of thing today because the aircraft of today have gotten, have now reached performance characteristics that are just almost staggering. So today there's less emphasis on setting records. But back then it was still a thing that was looked at by the different services as a mark of their combat prowess, I guess you'd say, so you were always looking for something like that. So, when I was flying the F8U, the Crusader, in test work at Patuxent—I did all the reference testing work, and all the gun fire, rocket fire, everything that was done on that airplane. It was called filling out the envelope, which meant you fired the guns at different altitudes, at difference speeds, to see what reaction you got on the airplane. And we did have some major difficulties with that airplane. So to get the changes put in—and it was a big job, and an important one, to make the airplane combat ready.

But later on then, at the end of my test work there with the Crusader, I had thought this thing was such a great performing airplane, better than anything that the Marine Corps or Navy had ever had in the way of a fighter. We were getting ready to do some of the engine tests on it. The prolonged, high power or full power tests on it. And rather than do that in a series of single flights, I thought, why don't we do the whole thing and do it on a cross country speed run and maybe set a new transcontinental speed record, which I thought we could do easily with that airplane. And so that's how the thing came about. I had drawn

up some tentative plans on it as to what I thought it could do and how many re-fuelings it would take—re-fuelings across the country—to make the whole project go. And I'd had those on one of my trips to Dallas. I had sat down with some of their engineers and went through all of that, what I had put together on it. And they ran it through their people too and thought my figures were accurate. So I had no doubt we could set a new cross-country speed record and accomplish the high power engine test at the same time. It was a fairly new engine, the Pratt and Whitney J57 engine, and so we could do the engine test and set a speed record to boot. And so, I started talking about this at Bu Air and there were some people interested in it. There was Admiral Dixon, who was the Chief of the Bureau at that time. I sat down one day and talked to him about it. He was a former fighter pilot himself and he was sort of taken with the idea, I think—had he said, “No,” right then, why the thing would have never occurred. But he wanted to have some people look at it again, and one thing led to another, and they finally approved this project. That's how it all came about.

THOMAS: Why the name Project Bullet?

SEN. GLENN: We were looking for a name for the project that would be, sort of, eye-catching or ear-catching. And we qued up how fast I was going to go and somebody pointed out—I don't know who it was one day, maybe I came up with it myself, I don't know—but the muzzle velocity of a 45 caliber pistol, which was standard service pistol, the muzzle velocity of that is fairly low. It has a big slug and it would knock anybody down. But it's only, as I recall, something like 580 some feet per second is what the muzzle velocity of that is. Well, when I figured out

what my velocity was going to be cross country, it was going to be faster. If the whole project was successful, I was going to average going across country faster than I would if it was a bullet fired out of a 45 caliber. And so that's where the name Project Bullet came from. And I think it was a pretty good one because it illustrated—sort of got people's minds comparing the speed we were going to set with the F8U compared to the bullet, which is figured in most people's minds as almost instantaneous.

THOMAS: Was that a pretty good selling point when you tried to get this project through the Navy bureaucracy and get approval, or what else did you use to try to sell the project?

SEN. GLENN: I don't remember whether the naming of Project Bullet came before or after it got approved. I think with the people in Bu Air and Admiral Dixon there, I think it sort of got approved on its own merit without the name. But that helped a lot on the publicity the Navy and Marine Corps wanted to get out of it afterwards. It was written up as Project Bullet and all the news accounts of it were Project Bullet.

THOMAS: Alright. Did you have much difficulty in getting this through? Getting it approved through higher-ups there in the Navy?

SEN. GLENN: It was delayed a while as I recall. It's a long time ago now, but as I recall it was delayed a while while Admiral Dixon and his staff wanted to look at this thing and make sure that we weren't getting into something that was just going to make big claims and couldn't produce. But the combined reason for doing it, for doing

the sustained high power engine test, and in addition to set the record, was something they finally approved and were enthusiastic about.

THOMAS: Having the Air Force hold the record at the time, did that have anything to do with trying to beat the Air Force?

SEN. GLENN: As I recall, the F-84 had had a cross-country record and obviously there was always a lot of competition between the Air Force and the Navy and Marine Corps, and this was no exception. In fact, one of the things we requested in that area that was interesting was, at that time the Navy and Marine Corps did not yet have high altitude jet tankers, where you could cruise along at jet speeds at altitude and re-fuel at the same time, which would give you a much better record cross country. And the Navy and Marine Corps didn't have those yet. The Air Force did. Well, we thought maybe they'd be big enough in their thinking to loan us the tankers to help make this cross country run as good as possible. So, we wrote a letter to the Air Force requesting tanker support for this project. And I don't remember the exact wording of the reply, but it was couched in very diplomatic terms that indicated they weren't interested at all. In fact, it was something like their operational commitments were such that they did not have the tankers to support our project, and I think they even put in something like, now or in the near future, to indicate they were not interested at all.

So, what we were going with then was the old AJ aircraft, which was a turbo prop airplane. But it had a little jet engine in the fuselage, which could be used to get the airplane up to a little higher altitude and speed. With a full load of fuel carried on board as a tanker, it would only get up to about 25,000 feet with a



full load. So it meant that in planning this, I had to plan on—at the end of each leg I would be at about 50 or 51,000 feet at the end of each leg. We have to come down then to find the tanker, and that was going to be a big penalty for the whole trip as far as the speed we could make, and the amount of time that we had the engines in full power. That's how we had to plan it though, because that was the only—when the Air Force refused, I remember I went back to Admiral Dixon again and they felt by that time we had gone into this thing and done enough planning and wanted to go right on through with it, which I was very glad that that happened.

So they assigned the Navy tankers, which were a ship-board tanker. It was a big airplane, but it was the tanker used off carriers. And so we planned that and that's what we used. But it meant at the end of each leg for re-fueling, I had to come down and rendezvous with the tanker. No radar or anything to help you on our airplane or from the ground that could really give you any help on that. So it had to be eyeballed. I had a direction finder that could find a radio signal from a tanker, but as far as its altitude and exact location, you had to get that by eyeball myself. And so those were the conditions. And the tanker of course, even running pretty much all full power, was far far below the speed that a jet tanker would have been had we been able to use those.

But it worked out and that's what we had to work with, and so we did our practices with it and got extremely proficient at doing in-flight re-fueling with the old probe and drogue system. The probe sticks out of the side of the airplane or it can be put out the side of the airplane, and then you fly it and plug it into what is

in effect just like an open basket almost about three feet across or three and a half feet across. When the basket guides the probe in, it latches into the hose which is in the center of the basket, and then as quick as you're latched in, the signal goes to a tanker and that's when he starts giving you fuel. So that is what we had to do coming across country.

THOMAS: And you needed to do this three times?

SEN. GLENN: Three times, yes.

THOMAS: Besides the use of tankers, were there any other logistical problems that you ran into as far as your flight plan?

SEN. GLENN: No, once we got the flight plan down, it was pretty good. We made up a, well, we used to call it a "How goes it" chart, which was the distance along the ground versus the amount of fuel you had. You took your fuel rate of use along one axis, and your distance under another, and so you could just plot this down, and you knew everything that went over a checkpoint. You wanted to be at a certain fuel level or you're going to be short when you get to the end. And so I could plot those religiously every so many minutes during the flight, and that's what you kept up with the exact amount of fuel. Since I was running wide open, I was using huge amounts of fuel. Running wide open with the afterburner, which was the max power you could put on that engine. And the afterburner you're literally just squirting fuel back into it, very high rate of fuel. So, if I got in a bind and had to cut back on the power, I could always save fuel by doing that if I needed that to get into an emergency spot or something like that. But the objective was to run a

perfect enough flight at each rendezvous point with the tanker. You would be right down to your minimum fuel just as you started to get fuel from the tanker.

But the only thing that really, I guess the only thing that I remember working with the tankers that was unusual, very unusual, was we were doing practice work with the tanker north of Dallas one day, in Greenville, Texas, I think it was. I had been climbing up to altitude and then coming down to 25,000 going very fast, and then slowing down enough that I could get slowed down to tanker speed, rendezvous with the tanker, plug in, take a little bit of fuel on board, then go back and do the whole thing over again just as a practice. On one of these runs, near the end of the day, I came down, I had just plugged in, and there was a big blast of black smoke that came out of the right engine of the tanker. I immediately pulled back power on the F8U and broke contact with the drogue, so there wasn't anymore fuel coming out, and pulled off to one side to watch. Well, he had some problem and was losing power on both engines on the AJ and losing altitude. And he couldn't find what the problem was.

To make a long story short, he came down to about 3,000 feet and still couldn't have enough power to maintain the aircraft in the air, and decided the only safe thing to do was to get out, and there was a pilot, a co-pilot, and one crew member. So there I am flying wing on them and watching what's going on. I watched the first two come back and bail out, and then the pilot said he was going to have to get out, too. This was very unusual, flying wing on another airplane, as everybody abandoned ship. So the pilot trimmed the thing down so it was headed toward sort of an open area, wasn't going to hit any town or anything, and he

came back to the hatch and bailed out. Meanwhile, I was radioing the rescue people back in Dallas as to what our position was to come up and rescue them. When that airplane hit the ground though, it came close to looking like, I guess, an atomic bomb because it still had a lot of fuel on board. But it blew and blew big time. In the investigation afterwards, what they found was—I mentioned this thing had a little jet engine in the fuselage. So it had two kinds of fuel. It had regular aviation gasoline for its own engines, and for this little jet engine they had some tanks that furnished jet fuel for that. Now jet fuel will not run properly in an aviation gas engine, 100 octane. Jet fuel is more like a high grade kerosene. So, as we found out later, there had been an error on the line in Dallas when the plane had re-fueled, and they had put, they had made a mistake and put some of this kerosene, the jet fuel, into the aviation gas tanks. So he was trying to run the 100 octane engines on jet fuel, and it just doesn't work. He couldn't get enough power out of it. It was quite an experience to sit there and watch three people go out and we lost an airplane there, but nobody was hurt. They parachuted out, everybody's chute worked, and they were picked up by helicopters and brought back into Dallas. That was a very unusual part of Project Bullet.

THOMAS: Let's see, you took off for the flight from Las Alamedas Naval Air Station in California and that was on the morning of July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1957. Did things pretty much go according to plan?

SEN. GLENN: Let me comment on Las Alamedas. It turns out, to make this official; we were going to apply to the, get what they call a sporting license. And those were issued by the FAI for international records, Federation of Aeronatique Internationale.

It's headquartered in Paris, but they represent all the aviation records around the world and they're the sanctioning body. And they then give authority to their people in the United States to be the ones that submit the records and the times and so on. Now, this is rather peculiar. The official time for the flight that is actually measured is the time from the federal building in L.A. to the federal building in New York. Now obviously you can't take off and land at each federal building. So what they do on a record like this—you're permitted to take off from any airport within 25 miles of the federal building, and land within 25 miles of any airport at the federal building at the other end of the line. Then what they do is, they take the actual airport time, from airport to airport, and they know those exact distances, they have those measured out, and they take the time that you set between those two airports, they apply that speed to the distance from federal building to federal building, divide that out, and what you would have flown had you gone from federal building to federal building, and that becomes the official time, if you can figure all that out. So that's why we picked Las Alamedas. It was only 25 miles from the federal building in L.A. and Floyd Bennett Field in New York, because it was still operational back in those days and was within 25 miles of the federal building in New York City. So that's how we came to pick the airports.

THOMAS: And things went pretty well according to plan?

SEN. GLENN: They did. We took off, it looked like good weather. We weren't going to have much tail wind, which would have been nice to have, but we were going to have good weather cross-country and not have to make any instrument approaches or

anything like that. Out of Las Alamedas there was a—it wasn't a real low overcast, but there was an overcast of several hundred feet or 1000 feet, I don't remember exactly what it was. But it was just a thin thing, so I took off and went up through that, and for the rest of the flight cross-country I had nice clear weather.

THOMAS: There was a back-up pilot?

SEN. GLENN: Yes. Admiral Dixon had decided we were going to all this effort, we should have at least two planes on this, so if something happened to one plane or one pilot got sick or something like that, we'd be able to still continue and wouldn't have to call the whole thing off. So they had selected a Navy lieutenant commander, Charlie Demmler, and Charlie was a back-up pilot. Now on the flight we went to the first re-fueling. He was to take off I think 20 minutes or so after I was, something like that, I don't remember the exact time, 20 minutes or half hour after I took off. Charles, he was a good fellow, he'd been a test pilot, also, and I knew him fairly well. I made my first in-flight re-fueling very close to Albuquerque. Everything went fine. Charlie was coming along behind, was re-fueling in the same area, but during his approach he came up and hit—when he was trying to re-fuel, actually hit the drogue so he could get fuel. He hit that pretty hard and broke it, and so he couldn't really get fuel. And so he had to go into—and I got that message on down the road, they sent a message to me that Charlie had gone in, which wasn't a good terminology because I thought maybe something more drastic had happened—but what they meant was he'd gone into Albuquerque and hadn't been able to re-fuel.

So I was the only one back to New York at that time. Came up toward Kansas, second re-fueling was over the Kansas area, not too far from that area where I had been in primary flight training as a matter of fact. You would go as fast as you could up to about 28 or 30,000 feet, then with all this high power on, you're going super sonic and you did a cruise climb. You didn't stay on one altitude. As the airplane got lighter, it could go higher, and still maintain the same speed or even faster. And with a cruise climb like that—at the end of each leg I was at about 51 or 52,000 feet, and it gradually accelerated up then to just under 1.5 mach number, which is the speed of sound. Actually 1.46 or 1.48 of the speed of sound, and then you had to cut back on power and come down and find the next tanker.

So, that's what I did over Kansas, and that one went well. Back up again, then repeated that whole procedure, and coming into Indianapolis, which is going to be the last of the in-flight re-fueling. From Indianapolis it would be a straight shot right on into New York. This was a little different there, and I came down to altitude and didn't find the tanker right off the bat. I couldn't see it. I had the direction of it on my direction finder, but just couldn't see it. The visibility was a little less I guess that day, but I was really getting low on fuel. And if I didn't find it pretty quick, I was going to have to divert and go into Indianapolis. We had the people on the tankers who were looking for me just as hard as I was looking for them. I think, as I recall, one of the back-up tankers was the one who spotted me and gave me the exact bearings from where I was to the tanker, and then I saw him, and I was getting very, very low on fuel. I didn't want to wait for

getting the prime tanker, I think it was the back-up one as I recall. And I got plugged in just when the fuel was getting very, very low.

Then I got fuel out of that, but the back-up tanker did not have all the same equipment the primary tanker would have had, and could not pass fuel at the same rate that the primary would have been able to do. So we were going along, trying to get more fuel, trying to get more fuel, and decided finally it was time to detach and go for New York no matter what. And so I wound up about 1,100 or 1,200 pounds of fuel short with that re-fueling from what I thought I was going to get. So it meant that going into New York, while I could make the first part of that run from Indianapolis into New York at the same full power I'd been using, the final run into New York I was going to have to doctor it a little bit to save some fuel coming down, which is exactly the way it worked out.

There was sort of a funny instance that I think would be good to tell you about. It just happened the flight path came by my home in New Concord, Ohio. Didn't plan it that way; that's just the way it all worked out. I was going to go by about five or six miles north of town. I had called my folks the day before and told them it looked like we were going to actually go the next day, and I told them the approximate time I'd be coming by north of New Concord. Well, coming by there I'd be at about 40,000 feet and climbing, but I was dragging a sonic boom that went down and actually hit the ground as I went along. I don't know if you've ever heard a sonic boom, but a sonic boom sounds about like a small bomb of some kind went off, and there's a boom, boom sound like that, and even sharper than that if you're close to it. But on a day where there's a perfect laps



rate, where there are no clouds in between and no changes of temperature and the atmosphere is very stable right down to the ground, a sonic boom—and I'm doing say 1.4, 1.45 mock number—even at 40,000 feet, that could reach the ground. That was something that we really hadn't planned on causing a problem. But it was sort of a humorous incident, when I came by New Concord and mother had told some of the neighbors about this. A lady who lived right up the road from us was a good friend of my mother and dad. I came by and this sonic boom hit New Concord. She came running down the road to our house telling my mom, "Mrs. Glenn, Johnny dropped a bomb, Johnny dropped a bomb!"

Anyway, the sonic boom was a bit of a problem we hadn't anticipated, because going on into New York there were areas as I was letting down in and coming across very fast that this sonic boom actually broke windows on the ground. And the Navy and Marine Corps—you could know exactly the track of, know the windows that were broken. It was right on the track that I was right at that time. I think the Navy and Marine Corps paid for some broken windows along that route. But I came across down there, then across, and the official time was there. I just had to keep doctoring the power coming down, to keep as much power on and still have enough fuel to get across Bennett Field and land, and I had to gauge that pretty close to get the max speed and still have enough fuel to land. But it worked out. When I came across I was very low on fuel coming across the field. I had a lot of speed, so I didn't really need any power; I could just pull up on a big turn going up for altitude and around, and made the approach then and landed. And I remember I had some doubt that the thing might run out

of fuel taxiing in. That would be an embarrassment with all the people waiting. But it didn't do that.

But that was a lot of fun on that flight, and there was a lot of attention to it afterwards. To be out like that with a project like that on your own, braving the weather and the winds and everything else, it was just a lot of fun. I enjoyed it very much. The only bad part was the losing of that AJ tanker. That was too bad, but I don't know if they ever got court-marshalled over that one or not, about putting the wrong fuel in the wrong tank. That was not very good. But anyway, coming across New York, too, we didn't get quite the time we had anticipated because I was short of fuel at the last re-fueling. So I couldn't keep quite the same speed. But we still broke the record I think by 21 or 22 minutes or something like that, 20 minutes. It was definitely a good break of the record and the Navy and Marine Corps were very proud of it.

THOMAS: As far as the timing goes, was it once you cross the field; was that like the finish line?

SEN. GLENN: Just like a finish line. In fact, when we took off at Las Alamedas, the official timer, with his official watch and all that, he was out in the middle of the field, right by the runway I was taking off on. And when I went by him, he was standing by the edge of the runway. When I went by him on takeoff, right in the center of the field, he started to time me. And that timing was sent to New York, official timing, and the same thing occurred in New York. The timer was out in the field there, and when I came down, came by very fast, at 3 or 400 hundred feet, whatever it was, when I went by his position, that was the end of the timing.

That's the way they did it. And then later on we got big certificates from the FAI, Federation Aeronatique Internationale, from Paris.

THOMAS: During the flight you used the camera equipped version of the Crusader and you took photographs while you were going across.

SEN. GLENN: That originally was not the plan, but it turned out that the photographic version of the F8U was a lighter airplane, because you didn't have to have guns and bomb racks and all that. It was a cleaner airplane, didn't have anything extending out in the air stream. But it did have cameras on board. Vertical cameras, light cameras out the side, but being a reconnaissance airplane instead of a straight fighter, it had about 1,100 pounds, I think it was, more fuel than the fighter version did. So we decided to use the photographic version because it held more fuel. And you could do a better record with it. So that was the reason why we had it. The cameras were sort of a gravy.

I saw that as—one time they planned to unload the cameras to make the airplane as light as possible, but I thought it was pretty neat to take pictures if we could all the way across the United States, and we did. And so I think we had the first strip picture ever taken across the whole United States. I started the cameras on take-off, and didn't touch them. The cameras were still taking pictures, overlap pictures; it was timed so the cameras had image compensation, image motion compensation, IMC, which was pretty new at that time. So at different altitudes and speeds, the cameras would set themselves to take pictures that automatically overlapped. And so you were taking fewer pictures at altitude, more pictures down low. But we had enough film at the time that we were going

to be there, and with that overlap, we could take strip pictures clear across the United States, which we did. And it worked out fine. When they sent that to the photo lab, they had an awful lot of film that they developed at the end of that flight.

THOMAS: What was the reaction at Floyd Bennett Airfield when you landed?

SEN. GLENN: Well, Floyd Bennett has a great flight path. They had prepared—they had a band, they had a lot of officials there. And the admiral in charge at Patuxent had come up for that day. Annie and Dave and Lyn, our two kids, were there. And so it was great to be back with them again. Then there were a lot of press, TV, and they wanted to do different TV programs the next day, a lot of interviews about the flight. One of the main things that was proven by the flight, though, was how the engine turned out after all this high power coming across county. We had never had a J57 engine run at that full power for that length of time. And so that's one thing they wanted very much, was to get the engine out of the airplane and take it back, tear it down, and see if there was anything at all wrong with the engine. There was not. It came out clean as could be. So it was good to know that, that it had an excellent engine—send that airplane out for the fleet for combat.

THOMAS: So the whole idea of killing two birds with one stone worked out.

SEN. GLENN: Yes, and the Pratt and Whitney people were very, very proud of that engine needless to say. I think they torn it down right to the last bearing to see if anything at all was wrong with it after all that super-use or mis-use, however you looked at it. It was wide open except when I was transferring fuel. The airplane

was running most of the time in wide open afterburner except when I was trying to rendezvous. So it got a good checkout.

THOMAS: You mentioned the media was there, but the flight really became front page news across the country, a lot of media attention. Is this something that you had anticipated beforehand, or prepared for, or did this catch you by surprise?

SEN. GLENN: A little bit by surprise. I knew there would be some attention because I had seen when aviation records were broken before, there was always something in the paper or news magazines, usually a short spread of some kind. It seemed to take over a little bit, to get more attention, whether it was a slow news day otherwise, or what the reason was, I don't know. But it did get a lot of attention and Chance Vought, who built the airplane, of course they had some collections of, had some news stories collected from across country, and it did receive far more attention than I had thought it would. But that was just a by-product, we didn't plan that.

THOMAS: Was the Navy, the PR people, working full force on this?

SEN. GLENN: Yes, and they did a good job on that. We had broken the record by 20 minutes, whatever it was. One thing I remember that was in the New York Times write-up the next day, I think—I was born in 1921, this was right at my birthday, couple days off of my birthday, and I would be 36 I think it was at that time. And in the New York Times, the article stated I was probably reaching the end of the period in my life when I could work with high powered equipment and speed or something like that. I didn't know what was going to come later on!

THOMAS: One consequence of the publicity you received after the flight was you made an appearance on the television game show “Name That Tune.” Can you talk a bit about how you were selected, and what your experiences were?

SEN. GLENN: Dave, my son and I, were walking around, I think we were shopping in Macy’s the next day for a little bit. And this woman came up to us. I think I had my uniform on, and she recognized me as having been in the news the day before, and wanted to talk to me. She was the one who selected people to go on that old game show “Name That Tune.” And this was big stuff back in those days and she wanted to know if I had an interest in it. Well, I was not particularly interested in it. I thought that the Navy and Marine Corps wouldn’t be all that hot for me going on a program like that. And I didn’t particularly care one way or the other. I had always been good at music, I knew a lot about music growing up as a kid, songs and so on. Anyway, I said I would find out. So I asked the people back at Patuxent where I was based, and they thought it was a good idea. They also thought it would add a little more publicity for what we had done on the flight.

So I called them back and said okay, and what they wanted me to do was to try out for it. What they did, you’d come in and they would have hundreds of songs. They would hum these songs and see if you knew the title or not, whether you were knowledgeable enough in music that they wanted to even think about putting you on. And so, I went through that, and apparently did pretty well because I was selected, along with my partner in this. There was a little boy, 10 years old, Eddie Hodges, from Mississippi, he was great. He later went on and had some movie roles and things later on. But he and I became the team that went

through on “Name That Tune.” We went through clear to the end and we won. At that time, it’s kind of small now, but at that time it was really big money, \$25,000. And it was \$25,000 total for the team. So when Eddie and I went through, we split that. The money I got from it went into my kids’ college account, which Annie and I had been trying to save a few bucks for.

Anyway, it was a great experience, and it was my first real experience with big time network television, just the interview process. I think we were on that for—we kept winning and coming back, I think we were on that for about six weeks. Anyway, it was a lot of fun, and Eddie later on, I kept in touch with him, and he was in Hollywood. He was in a couple of movies with Frank Sinatra as a kid. He then became the juvenile lead in *Music Man*, the original production of *Music Man* on the stage in New York. You may remember him as the little kid who stuttered but sang “Gary Indiana.” Remember that song or that show? But he was the one who did that. As a result of that, he had movie roles in Hollywood, had two or three roles, and when that sort of fizzled out. He became a—he wrote some music as a teenager and performed in a band, later got into some drug difficulties, got cured of that, and last I heard he was back, I think he was doing drug counseling work in his old home area of Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

THOMAS: A little over a year after the flight, you were selected as one of the seven Project Mercury astronauts. Were you ever told or did you ever have the feeling that the record flight you made helped in that selection?

SEN. GLENN: No, I don’t think it hurt. And I think they were looking for people who had done a lot of high speed—they were, that was one of the criteria, they wanted combat

time if you had that, high speed test time, which I had done with Project Bullet. So I'm sure that was part of it. I was never told that it was a major part of it or a reason for selection.

THOMAS: Is there any other aspect of Project Bullet we haven't covered that you'd like to comment on? Have we pretty well covered things?

SEN. GLENN: Pretty well covered it I believe. I don't know what else there would be about that except, the only thing is, I'd like to go back and do it again today. It was fun. It was really a great time. Of course, the airplanes now that can cruise at super sonic speed without even being an afterburner, highest power. And so today's record holding like that and the competition between the Marine Corps and Navy and the Air Force, those records have sort of gone by now. When you have airplanes that can cruise around at super sonic speed, some of the things the airplanes can do now compared to the fighters that we were testing then is just amazing. I don't think of anything else really that applied to the flight itself. The aftermath of the flight, we got a lot more attention than I thought we'd get. Whether it had any impact on me going into the space program or not, I never knew. They had their own set of rules on that for going into the space program of height, weight, educational background. They wanted combat time if possible, a lot of test experience. And I had had all of that. So I think I'm sure that Project Bullet didn't hurt in the selection process, but I don't think it was a prime reason for the selection.

THOMAS: Alright. Well, that's all I've got for this afternoon. I look forward to the next session.