

This Day in History... October 29, 1998

John Glenn Returns to Space

On October 29, 1998, John Glenn returned to space aboard the Space Shuttle *Discovery*. At the age of 77, he was the oldest person to go into space.

Born on July 18, 1921, John Glenn served with the Marines during World War II, flying 59 combat missions in the South Pacific. He went on to fly another 63 missions during the Korean War, twice returning to his base with more than 250 enemy anti-aircraft bullet holes in his plane.

Flying was a passion for Glenn and during peacetime he was appointed to test pilot school. In April 1959, Glenn was one of seven men chosen to take part in NASA's Project Mercury. Three years later, the spacecraft *Friendship 7* blasted into space with Glenn inside the capsule. On February 20, 1962, he became the first American to orbit the Earth. Upon his return Glenn was a national hero, with his own ticker-tape parade and a service medal awarded by President Kennedy.



Stamp features the Friendship 7 space capsule flown by John Glenn in the first successful orbit of the Earth.

Glenn must have thought his space flight days were over when he resigned from NASA shortly after his friend John Kennedy was assassinated. The former astronaut began his political career in 1974, when he was elected to represent his home state of Ohio in the US Senate. He held that position for about 24 years, until he was 78 years old.

One day during his term as senator, while reading a book on space physiology, the idea occurred to Glenn that a study examining the effects of weightlessness on older people could be beneficial. NASA officials weren't convinced, and neither was Glenn's wife, Annie. However, after two years of lobbying and being found in good health, Glenn began preparing for the journey.

Thirty-six years after he blasted into the skies aboard *Friendship 7*, John Glenn returned to space on October 29, 1998, as part of mission STS-95. Glenn, then 77, spent nine days on the shuttle *Discovery*. A member of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, Glenn hoped his journey would help researchers learn more about the effects of aging. In addition to these tests, Glenn served as the flight's photographer and videographer.

Glenn's heart and respiration rates, blood volume, and blood pressure were monitored regularly throughout the flight. Scientists analyzed the results, especially his immune system function and protein levels. Glenn's sleep cycles were also measured and compared to readings that were taken before liftoff. He was given another battery of tests when he returned home. Glenn was also honored with another ticker-tape parade upon his return to earth.



Stamp pictures the *Discovery* and the *Friendship 7*.

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