

By Cdr. Peter B. Mersky, USNR (Ret.)

Glenn, John, with Nick Taylor. *John Glenn: A Memoir*. Bantam Books, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036. 1999. 432 pp. Ill. \$27.00.

Long overdue, this book could probably only have been written as an autobiography, and only when John Glenn was ready. It is a unique story, whose author infuses the narrative with his special brand of American dedication and steadfastness of purpose.

Marine Colonel John H. Glenn has been part of the modern American story for a long time. He grew up in Ohio in a hard-working family. He enlisted in the Navy's flight program right after Pearl Harbor, but switched to the Marine Corps. He saw combat in the little-publicized Marshall Islands campaign in 1945.

Glenn's father served in France during WW I and instilled in his son John, whom he called "Bud," a strong work ethic and sense of patriotism. The elder Glenn also gave his namesake his first aviation experience, paying for a barnstormer ride not knowing that he had set his son on a life path.

Throughout the narrative there is John Glenn's deep, abiding love for Annie, his lifetime soul mate, and their family. We talk a lot these days about core values and returning to the initial sentiments and beliefs on which this country is based. John Glenn's autobiography—with ample help from Nick Taylor in putting the story down in a smooth, meaningful flow—might serve as a manual for such a return.

He writes of successes, failures, disappointments and thrills—getting his wings, first combat, marriage, friends, deaths and meeting famous personalities—always fine-tuning his focus on either the task at hand or the upcoming trials and hopes for the future. He also describes amusing digressions, such as appearing on the 1950s quiz show "Name That Tune."

Glenn recounts how he came up with Project Bullet, the July 1957 transcontinental dash in a photo-*Crusader*, as well as his tryout and ultimate selection as one of the Mercury 7 astronauts, America's first spacemen. If you have seen the movie *The Right Stuff*, you might have one impression of these men and their story. I was therefore amused to read that John Glenn is less than thrilled with the motion picture, calling it *Laurel and Hardy Go to Space*.

He details the development of the early space program, the incredible pressure to remain focused in the face of Soviet successes, and the constant push from the media and government officials.

The tense thrill of John Glenn's February 1962 space shot when he became the first American to orbit the earth gives way to the aftermath of public adulation which Glenn and his family were sometimes hard-pressed to

accept or negotiate. But in true American style they did, and it is to their collective credit that John was finally able to realize one of his life's goals: to serve in the U.S. government, eventually as a four-term senator.

Elected in 1974 and retired in 1997, Glenn saw as much, if not more, than he had seen in the preceding 25 years as a Marine Corps officer, aviator and astronaut. But as he approached the time to decide whether to run for a fifth term, he knew he really wanted to return to space. The book's last sections deal with this successful project, which finally saw John Glenn once again report, "Zero G and I feel fine."

This is an important book, not just for readers of this column with its specific subject area but for anyone who wants to know the man better.

Rochester, Stuart I., and Frederick Kiley. *Honor Bound: American Prisoners of War in Southeast Asia 1961–1973*. U.S. Naval Institute, 2062 Generals Hwy., Annapolis, MD 21401. 1999. 706 pp. Ill. \$36.95.

If you have put away questions and emotions regarding the Vietnam War, be prepared: this monumental account will reawaken them with a vengeance. It will also leave the story unfinished because so many people are still unaccounted for, but this book deserves to be read by anyone with an interest in the war. If you served there, lost friends or know anyone who was a prisoner of war (POW), this book will immediately give you some idea what it was like to be divested of basic human dignity and self-esteem.

*Honor Bound* is an amazing compilation of the POW experience in Southeast Asia. While I highly recommend it, the book is not for those with weak stomachs. Each page chronicles the incredible torture and deprivation the POWs suffered. The prisoners' unexpectedly tough resistance apparently caught the North Vietnamese unprepared. They had false impressions of American softness and lack of dedication, and the Hanoi jailers found they had to reassess their prison system and their methods of dealing with so many unobliging inmates.

The authors have gone to great pains to include as many individual names and experiences as possible, providing the reader with in-depth knowledge of who the prisoners were and how they survived—helping each other in even the most basic situations and suffering daily physical and mental indignities that left them battered and scarred, but unbowed.

*Honor Bound* is not just about the Stockdales, Risners and Dentons, the more well-known of these American patriots. It includes the less well-known service members who also suffered so much agony and travail for their country.