

## The Last American Hero: The Remarkable Life of John Glenn

**Alice L. George**

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John Glenn, a prominent representative of the Greatest Generation, gets a dimensional treatment in Alice L. George's biography, *The Last American Hero*.

While many Americans think of astronaut and senator John Glenn as "a bit of a square," George reveals him as a curious man who sought adventure at great risk to his own life. In his twenty-three-year military career, he served in two wars and set a flight speed record; as an astronaut, he pulled the US ahead in the space race, with three Earth orbits. And in his twenty-four years in the US Senate, Glenn sacrificed possible runs for higher office, embracing public service over politics. In 1998, at the age of seventy-seven, he returned to space on the Space Shuttle Discovery.

While Glenn's achievements are well documented in the text, so is the fact that he was first a small-town boy. "A Presbyterian in a secular age," he worshipped God, enjoyed a lifelong love with his wife, and believed in everything he did. He is uncovered as a fun-loving man who resisted the boardroom and befriended both the janitor and Bobby Kennedy with equal sincerity.

The book includes less than flattering depictions, too: Glenn's Korean War flight risks were sometimes overzealous. His wingman, baseball great Ted Williams, called him "crazy." Glenn's political decisions are also challenged, positioning him as a technocrat who had difficulties with revelations of campaign finance irregularities. There's adequate context for all, including about the air war in Korea and around US politics and culture during the space race with the Soviets.

*Time's* "Colonel Wonderful" receives a new biographical treatment in *The Last American Hero*, which positions him as an adventurer, a statesman, and a role model.

JOE TAYLOR (November / December 2020)

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