

Glenn Galen Miller's Early Years: He "Looked Toward the Future"



by

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A Farm Boy from Iowa Who Wanted to Fly

Although he comes from a Midwestern farming family, Glenn Miller knew from an early age that his life would not be tied to the land. One of his earliest memories dates from his toddler years, when he was about two and a half years old. He proved to be such an energetic little boy that he refused to stay in the front yard of the Miller farmhouse near Wayland, Iowa. Glenn's mother resorted, literally, to tying her young son down. Emma Miller knotted a rope around his waist and tethered him to a tree or fence. Glenn learned, however, how to untie that knot. He wanted to be free, to explore the world around him. His curiosity, seen at an early age, illustrates the type of person Glenn became as he matured. No matter how much he came to value his childhood and young adult years on the family farm, Glenn understood that his future would not be one that mirrored the life of family members who preceded him.¹

Like most of his generation, Glenn was born at home, in a downstairs bedroom. He made his appearance in this world on September 19, 1917. The Miller farm was located in the southeastern part of the state, about five miles away from the town of Wayland and a nearby village of Swedesburg. Both were small communities. In the 1930s, only about six hundred lived in Wayland and seventy-two in Swedesburg.² Glenn's parents were Frederick Steven Miller and Emma Slonker Goldsmith, born in 1871 and in 1879 respectively. Glenn's father had been born in Ohio, but his parents moved to Iowa when Fred was about four years old. Fred's parents were Amish. In fact, his father was a minister. With the family's move to Iowa, Fred's father established the first Amish Church west of the Mississippi when he built one in Henry County. Yet because his congregation could



Glenn at 7 months

not afford to pay him a salary, Fred's father worked a farm to ensure the family's economic survival. The family of Glenn's mother also immigrated to Iowa; Emma Miller's grandfather came to the United States from Canada. Her father, John Goldschmidt (later the family name was changed to "Goldsmith"), homesteaded three hundred acres a few miles north of Trenton, Iowa. Part of that land became the family farm Glenn grew up on. Religiously, the Goldsmiths belonged to a Mennonite church.



Fred Miller received title to the farm when he married Emma on October 30, 1901, but he did not envision making his livelihood as a farmer. Like his son, Fred seemed to have dreams for a different life than the agrarian one lived by generations of his family. In 1898, Fred was attending Howe's Academy in Mount Pleasant, a normal school that trained teachers, when his father (Glenn's paternal grandfather) was injured in a train crash. In the moments after the accident, a potbelly stove in the coach section exploded and fell on Fred's father. He died two days later of

severe burns. Fred came home from school to manage the farm for his mother. (In contrast, two younger brothers, Sam and Levi, went on to medical school, becoming doctors.) Glenn believes his father “never wanted to be a farmer.” In fact, Fred was pursuing a livelihood in Wayland, and not on the Miller farm, in the two-three years before he married. He had bought an interest in a clothing store owned by his cousins. After Fred and Emma married, the couple continued to live in Wayland. Helen, Glenn’s oldest sister, was born in the town a year later, in December 1902. The following spring, the Millers moved to an eighty-acre farm Emma’s father had given the newlyweds as a wedding present. A small creek ran through the land. Two family stories exist that explain the move from Wayland to the farm. In 1982 Helen wrote a brief account of her life. In it, she explained that her mother did not want to remain in town. Glenn agrees that Emma did not like living in Wayland; she had been born and raised on a farm. He also believes, though, that pressure from Fred’s father-in-law led to the couple’s decision. Regardless of the reason for the move, beginning in 1902 the Millers experienced a very different life from what they would have had if they had remained in Wayland.

Fred and Emma raised four children on that farm, Helen born in 1902, Mildred in 1908, Max in 1911, and Glenn in 1917. His siblings would have had many memories of World War I, but Glenn does have one that predates by many months the story of the rope that was meant to restrain him. If Glenn’s recollection is correct, he was only fourteen months old. It was November 1918. Belligerent nations involved in World War I had signed an armistice. A celebration occurred in Wayland that the Miller family attended. Glenn remembers the image of the Kaiser engulfed in flames as people hung the German king in effigy. With so many years between Glenn and his siblings, it turned out that his more constant playmate was his dog, Dash. Like Glenn, he was born in 1917, five months before Glenn. Dash was a mix, but primarily a shepherd. He was large enough, with a harness attached to his upper body, to pull a young Glenn around in a two-wheel cart. Unlike other boys and their dogs, though, Glenn’s did not sleep with him. Dash preferred the outdoors, even in the winter. The two grew up together. Dash did not die until he and Glenn were about twelve years old.



Unfortunately, losing Dash was not Glenn’s first experience with death. A much more powerful loss occurred in April of 1923 when Glenn’s father died. Glenn only had Fred Miller in his life for five and a half years, yet even today, the pride Glenn feels in his father is apparent to any listener. He describes him as “a very progressive individual,” a man who “was a generation or two ahead of his time.” In respect to animals and crops, the Miller farm was not unlike others in the area. The family raised cattle, hogs, cows, horses, and chickens. In other ways, however, the farm illustrated the forward-thinking philosophy of its owner. The Miller home offered central heating and indoor plumbing, downstairs as well as upstairs. Glenn’s father strung a telephone line out to the farm. The Millers built one of the largest barns in the area, so big that in the winter months all of the

cattle could be housed in it. For the hogs, Glenn's father laid a concrete pad where the animals ate corn, thus insuring that the hogs consumed only that crop and not dirt or mud intermixed with the corn. Fred Miller engineered a cistern system to conserve water from the rain and snow. A tin roof covered the barn; water easily fell from it to a tank below. A contemporary of Glenn's has written a book about her childhood growing up in rural Iowa during the 1930s. In it, she cites an Iowa saying that water from a well "is so hard you have to bite it out of the cup."³ Clearly, Fred wanted to give his family an alternative to the hard well water. He had the mechanical skill and drive to do so.

Neighbors shared the respect Glenn clearly has for his father. Fred Miller sat on the board of two local banks, worked the precincts in Olds on Election Day, served as a county supervisor, and was president of the school board for several years. Glenn's father also led a campaign to bring electricity to farmers in his area. Before that, generators at the Miller farm ran just in the evenings and on Mondays from 7:00 AM to 10:00 AM so Emma could do the laundry using one of the first electric washing machines in the county. Aside from being a liberal thinker, Fred Miller also was a man of principle. As a member of the Amish faith, he embraced that religion's pacifism. Yet Fred supported World War I. He flew the American flag and sold war bonds to help pay for the war. Glenn is not sure why his father took that stand, but it cost him dearly. Simon Gingrich, the leader of the local Amish church that Fred's father had established, punished Fred for his stand on the war. Simon saw it as contradictory to the Amish belief in pacifism. He decreed a "set back" for Fred. Glenn's father could not, for example, receive communion. In response to Simon's unfair treatment, Fred left the Amish church and joined a Mennonite one. In time, Fred's piety and character earned him the rank of "deacon" in the congregation. When Glenn was only five, his time with his father ended abruptly. Fred Miller died of complications from a mastoid infection.

Helen, twenty years old at the time, recalled in her memoir the details of her father's death. In March of 1923, Fred began experiencing intense headaches. The local country doctor stayed up nights, pouring over his medical books, to come up with a diagnosis. After his research, the physician correctly identified the problem as a mastoid infection. He arranged for Fred's admittance to a hospital in Burlington, Iowa, located in the southeastern corner of the state, near the Illinois border. According to Helen, her father appeared to have a premonition that he would not come home once he left. She recalled him going into the rooms in their house, looking around each one. Perhaps Fred was trying to recall its details, or perhaps he was remembering the good times spent in each room. As her father did this, Helen asked him if he forgot something, but Fred replied, "No, but I'll never see it again." Due to the inclement weather, neighbors made their way to the Millers farm to help transport him to a train station in a nearby town. A railroad line could take him to Burlington, but snowdrifts made it impossible for an automobile to travel the roads to the station. Neighbors carefully secured Fred to a cot that they placed inside of the bobsled. Still, at points in the journey to the train depot, friends had to scoop up piles of snow in order to allow the bobsled to move forward. The neighbors who Fred had always helped were there for him when he needed their assistance.

Once at the hospital, a doctor there operated on Fred. Helen remembers the surgery as successful in respect to the mastoid problem that had been the root of his illness. A few weeks later, however, his health declined dramatically. It appears that Fred contracted a streptococci infection at the hospital. It developed into erysipelas, a bacterial skin infection that spreads through the lymph system. Today, antibiotics can combat such a disease, but such drugs were not available in the early twentieth century. Helen and Glenn went to the Burlington Hospital to see their father. Helen felt “shocked” when she saw him--“He had fever blisters so huge around his mouth, he could hardly talk...He couldn’t eat when I tried to feed him...” Glenn visited separately from Helen. Perhaps because Fred had taken a turn for the worse, Emma wanted Glenn to see his father one last time. An uncle took him to Burlington about a week before Fred died. The long trip to the hospital would have been unsettling to any child. What should have been an adventure--a train ride to a distant, large city--became a sad journey. As Glenn traveled to Burlington, he was not sure what awaited him. Once at the hospital, the medical staff did not allow Glenn to enter the room. The five-year-old could only look in to see his father from the hallway. Glenn must have felt so isolated in those moments as he peered into the room from the doorway. Like Helen, his memories focus on Fred’s face, with “dark spots” all over it. That one visit proved to be the last time Glenn saw his father. According to Helen, in addition to his difficulty in eating, Fred experienced kidney failure. Those complications, and the erysipelas, took his life after almost four weeks in the hospital.

Helen kept a clipping on her father’s funeral for almost sixty years from the local paper, the *Wayland News*. She referred to it in her memoir. Helen might have seen the article as a piece of tangible evidence that testified to the esteem the community held for Fred Miller. She points out that the newspaper editor himself, not a reporter, wrote the story. The minister who had officiated at the funeral for Fred’s father when he had died some thirty years before helped to conduct the church service for another head of a Miller household who also died suddenly. Helen quotes the newspaper article as observing that, “Wayland has seldom if ever seen such a large funeral. The church was filled to capacity and hundreds stood outside.” Like Glenn would in later years, Helen took some comfort in knowing how highly the community thought of her father.

“Our whole world changed.” That is how Glenn explains the impact of his father’s passing. Financially, he characterizes the Millers as “pretty well off” when Fred was alive. Glenn’s sister Helen was enrolled in college when her father died, but she left school after Fred’s death. Even without a degree, Helen obtained a teaching job at a one-room schoolhouse in Prospect, just $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from the Miller farm. The proximity of the school allowed her to live at home and walk to work. A hired hand, Peter “Curly” Widmer, worked the farm along with Glenn’s father. Pete was the same age as Fred. The Millers employed a young woman inside of the house to help Emma with the household chores. While Pete stayed on after Fred’s death, the woman did not. Pete’s labor as a hired hand proved to be sporadic, however. In the late summer and early fall, he would be at the Miller table for breakfast and dinner. Pete spent his days, though, working for local farmers, thrashing their wheat. He also took on what Glenn recalls as “dirty, backbreaking jobs,” such as making tile trenches for water to flow through. When he was

not so occupied, Pete helped out at the Miller farm. Emma did not pay him since he received room and board. Pete lived in the house with the family. Emma even did his laundry and ironed his clothes. Fred hired Pete about a year before Glenn was born, and he remained with the family until Glenn graduated high school. Perhaps over the years Pete felt closer to the Miller family than any other “hired hand” would have.

Even with Pete’s help, though, Emma worked both outside of the house and inside of it, putting in fourteen to fifteen hour days. She sold the cattle and horses to decrease the responsibilities she assumed after losing her husband. Surprisingly, Glenn never milked a cow when he was young. Emma enjoyed doing that for the few cows they owned. Glenn believes the milking at the beginning and end of each day proved therapeutic for his mother. Emma certainly needed some relief from all of her new obligations. Glenn realized the pressure his mother was under when he was still very young, not that long after his father’s death. Each Saturday night, Emma gave her youngest son a nickel as his weekly allowance. Glenn freely admits he never saved it. When he accompanied his mother on her shopping trip to Wayland, Glenn bought a vanilla ice cream cone at the Boshart Drug Store. Emma knew how much her little boy enjoyed doing that, which explains one of Glenn’s vivid childhood memories. He remembers hearing his mother crying one week because Emma worried she might not have enough money to give him the five cents.

With the loss of his father, Glenn grew up surrounded by women, namely his mother and two older sisters. They influenced his development much more than his brother Max or Pete did. One could argue that Glenn’s childhood years instilled in him a nurturing, gentle spirit that served him well in World War II as a flight instructor of both men and women. Even in the years before the war, Glenn demonstrated a respect that unfortunately many of his fellow pilots did not share for women who wanted to fly airplanes. With the guidance provided by his mother and sisters, Glenn matured into a sensitive young man who today holds many positive memories of his childhood. His recollections of his Iowa world in the 1920s and 1930s take the listener back to a time that seems idyllic and all too distant from the America of today. At about the age of four, the Miller women introduced Glenn to “kitchen duties.” He learned that corncobs could make a quick, hot fire in the kitchen. An early responsibility Glenn had was a simple one, to dry the dishes. By the age of six, he was helping to make dough shaped into cookies and donuts. Assisting in the preparation of meals became part of Glenn’s chores that earned him his weekly allowance. Early in his life, he thus acquired household skills that served him well in his adult years. Even today, Glenn enjoys overseeing the preparation of a Thanksgiving Day dinner, using methods his mother taught him decades ago. Baste the turkey every fifteen minutes, and pour the juices under the cloth that covers the bird. Such a procedure, Glenn insists, insures moist turkey meat. Homemade ice cream, “plain old vanilla” as Glenn identifies it, accompanied some meals. He recalls not only his mother’s talents in the kitchen, but also her skills when it came to home remedies for various illnesses. If a flu virus struck the area, Emma might require Glenn to wear a bag containing the herb acifidity around his neck. It had brownish leaves and a pungent odor. Within the community, people sought Emma out for her whooping cough recipe that took most of the day to brew.



However much Glenn may have enjoyed his time inside of the house helping his mother, the “boy” in him became apparent at an early age. The story of his mother trying to tie him down testifies to Glenn’s adventuresome side. When he was about eight, Glenn taught himself how to drive a tractor and a car. He dreamed of controlling much larger machinery, though. Like his father, Glenn always wanted to do more than farm the land. In the years right after Fred Miller’s death, Glenn envisioned himself

as a railroad engineer. In the summer months, Glenn slept on a screened porch. From it, he could hear the train whistles of two railroad lines, the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy line that ran a half-mile to the north and a Minnesota and St. Louis line one that lay a half-mile to the south. From his front porch, Glenn could see the cars that belonged to the St. Louis line pass by. But soon another mode of transportation, the airplane, replaced the railroad in his imagination. Glenn dates his interest in flying from when he was about seven or eight. The Miller farm had a large windmill, perhaps fifty to sixty feet tall, on top of the barn. The windmill became a landmark for planes flying from Kansas City to Chicago. Everyday around 3:00 PM, a plane flew over the barn. When he saw it, Glenn remembers thinking, “Oh, boy, I would like to do that.” Throughout his elementary and secondary school years, Glenn held onto his dream to one day become a pilot.

For his first eight years, he attended a one-room schoolhouse, an educational institution that has become just a memory in American history. Yet just a few years before Glenn was born, fully one-half of all children in the United States attended such schools. As urbanization increased, such institutions declined in number, although in states located in the Midwest and the Great Plains, they operated longer than in other areas of the country. By the time of Glenn’s high school graduation in 1935, seventy-seven percent of the schools in Iowa were still one-teacher schoolhouses.⁴ In Glenn’s home state, small white schoolhouses stood along the roadsides every two to four miles, with ten to twenty students in each school.⁵ Glenn walked three-quarters of a mile to an old one-room schoolhouse. A potbelly stove warmed the building in winter and two outhouses stood near the schoolhouse. Some outhouse for boys had a sun on its door and the one for girls a moon, allowing the youngest students, who still did not know how to read, to distinguish between the two shacks.⁶ While Glenn remembers two outhouses, he recalls a moon carved into the door of both shacks. Iowa had no kindergarten classes, so Glenn began school in the first grade, when he was five year old. He was the only student in his first grade class, a situation that did not change throughout his eight years in elementary school. In that time, Glenn remembers a total school enrollment that ranged between eight to fifteen children. The academic year began the last week of August, with classes over the first week in May. Glenn explains that farm work dictated this schedule. Corn had to be planted in May, and even children helped with this task. During that month, families plowed the fields daily. As a child, Glenn drove a tractor at the Miller farm, digging rows that lay about three feet apart. By July, the corn could be harvested.

Over the course of his eight years in the one-room schoolhouse, Glenn had several teachers. His first one turned out to be his sister Helen who also taught him in the second grade. By that year, however, the old school had been torn down and a new one erected in its place. Instead of a potbelly stove, the new school heated the inside of the building with a furnace. In addition to the outhouses, a toilet stood in the basement, although students

used it only in the winter months. Without a drain in the basement, teachers had to empty the bucket used with the toilet. The dual desks in the old schoolhouse, where two students sat next to each other, had also been replaced. Glenn and others now sat at individual desks. In his first years Glenn owned a slate, but he did not use it. Students brought their own supplies, such as paper, erasers, and a ruler. Glenn recalls Helen sometimes using a ruler on boys who misbehaved. The school day was a long one. At 9:00 AM the teacher, using a handheld bell, signaled the start of school. It did not sound again until 4:00 PM when its ringing meant classes were over for the day. Students enjoyed few holidays. Thanksgiving Day was one, but the

Glen's new, one-room schoolhouse

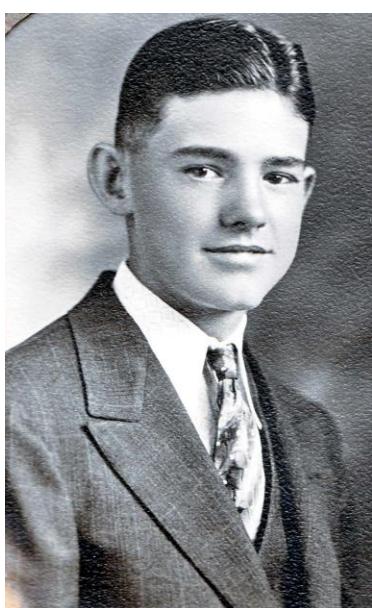
next day, a Friday, was not. And although students had Christmas Day off, they still attended school on December 24th. Glenn never experienced an Easter or spring break. The school year also did not include any snow days, even though the average snowfall over a fifty-year period for Des Moines, west of where Glenn lived, was 31.8 inches.⁷ Glenn just bundled up more to keep warm on the walk to school on snow days. He trekked that three-quarters of a mile, too, on rainy days, which in Iowa averaged about eight-five days a year⁸. Glenn carried no umbrella. He simply wore a blue denim jacket or a duck coat. (The latter garment is made from material similar to that used in a tent; tightly woven, it sheds water to a degree.) The southeast corner of the state, where Glenn lived, received about thirty-six inches of rain each year.⁹

Because of his fourth grade teacher, Merle Zinckefosse, Glenn had to stay at that level for two years. The man believed Glenn was too young for the fourth grade. Glenn also does not have a positive memory of him for another reason. Merle disciplined students by hitting them across the hand with a ruler. Glenn points out that if a teacher punished a student, another disciplinary action followed when he or she arrived home.



Surprisingly, Glenn remembers the names of all of his teachers--Helen in the first and second grades, Mabel Meyers in the third grade, Merle in the fourth, Ruster Ausberger in the fifth, Arthur Roth in the sixth, and Orie Slaughter for the seventh and eighth grades. Orie, raised on a farm just one and a half miles from the Miler homestead, proved to be Glenn's favorite teacher. At lunchtime, he allowed Glenn to string up a wire so they could listen to the radio. In the eighth grade, Orie administered a history and government test required of all who planned to move on to high school.

But that exam proved to be only the first of several tests that allowed eighth graders in one-room schoolhouses to move on to high school. Iowa adopted high educational standards, and adolescents from the country schools had to prove they had mastered the basics in academic areas. In Glenn's corner of Iowa, eighth graders gathered at Mount Pleasant, a town that functioned as the seat for Henry County. The exams were administered at the county courthouse. Mount Pleasant was about fourteen miles away from Wayland. Rather than drive that distance over the course of the test days, Glenn stayed with some of his father's cousins. Glenn remembers twelve comprehensive exams given on days that began at 8:00 AM and did not end until 5:00 PM. Unfortunately, he was not feeling well, suffering from flu-like symptoms. Glenn had difficulty focusing and found himself re-reading test questions over and over. He failed three of the exams, including the math and literature sections. The former had always been one of his strong areas in school. But students who did not pass the tests were allowed to re-take them. Glenn did so and passed them, scoring one hundred percent in math but much lower in the other two areas, although the scores were above the 75% required for passage. That pattern--strong in the sciences and weaker in English--followed him throughout his high school years.



8th grade graduation

Even before that, Glenn's mechanical aptitude was apparent. He always seemed to be taking things apart and putting them back together, sometimes with improvements over their original design. Helen once explained how her youngest brother got into trouble with their mother over this. Emma believed that Sundays, the Sabbath day, should be kept holy. She interpreted this as meaning no one in the family should work that day. But as Helen pointed out, "That was almost impossible for Glenn. Mother would scold him time after time, but pretty soon he'd be 'tinkering' with something again." Like other boys, he built a radio with a crystal set. Glenn also did more advanced mechanical tasks. He rigged up what he calls a "tin can telephone" on the family's porch. The Miller phone hung on a wall in the kitchen (a "party line," shared by ten families). To ensure that telephone calls were not

missed when people were outside, Glenn hooked up a tin can above the porch. He wired it into the telephone line that came into the kitchen phone. When a call came in, the tin can telephone rang as well as the one inside of the house. At one point, Glenn figured out how to bypass an electrical meter that

allocated the Miller family twenty-kilowatt hours per month; Glenn's contrivance allowed them to use more than the twenty hours yet not be charged for the additional amount. Repairing appliances was also easy for Glenn. As it turned out, Glenn's ability to fix things made him invaluable at his high school.

Glenn attended high school in the nearby town of Olds, about two and three-quarters mile from the Miller farm. Railroad tracks ran by the school. That fact proved a godsend in the winter months. Glenn could pick up the tracks near his family's farm and then walk among side of the tracks all the way to the high school. The rails were generally free of snow because a blade in front of the engine car cleared the snow. Not much of a drift piled up because the tracks were elevated over the surrounding terrain. Glenn and two friends eventually carpooled to save themselves the daily walk. He and Eleanor Miller (no relation to Glenn) lived about a mile away from each other. Together with Wallace Johnson, who had attended the same one-room schoolhouse as Glenn, the three teenagers took turns driving one of their parents' vehicles to Olds, with the other two being passengers. Glenn drove a Dodge, four-cylinder sedan, what he judges to have been "the fastest four in America." He describes the engine as similar to one a truck would have. According to Glenn, the Dodge could go as fast as 70 mph on Highway 218, a concrete road that ran through Olds. (Iowa state law required only a "prudent" speed in county districts.)¹⁰



"Tin can telephone" to right of upstairs, corner window.

Glenn characterizes himself as "a subdued student" during his teen years. The country boy from the small, one-room schoolhouse found himself in a high school with at least four times the number of students than he had been with each school year in his previous eight years of education. In high school, each class had about fifteen students, with a total student body of approximately sixty. This was in sharp contrast to the eight to fifteen classmates he had in elementary school. Glenn was used to being the only student in his class when he attended the one-room schoolhouse, but now in Olds he had fourteen other students with him. Together, they progressed through the high school years. In each course Glenn took, his fellow students were drawn from his class. Today some universities organize students into "cohorts," with each group taking classes together as they work toward a degree. Glenn experienced this in Olds High School during the 1930s. But Glenn did not have an easy time in his new world for the first three months. When school began in his freshman year, he only knew two students out of the entire student body, Eleanor Miller and Wallace Johnson. Wallace was one year ahead of Glenn. On Glenn's first day at Olds, Wallace led him up the steps outside of the school, into the Assembly Room. Glenn's eyes must have grown large when he saw sixty some students there. From that room, students went to individual classrooms. A school day consisted of four classes that ran one hour each. Students spent the other hours in the

Assembly Room. Glenn did his homework there and thus never took assignments home to do. Surrounded by so many students, Glenn remained shy for about the first three months. He hardly associated with anyone. Glenn describes himself as "scared," a feeling many freshmen at a new school would share, regardless of the era.

In that first year, Glenn recalls two powerful memories, one outside of the classroom and one inside of it. The former happened at home one night. Because of his height, Glenn went out for basketball. Being on the team entailed several hours of practice after school was out. One evening, Glenn arrived back at the Miller farm about 8:30 PM. Before he opened the front door, he heard his mother crying. He also heard her praying. Because of Glenn occupation with basketball, Emma understood that she would have more work to do around the farm. She asked God for strength. Glenn stayed on the porch for perhaps ninety minutes, waiting for Emma to fall asleep. Glenn did not want his mother to know that he heard her crying. The very next day, Glenn turned in his uniform to the coach. Glenn could now be home after school to help with the farm work. The other strong memory he has concerns his freshman algebra class. Because he came from a one-room schoolhouse, Glenn had not studied algebra before. Aside from his friend Eleanor Miller, all of his classmates had attended school in Olds where algebra had been taught. Compounding this disadvantage was another one. The teacher, Helen Milligan, was new to her profession. She had been well educated at Iowa Wesleyan College, but she did not know how to teach. Miss Milligan went over problems but never explained how an answer was arrived at. She was interested only in the answer. Glenn struggled all semester. He was not alone. Some of the girls took pity on him and allowed Glenn to copy their work. Glenn memorized answers to various problems, a fact that served him well if Miss Milligan drew the exam questions from work the class had done. If the questions were new ones, however, Glenn floundered. As the end of the semester approached, he calculated he needed at least an 82% on the final exam to pass the class. Glenn came up with a plan to help him and others. He told all of his classmates to bring bouquets of long-stemmed lilac flowers to Miss Milligan on exam day. They filled her desk with the tall flowers. There were so many that the bouquets blocked her view of the class as they took the test. Students were thus able to help each other on the exam. Glenn scored an 85%.

His sophomore year proved to be his best one. Glenn did have one last math class to take that year, but it was in geometry, and the teacher was Mr. Loper, not Miss Milligan. According to Glenn, Mr. Loper "made geometry simple." Glenn judges it to be the easiest course he had while in high school. Glenn averaged 94% to 96% in the class. That second year proved memorable for another reason. Glenn reveled in a friendship he formed with three other students. Two were juniors, Wallace Bergstrom and Harris Morgan, and the third a senior, Leslie Lindeen. Glenn carries fond memories of their daily lunch hours together in the boiler room. In fact, when asked what he liked best about his high school years, Glenn readily identifies the comradery he felt with his fellow classmates. He had roles in the sophomore, junior, and senior plays. And even though Glenn could not sing, he participated in school operettas. He and his friends often played pranks on each other. At times, the principal, Mr. Jones, punished him for pranks he was not responsible for. Glenn has a theory about that. A cousin, Don, also attended Olds.

Don was two years ahead of Glenn. By the time Glenn began his freshman year, Don had already created a reputation for himself as a prankster. Glenn identifies his cousin as "a thorn in the side" of the principal. Glenn thinks Mr. Jones did not like him because he was Don's cousin.

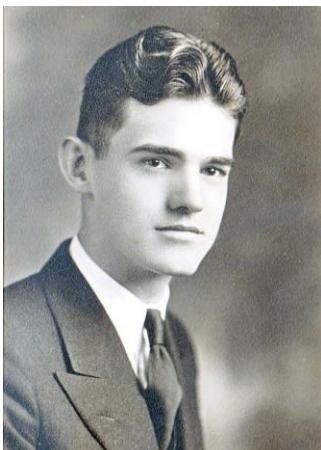
Olds Consolidated Schools									
Glenn Miller									
Grade 11		1933		1934					
STUDIES	1st 6wks	2nd 6wks	3rd 6wks	Exam	Sem Ave	4th 6wks	5th 6wks	6th 6wks	Exam Sem Ave
Days Absent	2	1	3		0	½	2		
Times Tardy	2	0	1		0	0	0		
Gen'l Attitude	90	90	90		90	90	90		
Eng. III	75	80	84	76	82	80	84	87	80
Am. Hist.	80	83	83	91	86	90	92	90	91
Am. Govt.	81	87	86	87	86	86	77	85	78
French	81	91	90	87		78	81	90	89
Psych.									
J. F. Loper									
L. J. Jones									
Supt.									
Prin.									

Like all of the students, Glenn took four years of English, public speaking, history, and government classes. English was one of his hardest courses, regardless of which year he had it. In contrast, science was an area of strength for him. The school did not offer any specialized science courses, such as ones in biology or chemistry. Instead, Glenn took a general science class in his junior and senior years. Glenn's innate mechanical skills served him well both inside and outside of the classroom while he attended Olds. Mr. Loper taught the senior science class. More than once, he invited Glenn to take over the class because of the knowledge Glenn had of electronics. For example, Glenn read about the development of television. Mr. Loper allowed him to explain how such images were transmitted. One other school employee recognized Glenn's abilities. He was Chris Garrick, the school janitor. Chris himself was not very mechanical, and once Glenn helped him fix something, Chris kept asking the student for assistance. Glenn gave it willingly. Their partnership began mid-way through Glenn's freshman year. For the next three and a half years, Chris called on Glenn many times as locks, switches, machinery, and other items needed repair. Sometimes Chris even took Glenn out of class to help him. Glenn did all of the repair work for free, considering it "an honor" to help out Chris and the school. The freshman boy from the one-room schoolhouse eventually came to value his experiences at Olds High School.

But that time in Glenn's life came to an end in June of 1935 when he graduated. Glenn was popular with his classmates. He had served on the student council and became senior class president. Overall, Glenn remembers his senior year as a serious one. His closest friends had already graduated. But the levity of high school decreased in that last year at Olds for a more important reason. Glenn's mother planned to sell the Miller farm. First, though, she wanted her son to finish high school at Olds. Glenn admits that the impending sale "bothered" him throughout his senior year. He worried about what would happen to him after graduation. Where would he and his mother live? What type of a job would he get? The farm world Glenn knew would be replaced by a different one whose particulars Glenn could only wonder about throughout his senior year. However big Olds High School seemed to Glenn, it would be small in comparison to the much larger world that awaited him. On graduation night, Glenn introduced the speaker, a professor from the University of Iowa. Dressed in a new suit, he received his diploma with his mother proudly watching from the audience.

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Glenn remembers his youth as one where his “curious mind” led him to seek out by himself answers to mechanical questions he had. He and his teacher Orie Slaughter had built a radio to play at lunchtime. Glenn explains that they did this “to see if we could.” His curious mind served him well not only in the years right after high school, but throughout his life. The little boy who wanted to fly an airplane later, as a high school student, wrote a class essay on his intention to become a bush pilot. Glenn read magazine articles on such fliers, particularly some who flew in Alaska. These men piloted small planes to remote geographical areas, often in adverse weather. Glenn recalls that some of the bush pilots had no radio and therefore no contact with the world outside the cockpit. They relied on landmarks or dead reckoning to navigate. To a teenager, bush pilots understandably embodied the adventure association with flying. Unfortunately, Miss Hudson, Glenn’s teacher, failed to understand her student’s topic and unfairly gave the assignment a grade of zero.



Glenn's senior picture

After graduation Glenn followed his dream, and he became a pilot, although not a bush pilot. Glenn nurtured in others the same dream he had of flying. He taught young men, and some women, how to fly before and during World War II. After his service as a flight instructor for the Army Air Corps, Glenn flew for American Airlines. Over the course of his professional career—from his time as a student pilot to his retirement from American Airline—Captain Glenn Miler estimates that he logged in over 32,000 hours in the air. He flew small, single engine planes early in his career and later large jet airplanes, quite an achievement for a farm boy from Iowa who wanted to be just a bush pilot.

¹ Information on Glenn’s family and his early years through high school is taken from conversations between Glenn and the author between 2008-2010.

² The WPA Guide to Iowa, originally published in 1938, gives Wayland’s population as 625; while it has an entry for Swedesburg, no population figure is cited. Federal Writers’ Project of the Works Progress Administration, *The WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa* (Ames, Iowa, 1986), p. 343. Glenn remembers Swedesburg’s population as being seventy-two when he was in his teen years.

³ Mildred Armstrong Kalish, *Little Heathens: Hard Times and High Spirits on an Iowa Farm During the Great Depression* (New York, 2007), p. 157.

⁴ Jonathan Zimmerman, *Small Wonder: The Little Red Schoolhouse in History and Memory* (New Haven 2009), p. 17. Zimmerman points out that the one-room schools disappeared with World War II and the Baby Boom that followed it. By 1960, only one percent of American students attended such institutions (p. 17).

⁵ Federal Writers Project, *WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa*, p. 107. Zimmerman explains the evolution of the schools color. “Some districts did paint their schools in ‘Venetian red,’ the inexpensive pigment used in

barn paint, which came from iron ore. After the United States developed its own lead supply, however, white paint--derived from lead oxide--became the cheapest option" (*Small Wonder*, p. 22).

⁶ Zimmerman, *Small Wonder*, p. 27.

⁷ Federal Writers Project, *WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa*, p. 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Federal Writers Project, *WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa*, p. xxxiii.

In Pursuit of a Dream--Number 73942

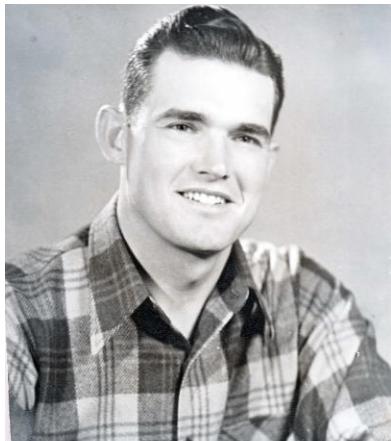
Glenn Miller likes to point out a fact that is generally known only to those involved in the world of aviation. When a person receives a pilot's license from the federal government, that number stays with the individual for his or her entire life. Glenn can think of only one other number issued by the national government to the civilian population that remains with a person forever, a Social Security number. But Washington D.C. did not begin to assign those nine-digit numbers until 1936, while the first pilot's license issued by a civilian bureau of the United States government dates from 1927. Glenn received his license number--73942--in 1940 when he passed a federal agency's test to qualify for a private pilot's license. Even though Glenn later received a commercial license and an instructor's license, those two did not carry a new number. The first number he received as a pilot from the national government remained the same regardless of what type of license he held. Today, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) license numbers consist of six digits. Very few hold a five-digit pilot's license number. Glenn Miller is one of them.¹ It was not until four years after he left high school in 1935 that Glenn realized his dream to learn how to fly.

After graduation, Glenn and his mother Emma continued to live on the family farm. Glenn's sister Helen and her husband Jake rented an adjacent piece of land and homestead from Emma's brother, Frank Goldsmith. Glenn worked that farm with his brother-in-law. Since he had learned how to operate a tractor when he was only ten years old, Glenn proved to be a valuable addition to the family's small labor crew. As he points out, "Driving a tractor is no different from driving a car. You just need more muscle." When he attended high school, Glenn often drove Jake's tractor for him after coming home from school. With graduation, Glenn did it full-time, a task he enjoyed. Understandably, the farm job that Glenn did not like was spreading manure in the field. Just one month after his nineteenth birthday, however, Glenn and his mother left farm life forever. Emma sold the Miller homestead. In October 1936 she moved the family to Mount Pleasant, a nearby town of approximately thirty-seven hundred people.²

Emma did this in spite of her love for farm life over town life. Financial considerations dictated the move. When her husband was alive, he managed the family finances. Such a marital arrangement was typical for that time period, but it could be detrimental for a widow. This proved true for Emma after Fred's death. Aside from the farm the Millers called home, Glenn's father owned two other pieces of land. One was another working farm he rented to Hugo Alvine. The other one consisted of woods and lowland; in the non-winter months, Fred ran cattle on it. Glenn's father made mortgage payments on all three pieces of land. This became more difficult in the 1920s. Prices for farm products dropped throughout the decade. After Fred's death in 1923, Emma eventually reached a point where she had to borrow money to make the mortgage payments. She sold the Alvine farm in the late twenties, but any relief that brought proved short-lived when the Depression appeared in 1930. Glenn also characterizes his mother as "being taken advantage of" by one unprincipled individual who gave her some poor financial advice. Emma only stayed on the farm for several years to allow Glenn to

finish elementary and the high school with his friends. By selling the farm, Glenn's mother was able to pay off the family debts.

Emma moved what remained of her family--Mildred, Glenn, and herself--to Mount Pleasant. The town served as the seat for Henry County and also as the site for Iowa Wesleyan College, a four-year institution supported by the Methodist Church.³ Emma had first considered a move to Iowa City. The family took a trip there to see if the town appealed to them. Certainly its population, over fifteen thousand people, would have overwhelmed the Millers. Glenn realized how modern Iowa City was when he saw a dial telephone for the first time in his life. As the site for the State University of Iowa, Glenn's mother knew she could buy a home and rent out rooms to a few of its eight thousand students.⁴ In the end, though, Emma decided to remain in the area where she had been born and raised, and where, in turn, she had brought up her children. Glenn remembers that a desire to stay with "our community" influenced his mother's decision. An old friendship, too, appears to have factored into the Millers' relocation to Mount Pleasant rather than Iowa City. Margaret Summers, a contemporary friend of Emma's, lived there. Having never married, Margaret had been making her own way in the world for about thirty years. In Mount Pleasant, she supported herself by renting out three or four rooms in her house to college students. Emma decided to do the same. The new,



Glenn, about 1937

three-bedroom Miller home stood at 707 North Lincoln, less than two blocks from Iowa Wesleyan College. Like the Summers' residence, it became a rooming house. Emma and Mildred shared one bedroom, Glenn had his room, and Emma rented out the third one to two Wesleyan students. Even though she now lived in a large town, the farm girl in Emma was still apparent; she kept about fifteen chickens in the backyard, which allowed her to serve fresh eggs to her boarders. With only one bedroom to rent out, Emma found that she could barely support her family. Before long, however, Mildred and Glenn secured jobs. Both children turned over to their mother a substantial part of their earnings.

During his time in Mount Pleasant, Glenn held three different jobs. He worked first as an attendant at a "filling station," or what we call today a "gas station," owned by Glen Nihart. Glenn's shift ran from 11 PM to 6 AM, during which time trucks frequented the station much more than automobiles. He put gas into the vehicles and serviced them when necessary. Glenn held this job during the winter of 1936-1937. Working outside in the cold, Iowan months, he decided to look for an indoor job. Glenn found one at a grocery store where he tested the amount of butter fat in the cream the storeowner bought from local farmers. Glenn also tested the eggs, holding them up to a light to see if they were marketable. He left this job for one at a grocery store owned by Walter Shepp. Glenn speaks with pride as to how he has never worked at a job with the traditional eight-hour day. With Mr. Shepp, on weekdays Glenn worked from 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM. Saturdays were even longer, from 7AM to midnight. For these six days a week, Shepp paid him \$6. Having learned from his family, especially his father, about the importance

of community service, Glenn also took a two-week job at the Henry County Fair in the summer of 1937 for which he received no compensation. As Glenn puts it, “just to help out,” he worked as a “watchman” (or what we call today a “security guard”). That good deed ended up leaving a lasting impact on Glenn, and not in a positive way. Planks surrounded the racetrack on the fairgrounds, acting as a fence around the outermost lane. Glenn estimates the wooden boards measured about two feet by twelve feet. One day he ran under some of the planks, and they fell on his back. Today, Glenn believes that injury may have been the beginning of a chronic back problem. Glenn lived in Mount Pleasant for less than two years. In the early summer of 1938, Mr. Shepp wanted his son Bob, a student at Wesleyan College, to work at the family store during Bob’s time between the summer and fall semesters. Glenn thus lost his job through no fault of his own.

Rather than look for another position, Glenn left Mount Pleasant. He “spread his wings,” both figuratively and literally. Emma’s youngest child decided it was time to leave the comfortable home Emma had made for herself and her children. Family ties factored into Glenn’s decision. He moved to the Minnesota town of Albert Lea where his brother Max lived. With a cardboard suitcase in his hand, he walked from his mother’s boarding house to U.S. Highway 218. From there he hitchhiked north to Albert Lea, right across the Iowa-Minnesota border. The journey took only one day since Glenn was lucky enough to find just two drivers who allowed him to ride with them on two different legs of the trip. The move to the new state proved to be a significant one for Glenn.

His four years in the most southern part of Minnesota, where it bordered Iowa, shaped the rest of his life. It was there that Glenn learned how to fly. As a consequence of this, he received a pilot’s license from the federal government’s Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA) that he carries with him even today. Additionally, the move to Albert Lea proved crucial to Glenn’s life because while living in that community he became involved in a federal government aviation program, and the military tapped him for World War II service. Without Glenn’s decision to leave Mount Pleasant and venture out on his own, his dream to become a pilot might not have been realized to the degree that it was, if at all. Mount Pleasant did not have an airport. The closest one was in Burlingame, which Glenn could have reached by train. However, that would have added another expense in addition to the cost of flying lessons. And it was in Albert Lea that Glenn found a very well-paying job that allowed him to afford flying lessons. Even if Glenn had stayed in Mount Pleasant, and learned how to fly an airplane at some other Iowan town that had an airport, he certainly would not have become involved in two historic aviation programs sponsored by the federal government, the Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP) and the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs). Both of those opportunities grew directly out of his stay in Albert Lea. By packing up his suitcase and hitchhiking to Minnesota, Glenn significantly changed his life forever.

Albert Lea would have impressed anyone who had grown up on a farm. It was a much larger town than Mount Pleasant, with a population of just over ten thousand people. It served as the government seat for Freeborn County. Albert Lea, named after a man who surveyed the area in 1835, was built on low hills surrounded by two lakes. More than a few companies contributed to the businesses that employed Albert Lea’s

population. Two large gas-stove factories, a meatpacking plant, and a fish hatchery boosted the town's economy. The greatest revenues came from Albert Lea's diary and oil co-operatives that together generated a million dollars worth of business each year.⁵ Max had urged Glenn to come to Albert Lea, but he was single when he did that. Before Glenn left Mount Pleasant, Max married an Albert Lea woman, Ruth. When Glenn arrived in Minnesota, he thus moved in with not only his older brother, but also his new sister-in-law. Max and Ruth rented an apartment above a store. It was as wide as the store itself, with eleven-foot ceilings. Glenn had his own room where he slept on a cot. He paid no rent since his brother knew that Glenn intended to send a large portion of his wages to their mother.

Glenn first worked in a factory owned by the American Gas Machine Company that produced heating stoves used not to cook on but to warm homes. The graveyard shift earned him \$18 a week. He left that position after about two months for a much more lucrative one at the Johnson Laundry where he picked up and delivered dry-cleaning. At first, the laundry owners paid him a fixed salary, the same amount that he had earned at the stove factory. But Glenn soon negotiated a salary for himself based on commissions. He put in long hours, delivered on special requests from his customers, and treated his clientele with respect. Glenn's workdays ran from 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM on Mondays-Fridays. While his Saturdays also began at 7:00 in the morning, he might work until 8:00 or 9:00 at night. Every third Sunday he delivered and picked up laundry at the Hotel Albert. For all of this labor, Glenn brought home \$45-\$55 a week. In comparison, Glenn cites a top weekly salary of perhaps \$35 for a manager in a retail store. Or as Glenn puts it, his commission at the laundry paid him a salary that was 300% higher than a typical one of \$16-18 a week. A dutiful and caring son, Glenn sent almost half of his paycheck to his mother in Mount Pleasant.

With more money than he had ever had, Glenn pursued a childhood dream. On February 1, 1939, a cold winter's day, he borrowed Max's car and drove to Austin, Minnesota, about twenty miles from Albert Lea. The town had an airport, which Albert Lea did not have. Glenn paid \$8 for a one-hour flying lesson in a Piper Cub, a small, light airplane. The airport manager, Marcelas King, took him up on that very first ride. Glenn remembers that King was not happy about Glenn's request for a flying lesson since it meant more work for him. As the only employee on the job that day, he had to pull the plane out of the hanger. The Cub had no heater, so King may have also been upset at the thought of climbing to an even colder, high altitude. Once airborne, Glenn remembers to this day how he felt "perfectly at home" in the sky. At one point in the hour's lesson, King turned the controls over to Glenn. Glenn was so interested in the experience of flying that he did not notice how cold it was. On that February day, the Iowa farm boy realized his dream to fly.

Over the course of the next months, Glenn took weekly flying lessons, but not from King. His instructor, Ernest Evans, was a former top executive of the American Gas Company where Glenn had briefly worked following his arrival in Albert Lea. After a dispute with the employees' union, Evans left the company. He started a collections agency. Flying became his hobby. In the nearby town of Glenville, Evans rented a strip of

land, about thirty-forty feet wide and over thirteen hundred feet long, from a local farmer. It became Evans' private runway for takeoffs and landings in his small Taylorcraft plane. Crops grew beyond the edges of the field, but the farmer kept the piece of land Evans used well mowed. After qualifying for an instructor's license, Evans sought out students. He approached Glenn early in April 1939, having heard about his Austin plane ride. Evans offered to give him lessons, one hour a week for \$8 an hour. Glenn became his first student. Evans enrolled two more young men in the weeks after he signed up Glenn. Glenn proudly points out, "I flew when there were not a lot of pilots." In fact, in the area

surrounding Albert Lea, only two other men held a CAA pilot's license. Even though Glenn still lived with Max and Ruth, he kept his flying lessons a secret from them. Glenn knew that if he told his brother what he was doing, Max would mention it to their mother. Glenn was not sure how Emma would react to the fact that her



Glenn at Glenville, MN, 1939

younger son was flying in an airplane thousands of feet above the earth. He thus decided not to share the news with the family. Evans picked his student up at 5:00 AM. After a one-hour lesson, Glenn arrived home early enough to leave for his job at the laundry before Max got up. Due to the north-south position of the "runway" Evans rented from the farmer, Glenn learned at the very beginning of his flying career how to take off and land in cross-winds. Like other pilots, Glenn wore a long scarf around his neck to protect it from glass shards in case the windshield broke. Imagine the excitement Glenn felt as he practiced circle eights over the intersection of two country roads, flying just two hundred feet over the earth. It took Glenn about three months under Evans' tutelage to log in the eight hours of flight time required before a student could solo. Glenn reached that number in June 1939. On the twentieth, he soloed as his instructor looked on approvingly. Once Glenn landed, Evans certified his student's logbook to indicate that Glenn had successfully flown alone, taking off by himself and landing afterwards. He also handled all of the aeronautical demands that came in-between. Under CAA guidelines, however, Glenn still needed twenty-seven hours to qualify for a private pilot's license.

The summer of 1939 saw Glenn working part-time on the weekends for Evans at his flying school, which had no commercial name and still operated out of a well-mowed grass field. (In time, Evans called his small business the Freeborn County Flying Service. Over seventy years later, Glenn still had his shop coat with the school's name and logo embroidered on it. It hung in the closet of his study. While stained with oil and dirt, the coat is a tangible example of its owner's sense of history.) Glenn sold tickets for plane rides and gassed up the Taylorcraft. He also washed and waxed it. Instead of a salary, he received flying time. A special, lifelong relationship developed between the two men. As Glenn describes it, "He took me in like a son." Glenn saw similarities between the father he had lost at age five and his flying instructor. Fred Miller and Ernest Evans came from humble backgrounds yet rose to prominent positions within their communities. Glenn also describes both as "progressive men." If Fred Miller had lived longer, like Evans, he

too would have understood the importance of the new field of aviation. Certainly Evans not only understood its significance, but he also worked to advance aviation's possibilities. Late in 1939, his advocacy of flight found an outlet in a new federal government program, the CPTP.

Seven days after Glenn soloed, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed into law on June 27, 1939 a Congressional act to train thousands of civilian pilots. It became known as the CPTP.⁶ Although the military aggression of Japan and Germany threatened to move nations toward another world war, the CPTP was born more out of the New Deal's economic and educational goals than any military considerations. In fact, the Army and Navy were naturally suspicious of any training program they did not control, especially a civilian-based one, as was the CPTP.⁷ The program possessed economic, educational, and military goals. Economically, it fit into New Deal attempts to stimulate areas of the economy. Specifically, the CPTP hoped to assist entrepreneurs known as "fixed-base operators," men such as Mr. Evans, who provided flying lessons. Under the legislation Roosevelt signed, the thousands of pilots trained would be taught in privately owned flight schools.⁸ Advocates of the program also envisioned it as a way to stimulate the light plane segment of the aviation industry that had been negatively impacted by the Depression (more privately licensed pilots meant more of a potential market for small aircraft).⁹ Educationally, the CPTP also aimed to broaden public education by introducing young people in high school and college to the world of flight. The program published textbooks and curriculum guides that used aeronautics to teach children about science, geography, and even social studies.¹⁰ Lastly, the CPTP envisioned graduating tens of thousands of young men. Possessed of a pilot's license, they could in theory be drafted into the United States military if, or when, the country became involved in another war. In contrast, the Army Air Corps had been certifying only about two hundred air cadets each year.¹¹ In this aspect, the CPTP reflected what some civilians in the federal government saw as a need to strengthen the national defenses.¹² That need became even more pressing when a world war broke out in Europe in September 1939, with Britain and France at the forefront of the Allied nations and Germany and Italy at the head of the Axis Powers. Overall, the CPTP became "the first full-scale, federally funded aviation education program" in American history.¹³ The "progressive" Ernest Evans, who promoted flying whenever he could, wanted to be a part of it. When he received a CPTP contract to train pilots, he in turn brought Glenn Miller into the program. For Glenn, his participation with the CPTP turned out to be his first involvement with a historic federal government aviation program.

Students in the CPTP were to be primarily drawn from colleges and universities. For the "ground school" component of the curriculum, the program used as some of its instructors members of the faculty at those institutions. Local flying schools certified by the CAA taught the flight training component. Administrators at participating academic institutions recommended local flying schools to the CAA. That agency drew up contracts with the schools and aviation instructors. Like other New Deal programs, the federal government subsidized the ground and flight programs.¹⁴ As the year 1939 drew to a close, the CPTP enrolled over nine thousand students at four hundred and thirty-five college and universities.¹⁵ In the next year, those numbers increased. One of the

institutions that participated in the CPTP was Albert Lea Junior College. Ernest Evans knew the Dean of Social Science, Clair Jordan. Having read about the CPTP, Evans approached Jordan about his flying school and the college becoming part of the program. Albert Lea's community college and the owner of its only flying school thus became partners in the CPTP beginning in the summer of 1940. Glenn points out, with pride, that Albert Lea and Evans taught the first three CPTP classes in that area of the Midwest.

In May 1940, right before the partnership officially began, Glenn logged in the last of the twenty-seven hours of flight time he needed in order to qualify for a private pilot's license. It had been more than a year since he took his first airplane ride back in February of 1939. Glenn explains that in good-weather months, a person trying to accumulate flight time might average only one hour up in the air every two weeks. Winter made it almost impossible to record any flying time. A federal inspector from the CAA watched Glenn pilot Evans' Taylorcraft over the Glenville farming strip on May 16th. The inspector sent in paperwork to Washington, D.C. Weeks later Glenn received his pilot's license--number 73942--from the CAA. That same month, Glenn quit his job at the laundry to work full-time for Evans. As Glenn puts it, his mentor was "programming my life." In the months when Glenn had worked for Evans part-time, not for money but for flying time, Evans proved instrumental in helping Glenn accumulate the hours he needed to qualify for a CAA license. But Evans had much more in mind for Glenn aside from a pilot's license. He probably saw his protégé as a junior partner in the CPTP venture, a very junior partner, but nevertheless a partner. Having Glenn work for him full-time was another step in grooming the Iowa farm boy for a career in the air. In accepting Evans' offer, Glenn left a well-paying position where he averaged \$45-\$50 a week for one with the fixed weekly salary of \$15.

While some might see the career move as an illogical one considering the economics of it, it made perfect sense to Glenn. The job with Evans gave him the opportunity to fly on a regular basis. And Glenn's full-time position with his mentor gave Evans a certified pilot he could draw upon as he began instruction with the first group of fifteen students. In another step to prepare for the program, Evans realized that the field he rented at Glenville would not suffice for the CPTP. He rented a larger one west of Albert Lea from a farmer, Mr. Ruble. Evans moved his hanger and airplane to the new airstrip. Before the first CPTP class began, Evans also traded in his Taylorcraft plane for an Aeronca Chief. After the first class graduated, Evans bought a second Aeronca to expedite the flight training. Glenn washed as well as waxed the planes; he also did light maintenance work on them as needed. The first Albert Lea CPTP class began in the summer of 1940; two other classes followed it. Evans and Glenn flew with students in those two classes even in the winter months. In place of wheels, skis were attached to the planes. Evans bought a Cletrack, a tractor that resembled a Caterpillar, so Glenn could smooth down the airstrip and remove snow drifts. In a nod to the Minnesota cold, Glenn drained the oil at the end of each working day in the winter months, returning the oil to the engine when the plane was to fly again. In addition to these responsibilities, Glenn scheduled the students for their flying time. He spent time in the cockpit with some of them, too.

Altogether, Evans oversaw three classes of students. Glenn was his only employee. Together, the “father-son” team taught the fifteen students who enrolled in each of the three classes. (Evans used his influence at Albert Lea’s junior college to get Glenn into some courses there so that officially he could be a student in the CPTP. Glenn did not need the flying instruction, but as a student at the college, he could take some of the ground school classes taught by college instructors. In addition to those courses, Glenn recalls enrolling in some General Education classes such as one in psychology. He attended Albert Lea for one semester, from 1940-1941.)



Evans’ airstrip at the Ruble Farm

Only one of the fifteen CPTP students was a woman, Jean Hearn, who Glenn believes was the only female to apply for Albert Lea’s CPTP. CPTP guidelines allowed one woman to participate in the program for every ten men.¹⁶

As Evans implemented the program, Glenn assisted him when it came to teaching the students how to fly an airplane. Each CPTP student needed at least eight hours of flight instruction before he or she could solo; once the person accomplished that feat, the student still needed to log in twenty-seven more hours to qualify under CAA regulations for a private pilot’s license. In those thirty-five hours, an aspiring pilot shared the airplane’s controls with Evans, or sometimes Glenn. While Glenn possessed a private pilot’s license, he did not yet hold one from the CAA that certified him as an instructor. Evans, however, recognized Glenn’s natural teaching ability. He clearly explained concepts, detailing not just aeronautical principles but also explaining why planes responded in a certain way to an action on the part of the pilot. In other words, Glenn pointed out not only what happened but why it happened. His easygoing demeanor put others at ease. According to Glenn, with fifteen students, Evans carried the maximum class load allowed under CPTP guidelines. He was able to handle such a large number because Glenn assisted him in more than one way. Evans finessed the issue of how Glenn could help to teach students when he had no instructor’s license by having him fly with some students as a “safety pilot.” In that role, Glenn identified for the student what he or she was doing wrong, offering suggestions as to how the problem could be corrected.

In addition to his role as a safety pilot, Glenn served in one other capacity in the Albert Lea CPTP program. The curriculum required seventy-two hours of ground instruction. Glenn, who possessed what he calls “practical knowledge” in the field of aerodynamics, taught some ground school classes such as one in plane maintenance. Faculty members at Albert Lea Junior College oversaw other courses such as those in navigation and meteorology. With the college enrollment that Evans had engineered for Glenn, he was able to sit in on, at no cost to himself, some of the ground school classes taught by science professors. Since flight instruction occurred in the daytime, ground instruction courses were taught at night, from 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM. Recall that Glenn either taught some of the basic ground school classes or attended others offered at the college. As such, his workdays were extremely long ones. They began when Glenn arose at 4:30 AM. He arrived at the airport by 5:00 AM. His day was not over until 9:00 PM

when ground school classes dismissed. Glenn arrived home about 9:30 PM. Remember, too, that Evans paid him only \$15 a week for his time. But money was not the issue. Glenn maintained such a schedule because it allowed him to pursue his childhood dream to fly.

In the same months when the CPTP came to Albert Lea, Max's company transferred him to Kansas City, Missouri. This forced Glenn to find new living accommodations. He located a basement room to rent from the local barber and his wife, George and Jen Flannigan. Glenn had to now pay rent, a different arrangement than the one he had with his brother. The Flannigans charged \$8 a week for the room, but since Glenn shared it with another man, his rent was only half of that amount. The sum still totaled sixteen dollars every four weeks out of a monthly salary of only sixty dollars. And Glenn had expenses outside of rent. He did not eat with the Flannigans. Glenn's breakfast consisted of just a sweet roll and coffee. He bought a mid-morning lunch and another sweet roll in the afternoon. Glenn regularly ate his dinners at a Chinese restaurant. For thirty-five cents, he enjoyed soup, a main course, and dessert. Glenn observes that he had no social life in this period because he had no money with which to go on dates or to attend parties.

In spite of the seventy-two hour ground school requirement, a CPTP student completed that demand quickly in comparison to the second aspect of his or her training, the flight instruction. Students sometimes could not do an hour everyday simply because Evans only had two airplanes for fifteen students. They also had college classes to attend as they pursued their General Education, undergraduate courses. And as Glenn points out, one hour of flight time really translated into two hours because whether Evans or Glenn flew with the students, a teaching session occurred as the instructor discussed the flight plan for that day with the young man or woman. After the flight, the two went over the details of what had transpired during the time up in the air.

Just months after Glenn became involved in the CPTP, the federal government passed the first peacetime draft in United States history. The war in Europe had been going on for a year. American advocates of military preparedness pushed the legislation through Congress in September 1940. The government required all men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five to register for the draft. On October 16th, over sixteen million men did so at 6,443 draft boards throughout the country.¹⁷ Glenn signed up at one in Mount Pleasant, Iowa. Each local draft board drew on those registered to fill the quota of men it received. Prominent members from the community sat on the board. Usually it did not need to draft all of the men enrolled from the nearby towns to meet its quota. Also, boards granted exemptions, due to religious affiliations for example, or it granted deferments if men worked in jobs related to a war industry. Glenn identifies the head of the draft board for the Mount Pleasant area as Charlie Rogers, the editor of the local newspaper. Rogers still believed in what would soon become a dated view of what determined victory in wars--he put the greatest value in the infantry. He failed to grasp the significance of air power, a new factor in modern warfare. If Glenn received a notice to report for military service from the Mount Pleasant board, he is positive it would have meant service in the infantry. In the first year or so of the draft, Glenn does not remember

any such notification arriving in the mail. Eventually, in spite of Rogers' prejudice, the draft board granted Glenn a deferment because of his work with the CPTP in Albert Lea.

While not officially a military program, the CPTP was associated with the armed forces because of the program's goal to train tens of thousands of pilots, some of whom could potentially become Army and Navy aviators due to their CPTP training. Glenn distinctively remembers an Army major who regularly visited Evans' school. This man reviewed the CPTP expenses Evans submitted and evaluated the progress of the Albert Lea program. The officer always came in civilian clothing and made no reference to his rank in conversations he had with Evans and Glenn. The military clearly had a vested interest in following the progress of the CPTP, but it could not do so openly without arousing suspicions, especially among those isolationists or noninterventionists who did not want the United States to again become involved in a world war. Throughout 1940 and 1941, civilians remained in control of the CPTP.

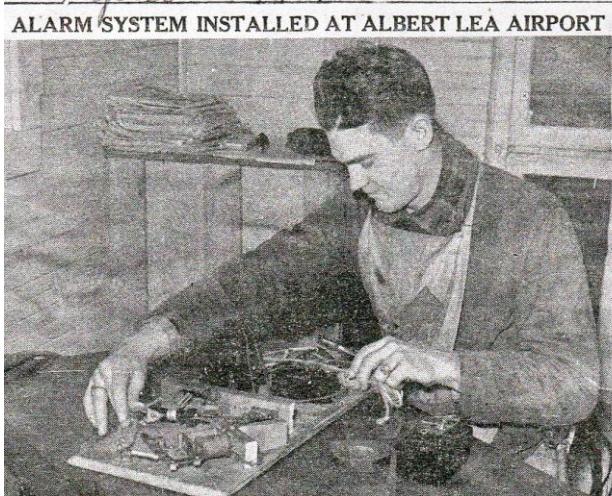
In 1941, while still involved with Evans' flying school, Glenn worked towards a CAA commercial license that would allow him to apply for a job at one of the major airlines. Such certification required two hundred hours in the air before the CAA test could be taken. Glenn estimated he needed \$500 to help him pay for flying time and living expenses. At first he asked his father's brother, Sam Miller, for a loan. Sam was an Indiana medical doctor. He had put one of Glenn's cousins through dental school. Glenn thought it was "a long shot," but if his uncle helped one nephew, Glenn reasoned there might be a chance he would help another one. Uncle Sam, however, refused Glenn's request. Decades later, Helen remembered this incident. She included it in her brief memoir. According to his sister, Uncle Sam told Glenn, "Better ones than you have tried and failed." Helen recalled this story in her writing because her husband Jake always felt bad that Glenn had not asked them for help. While Helen and Jake did not have the \$500, they did have a good credit record at the local bank. In fact, when Max and Ruth moved to Kansas City, Jake borrowed \$500 for them to use as a down payment for a house. Max repaid his sister and brother-in-law in just one year. Helen believed she could have gotten the money from the bank for Glenn, too. But Glenn hesitated to ask his sister for the \$500, feeling that she and her husband had enough financial concerns to deal with. In the end, it was Glenn's mother who helped him move forward even more with his dream. Emma mentioned Glenn's predicament to her old friend Margaret Summers who offered to loan Glenn the \$500 at a 4% interest rate.

Albert Lea Junior College and Ernest Evans' third CPTP class in the early months of 1941 proved to be their last. A vacuum company that had received a federal government contract to move toward war-related production offered Evans an executive position. The company wanted Glenn's mentor to head up its financial department. Evans closed up his flying school. Since Albert Lea had no other pilot licensed by the CAA as an instructor, the college's third CPTP class became its last. (Glenn held a license, recall, as a private pilot only; an instructor's certification required additional work.) Glenn found a new job at an electric shop run by a Mr. Bailey. The small business had secured a contract to wire a new Coca Cola bottling plant. Even though Glenn did not hold an

electrician's license, he knew the field so well that the owner chose him to wire the new building and not a licensed electrician who also worked for Bailey's company.

On December 7, 1941, the life of every American dramatically changed. The Japanese attacked the United States Pacific fleet based at Pearl Harbor. Glenn remembers with great clarity where he was when he heard the news. He was standing on Broadway, in front of Bailey's Electric. A radio in the window carried news of the attack. Glenn recalls his reaction as one of, "Oh, boy, this is it. I'm going to get involved." The very next day, President Roosevelt addressed a joint session of Congress to request a declaration of war against Japan. Due to a treaty between Japan, Germany, and Italy, within days the United States became involved in World War II. Like so many other young American men, Glenn went to military recruitment offices. He applied first to the Coast Guard. After explaining to the recruiter that he already possessed a pilot's license, the Coast Guard representative told Glenn that his application would be sent to Washington. Weeks passed. As Glenn waited for what he hoped would be orders to report to a Coast Guard base, he continued to work at Bailey's Electric Company.

He also spent as much time as he could at the Albert Lea Municipal Airport. He held no job there, but Glenn loved just being around the planes and flying when he could. Fear of sabotage by foreign agents pervaded cities in the United States regardless of their size. The Minnesota National Guard held the responsibility to guard the airport. Glenn became friends with one of the men, a Mr. Stieler, who did not relish walking the grounds in the cold hours of the late night and early morning. Applying technical skills Glenn possessed since childhood, skills that had been fine tuned during his time with Evans and Bailey's Electric, he created a security alarm system for the airport. It operated on two storage batteries. All of the hangers were connected to the system. Any entry through a window or a door without permission of the guards triggered an alarm. An attempt by an intruder



to cut one of the wires in the system also set off the siren. Albert Lea's newspaper, the *Evening Tribune*, featured a picture of Glenn and the alarm system's control board in its April 2, 1942 edition. Emma proudly glued it into a notebook she kept on her younger son. After waiting a few months to hear from the Coast Guard, Glenn tried to sign up as a pilot in the Navy. The recruiter promised Glenn a commission as a second lieutenant. As Glenn puts it, however, the Army got to him first.

Glenn's certification by the CAA as a commercial pilot early in 1942 might have brought him to the attention of the Army Air Corps as it sought more flight instructors. In mid-1942, CPTP administrators moved to militarize their program to a much greater degree than it had been. As a step in that direction, the CAA and the Army Air Forces

(AAF) agreed that the CPTP would train pilots in the reserves as flight instructors.¹⁸ Clearly, the military was now looking at the CPTP as a source from which to draw instructors. Although he anticipated orders from the Coast Guard or the Navy, it was the Army that grabbed Glenn. He received orders to go to an airport in Waterloo, Iowa owned by the Livingston brothers. In Waterloo, Glenn took some classes taught by civilian instructors. The Army Air Corps paid for additional flying time. Under its direction, Glenn received CAA certification as an instructor in June 1942. He now held three certifications from the federal government--one as a private pilot, one as a commercial pilot, and one as an instructor. Glenn spent the next few months taking more flying courses at Waterloo. In September, the Army Air Corps sent him to Kelly Field in San Antonio, Texas to be trained by the Army as an instructor for military aircraft. Once he graduated from this San Antonio program, he was Army-certified to teach air cadets. His stay at Kelly Field proved to be a brief one. At the end of September, the Army transferred Glenn to Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas where he trained the first women who flew American military aircraft. But both the women and Glenn officially worked as civilian employees. Regardless of his classification, this assignment afforded Glenn a prominent role in a second historic federal government program, the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs).

¹ Information on Glenn Miller's life after his 1935 high school graduation to his 1942 departure for Texas is taken from conversations between Glenn and the author over the years from 2005-2011.

² The Federal Writers' Project's *The WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa* lists the population of Mount Pleasant as 3,743 (Ames, Iowa, Iowa State University Press, p. 523; 1986 reprint of the 1938 volume). As testimony to his keen memory, Glenn correctly recalled the population of Mount Pleasant some seventy years after his 1936 move to that city.

³ Federal Writers' Project, *The WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa*, pp. 523-524.

⁴ See Ibid. for the population of Iowa City and the enrollment at the State University of Iowa, pp. 264 and 268 respectively.

⁵ This portrait of Albert Lea is taken from the 1985 Minnesota Historical Society Press reprint of the 1938 *The WPA Guide to Minnesota*, p. 413.

⁶ Dominick A. Pisano, *To Fill the Skies with Pilots, the Civilian Pilot Training Program, 1939-1946* (Chicago, 1993), p. 55.

⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 3.

¹² Ibid., p. 82.

¹³ Ibid., p. 3

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 76-77. CPTP increased the number of female pilots from 675 in 1939 to almost 3,000 by July 1941.

¹⁷ David Kennedy, ed., *The Library of Congress, World War II Companion* (New York, 2007), p. 163.

¹⁸ Pisano, *To Fill the Sky*, pp. 128-129. At the end of 1942, the CPTP underwent a name-change that reflected its more open military stance; it became the War Training Service (WTS).

Glenn and others who served in the Army as pilots during WW II identify themselves as veterans of the Army Air Corps. (Glenn's Honorable Discharge is from the Army Air Corps.) But there is often confusion regarding the use of two phrases for the WW II years-- the "Army Air Corps" and the "Army Air Forces." From its beginnings in 1907 as the Aeronautical Division of the U.S. Signal Corps, the United States air forces have undergone several organizational and name changes. From 1926-1941 it was known

as the Army Air Corps. In June 1941 it became “a subordinate element” of the newly created Army Air Forces. Because the Air Corps “had been established by statute in 1926, its disestablishment required an Act of Congress, which did not take place until 1947.” [In 1947 the Air Force was created as an independent branch of the United States Armed Forces.] From March 1942-September 1947, “the Army Air Corps continued to exist as a combatant arm, and personnel of the Army Air Forces were still assigned to the Air Corps.” “The Air Force in Facts and Figures,” *Air Force Magazine*, May 2009, p. 25.

The War Years: Instructor and Co-Pilot

Glenn Miller served on the Home Front during World War II in a unique capacity. The Army assigned him to its Air Corps branch, but not as an enlisted soldier. Instead, Glenn carried out orders he received first as a civilian in the Civil Service and then as an unassigned member of the Air Corps Enlisted Reserve.¹ He was under the control of the military yet not officially in the military. In all probability, the special aviation skills Glenn acquired accounted for the interest the Army Air Corps showed in him. The CAA certified him as a private pilot, a commercial pilot, and an instructor pilot. Glenn's flight log recorded hundreds of hours in the air. He also had



a history of teaching others how to fly, most notably in his work with Ernest Evans and the CPTP program in Albert Lea, Minnesota. Early in World War II, the Army thus took Glenn and used him to teach others how to fly. He spent his last year and a half of service as a pilot with American Airlines, which fell under the control of the military during the war. Millions of his countrymen and women also served on the Home Front. Yet few performed their duties while holding such an ambiguous status as Glenn's. The vast majority of Americans served either as civilians or as members of the armed forces. Glenn Miller fell somewhere in between those two categories.

After the Army oversaw Glenn's certification as a flight instructor in Waterloo, Iowa, it ordered him to report to Kelly Field in San Antonio, Texas. He received those orders, and traveled to Texas, as a Civil Service employee. Glenn is quite clear in his memory on that status. Because of this classification, Glenn had to provide for his own transportation to Texas. The Army did not offer him a ride on one of its military flights to an Air Corps base in the San Antonio area. Glenn traveled by train to Texas, a ticket that he paid for out of his own pocket. After saying goodbye to his mother in a quick trip to Mount Pleasant, Glenn headed south. During World War II, with the country's full mobilization for the war effort, freight trains had the number one priority on the tracks that crisscrossed the nation. As such, railroad authorities pulled the passenger car Glenn rode in off to a siding more than once as he made his way south. After he arrived in San Antonio, he took a taxi to Kelly Field, five miles from the city. As with the train ticket, Glenn paid for the taxi ride on his own.

Kelly Field is identified today as the "oldest, continuously active air base in the United States Air Force."² First used by the military in World War I, it became one of the few air fields the government kept open after the war. In 1922 the Army designated Kelly Field as the site of its Advanced Flying School.³ In time, Randolph Field, seventeen and a half miles outside of San Antonio, overshadowed Kelly Field. Dedicated in 1930, Randolph Field spread over a large tract of land about two square miles in size. Randolph served as home to the Army Air Corps' primary training (PT) and basic training (BT) flying schools.⁴ By World War II, the air base received the nickname, "the West Point of the Air" as it trained pilots who hailed from civilian life, the Regular Army, and the West Point Military Academy. Those who made it through Randolph's PT and BT went on to Kelly Field for advanced training (AT).⁵ Given the Army's need for pilots, the military history of the San Antonio area, and Glenn Miller's background in training aviators, it is understandable that the former Iowa farm boy found himself at Kelly Field in the fall of 1942.

Glenn estimates that between thirty and thirty-five civilian flight instructors arrived at Kelly Field that September of 1942. He remembers that he got there first, however. As such, his appearance created confusion. Glenn gave the copy of his written orders to report there to an armed guard at the main entrance to the field. Military orders for a civilian assigned to an Army installation perplexed the guard, even though Glenn explained that he was there to teach air cadets how to fly. The guard contacted an officer for direction. The officer, in turn, was as mystified as the enlisted man as to what to do with Glenn. But the orders out of Washington D.C. were clear--Glenn Miller, a civilian Civil Service employee, was assigned to Kelly Field. The officer read that and granted Glenn admittance to the base, sending him to the military barracks where he could grab a cot. Over the next days, Glenn and other arriving civilian instructors attended ground school classes where they watched aircraft identification movies and performed calisthenics.⁶ They also "marched, marched, marched," as Glenn puts it. The civilian instructors stayed in the barracks for a little more than a week. Suffering from a severe sunburn, Glenn spent a few of those days confined to bed. During this time, the military at Kelly Field verified that the instructors would remain, at least for now, civilian employees. They thus received orders to vacate the barracks. An officer told the instructors to find a spot in the tent city that had sprung up on the field.

The accommodations there failed to impress Glenn. Each tent housed four cots. Since September signaled the end of summer and the beginning of fall, the evenings were cold. The Army did not give out enough blankets to keep tent city residents warm at night. Glenn, ever inventive, laid newspapers under his blanket as an added layer of insulation, much to the displeasure of the sergeant who oversaw his tent. He also aroused the ire of a certain lieutenant, nicknamed "Lt. Wolf" by the civilian instructors because he acted so "uncivil" towards them, as Glenn characterizes it. Glenn thinks the officer was very unhappy with his assignment to oversee the civilian instructors. Like all pilots as America entered World War II, the lieutenant wanted to fly combat missions in either the Pacific or European theater. Training cadets to do so was a poor consolation prize. Teaching civilian pilots, in turn, to train military cadets would have been even further down the list of desirable assignments.

Glenn upset Lt. Wolf even more when he lodged a complaint about the meals served in the mess tents. Glenn noticed that the food did not taste as good as the meals he had eaten when he briefly stayed in the barracks with the regular military. In his words, Glenn "nosed around," trying to understand the difference in quality for the same food at the same base. He discovered that the Army mess staff served residents in the tent city food leftover from meals given to the soldiers who lived in the barracks and ate at those mess halls. Glenn reported his discovery. While food in the tent city improved once the cooks served fresh meals, Glenn's role as a "whistleblower" earned him the lieutenant's enmity.

If his housing and eating accommodations were not bad enough, Glenn admits to being rather "dismayed" at the Texas climate. The environment appeared to be so dry in comparison to Iowa and Minnesota. The sun "shining all day" confused him, too. When he flew in the skies over the Midwest, Glenn used the sun to verify what direction he was flying in. But in the next weeks when he flew out of Kelly Field, Glenn felt disoriented, so much so that he used his compass to get back to the field. The air base itself resembled the Glenville field in Minnesota

where Glenn had taken his first plane ride in February 1939. He even describes Kelly Field as “one big open field,” with no hard-surface runway. Pilots simply took off in whatever direction they wanted to, north, south, east, or west. Glenn did that during his time at Kelly Field. Soon the high command at the air base verified with Washington D.C. the role Glenn and the other civilian pilots were to play in training cadets. After that, some officers took all of them out to a plane parked on the field. As Glenn recalls, “We were given one ride and...[told], ‘Okay now, here’s the book...go out and learn how to instruct [be]cause you were instructors before. Go out and practice...’ And that was our training at Kelly Field.”⁷

Glenn, of course, took every opportunity he could to “practice.” Such exercises meant more time in the air. Glenn characterizes Kelly Field as “a big square mile of dust and sand.” And one day, those elements almost led to Glenn being “washed out” of the ambiguous training program he was a part of. Glenn took off at the same time as a parade passed by the field. He noticed the line of cars. Some were convertibles, “but I didn’t pay any attention...I opened the throttle and a big cloud of dust [appeared.]”⁸ A general who was part of the festivities later tried to find out who had created the disturbance. Luckily for Glenn, no tower stood on the field from which a controller could identify his plane. And since Glenn flew away from the general, that high-ranking officer could not read the numbers on the plane’s tail.⁹ Lt. Wolfe asked questions in an attempt to identify the pilot, but he was unsuccessful. Glenn thinks it was mere luck that saved him from being kicked out of the training program that day.

The month Glenn spent at Kelly Field failed to be a positive experience. During his brief time there, the Army did not issue Glenn any uniform so he clearly stood out among the population at the base. Surrounded by men in military attire, he simply wore overalls when he attended ground school or when he flew. And even though the Army sent him to Texas to be a flight instructor, Glenn did not teach any cadets at Kelly Field. In October he received orders to report to Avenger Field outside of Sweetwater, Texas, not far from Abilene in the central part of the state. For more than one reason, most prominently the way the military treated the civilian instructors, he looked forward to his transfer. Glenn knew that his orders indicated he would train cadets at Avenger Field. What he did not know was that most of them would be women.



Glenn took this picture of Sweetwater from his room at the Blue Bonnet Hotel.

In respect to population, Sweetwater had about the same amount of residents in 1940 as Albert Lea (between 10,000 - 11,000), but its culture was quite different. Glenn remembers Sweetwater as a “western cowboy town.” Economically, it was a major shipping center for the local cattle ranchers. The mining of gypsum deposits in the years before Glenn’s arrival expanded Sweetwater’s economic base. Two oil refineries, sheep ranching, and cotton crops

further diversified the town.¹⁰ Certainly it did not resemble or feel like the Midwest in which Glenn had been born and raised. He remembers with a smile conversations he had with “the locals” about cattle raising in Iowa versus Texas. Glenn astounded people in Sweetwater when he mentioned that the Miller farm might put twenty steers on twenty acres, with enough grass to

feed the small herd. Texans explained to Glenn that their twenty cattle would roam one thousand acres. It took that much land to sustain the cattle with grass. The area around Sweetwater simply did not have the quality of grazing land the Midwest did.

Glenn was not the only Civil Service instructor from Kelly Field to be transferred to Avenger Field. Three others accompanied Glenn--Loris McElyea ("Mac"), "Click" Rowe, and Jack Reinhart. When they arrived in Sweetwater, they stayed at the Blue Bonnet Hotel. Soon, however, the four found a house to rent on the outskirts of town. Empty at the time, the friends moved in right away. They drove together to Avenger Field, about three miles outside of Sweetwater, where other civilian instructors were also arriving. In May of 1942, when Glenn was working on his instructor's license in Waterloo, Iowa, the War Department leased the original field as a training base for the Army Air Corps. It paid the city a symbolic fee of one dollar a year for use of the site. The field had been a small municipal airport, but the city of Sweetwater turned over an additional nine-hundred and twenty acres to the government to expand the airport that had been in operation since the late 1920s. Since the title "Municipal Airport" was no longer appropriate, the local newspaper arranged a contest to rename the field.¹¹ Emotionally, the spring of 1942 proved to be a hard one for Americans. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, that brought the United States into the war, had happened just months before. Almost three thousand of their countrymen had been killed there. Casualties increased even more as the Japanese advanced throughout the Pacific, seizing the Americans territories of Guam, Wake Island, and the Philippines. The Japanese wounded, killed, and took as prisoners of war thousands of members of the United States military. From January to early May, Americans in particular followed the defense by United States forces of Bataan and Corregidor in the Philippines. Against overwhelming odds, however, Bataan fell to the enemy in April and Corregidor in May. It is no wonder that "Avenger Field" became the winning entry for the airport's new name.

Some classes graduated before Glenn arrived there in October. The first class was a group of British Royal Air Force cadets.¹² Glenn believes some Chinese cadets also were also taught how to fly American planes before he arrived in Sweetwater. When Glenn showed up, however, the students were drawn primarily from the American Army Air Corps. The armed forces organized flight training in all of its branches around three stages--Primary Training (PT), Basic Training (BT), and Advanced Training (AT). Instruction in each stage took about two months. One stage was taught at one airfield. Students thus trained at three different air bases before they received their wings. From May of 1942, when the Army acquired Avenger Field, until February of 1943, when the mission of the training base changed dramatically, only PT was taught at Sweetwater.

A private company based in Houston, Aviation Enterprises, Ltd., supplied civilian instructors to the Army Air Corps at Avenger Field. Glenn, in essence, directly worked for it. Aviation Enterprises issued his paycheck, a portion of which he sent to his mother in Mount Pleasant, continuing a habit he had followed since he left home for Albert Lea four years earlier. Kenny Friedkin, one of the executives in Aviation Enterprises, rode with each of the civilian instructors upon their arrival. After his ride with Glenn, Friedkin complimented him on his ability to clearly explain aspects of flight when asked to do so. With Friedkin's approval, Glenn began teaching air cadets how to fly.

Glenn developed an egalitarian teaching style. He believes that the relationship between an instructor and a student should not be that of a superior/inferior. Rather, he thinks the two should interact more as equals. Glenn feels that such an arrangement allows students to be relaxed; they felt free to bring up questions in a comfortable atmosphere. Glenn asked students to call him by his first name and he did the same with them. He is rightly proud of the fact that he never became angry at a student or swore at one, as some other instructors did. One entire class of cadets did, however, severely taxed Glenn's patience in his first months at Avenger Field.

As it turned out, the first group he taught proved to be the most annoying class he ever had. Each civilian instructor oversaw the training of four students in a class. One of Glenn's four was a cadet in the Army Air Corps. The other three, however, were Academy graduates from West Point. They wanted to fly in the sky as pilots instead of serve on the ground as infantrymen. As officers, they stood before Glenn as lieutenants or captains. They expected Glenn to stand at attention before them and to salute them. Glenn refused to do so, pointing out that he was a civilian. Not about to be rebuffed, the West Point graduates made another demand of Glenn. The airplane used in PT training had a crank engine. Students were to turn the crank in order to start the engine, then jump into the cockpit and take off. The three West Pointers wanted Glenn to turn the crank and start the engine for them. Glenn explained that students were to do that on their own, not the instructor. In addition to these demands, the West Pointers made it clear that they did not intend to take orders from Glenn or any other instructor. While the Air Corps cadet graduated, the other three in the class did not. The West Pointers left Avenger Field without their wings, returning to the infantry. Glenn was teaching his second class of air cadets when the mission of Avenger Field radically changed. Beginning in February of 1943, the Army transferred all of the male students at Avenger Field to other bases to complete their PT training. A new group of trainees were on their way to Sweetwater. They would dramatically alter life at the air field and in the nearby town. The students were members of the newly created Women Airforce Service Pilots, the WASPs.



The women arrived in a community that Glenn describes as "a dead town, nothing ever took place." According to Glenn, the town newspaper carried little news of the world outside of central Texas unless a Texan was the subject of the story. Even news of World War II focused on stories of state residents. Glenn read the Fort Worth/Dallas papers for global news of the war unfiltered through a regional prism. When radio was the main medium of mass communication, Glenn seldom turned one on because the local stations broadcast productions about Texas. Glenn passed his spare time in various ways. He wrote letters to his mother. In some of them, Glenn put her mind at ease regarding his church attendance. He told her he went to the Sweetwater Episcopal Church when his work schedule permitted it. (Instruction occurred even on Sundays. Glenn characterizes it this way--"If the sun was out, you went and taught the students.") He and other instructors hung out regularly at the drug store located inside of the Blue Bonnet Hotel. Since Sweetwater was a "dry town," meaning no alcohol was sold within city limits, drinking at local bars was not an option. Residents of Sweetwater, including the civilian instructors, did drink liquor, however. A railroad that stopped in town carried passengers about twenty-five miles away to Big Spring, a "wet town" where alcohol could openly be purchased and

consumed. On Saturday nights, Glenn and his three housemates hosted a party at the home they rented. They served liquor bought in Big Spring. The instructors were not alone in enjoying the alcohol in spite of the dry law under which Sweetwater operated. Glenn points out that “everyone else in town had it.” Even restaurants discreetly allowed liquor both on and under their tables. The drink could stand on the table, with the bottle from which it came sitting on a shelf under the table, not easily visible. Unlike most of the other instructors, Glenn frequented just one restaurant in Sweetwater. He ate at the only one that did not have Mexican food. But it did serve french fries at every meal, a fact that explains why, to this very day, Glenn does not eat french fries. In his first months in Sweetwater, Glenn also went out at night, once a week, to a meeting of the local branch of the Order of Odd Fellows. An all-male, fraternal organization founded more than two hundred years ago, local members approached Glenn and other instructors soon after they moved to the community. Not all of the instructors joined, but Glenn did. He thinks he paid a year’s dues that fall, an indication that he believed he would be staying at Avenger Field for an extended time. The weekly meetings, attended by about twenty-five to thirty men, gave Glenn an opportunity to mix with the town’s residents, civilians like himself. Other social opportunities arose starting in the winter of 1943 with the arrival of the female trainees at Avenger Field.

Unlike women who served in the Army, Navy, Coast Guard, or Marine Corps, the WASPs were not officially part of the military. During World War II, branches of the armed forces justified bringing women into the military with a phrase that appeared on posters urging women to join—“Free a Man to Fight.” Women who enlisted in the Army became known as WACs (Women’s Army Corps), in the Navy as WAVES (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service), in the Coast Guard as SPARs (*Semper Paratus*-Always Ready), and in the Corps simply as “Women Marines.” The Army Air Corps, however, brought the WASPs into service as civilians. These women pilots freed male pilots for other assignments, including combat ones, by ferrying military planes from one base to another within the United States. They also towed targets for artillery practice by ground units. Some WASPs flew aircraft that had been repaired, and a small number even tested experimental planes. Like Glenn Miller, the military used the WASPs as Civil Service employees.¹³ The WASP program officially began in November 1942 when the first women arrived at an airport in Houston, Texas for training. From that fall through April 1944, one class began training each month. (A class could have anywhere from twenty-eight to one hundred and fifty women.) By the time the military disbanded the WASP program in December 1944, eighteen classes graduated. Applicants had to already have a private pilot’s license and thirty-five hours of flying time. Thousands of women volunteered, with 1,830 accepted. Of that number, 1,074 graduated. Although the program began in Houston, in February 1943 the Army Air Corps moved the WASPs to Avenger Field outside of Sweetwater. Aside from the first class that received its wings at the Houston Municipal Airport, the other seventeen classes graduated at Avenger Field.¹⁴ The WASPs made American history by being the first women to fly military aircraft, and Glenn Miller helped to prepare them to do that.

As with men selected to be military pilots in the Army Air Corps or Navy, WASP training was divide into Ground School and Flight School. At Avenger Field, Army officers and some civilians taught Ground School instruction. The women took classes in areas such as engines, the theory of flight, math, physics, navigation, instruments, meteorology, and Morse Code.¹⁵ Glenn remembers many of the WASPs openly stating their dislike of Ground School. It simply was not

what they had come to Texas for. The women were anxious to fly. That is what they volunteered to do and that was the part of their training they were most anxious to pursue. With the arrival of the WASPs in February 1943, Avenger Field became a unique Army Air Corps base. It was the only airfield that trained women pilots and the only airfield that brought all three levels of training--PT, BT, and AT--onto one field. Unlike male cadets, the WASPs progressed through all three stages of flight instruction at only one base, Avenger Field. In contrast to Ground School instructors, those who taught WASP Flight School were all civilians supervised by Aviation Enterprises. According to Glenn, the government paid the company based upon how many students it taught. In turn, Aviation Enterprises paid the civilian instructors. Glenn remembers his first monthly paychecks were somewhere in the neighborhood of \$400 to \$425. Around fifty men served as flight instructors for the WASPs. Most were young, but Glenn recalls one man, Fred Hight, who was about fifty-five years old. Glenn remembers being impressed by the fact that the Wright Brothers signed Fred's pilot's license.

Many, if not most, of the male instructors were not pleased with their new assignment to work with the women students. In all truthfulness, though, they were unhappy even before the WASPs arrived in Sweetwater. The civilian instructors felt disappointed with their job teaching male cadets. They wanted to fly combat missions overseas. Glenn confesses he felt that way. If he would have been given a choice, too, between an assignment as a fighter or as a bomber pilot, he would have chosen the latter. Bomber pilots flew in a multi-engine plane with more of a hope for survival if something happened to one of its two or four engines. Glenn, an extremely sensitive man, also explains his preference for bombers over fighters by pointing out that warfare became more personalized for fighters. They saw the enemy much closer up than a bomber pilot saw his target miles below him. The high altitude from which bombers killed the enemy masked the personal nature of warfare. As Glenn admits, "I would have liked to have flown bombers, but I didn't have a choice. Instructors were at a premium, and the military kept control of you."

The WASPs themselves picked up on the disappointment their instructors felt. An issue of *The Avenger*, a newspaper published by the students, reprinted an editorial from the Austin newspaper, *The Statesman*. The author, Gordon Fulcher, praised civilian instructors at air bases around his city, state, and nation. But he recognized that they wanted to be elsewhere--"Every civilian instructor knows this. He would rather be in combat than where he is. Rather? He would LOVE to be in combat, flying fast ships, lapping up a little glory for himself."¹⁶ In spite of the fact the instructors preferred to be elsewhere, they carried out their job as teachers at bases all over the country. Fulcher applauded their skill and patience. In reprinting this editorial, the editors of *The Avenger* signaled their agreement with the sentiments Fulcher conveyed in his piece. Yet if civilian instructors felt as if the war was passing them by with their assignments to train male cadets, they felt even more frustrated when female trainees became their students. In the mind of civilian instructors, teaching women students was even more unappealing than teaching male cadets. Many men did not think females should be pilots. Glenn remembers enlisted men and officers in the Army Air Corps at Avenger Field who did not hide their negative views on women flying military aircraft. As Glenn explains, the military felt that "the women were infringing on our territory [i.e., flying]." He recalls some civilian instructors who left Avenger Field so they would not have to teach the WASPs. The attitude many members of the military at Sweetwater held toward the women students reflected the prejudice Army men at Kelly Field displayed toward civilian instructors. Both they and the women trainees faced

discrimination by those who wore a military uniform. Because of this shared prejudice, Glenn certainly had something in common with the WASPs when they showed up at Sweetwater.

Glenn, however, did not share the resentment some military men and male civilian instructors felt toward the WASPs. In more than one way, Glenn's childhood and high school years prepared him for his role to teach female students. After the death of his father when Glenn was only five, he grew up surrounded by women. There was his mother Emma, his sister Helen (fifteen years older than Glenn) and another sister, Mildred (nine years older than Glenn). Due to the years between Glenn and his two sisters, Helen and Mildred acted as maternal influences on him. While Glenn's older brother Max also lived in the house, the six years between the two boys detracted from Max's role as a playmate. The female presence that pervaded his home life continued when Glenn stepped outside of the farm to attend school. The boy-girl ratio varied from year to year at the one-room schoolhouse, so at times he found himself surrounded even at school by females. Once Glenn moved on to high school, his class had many more young women than men; at graduation in 1935, only five men received diplomas out of fifteen students.

Glenn's lack of discomfort when surrounded by women does not mean, however, that he did not have some reservations when he learned of his new assignment. Glenn admits that at first he wondered if the WASPs really would be able to learn how to handle military aircraft. Such planes were bigger and heavier than anything the women had flown before. Additionally, the small, private planes they flew before their arrival in Sweetwater were all single-engine aircraft. Would they be able to handle multiple-engine planes? Glenn also acknowledges one other concern he had before classes began--would the WASPs be able to grasp the mechanics of flight and the theories of aerodynamics? In spite of these questions, Glenn never felt frightened of riding with a woman student. He had, after all, helped shepherd one, Jean Hearn, through CPTP back in Albert Lea. Up until Glenn's involvement in the WASP program, he had only flown with one woman, Jean. Now at Sweetwater, he faced not one female student, but an entire program of them.

As noted earlier, from its beginnings in November 1942 until its end in December 1944, eighteen WASP classes graduated with their wings. Glenn taught seven of them. He worked with the WASPs in two capacities. First, Glenn served as an instructor in PT and BT. This assignment lasted for about four months. In that time, Glenn worked closely with four students. He moved them through PT and BT. Once those students and Instructor Miller reached the AT level, Glenn received a promotion to check pilot. In that position, he became responsible for verifying that students who had worked with other instructors in PT, BT, and AT possessed the skills required to receive their wings. Flying with a civilian check pilot was, in a way, the second to the last exam WASP students had to pass. (The final one was flying with an Army Air Corps check pilot.) Even with this promotion, however, Glenn wanted to continue instructing students. So in addition to his responsibilities as a check pilot, he volunteered to teach two WASPs in each class at the AT level. Glenn taught an estimated eight AT students during his time as a check pilot. He did this in the mornings. In the afternoons, Glenn worked solely as a check pilot. Glenn spent his last eight months at Avenger Field in this dual role, still an instructor but also a check pilot. In his year at the air base outside of Sweetwater, Glenn worked closely with about twelve WASPs, four from his months as just an instructor and eight from his time as an instructor/check pilot. As

a check pilot, Glenn estimates that he signed off on about 25% of the WASPs who graduated during his time at Avenger Field, or about 150 WASPs.

A numerical and letter sequence identifies the eighteen WASP classes. It indicates the year in which the student received her wings, states that the trainee is a female, and specifies the order of her class' graduation within that year. Some of Glenn's earliest students were from 43-W-4, meaning they would graduate in 1943 if they successfully completed training, they were women pilots, and they would be the eighth graduating class in 1943. Graduating classes published a



yearbook that in size and content resembles high school or college yearbooks. The first pages showcase photographs of Jacqueline Cochran, a famous woman pilot who headed the WASP program, and the Army Air Corps staff at Avenger Field. Studio photographs of the graduates in their flight jacket, with a traditional white pilot's scarf tied around their neck, fill several pages. Names and, for many of the yearbooks, hometowns appear under each picture. The yearbook also includes pages of informal photographs taken by the students. Some volumes share poems, cartoon drawings, and recollections by the graduates. A dedication appears at the very front of the book.

Appropriately, students honored their instructors in the yearbook for Class 43-W-8. Glenn worked with some of the WASPs from that group as their instructor and check pilot. He must have smiled as he read these words--“To Our Instructors we dedicate this book. And also we dedicate to the service of our country all that you have taught us. We thank you for the standards of flying skill you have demanded. And we thank you for the encouragement given to attain those standards.” Yet in spite of the crucial role they played in the WASP program, little has been written about the instructors. Few WASP memoirs even identify the men by name, although that might be explained merely by the passage of time between the war and when, years later, some women wrote their stories.¹⁷ Photographs of the instructors appear in the yearbooks, but in group pictures that do not give their names. Glenn bought some of these volumes and kept them throughout the decades. For these four books, the number of instructors each class had varied from a low of forty to a high of sixty-five.



This photograph is from the yearbook for 43-W-8. The caption on the picture reads simply, “Instructors AT-6’s.” The names of the ten men are not given. Glenn is standing in the back row, the first instructor on the left.

Glenn, however, did not buy the yearbooks to remember fellow instructors. He wanted to recall students. At one point, years after the war ended, he put a checkmark next to the photographs of “his” students. These markings allow us to identify some of the classes and students Glenn taught as an instructor and check pilot. From 43-W-4, they were Ann C. Brennan, June L. Ellington, Mary J. Farley, Rosa Lea Fullwood, Virgie L. Jowell, Alice J. May, Gene Slack, Patricia L. Hanley, Virginia Hill, Mary Elaine Hines, and Catherine M. Houser. Similarly, Glenn

served as instructor or check pilot for the following graduates from 43-W-5: D. Gayle Bevis, Elizabeth M. Haas, Helen F. Hague, Betty G. Clements, Winifred Jean Livingston, Alice E. Lovejoy, Josephine A. Pitz, Marjorie T. Popell, Helen B. Porter, Nadine B. Ramsey, Lorraine M. Sterkel, and Virginia Streeter. For 43-W-8, Glenn worked with Ann Lincoln, Dori M. Marland, Marilyn Seafield, Iris K. Heillman, Doris I. Moffat, Elizabeth A. Starvrum, and Joalene Snodgrass. Effie M. Pratt, Donna M. Spellick, Jeanne E. Robbins, Helen Marie Skjersaa, Kathryn Stamps, Margot F. Reck, Marian Toevs, Marjorie Selfridge, Peggy E. McNamara, Helen J. Trigg, and Frankie B. McInerney. From 44-W-2, Glenn taught Elizabeth McKethan and Marie Michell. In spite of a rule against it, instructors sometimes dated students. Glenn went out with Marie Michell and Helen Hague during their time at Avenger Field.



Glenn's students would not have taken long to appreciate his easy-going manner. While other instructors wanted their trainees to address them with the title of "Mr.," Glenn allowed the women to simply call him by his first name, although one teased him with "Mr. General Miller." Before the WASPs arrived at Avenger Field, Glenn had addressed his male cadets by their first name and asked them to do the same with him. He continued this practice with the WASPs. As explained earlier, Glenn feels this familiarity helped to create a more egalitarian relationship between instructor and student. More than the manner of addressing each other, however, students would have felt relief at the way Glenn treated them. WASP memoirs share stories of instructors who lost their temper when trying to teach their students. Glenn believes that some instructors wanted the students to be afraid of them. WASP

Jean Hascall Cole (44-W-2) observes that while most of her fellow women trainees had no problems with their instructors, "there were a few men who either did not like instructing women or were just 'mean and ornery,' and who probably should not have been instructing."¹⁸ She detailed one who chastised his student, yelling at her to "take your Goddamn feet off of the Goddamn rudders."¹⁹ WASP Winifred Wood (43-W-7) recalls such language as being the norm, not the exception. She refers to the "thick skin" the trainees had to acquire, "impervious to 'God damns'...and the everyday speeches of 99% of the men."²⁰



Glenn's friend L.K. "Mac" McElyea believed that instructors naturally carried over to their female students the language they had used with their male students. As Mac recalled, "But there were some that had to learn...to watch their language because it's kind of a common practice...for some instructors...to use some pretty rough language on the girls. It did upset them..."²¹ Unlike other instructors, Glenn never lost his temper, and he certainly never swore at them. The combined WASP yearbook for the Class of 43-W-4 and 43-W-5 contains an informal picture of Glenn smiling broadly as he was climbing in or out of an airplane, with the caption, "My favorite instructor." Glenn thinks one of his students identified him that way because he never lost his temper, be his students male or female. The Iowa farm boy who dreamed at an early

age of flying identified with others who also loved piloting a plane through the sky. The fact that some of those aviators were women did not bother Glenn. As with the male cadets he taught at Avenger Field before the WASPs arrived, Glenn proved eager to share what he had learned about flying.

Before each one-hour flight with a student, Glenn first spent about thirty minutes on what he and the WASP would be doing once they were in the air. A similar discussion occurred on the ground after the plane landed as instructor and student went over what had happened during the flying lesson. Glenn learned from Ernest Evans back in Albert Lea to understand the aerodynamics of what happened in a flight and why it occurred. At Avenger Field, Glenn used that same approach with all of his students, male and female. Once airborne, Glenn sat in the rear seat, with the WASP in the front. The single-engine training planes all had dual controls. The airplanes themselves were identified with the level of training. For example, the Fairchild Primary Trainer, designed and manufactured by Fairchild Aircraft Company in Hagerstown, Maryland, became known as the PT-19. Once the student moved on to Basic Training, WASP instructors used the Vultee BT-13 or 15. Since Glenn moved up quickly to his role as a check pilot, he spent most of his teaching time the WASPs in a plane associated with Advanced Training, the AT-6s built by North American.

Once airborne, Glenn followed the same curriculum as the other instructors, but the trainees would have appreciated his gentle teaching methods as much as the knowledge he brought to the task. Recall that the WASPs all had a private pilot's license. Before their arrival in Sweetwater, they flew small, single-engine planes. Glenn's job, like that of the other instructors, was to teach the women how to fly larger, heavier aircraft, including some multi-engine planes. And, as it was often said, the WASPs had to learn how to fly the Army way. Glenn began the flight lesson by teaching the women how to handle the plane when they taxied the PT, BT, or the AT. Instructor and student would practice take offs in various wind variations. They might take off into the wind, into a cross-wind, or just into blasts of wind the plane could encounter. Since women entering the WASP program were to have flown at least thirty-five flight hours, much of the Primary Training should have been familiar to them. Glenn had one student who came into the program with 1,600-1,700 hours. She was such an excellent pilot that Glenn thought she could out-fly him. He recalls her as the best student he ever had. Glenn remembers another of his students, however, who fell at the opposite end of the spectrum. Upon questioning by Glenn, this WASP admitted that she only had one or two hours of flight time, even though her log book indicated the required thirty-five hours. Glenn explains that she, and some others, paid for hours in the air that they really never flew. Unprincipled flying instructors at private air fields just pocketed the money some of the women paid to "pad" their logbook.

When he taught flight instruction, Glenn believed that learning to fly straight and level was an important but often overlooked aspect of training. Students viewed such flying as "boring," to use Glenn's word. They failed to recognize the skill and work it took to keep the plane in a horizontal position. What students saw as much more exciting was making the airplane climb and turn. One of the most frightening lessons was the one on what to do if the engine stalled. Instructors, with their back-seat controls, purposely put the plane into a stall or spin to teach their students how to recover from such a situation. Glenn recounts the story of one of the students he had when he was a check pilot, Mary Farley. He could not get her to understand how to break a

spin in the AT-6. Glenn began one at around 6,000 feet. At 700-800 feet, Mary became "hysterical" and Glenn took over the plane. Upon landing, he did not show any frustration or anger. If Mary or other trainees made errors during the flight lesson, Glenn did not dwell upon their mistakes after the plane landed. With his characteristically calm manner, he simply told the student "things happen." As for Mary Farley, Glenn took her up again and went through the procedure of how to pull the plane out of a spin. They did this until she mastered the maneuver.

While in the air, instructor and student communicated throughout the flight. If the plane was a PT, they used a gosport, a flexible tube that went from the rear seat, where Glenn rode, to the front seat where the WASP sat. BTs and ATs used a radio. Glenn cautioned his students with a variety of phrases. "Watch your gauge and compass" referred to instrumentation that gave the pilot altitude, speed, RPMs, oil pressure as well as oil temperature, and, of course, location. "Take your feet off the rudders," Glenn warned the WASP; if she did not do so, the plane would lose speed and slip or skid. "Pull back on the throttle," Glenn urged his students; this had to be done to reduce speed when executing certain maneuvers or when landing. And regardless of



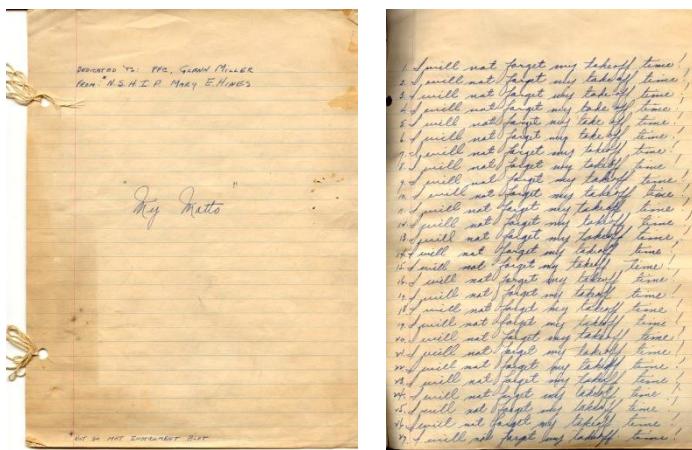
what exercises they practiced, Glenn explained that if the WASP felt uncomfortable doing it, she was probably not executing it correctly. As with take offs, instructor and student practiced different types of landings, such as how to land into the wind or how to land in a cross-wind. In all of the runway approaches, Glenn reminded the WASP to look down the runway, not at the ground.

In addition to his easy-going manner, Glenn's students would have come to value his abilities as an instructor. No one ever taught Glenn how to teach. It just came to him naturally. He explained clearly to students why planes responded as they did to various movements of the controls. Three traits Glenn possesses explain his talent in this area--his patience, attention to detail, and clarity of expression. Evans recognized these skills in Glenn. As such, he bent the rules and found ways for his protégé to help out CPTP students even though the CAA had not yet certified Glenn as an instructor. Once at Sweetwater, those in positions of authority also saw Glenn's special talents in conveying information. They moved him up quickly from an instructor status to one of a check pilot. If the performance of a WASP close to graduation still indicated some type of weakness in a particular area, Check Pilot Miller pinpointed what it was and offered suggestions before the final check flight with a member of the Army Air Corps. Students who were both "his" and also those he rode with as a check pilot would have come to appreciate the "tricks" Glenn used at times to help students grasp a point.

One of Glenn's PT students had a problem landing the trainer plane. She tensed up on the control stick, so much so that Glenn feared the WASP would "not trim the airplane on the approach," meaning the plane would become unbalanced. No matter how many times Glenn warned her about this, the student did not correct how she handled the stick. Glenn finally got his point across by using an unconventional adaptation for the stick. A rubber cover went over the stick, with a hole in the cover at the very top of the stick. Glenn put a new, unsharpened pencil through the hole. The thinness of the writing tool forced the WASP to use only her thumb and forefinger when moving the pencil, which in turn moved the stick. Glenn directed her to take off,

execute maneuvers, and land, using only the pencil. At first, the WASP "was a little frantic," as Glenn describes her. The take off was rough, "and the flying wasn't very steady," as Glenn recalls, nor was the approach. A second flight followed this one, again with the pencil attached to the stick. But in this second lesson, the student mastered a light touch to the stick, using only two fingers on it, just like she had used with the pencil. She now understood that she could control the plane with a gentle touch.

Glenn used another, more traditional approach to make a point. Teachers know that repetition can help students grasp an idea. Many recall the multiplication tables because as children they said them aloud, over and over again. A few times Glenn gave a homework assignment to a WASP that resembled a classroom exercise a teacher might demand in elementary school where a child had to write a phrase on the chalkboard board again and again. Glenn adapted that tradition with some of his students. Mary Hines (43-W-4), for example, had two problems. Radio stations at or near airports, or stations in line between two cities, transmitted a beam. Pilots used it to verify their course and keep them on it. Mary had difficulty correctly entering and leaving the radio beam. She confused the direction to be used in her approach. Glenn ordered Mary to write, two hundred times, "To enter beam turn left, to leave beam turn right!" Mary turned in the assignment on college-lined notebook paper. A string pulled through two punch-holes in the sheets held the five pages together. Mary tied the string into a bow, giving the completed assignment a feminine appearance. She had some fun with her



instructor in respect to the title and dedication of her small booklet. On the cover sheet, Mary entitled the pages, "My Motto," and she dedicated it to "PFC, Glenn Miller." She identified herself on the same page as "N.S.H.I.P. Mary E. Hines." On the very bottom of the sheet, Mary defined the letters for Glenn--"Not So Hot Instrument Pilot." Unfortunately for Mary, she had to turn in that type of assignment a second time. When students took off in their trainer planes, they were to record their take off time on a form

kept in the airplane. Mary kept forgetting to do that. Glenn thus had her write, again two hundred times, another reminder--"I will not forget my takeoff time!" While Mary tied together these pages with the same type of string and bow, she identified this second booklet simply as, "Theme No.2." Mary omitted the "N.S.H.I.P" title as well as her name. She wrote only Glenn's name at the top of the cover page. Mary probably felt confident he would know who the assignment came from.

As an instructor, Glenn understood that students needed not only aviation skills, but also self-confidence. He went to an unusual length with one WASP to insure that a mistake she made did not lessen her self-assurance. The incident occurred when Glenn was teaching her how to come out of a stall. A problem developed when the student would not put the plane into a complete stall; she simply slowed it down. As Glenn tried to explain the proper way to execute the maneuver, the WASP suddenly "went full forward with the stick." The plane jerked Glenn to

such a degree that the gosport, which had fallen under the seat belt latch, pulled up the latch. Glenn found himself being thrown out of the cockpit. As he realized where he was headed, Glenn turned his toes outward, catching himself on the longerons (he describes these as tubes that form the tail section). Glenn found himself lying on the back of the fuselage. He immediately pulled himself into the plane. Glenn and the WASP practiced a few more stalls before they landed. He never told her that her actions had temporarily ejected him from the plane, putting his life in danger. Glenn thought that if he had explained to her what had happened, she might lose some of her confidence, fearful that a future action on her part would hurt someone.

Glenn's rapport with the students put them at ease when they flew the all-important check flight with him. That was not the case with those who flew with other instructors. Students were nervous about the check flight. They knew that if they did something wrong, they could be washed out of the program. One of the WASPs wrote in the yearbook for 43-W-6, "Well how about that cold fever and those duck bumps at the mere mention of check pilot?" Dorothy Swain Lewis (43-W-7) once sketched a drawing of how WASPs perceived the check pilot--he had a leering, wolf-like face with threatening fangs that looked down upon a quivering student. The wolf wore goggles and a sign that identified him as a "check pilot."²² Each class had only four such pilots, with two flying in the morning and two in the afternoon. Glenn and the other check pilots unquestionably enjoyed the prestige and pay raise that accompanied their promotion. In his new position, Glenn not only certified students as ready for their final, military check flight, but he also certified fellow instructors as qualified to teach with what he calls "the heavier equipment," meaning the bigger planes. Like the students they taught, all of the instructors

started out at Avenger Field on the PT planes. Once a check pilot such as Glenn certified them, they moved up, as did their students, to BT and AT. While other check pilots sat around the hangar in the mornings, Glenn worked with the two students he had volunteered to teach in those hours. In the afternoon he went on the check rides with instructors who needed certification or with students who needed approval by a civilian instructor to qualify for the final check ride with a military pilot. Usually, Glenn averaged 80-85 flight hours each month. Many times, however, he put in more than one hundred hours working with instructors and students. He particularly remembers one month when he logged in 142 hours. Aviation Enterprises paid Glenn based on a set salary, however, not on an hourly rate. In his eight months as a check pilot, the company paid him a monthly salary of about \$500, a substantial figure at that time.



Glenn with Alice May (on his left) and Virgie Jowell (on his right). Both were 43-W-4.

Glenn rode with the WASPs twice to prepare them for the military check ride. Students, recall, spent about two months at each training level. In the eight weeks a WASP was in AT, she spent the first month getting acquainted with the plane, learning about its strengths as well as its weaknesses. Glenn rode with the student the first time in her second month of Advanced Training. Ever the teacher, on this initial ride Glenn watched his charge carefully, pointing out when necessary any areas where he thought the WASP could improve her performance. The second time he rode with her was the final, critical check ride. Usually, the Army check pilot signed off on the student if the civilian check pilot did so. Sometimes the military check pilot did

not take the student up if she had passed the flight-check with Glenn. Glenn tried to give the WASPs the same exercises the military check pilot would, thus, in a way, giving the students a heads-up on what to expect with the Army pilot.

In one rare instance, a WASP Glenn failed still graduated because the Army check pilot certified her in spite of Glenn's belief she was not qualified to graduate. As it turned out, she was the only student he ever washed out. When she took Glenn up, she failed to follow procedures in more than one area. The WASP did not, for example, fly the correct approach pattern to return to the airport. Glenn ordered her to try the approach a second time, but she still failed to adhere to the correct guidelines. Glenn remembers this check ride as the only time he came close to losing his temper with a student. As Glenn puts it, he "pink-slipped" her. The Army check pilot, however, took her up and passed her. Glenn believes the student "sweet-talked" her way to graduation. Her first assignment after leaving Avenger Field validated Glenn's assessment of her capabilities, or lack thereof. The WASP flew into Stockton, California with a plane she was ferrying from one air base to another. While taxiing, she ran into six planes. Furious at the damage done, the Commanding Officer at the airfield grounded all of the WASPs. According to Glenn, Cochran herself had to intervene to get the ban lifted.

About a month after he became a check pilot, the military changed Glenn's status from that of a Civil Service employee contracted by Aviation Enterprises to that of an enlisted man in the inactive reserves of the Army Air Corps. He had been working as a Civil Service employee



since his arrival in Texas in September 1942. In July 1943, however, his status dramatically changed. Glenn distinctively remembers a group of civilian instructors called into an office at Avenger Field. From the dates on his Honorable Discharge, this occurred on July 24, 1943, the "induction" date listed on the military document. A colonel explained to the instructors the Army was concerned that the draft boards where each man was registered might assert jurisdiction over them. If the boards did so, the instructors could end up in the infantry. First, though, would come weeks of boot camp, so even if the Army tried to order a transfer of the soldier into the Air Corps, months would be lost as the bureaucracy slowly processed the paperwork to allow the transfer. Almost any man could be made into a foot soldier in a short period of time. But not any man could be quickly transformed into a flight instructor. Pilots with a proven record of teaching aviation students possessed special skills that the military desperately needed. As World War II progressed, the air war proved more and more to be a determining factor in the ground war in the Pacific and the European Theaters. The civilian instructor played a crucial role in that air war. As Fulcher pointed out in his newspaper editorial reprinted in *The Avenger*, an instructor "can create 40 to 100 pilots, whereas he himself constitutes only one." But unless they were removed from the jurisdiction of their draft boards, instructors might be taken from the air war and put into infantry.

So on that date in July 1943, Glenn recalls the colonel telling the civilian instructors that the Army would contact their respective draft boards back home to notify those agencies that the men had been inducted into the Army Air Corps, but with an "inactive" status. A threat accompanied this announcement. The colonel warned that if any of the civilian instructors at Avenger Field refused the induction, his draft board would be so notified. Service in the infantry

would follow. Under the direction of the colonel, Glenn and others raised their right hand and were sworn into the Army Air Corps. Only one instructor refused to change his status, and the Army carried out its threat. According to Glenn, that man spent the entire war as a private in the infantry. Even with his “inactive” Army status, Glenn’s paycheck continued to be issued by Aviation Enterprises. It appears from Fulcher’s editorial that what happened to Glenn at Avenger Field happened to other civilian instructors at other air bases, too--“The civilian instructor has been placed on reserve status and kept at his post because he is doing a more important war job there than he possibly could do anywhere else.”

The inactive reserve status created misperceptions among the general public and even members of the military about the role played by men such as Glenn. Glenn remembers visiting his mother in Mount Pleasant during the sixteen months when he trained cadets and WASPs in Texas. After one such trip, Emma asked her son not to come back again when he had his next leave. Each time Glenn left after these visits, friends and neighbors asked her pointed questions as to why Glenn was not serving in the military. While Glenn performed the same job that Army flight instructors did, he was not recognized as being in the military. Even the uniform he wore on and off of Avenger Field illustrated his unique status. He wore the Army “tans” and “pinks,” but without any military insignias. (Glenn appears below, in the back row, fifth from the left.)

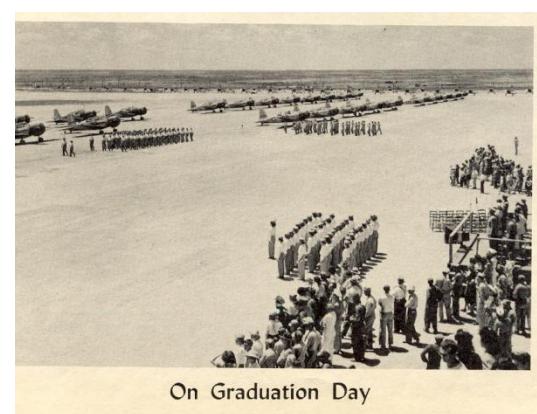


A clothing store in town carried the military apparel worn by the men and women at Avenger Field. In time, civilian instructors came to purchase their outfits there, too. The Army Air Corps did not require a uniform for this group at Sweetwater while Glenn taught at the base. But sometime in the winter of 1942-1943, Glenn and other civilian instructors began wearing shirts and pants they adopted as, in essence, their “uniform.” Glenn points out that because of the military’s demands upon the garment industry, new clothing was not readily available for people outside of the armed forces. That fact, combined with the coldness of the winter season, made the Army “pinks” a reasonable clothing option for the civilian instructors, who paid for them out of their own pockets. The Army used the word “pinks” to describe the clothing Glenn wore in the winter, although he describes it as more of a light grey. The outfit consisted of a high quality, long-sleeve, woolen shirt and woolen trousers. When the season changed, the instructors wore Army “tans” in the summer. The shirts could be either short-sleeve or long-sleeved. Glenn preferred the latter so he could button the sleeves. He rolled them up when the temperature climbed too high. Glenn bought a garrison cap, but he hardly wore it. Instead, he used a baseball cap, regardless of the season. From a distance, the civilian instructors wearing the pinks and tans

appeared to be in the military since the clothing was Army-issue. Yet the absence of any military insignias created confusion when Glenn and his fellow instructors traveled off base.²³ He remembers members of the Army stopping him and other instructors more than once when they visited a nearby city such as Fort Worth. Glenn simply stopped going to such towns to avoid the interrogations to which he had been subjected.

Wearing his Army-issued clothing, Glenn attended the first WASP graduation ceremony at Avenger Field on May 23, 1943. He recalls city officials saying a few words, but the most important speaker that day for the WASPs was Jacqueline Cochran, the woman behind the program. Glenn went to other graduation ceremonies, in part to see Cochran. The civilian instructors were not required to attend the ceremonies. According to Glenn, "just a handful" came. "Being single and having nothing else to do, I generally went to watch." Glenn stood during the ceremony. Those who organized the event at Avenger Field reserved no place of honor for the civilian instructors, although this was not the case for Army ground school instructors. They were given seats at the graduation ceremonies. As Glenn puts it, "We [the civilian instructors] really weren't that important."

One can argue with his conclusion. Certainly the WASPs understood who was responsible for their achievement. In the yearbook for 43-W-6, an unnamed women pilot on a page entitled "Memories" penned some thoughts about graduation day for her class--"Yes...I know we all remember how our breath was let out for the first time in six months...and we nearly burst with pride when those wings rested over our hearts...The real true feeling rang bells deep down within us...but all eyes were turned to the stars and stripes forever and to those who had cussed, pleaded, and prodded us on...Our instructors." If the Army officials who organized the ceremonies did not understand who should receive a major "thank you" on Graduation Day, the WASPs themselves did.



On Graduation Day

Glenn remained at Avenger Field for sixteen months, teaching first male cadets and then the WASPs. During that time, he thought often of the career he wanted to pursue in aviation--flying for American Airlines. It was the largest airline at the time, and that is why Glenn chose it over others. American began in 1929 as the Aviation Corporation. It soon acquired several small aircraft companies, becoming American Airways, Incorporated. In 1934, with a minor name change, the company became American Airlines, Incorporated. Three years later, the carrier's one-millionth passenger boarded one of its commercial planes. By the end of the 1930s, American was the number one domestic passenger airline in the United States.²⁴ Glenn first applied for a job with American in 1941. Ernest Evans knew the company's vice-president, Gage Mace. While Glenn had enough flying time to qualify for a position with American, he did not have the instrument rating to do so. In 1942, with more certifications from the CAA and a more substantial log book, Glenn contacted the airline again. Soon after that, however, the Army sent him to Texas. Instead of flying commercial passenger planes, Glenn trained men and women pilots at Avenger Field. After a full year in Sweetwater, Glenn sensed that the Army's need for his skills would soon decline. More and more cadets were graduating as pilots. At the same time,

an Allied supremacy loomed in the skies over the European and Pacific theaters, resulting in less of a need for aviators there. Glenn believed that the Army would soon have more pilots than missions for them.

In the third week of October 1943, twelve months after his arrival at Avenger Field, Glenn and his friend "Mac" drove to Fort Worth for an interview with American Airlines. The company decided it could use both pilots. At that point, bureaucracy dictated a drawn out process that had to be followed if Glenn and Mac were to leave their positions as Army Air Corps flight instructors to become pilots for American Airlines. Avenger Field fell under the control of the Gulf Coast Air Corps Training Center, based at Randolph Field. That entity oversaw cadet training at airfields throughout the Central part of the United States. Created in July 1940, the Training Center underwent a name change three years later. Just three months before Glenn and Mac went for their interview with American Airlines, the Army combined its technical and flying training into one agency, the Central Flying Training Command.²⁵ American had to write a letter to it stating the airline's intention to hire the two Air Corps Reserve instructors. The Central Flying Training Command, in turn, sent that letter to the War Manpower Commission (WMC) in Washington. Organized in April 1942, the WMC attempted to fulfill labor demands in both civilian and military areas. It distributed workers to various agencies to meet manpower needs.²⁶ Glenn distinctly remembers waiting almost four months for the three bureaucracies--American Airlines, the Central Flying Training Command, and the WMC--to process the paperwork approving his transfer from the Army Air Corps to American Airlines. Officially, the military "released" Glenn to the airline on February 1, 1944. The dates on his Honorable Discharge indicate that Glenn's unassigned reserve status in the Air Corps continued even when he worked for American; this guaranteed that the Mount Pleasant draft board could not call him up. January 1944 proved to be his last month in Sweetwater. It did not bother Glenn that he was leaving a job that paid him a monthly salary of about \$500 for one that paid about \$140. What was important to Glenn was the fact that he was following his dream to secure a career-track position that allowed him to fly as a professional pilot.

Together, he and Mac left early in February for New York City to begin training with American Airlines. First, however, they both had to get an instrument rating from a flying school in Fort Worth that contracted with American Airlines. The two drove there in Mac's Ford convertible. Glenn and Mac shared a rented room in the city. For three weeks, they attended Reed Pigman's Flying School which ran training sessions twenty-four hours a day in instrument flying. As it turned out, Glenn's one hour session began at 2:00 A.M. After that, the rest of the day was Glenn's to spend as he wished. American Airlines paid for their instruction. The two friends only had to cover the cost of their room and daily expenses. Those expenditures were somewhat offset by the fact that American put Glenn and Mac on the payroll in February when they began instrument training. After they received that rating, the airline also paid for their railroad tickets to New York City where they began Ground School. The train ride from Texas to New York proved to be a very comfortable one for Glenn since he traveled in a Pullman sleeping car, the first time he had ever used one. After one stop in Chicago, Glenn and Mac arrived in New York City where they reported to La Guardia Airport on Long Island.

In March and April of 1944, Glenn attended American Airlines' Ground School and Flight Training. The airline's Personnel Department gave them information on nearby homes where

families rented out rooms. They contacted a widow with two daughters and arranged to use one of her extra bedrooms. Located close to the airport, Glenn and Mac walked to work. In a role reversal of their job at Avenger Field with the male cadets and the WASPs, the two former flight instructors now became the students. First, they spent time in Ground School. Glenn recalls that a Ground School class consisted of twenty-seven men. Over the course of three weeks, for nine hours a day the future co-pilots studied airline procedures, meteorology, and Morse Code (the students had to be able to send eight words a minute). They also reviewed the maintenance and specifications of the plane they would soon help to fly, the DC-3 (the Douglas Commercial plane, Model 3). It carried twenty-one passengers. Once the men completed Ground School, they began Flight Training with the DC-3. As it turned out, Glenn and Mac finished this part of their education a week before the other students because of their flight experience at Avenger Field. While working with the WASPS, the two instructors became familiar with flying the UC-78, a two-engine airplane, as was the DC-3. That experience saved them from taking the last week of Flight Training. Captain Davidson, an instructor, flew with Glenn for his final check flight. He gave Glenn a 94% rating, a better score, according to Davidson, than some of the experienced airline captains could have received.

American Airlines offered graduates a choice as to which airline base the new co-pilots wished to fly out of--New York City, Washington D.C., Boston, Chicago, Nashville, or Burbank. With a childhood spent on an Iowa farm, and his early adult years in southern Minnesota, Glenn saw the first four cities as "too big." But Burbank, located in the Los Angeles area, appealed to him. Glenn had never been to California, a state that throughout its history has held as allure for people looking for a new start. Both Glenn and Mac chose Burbank for their base. Aside from commercial flying in the States, Glenn could have asked for an assignment to the military airline, Air Transport Command. During the war, American Airlines turned over half of its planes and accompanying crews to that agency for overseas assignments, primarily carrying troops and cargo to the various war theaters.²⁷ But Glenn understood the DC-3 to be the number one commercial plane at that time. He wanted to learn all he could about its abilities as a passenger airliner. As Glenn explains, he "wanted to stay with one plane and get to know it." Such knowledge would enhance his position at American Airlines and his ability to advance in the company.

The trip across the country to California gave Glenn a feel for what awaited him with this major career move. On the very night he received his West Coast assignment, Glenn departed for Burbank. He caught an American Airlines flight, piloted first by Captain J.C. Rose, bound for California. But the plane needed refueling and crew had to be changed. The itinerary, therefore, allowed for several stops along the way--Washington D.C., Nashville, Fort Worth/Dallas, El Paso, Phoenix, and finally Burbank. After the five stops and three crew changes, Glenn arrived in California about twenty hours after his flight left New York (approximately eighteen and a half hours of that was in-flight time).

Burbank was home to the main airport for the Los Angeles area. At its opening in 1930, it was named the United Airport after the company that built it, United Airports. Ten years later, Lockheed Aircraft Company purchased the airport and changed its name to Lockheed Air Terminal.²⁸ After his arrival in Burbank, Glenn connected with Mac, who had taken a different plane. As in New York, the airline's Personnel Department gave them a list of places for rent in

the area. The two friends took a room together again, although Glenn admits they moved several times that year. War restrictions that civilians lived with on the Home Front did not pose that great of a burden on Glenn. Aside from fruit and vegetables, the government rationed most food. Although he applied for and received a ration book, Glenn ate out most of the time. The government also strictly rationed gasoline. Authorities issued coupon books filled with stamps civilians used to purchase a limited number of gallons each week. But American Airlines gave its crewmembers additional stamps for gasoline since relying on public transportation to get to work at odd hours would be difficult (an employee might be asked to arrive at midnight or 5:00 A.M.). Glenn recalls buying a car within ten days of his arrival in Burbank. Owning an automobile gave Glenn more options as to where he could live. It also gave him an opportunity to meet with other American Airlines employees to socialize.

During his first year and a half with the airline, neither the Mount Pleasant draft board nor the Army bothered Glenn. He retained his Army Air Corps Reserve inactive status. With the war in Europe over in May 1945, the United States military prepared for a ground invasion of the Japanese homeland. Pilots were needed even less that summer than they had been when he transferred out of Avenger Field. As such, it is not surprising that Glenn received his formal separation papers, dated July 15, 1945, from the Army Air Corps. He did not have to show up at any military base to be discharged. The government simply mailed him the papers.

In that same first year with American, Glenn remembers that the airline could demand crews fly up to one hundred hours a month. Glenn recalls ninety-six being the average. The crew for the DC-3 consisted of only three people--a pilot, co-pilot, and a stewardess. There were no navigators or radio personnel. The captain assumed those responsibilities, although he could ask the co-pilot to assist him if he felt that individual was qualified to do so. Glenn flew for about

eight years as a co-pilot. His first route took him back and forth between California and Texas. After taking off from Burbank, the plane stopped in San Diego, followed by the Arizona cities of Phoenix, Tucson, and Douglas. After leaving this last town, Glenn only had El Paso left on his flight plan. After a layover there, Glenn reversed the itinerary and made his way back to Burbank. He always flew passenger flights since American Airlines had no cargo planes in its domestic fleet. Passengers tended to be members of the military; civilians flew only if a seat was available. From his salary of \$140 a month, American Airlines deducted \$18 for the purchase of a \$25 government war bond. Recall that when Glenn worked as a flight instructor at Avenger Field, he earned \$500 a month. But for Glenn, flying professionally was never about the salary. No, being a co-pilot was about flying itself.



And fly he did. Glenn stayed with American Airlines for the rest of his professional career. He flew the DC-3, 4, 6, and 7, as well as the Convair 240 and 990. Glenn also piloted the Boeing 707-123, 720, and 323. He is especially proud of the fact that he became the second captain in the United States to fly the DC-10. By the time of Glenn's retirement from American Airlines on September 19, 1977, his flight records indicate that over the course of almost thirty-four years with that company, he had flown 32,200 hours.

During and after his professional aviation career, Glenn attended some of the WASP reunions. He recalls being at the 1972 one held in Sweetwater; it marked the thirtieth anniversary of the WASP program, begun in 1942. Glenn also went to the fiftieth anniversary reunion in San Antonio. Clearly in the minority at such gatherings, he remembers that the instructors who came sat together at the formal dinners. Some seats remained empty at the small, circular table where the men ate. Glenn estimates five or seven instructors attended the reunions. The WASPs always greatly outnumbered the instructors at such gatherings. Over time, the women pilots understood the significance of their role as the first females to fly United States military aircraft. Today, Glenn points to the deep “respect” he holds for “the girls.” The WASP program made history, and Glenn played an important role in it. He knew that he had been part of an enormous step forward in the field of aviation for American women. Glenn also recognized, on a more personal level, that he helped his students become better pilots than they were when they arrived in Sweetwater. He deserves to be proud of his role as an instructor. With such an attitude, Glenn joined the WASP reunions when he could. He had been part of history-in-the-making. Glenn wanted to remember that collective moment with the WASPs, especially with those who had been his students.

When confronted with major decisions in his life, Glenn likes to say that he “looked toward the future.” Certainly in the early twentieth century, when Glenn was born and grew up on the family farm, Americans believed aviation would define the future. It would transform society, creating a veritable utopia. The ability to fly would result in more individual freedom and equality.²⁹ As a child, Glenn, of course, would not have understood any of this. What he did grasp was the heroic stature of those who flew airplanes. Pilots seemed to defy the laws of gravity as they soared above the earth. Glenn was almost ten years old when, in May of 1927, Charles A. Lindbergh flew nonstop between New York City and Paris, a historic feat. “Lucky Lindy” became front-page news, even in small rural communities like the one in which Glenn lived. He remembers that in his youth, adults he knew “looked upon pilots as an odd group of people.” They seemed to court danger. More than one aviator died trying to do what Lindbergh did. While the vast number of Americans traveled in a two-dimensional-world, pilots existed in a three-dimensional one.³⁰ People who drove wagons, automobiles, or trains moved forward, backward, and sideways. Those who flew airplanes moved in those directions, but they also moved upward and downward. Decisions made thousands of feet up in the air proved inherently more dangerous than those made on the earth.

Adults in Glenn’s family, who had lived through the first two decades of the twentieth century, saw planes as fragile. The front pages of newspapers carried stories of crashes. A ride in an airplane could put one’s life at risk. As one historian concludes, “Early aircraft...not only looked frail and dangerous but often were. With disheartening regularity their wooden frames collapsed, their controls jammed, and their engines failed.”³¹ Even though flying became less dangerous in the 1920s and 1930s as technology improved, older Americans recalled the dangers of earlier decades.³² It is not surprising, even in 1939, that Glenn kept his flying lessons secret from his family. It is also not surprising that his Uncle Sam Miller slighted Glenn’s interest in aviation. He, like Charlie Rogers in Mount Pleasant, clearly did not believe in the potential of air power, on an individual or national level. Still, as a child Glenn decided he had to fly. He wanted to be a part of the modern world of aviation. Twice while in his twenties, Glenn quit well-paying

jobs for ones that paid less because the new positions meant he could advance his childhood dream. First he left the Johnson Laundry where he earned about \$50 a week. His new job, as an assistant to Ernest Evans, paid \$15 a week. Then four years later, he resigned as a flight instructor at Avenger Field where he received a monthly salary of about \$500. From there, Glenn went to work as a co-pilot for American Airlines where he was paid \$140 a month. When asked why he did this, not once but twice, Glenn's reply spoke to his dream--"I looked toward the future." When he left his employment at the laundry to work for Evans, the money was not a major consideration for Glenn. With Evans, he could fly regularly and not have to pay for the hours in the air. While Glenn flew at Avenger Field as an instructor, it was not advancing his professional dream to fly for a commercial airline. Taking a substantial pay cut in a job that would eventually disappear as the war wound down meant little to Glenn. He correctly saw his future with American Airlines. When the opportunity presented itself, he applied for a position with that carrier, regardless of the pay cut it then represented. He was not looking at "the moment." He was looking "toward the future."

These pages recount the early life, from his childhood years through his twenties, of an Iowa farm boy who wanted to fly. When Glenn began working with American Airlines, he



reminisced with some of the more senior captains. He shared with them the story of how, as a child, he watched airplanes use the windmill atop his family's barn to verify their location. Some of those captains told Glenn that they remembered that windmill. They themselves had used it as a landmark while flying between Kansas City and Chicago. In a way, the windmill served as a reference point not only for the pilots, but also for the young boy who took direction from it. The windmill pointed Glenn's mind upward, enabling him to imagine a world that existed high above the ground. As a young man, he learned how to navigate that celestial world. Glenn Miller dreamed of flying, but unlike so many others who give up on their dreams, he achieved his.

¹ Glenn has an Honorable Discharge certificate from the Army Air Corps. It identifies his status as “Air Corps Enlisted Reserve, Unassigned,” with an induction date of July 24, 1943 and a separation date of July 12, 1945.

² <http://profit.50megs.com/kelly.html> (accessed January 15, 2011).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Information on Randolph Field is taken from *Texas, A Guide to the Lone Star State*, Compiled by Workers of the Writers’ Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Texas, (Texas, 1940); reprinted 1986 by Texas Monthly Press as the *WPA Guide to Texas*, pp. 446-447.

⁵ Of those who trained at Randolph, by 1940 only about 45% of the students graduated; the rest “washed out,” or failed to complete training in the primary and basic stages. Ibid., p. 447.

⁶ Transcript from *An Oral History* interview with Glenn Miller conducted by Dawn Letson and Elizabeth Snapp of Texas Woman’s University, September 10, 1992, p. 3.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Information on Sweetwater is taken from *The WPA Guide to Texas*, p. 557.

¹¹ Information on the history of Avenger Field is from <http://www.texasescapes.com/WorldWarII/Avenger-Field-Sweetwater-Army-Airfield-Texas.htm> (accessed January 25, 2011).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Jean Hascall Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II* (Salt Lake City, 1992), p. x.

¹⁴ The statistical information on the WASPs is taken from Cole, *Women Pilots*, pp. ix-xi, xiv.

¹⁵ This was the Ground School curriculum for a 1943 class. The *Sweetwater Daily Reporter* published a newspaper for the WASPs, *The Avenger*. The women themselves wrote the vast majority of the stories. Glenn kept some of the issues, which he kindly shared with the author. The Ground School Curriculum detailed above appeared on page 3 of the December 17, 1943 issue, in a story on the type of classes required in Ground School.

¹⁶ *The Avenger*, November 19, 1943, p. 2.

¹⁷ An exception is a detailed memoir by Winifred Wood (43-W-7), *We Were Wasps*. First published in 1945, Wood refers to her instructor, “Click” Rowe, by name throughout the book.

¹⁸ Cole, *Women Pilots*, pp. 27-28.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

²⁰ Winifred Wood, *We Were WASPS* (1945; 1978 reprint), p. 66.

²¹ Transcript from *An Oral History* interview with L.K. McElyea conducted by Dawn Letson and Elizabeth Snapp of Texas Woman’s University, September 10, 1992, p. 12.

²² Wood, *We Were WASPS*, p. 47.

²³ In time, civilian flight instructors who worked at Army Air Corps bases wore uniforms that displayed patches and/or wings to designate their instructional status. See Jon A. Maguire, *More Silver Wings, Pinks and Greens* (Atglen, Pa., 1996), pp., 309-310, 322-323, 325, 337.

²⁴ <http://www.aa.com/il8n/amrcorp/corporateInformation/facts/history.jsp> (accessed January 20, 2011).

²⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:USAAF_Gulf_Coast_Training_Center (accessed January 22, 2011).

²⁶ David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York, 1999), p. 620.

²⁷ <http://www.aa.com/il8n/amrcorp/corporateInformation/facts/history.jsp> (accessed January 20, 2011).

²⁸ <http://www.burbankairport.com/airportauthority/about-airport/history.html> (accessed January 23, 2011). The airport went through more name changes in the decades after the war--Hollywood-Burbank Airport, Burbank-Glendale-Pasadena Airport, and today it is known as the Bob Hope Airport.

²⁹ These are major themes in Joseph J. Corn’s concise but excellent survey on the first five decades of America’s fascination with flight, *The Winged Gospel: America’s Romance With Aviation* (Baltimore, 1983; 2001 reprint). See especially pp. 135, ix, x, and xiii.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 93. Corn points this out in one salient sentence, “Flying, in part because it demanded sensitivity to three dimensions rather than two, required special training and expertise.”

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., pp. 93-94.