

NASA HEADQUARTERS NACA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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The following document contains career highlights provided by Edith K. Spritzer for the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics [NACA] Oral History Project, sponsored by the NASA Headquarters History Office.

Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I would be privileged to not only witness, but play a part in an event of significant historical importance. THANK YOU NASA.

The [National Aeronautics and] Space Act was passed in 1958. I was over committed in community volunteer activities (Girl Scout Council Board, Girl Scout Leader, Boy Scout Den Mother, sponsor of a girls club at my temple, and secretary and publicity chair for the Hampton Roads Section, National Council of Jewish Women).

I decided to return to a full-time job (after a 15-year hiatus raising my children). I took a civil service exam, was called the next day and assigned as a GS-5 to the Flight Operations Division, NASA Space Task Group, to Chris [Christopher C.] Kraft and Charles [W.] Mathews (Chief) located in separate buildings, on the West Side of Langley Air Force Base. My office was next to Chris Kraft.

Before reporting, a full-field top priority security clearance was performed because of the duties of the job and handling many top security priority items.

The electric typewriter was introduced when I reported for work. I spent my lunch hour learning how to use the typewriter – fabulous. Obviously it has remained with me ever since. I still have a portable which my Dad gave me when I was in high school (1934). I now use my desk typewriter daily.

Chris Kraft was also the Mission Flight Director for the Mercury Astronauts. I was privileged to know all of them and was on the list of employees assigned to go to the Cape [Canaveral, Florida] when John [H.] Glenn made his historical flight.

Maxime A. Faget and Robert O. Piland were responsible for the preliminary design work and development testing on ballistic capsules. The McDonnell Aircraft Corporation was also concerned with the detailed design and development testing.

I was in the Mission Flight Control Center when there was a concern that a tile was loose on the capsule which might cause the capsule to burn on reentry, if it wasn't properly positioned to reenter with the blunt end forward, which was protected by a heat shield. NASA Headquarters officials called a meeting to discuss how to handle the situation. Chris advised it was critical to give him an immediate response to enable landing at the next landing area. When they failed to advise him, he ordered John Glenn to return, which was successful with no problems. It took a man of steel courage to make that decision.

The basic objectives of Project Mercury was orbital flight recovery of a manned vehicle and studying of man's capability in the environment of flight.

I was the first in my peer group (I am now 96) to start a paying job, which was most challenging. I transferred to the Langley Research Center in 1962 [when the Space Task Group moved to Houston, Texas] with the right credentials to move forward. I received 20 special achievement awards, including a NASA Special Achievement Award (with monetary award) for developing handbooks on Project Management and Flight Research Program Management (LHB 7121.1 and LHB 7910.1). My tenure was January 9, 1959 [GS-5] through retirement on May 1, 1991 [GS-12] as Head of the Directives and Forms Management Office.