

NEWS RELEASE

GENERAL DYNAMICS | ASTRONAUTICS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SAN DIEGO, Calif. -- Gordon Cooper, scheduled to be the nation's first astronaut to orbit earth for more than 24 hours, today made an inspection here at General Dynamics/Astronautics of the Atlas launch vehicle that will send him into space.

Cooper, a major in the Air Force, inspected the 71-foot long vehicle and signed a special Mercury seal on the shining stainless steel "skin" of Atlas 130-D when it was rolled out of the final checkout area prior to delivery to Cape Canaveral.

He is the first astronaut to view at plant site the Atlas that will launch him into orbit.

Participating in the inspection was Calvin D. Fowler, launch conductor for General Dynamics/Astronautics at Cape Canaveral, who will push the button next April to send Cooper on his way to 22 orbits. Fowler also was launch conductor for the flights of astronauts Scott Carpenter and Walter M. Schirra Jr.

Cooper also attended technical meetings with representatives of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the Air Force, Aerospace Corp., and General Dynamics/Astronautics. Discussions covered the Atlas 130-D and its role in the upcoming orbital flight.

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Inspection of the huge Mercury-Atlas "bird" was under the direction of Charles S. Ames Jr., General Dynamics/Astronautics vice president and program director for Atlas space launch vehicles, and Maj. Charles L. Gandy Jr., chief of Mercury launch vehicles for the Air Force Space Systems Division with headquarters in Los Angeles.

The Atlas will be trucked to nearby Miramar Naval Air Station where it will be loaded into an Air Force C-133B Cargomaster aircraft specially designed to transport Atlas vehicles.

Traditionally, one of the astronauts views first-hand at General Dynamics/Astronautics the Atlas to be used in manned flights before they are flown to Cape Canaveral.

Astronaut Cooper, 36, flew his own T-33 plane to Miramar to be present at today's briefing and inspection.

Cooper served as back-up pilot and technical advisor for astronaut Schirra. Astronaut Alan B. Shepard will be back-up pilot for Cooper's MA-9 flight.

Cooper was born in Shawnee, Okla., March 6, 1927, the son of Col. and Mrs. Leroy Gordon Cooper. While he currently resides in Houston, Tex., he calls Carbondale, Colo., where his parents have a ranch, his "home town." He attended primary schools in Shawnee before going to the University of Hawaii. Later he attended the Naval Academy Preparatory School. He was commissioned in the Army and then transferred to the Air Force.

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