



HE'LL PUSH THE BLAST-OFF BUTTON FOR COOPER
Calvin D. Fowler, 34, has launched two astronauts

Astronauts' Biggest 'Booster'

Button Pusher with Prime Job

BY PETER REICH

(Aviation Writer)

The man who will push the button blasting Astronaut Gordon Cooper into space is electronics engineer Calvin D. Fowler, 34.

Fowler is site manager and launch conductor for General Dynamics Astronautics, builder of the Atlas rocket that will propel Cooper aloft. He previously sent two other astronauts into orbit successfully—M. Scott Carpenter, on May 24, 1962, and Walter M. Schirra, on Oct. 3, 1962. Cooper's 22-orbit flight now is scheduled to begin Tuesday morning.

For the last 2 months, Fowler has been supervising the pre-flight inspection and checkout of Atlas 130-D, Cooper's vehicle, which arrived at Cape Canaveral, Fla., last March 18 from the General Dynamics plant in San Diego, Cal.

countdown about 8 hours before launch time.

Two hours before launch, the astronaut is sealed inside his spacecraft.

From that moment until lift-off, the safety of the astronaut is in Fowler's hands.

It is Fowler who makes the vital decision to continue or halt the countdown. It is he who makes the critical final decision to launch. And it is he alone — except for the astronaut — who can touch off the big orange solid-propellant escape rocket that will blast the astronaut's capsule clear of the big Atlas while it still is on the pad.

28 Vital Seconds

An automatic "abort sensing and implementation system" A. S. I. S. which can detect impending trouble, does not begin operating until the Atlas is at least 2 inches off the pad.

Fowler's moment of truth is 28 seconds long.

At 18 seconds before launch,

Fowler, 29.

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His Console Ready

While the Atlas was being erected at Complex 14 — the same pad used for all Mercury orbital flights to date—Fowler was responsible for all activities in the area.

On launch day, Fowler will sit at a console in a concrete blockhouse 750 feet from the pad.

The walls are 10½ feet thick at the base, with 40 feet of sand (for blast absorption) around them.

At the top of the blockhouse dome, the walls are 5½ feet thick and covered with 10 feet of sand. The sand is overlaid with a thin sheet of concrete.

Crew of 68

Fowler and his crew [two assistant launch conductors, 15 engineers, 40 technicians, and 10 inspectors] will begin a

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At 18 seconds before launch, he pushes the plastic button on his console that initiates the automatic sequence of events leading to ignition and liftoff.

In Instant Readiness

The automatic sequence involves an electronic check of each rocket system to verify readiness. If any system is not ready, the countdown is designed to stop automatically. But if it continues, Fowler has to be ready instantly to halt the progression himself by pushing another button.

Only after all five of the Atlas' rocket engines ignite, and the steel clamps that bind the missile to the pad fly back and permit the giant bird to thunder aloft, is Fowler's job done. That happens at "T plus 10"—10 seconds after ignition.

And by that time, he admits, he invariably is drenched with perspiration.

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