

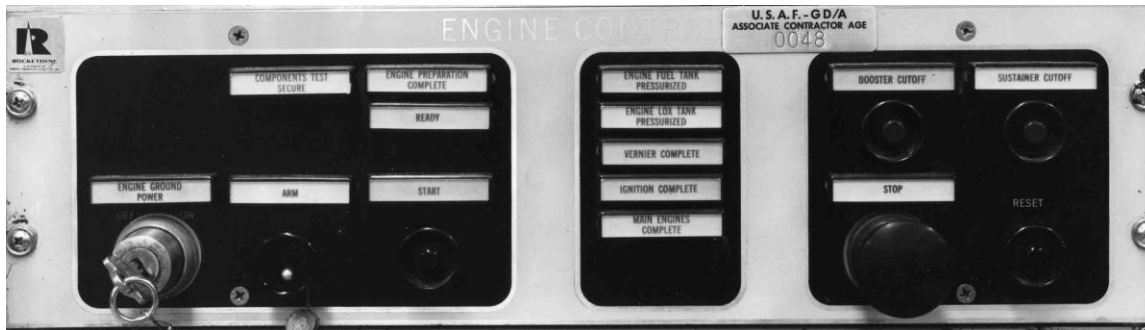
## 1.5 Atlas - John Glenn Launch Button

On February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1962 Tom O'Malley, the General Dynamics Complex 14 test conductor at Cape Canaveral leaned forward at his console and reading from his countdown script announced "All recorders to fast , T-18 seconds and counting .. Engine start" as he jabbed his thumb down on a push-button in front of him.



This button labeled simply as "Start" on the Engine Control Panel was a common innocuous momentary switch, about ½ inch in diameter and shrouded by a circular guard and somewhat overshadowed on the panel by the garish red oversize (1 ½ inch diameter) emergency "Stop" button. However that start button initiated a series of automatically sequenced steps that culminated 18 seconds later with the lift- off of John Glenn, the first US

man to orbit the earth in a successful flight that did much to restore the country's faith in NASA's manned space program.



Immediately after the launch crew had secured their stations and departed from the blockhouse, Jim Keatley, the blockhouse supervisor broke the seals and opened the back of the Engine Control Console. Working past the cluster of connectors that impeded his access he cut the wires and removed the start button – apparently at an earlier behest of Tom. He quickly squirreled the switch away out of sight and took a non-compliance discrepancy report on the missing switch – just in time. A short time later the responsible agency for the panel, Rocketdyne, sent out a technician to Complex 14 to remove the switch for their manager, Lee Solid, only to find the switch was no longer in the panel and no-one was sure where it was. The dust soon settled and the switch was subsequently replaced with a new item bringing the panel back to drawing configuration. A little later Jim Keatley slipped the switch to O'Malley – his assignment complete.

In due course Tom had the switch mounted in a wooden display trophy and kept it available for 'show and tell' for the next 47 years at his home in Cocoa Beach.

Today when you talk with Jim Keatley he will openly admit that the switch Tom pushed that day was the only one ever removed after a launch.

Subsequently he would just go to the spares in his desk, solder a couple of snipped wires to a switch and give it to the requester. To this day they don't know the difference.



Upon Tom's death in 2009 his wife, Anne asked me if she should pass this historic switch on to the Smithsonian. Upon reflection I realized that it might well get lost in the immense Air and Space Museum in Washington while its placement in the Astronaut Hall of Flame here in Brevard County would keep it close to the people who really valued it and facilitate its ready viewing.

However before anything could be done with the switch we had to authenticate its pedigree. I needed to produce some documentation that backed up the claim that it was indeed the button that launched John Glenn. So I wrote up the attached record that documented its history. I had Jim Keatley, still alive and going strong, sign off on the story of its removal from the panel. Paul Donnelly (shown below), the NASA Capsule Test Conductor who was Tom's opposite number in the blockhouse and finally Anne O'Malley who could certify its possession over the years, also signed off on it.

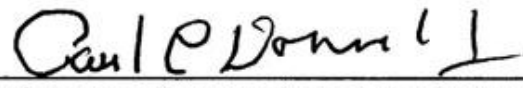


**ENGINE START BUTTON AUTHENTICATION**

I, Jim Keatley, certify that I directed the blockhouse monitor to remove the Engine Start button from the Engine Control Panel on the Test Conductor's console in the blockhouse of Complex 14 after the launch of Atlas 109D carrying John Glenn into orbit. This start button switch, p/n MS 25089-4F, manufactured by Allen Bradley, was subsequently presented to Thomas J. O'Malley, the General Dynamics Astronautics test conductor who had pushed it to initiate the Atlas launch on February 20<sup>th</sup> 1962. Paul Donnelly, the NASA Mercury Spacecraft Test Conductor, witnessed this event and the subsequent presentation.

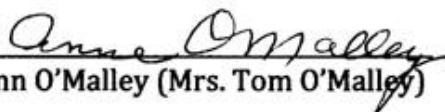
  
James H. Keatley, Assistant Foreman, Complex 14  
General Dynamics Astronautics

25 MAR 10  
Date

  
Paul C. Donnelly, Capsule Test Conductor, Mercury Program  
NASA

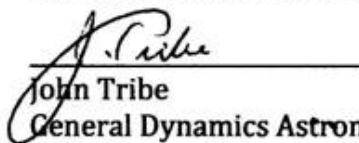
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I certify that the above switch was brought home by my husband and remained in his possession during his life. I retained possession of it after his death in November 2009.

  
Ann O'Malley (Mrs. Tom O'Malley)

3-16-10  
Date

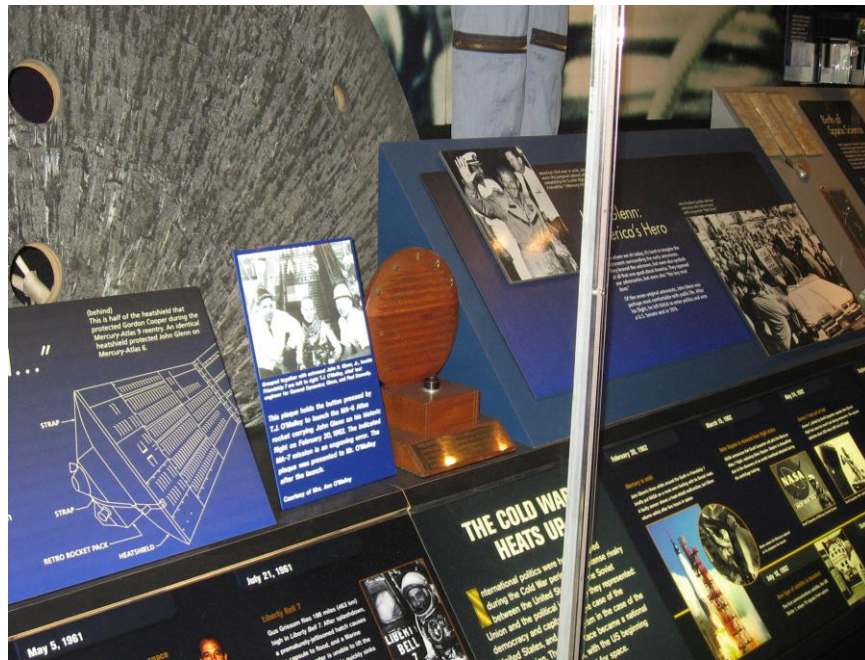
I collected the above data at the time that the O'Malley family wished to offer the switch for display and I certify its validity.

  
John Tribe  
General Dynamics Astronautics Propulsion Engineer (1961-64)  
NAA/Rockwell/Boeing (1965-1997), Chief Engineer  
NASA Docent (1997- )

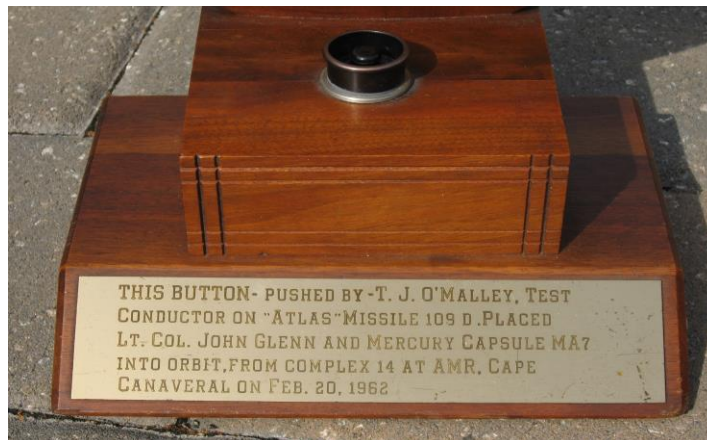
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Armed with this certificate I now approached NASA and Delaware North, the operating contractor for the Kennedy Space Center Visitors' Complex and the Astronaut Hall of Fame. They were delighted to have the switch for display and it was formally turned over by the O'Malley family to NASA in August 2010 and is now part of the John Glenn exhibit in the Astronaut Hall of Fame at the entrance to the Kennedy Space Center.



One additional correction was required to accompany the switch. When O'Malley had had the brass plaque on it made he inadvertently referred to the Mercury capsule as MA7. It was, of course, MA6.



Addendum November 15<sup>th</sup> 2016

In 2016 the Astronaut Hall of Fame was moved into the new Kennedy Space Center Visitors Complex as part of a new exhibit “Heroes and Legends”. Many of the personal items that had been featured in the old Astronaut Hall of Fame were not incorporated into the new exhibit and I reclaimed the switch on behalf of the O’Malley family. With their consent I presented it to the American Space Museum in Titusville for display in their new Mercury Room. This was completed on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016.