

Atlas rocket launches for 1st time since March grounding

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A United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket carrying a U.S. Navy communications satellite lifts off from Complex 41 at the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Friday, June 24, 2016, in Cape Canaveral, Fla. The satellite is designed to significantly improve ground communications for U.S. forces on the move. (AP Photo/John Raoux)

America's Atlas rockets are flying again, successfully launching a communications satellite for the Navy.

The unmanned Atlas V rocket blasted into a brilliantly clear sky Friday

morning. It was the first Atlas flight by rocket maker United Launch Alliance since March, when a fuel-valve problem popped up on a space station delivery for NASA.

The first stage of that rocket shut down six seconds too soon, but the second stage took control and put the Cygnus cargo ship in the proper orbit. United Launch Alliance grounded its Atlas fleet until it could fix the problem. Everything worked right Friday, according to the company, and the satellite reached its targeted orbit.

The launch was the fifth in a series of advanced Navy communication satellites for use by the U.S. military worldwide.

Less than two weeks ago, the company's Delta IV rocket hoisted a secret spy satellite for the National Reconnaissance Office.

Atlas rockets have been launching for almost 60 years. John Glenn rode an Atlas to become the first American to orbit the Earth in 1962. The considerably bigger, more powerful Atlas V will be used to launch Boeing's Starliner capsules with space station crews in another couple of years

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