

Astronaut badge

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The **astronaut badge** is a badge of the United States, awarded to military pilots, naval flight officers, navigators/combat systems officers (this badge can also be awarded to USAF officer astronauts who are not navigators/CSOs, but who wear the same insignia while designated as astronaut-qualified Air Force "observers"), flight surgeons, and civilian pilots who have completed training and performed a successful spaceflight. A variation of the astronaut badge is also issued to civilians who are employed with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration as specialists on spaceflight missions. It is the least awarded qualification badge of the United States military.^[2]

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Eligibility

To earn an astronaut badge, a military officer must complete all required training and participate in a space flight more than 100 kilometers (62 miles) above the Earth. This boundary, known as the Kármán line, comes from the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale. However, in the 1960s, the United States Department of Defense awarded astronaut badges to military and civilian pilots who flew aircraft higher than 50 miles (80 kilometres).^[3] Seven USAF and NASA pilots qualified for the astronaut badge by flying the sub-orbital X-15 rocket spaceplane.^[3] American test pilots Michael Melvill and Brian Binnie were each awarded a commercial

Astronaut badge
(US Army: Astronaut device)



Awarded by United States

Type	Badge
Awarded for	Completing training and traveling in a spaceflight, as defined by NASA or the United States Department of Defense.
Status	Currently awarded

Statistics

Last awarded	Ongoing
Army Precedence	
Next (higher)	Army aviator badges
Next (lower)	Flight surgeon badge ^[1]

astronaut badge by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) when they flew sub-orbital missions aboard the Scaled Composites SpaceShipOne rocket spaceplane.^[3] All other men and women awarded the astronaut badge earned it travelling to space in non-winged rockets, the X-15, or the Space Shuttle.

NASA currently awards the astronaut badge to all their current astronauts selected for the space program regardless of whether they have flown any distance above the earth—a stark departure from the historical significance of the badge.

Military badges

Each of the military services issues its own version of the astronaut badge, which consists of a standard aviation badge with an astronaut device (shooting star through a halo) centered on the badge's shield, or escutcheon. The United States Army and Air Force astronaut badges are issued in three degrees: Basic, senior, and master/command. The senior astronaut badge is denoted by a star centered above the decoration, while the master/command level is indicated by a star and wreath.

U.S. Army astronauts

The gold astronaut device is issued by the U.S. Army to Army aviators, flight surgeons, and aircrew members that qualify as astronauts. The astronaut device is a gold shooting star and elliptical orbit which is affixed over the shield of previously awarded Army aviation badges. Army astronauts that have yet to fly a mission and have not previously been awarded any aviation badge are awarded the army aviation badge. Once they have flown a mission, they are awarded the Astronaut Device which is affixed to the shield of their army aviation badge. The shooting star and orbit representation is meant to imply the astronaut's theater of operations, space. The army astronaut device was approved on May 17, 1983. The black version of the device and its sew-on equivalent may be worn on the Army Combat Uniform (ACU); the silver wings with gold device version is authorized for wear on Army Service Uniforms. It is believed to be the rarest badge issued by the U.S. Army.^{[4][5][6][7]}



U.S. Air Force astronauts

The U.S. Air Force astronaut badge consists of a standard USAF aeronautical badge upon which is centered the astronaut device. The Air Force does not consider astronaut to be a separate rating from its six established rating badges, but as a "qualifier" to them, and may only be awarded by the Air Force Chief of Staff after written application upon completion of an operational space mission. The rating of observer is used for USAF mission specialists who have completed training but not a mission and are not otherwise aeronautically rated as a USAF pilot or USAF navigator.



U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard astronauts

The naval astronaut insignias are issued in a single degree to naval aviators and flight officers from the United States Navy, United States Marine Corps, and United States Coast Guard, with officers of all three branches receiving their designations as aviators or flight officers through the naval aviation flight training program. All three branches also wear the same insignia which consists of naval aviator insignia or naval flight officer insignia with a centered gold astronaut device. However, the Coast Guard only issues the naval flight officer version of the astronaut insignia under the name "Coast Guard Astronaut insignia."^[8]

Civilian badges

NASA has a civilian astronaut badge, which is issued to civilian personnel who participate in U.S. space missions.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration also grants commercial astronaut wings to commercial pilots who have performed a successful spaceflight. Currently, only Mike Melvill and Brian Binnie have these wings.^{[9][10]}



NASA Civilian Astronaut Wings.



FAA Civilian Astronaut Wings.

NASA astronaut pins

In addition to the astronaut badge, which is worn on a military uniform, an astronaut pin is also issued to all NASA astronauts. It is a lapel pin, worn on civilian clothing. The pin is issued in two grades, silver and gold, with the silver pin awarded to candidates who have successfully completed astronaut training and the gold pin to astronauts who have actually flown in space. Astronaut candidates are given silver pins but are required to purchase the gold pin at a cost of approximately \$400.^[11]

A unique astronaut pin was made for NASA astronaut Deke Slayton in 1967. It was gold in color, like the ones given to astronauts who had flown, and it had a small diamond embedded in the star. It was made at the request of the crew of the first manned mission of the Apollo program as a tribute to Slayton's work at NASA. The idea was that everyone in the Astronaut Office had thought that Slayton would never get to fly in space (due to his paroxysmal atrial fibrillation; he would later fly on board the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project as docking module pilot), but as they knew that it was primarily because of him that they managed to do so, he should wear a gold pin rather than a silver one as a token of appreciation. As they knew that Slayton would refuse to wear exactly the same gold pin as veteran astronauts, the diamond was added. The pin was supposed to have been flown on board the Apollo 1 spacecraft, then given to Slayton after the mission was over. However, the Apollo 1 crew died in a fire during a training exercise in January 1967. The pin was given to Slayton by the widows of the dead crew as a token of condolence. This diamond-studded gold pin was later flown to the moon on Apollo 11 in July 1969.^[12]



One silver astronaut pin currently rests on the surface of the moon, left there by astronaut Alan Bean during Apollo 12 in 1969.^[13]

See also

- Military badges of the United States
- Badges of the United States Air Force
- Badges of the United States Army
- Badges of the United States Coast Guard
- Badges of the United States Marine Corps
- Badges of the United States Navy
- Human spaceflight
- Edge of space

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Categories: United States military badges

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