

Bogus Astronaut  
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NASA announced 25 new American astronaut candidates on June 5, while a would-be colleague was in a Houston jail awaiting arraignment for falsely posing as a member of that class.

The name of Jerry Whittredge isn't new to NASA. For months, the 48-year-old pilot has been visiting space facilities and conferences around the country with a convincing story that he was about to be named to the 1998 class.

So credible was this claim that, according to a NASA criminal complaint filed with the U.S. Attorney's Office in Houston, Whittredge was given unwarranted access to both NASA and military flight facilities.

Whittredge has his own Web site, giving himself a fanciful background. According to people he talked to, he wove convincing narratives of being a student intern during the Apollo 13 crisis and serving coffee to Flight Director Gene Kranz, and of being personally called by Bill Clinton to inform him of his astronaut selection.

People who lived in his RV park near Galveston told local Houston TV reporters that he was fully believable.

Over the last three decades, dozens of imposters have passed themselves off as NASA astronauts, although they've generally been pretty harmless. They attend public activities around the country, wearing NASA-like uniforms, telling stories, and signing autographs.

Some use their own names, some use the names of real NASA astronauts. Few ever got into trouble—until now.

Whittredge seems to have crossed the line with what the NASA complaint called "false personation," making false statements about his status in order to obtain "anything of value." He was arrested by the FBI on May 31, but his arraignment has been delayed due to his claim that his lawyer is named William J. Clinton.