



Astronaut Snoopy's 50-Plus Year History with NASA

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Provided

In the photo above, you can see Stafford petting the nose of a Snoopy stuffed animal as he heads to the launch pad. Holding Snoopy is Jayme Flowers Coplin, who served as secretary for Lt. Gordon Cooper, a Mercury-Atlas 9 and Gemini 5 astronaut who was also part of the backup crew for Apollo 10.

Wednesday, Artemis 1 successfully launched with one famous passenger on board: Astronaut Snoopy.

Unknown to many, Snoopy has been working with NASA since the late 1950s, even before man first stepped on the moon. Space, as it turns out, is the final frontier — even for beagles.

May 18, 1969, Gen. Thomas P. Stafford and his crew of Apollo 10 launched from Cape Kennedy on a Saturn V rocket. The mission served as the “dress rehearsal” for Apollo 11, and its payload included a lunar module dubbed by the crew as “Snoopy” and a command module called “Charlie Brown.”

The name “Snoopy” was chosen because the lunar module was sent to “snoop around” the surface of the moon looking for a safe landing place for the Apollo 11 mission. Snoopy flew within 50,000 feet, roughly nine miles, of the moon’s surface searching for the place where Apollo 11’s Eagle lander would touch down shortly thereafter in the Sea of Tranquility.

Apollo 10 was crewed by commander Thomas P. Stafford, command module pilot John W. Young and lunar module pilot Eugene A. Cernan, and Snoopy was the mission’s mascot.

In an interview which took place on November 2008, Rebecca Wright, NASA’s Johnson Space Center History Office coordinator, asked Coplin about what led to the memorable moment. Jayme Coplin explained the Snoopy-of-it-all was meant to be a fun prank which turned into something which would come to be associated with Apollo 10 forever.

The prank started when astronaut Cernan agreed to

take something to the moon — he wasn’t aware of what specifically — for Coplin. Coplin explained, “The plan was for me to stand at the door of the crew quarters as the crew was coming by with this Snoopy, and the gotcha would be on Gene Cernan he was going to have to get this very large Snoopy in this very small pocket on the side of his spacesuit.”

However, that’s not how things transpired. In a last-second change to the prank’s plan, Coplin was pushed into the hallway holding the Snoopy stuffed animal.

Coplin described what led up to the iconic moment. “Stafford was right there, and he stopped briefly and patted Snoopy’s nose. That was a picture which defined that mission. I think Capt. Young patted him when he went by. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Capt. Cernan heading in my direction,

and he was a man on a mission at that point. So, I knew I was in trouble.

“But he came, and instead of patting Snoopy on the nose, he turned the prank into a gotcha on me, because he grabbed me and Snoopy and tried to get us in the elevator. So, it ended up being he was going to take Snoopy and me to the moon if he could. But the picture itself was just — when you see Apollo 10, that’s the one everyone thinks about. Tom Stafford still said that is one of his, if not his favorite photo.” Coplin also told Wright Stafford continues to refer to her as “the Snoopy girl” many years later.

Snoopy’s ties to the Apollo 10 missions run deeper than just a last minute prank turned iconic moment. Apollo 10 astronauts took artwork of Charlie Brown and Snoopy, wearing his Flying Ace scarf, with them to calibrate the cameras which recorded the first-ever color television feeds sent to Earth from space. These historical images of Snoopy and Charlie Brown are currently part of a traveling exhibition, “To the Moon: Snoopy Soars with NASA,” organized by the Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center in Santa Rosa, California.

While Apollo 11 enjoys a great deal of well-deserved attention, Apollo 10 was critical in making the mission as safe as possible, an invaluable contribution to human space travel. Lunar module pilot Cernan even remarked, regarding Peanuts’ influence on the public’s memory of the mission, “No one remembers Apollo 10 — until you tell them our spacecraft were named Snoopy and Charlie Brown, and they say ‘Oh! I remember.’”

The legacy of Apollo 10 and Peanuts was a big deal for the Peanuts creator himself. Craig Schulz, Charles Schulz’s youngest son, a filmmaker and the producer of 2015’s “The Peanuts Movie,” said, “My father once told me that when NASA selected Charlie Brown and Snoopy to be the names chosen for the modules for the Apollo 10 mission on its trip to the moon, it was the proudest moment in his career.”

But Apollo 10 was not the first foray into space exploration for Snoopy. The history of the Peanuts-NASA relationship can be traced back as early as 1959 when Schulz, a fan of the space program, first added space exploration themes to his Peanuts comic strips. Schulz even gave NASA permission to use his characters as part of NASA’s safety materials, and Snoopy remains the embodiment of space flight safety to this day.

It’s notable Schulz did not profit directly from the partnership with NASA. He authorized NASA to use his characters at no cost, provided he be the only illustrator to draw Snoopy for NASA’s purposes — of which there are many — including the impressive Silver Snoopy Award.

As part of its Spaceflight Awareness Program, NASA also celebrates its employees and contractors who adhere to a strict criterion which includes, according to the organization, its recipients: “significantly contributed to the human space flight program to ensure flight safety and mission success.”

Established in 1968, the Silver Snoopy award was created to reward diligence to flight safety and success. All Silver Snoopy lapel pins have been flown in space and are awarded to the recipient by an astronaut. Needless to say, it’s considered to be an extremely high honor as less than one percent of NASA’s workforce has been awarded a Silver Snoopy.

So when someone looks up at the moon and imagine humans returning to its surface, remember the accomplishments of Gen. Thomas P. Stafford and his crew of Apollo 10 astronauts who made the first moonwalk possible — and remember their mascot, Astronaut Snoopy.



Weatherford astronaut still hold spaceflight speed record

What is the greatest speed ever attained by humans?

◀ The crew of Apollo 10 (American astronauts Tom Stafford, John Young, & Gene Cernan) reached a top speed of 24,791 mph on May 26, 1969 during their return to Earth from the moon. This is the greatest speed at which any human has ever traveled.