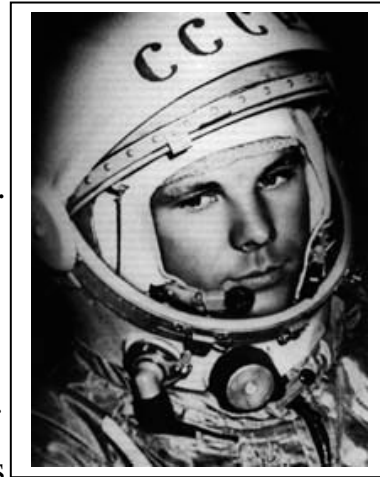


Yuri Alekseevich Gagarin (1934 - 1968)

Gagarin was a Soviet cosmonaut who in 1961 became the first man to travel in space.

He was the son of a carpenter, born in a village near Smolensk, Russia. He grew up on a collective farm. When Yuri was seven years old, the German armies invaded Russia. Yuri's father joined the army, while his mother took him away from the fighting. In high-school, trained metalworker and enrolled at an industrial college. He has a natural talent for flying.



He graduated from the Soviet air force as pilot. Gagarin's abilities as a pilot were beyond normal. He passed through tough and difficult training-periods. As a part of the psychological training, he sat in a soundless, lightless room for 24 hours.

The first manned space flight took place on 12th April 1961. Gagarin was launched into orbit aboard the spacecraft 'Vostok I' and completed a single circuit of the Earth. The flight lasted one hour and 48 minutes before the craft, ejected at an altitude of 7 kilometers and landed by parachute. Upon return, the capsule itself landed too heavily, with an impact making it impossible for humans to remain inside during landing.

Gagarin was sitting in a tin-can on top of a bomb. Imagine leaving Earth before anyone had done it before! Nobody could tell what would happen to him; nobody really knew how the brain would function in weightlessness, or how the body would adapt. He was not given control of his craft. They didn't want to risk the cosmonaut losing control over himself while in space, and thus endangering the mission.

In the official Soviet documents, there is no mention of the parachute ejection. A trivial lie, due to the international rules for aviation records, which stated that "The pilot remains in his craft from launch to landing". This rule, if applied, would have "disqualified" Gagarin's space-flight.

Gagarin made no other space flights, and was killed in an aircraft accident. He died seven years later, on March 7, 1968 in an airplane accident, flying the MIG-15 as a test-pilot. By then he was 34 years old.

I see Earth. It's so beautiful! —the first words spoken from a man in space