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# **Chapter 1**

## **50th Anniversary of the Manned Spaceflight\***

**Olga Zhdanovich<sup>†</sup>**

### **Abstract**

This chapter describes the First flight into space done by the Soviet Air Force pilot Yuri Gagarin on the 12th of April 1961. It represents a few official documents as well as tells about Yuri's "good-bye" letter to his family before this historical event. Today there are many documents available about Yuri Gagarin's flight; it is even possible to find documents from Russian websites with all the necessary technical details of the First manned spaceflight. This chapter gives a short but concise story about this historical event.

### **Introduction**

In April 2011 the world celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Yuri Gagarin flight, the First human in space. On the 12th of April 1961, the senior lieutenant pilot of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) Air Force, Yuri Gagarin, was 27 years old. His spaceflight, the First ever in the history of humankind on the Vostok spacecraft lasted 108 minutes (1 hour 48 minutes). He was unknown before the flight and after he stepped into eternity (as we say in Russian language), he became the most famous man on the planet Earth. His

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<sup>†</sup> Modis for ESA/ESTEC, The Netherlands.

flight also set a number of traditions that all cosmonauts and astronauts flying from Baikonur Cosmodrome have followed thoroughly during the last fifty years.

The traditions started by the Soviet Union cosmonauts are carefully preserved now by International Space Station (ISS) international space crews. But Yuri Gagarin is always remembered. Today Yuri Gagarin virtually participates at any start and finish of every Soyuz based expedition to the International Space Station. Before departure to Baikonur, crew members bring flowers to his grave at the Kremlin wall at the Red Square in the center of Moscow. After pick up from a landing spot in the Kazakhstan steppe a crew brings flowers to the Yuri Gagarin monument at the Cosmonaut Training Centre to pay tribute to the First Man in Space.

### **Selection of Candidates to Fly beyond Stratosphere**

In June 1958, after the successful launch of Sputnik, which was on the 4th of October 1957, Sergey Korolev, Soviet Chief Designer, together with Mikhail Tikhonravov wrote a letter to the USSR Central Committee of the Communist Party about the possibility to send a human into space. It was the time of the era of the Cold War and the start of the space race between two superpowers (the USSR and the United States of America—USA) had just begun. “Firsts in space” were of strategic priority and national importance in the race between the USSR and the USA. Sergey Korolev and Mikhail Tikhonravov’s idea was supported by the Soviet government. On the 5th of January 1959 the Order of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the USSR Cabinet of Ministers “About Medical Selection of Cosmonauts” N22-100SS was issued, followed by the Order from the 22nd of May 1959 “About Preparation of Human to a Space Flight” N569-224.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time in parallel, the launch of Sputnik and then the dog Laika into space were so inspiring that military officers, first of all Air Force pilots, started to write applications to their Soviet Army superiors asking permission to join the special group (if it ever existed) to fly to space.<sup>2</sup>

Yuri Gagarin was saying that after the 4th of October 1957 young military officers at his military unit at the Russian North had nonstop discussions about the possibility of a human to fly to space. They saw it as logical step after the flight of the dog into space. They were making drawings of what the spacecraft might look like. Gagarin was making such drawings too, but of course they were too far from a real spacecraft that was under development at that time by Sergey Korolev’s team.<sup>2</sup>

The flight of Yuri Gagarin was a significant achievement because of many reasons. The most crucial and important is that the training and preparation of pilots was done in nearly one year!!!! It is really hard to believe today, after fifty years of human spaceflight, when basic astronaut training is two years long, followed by another training after assignment to a specific space mission. At that time, there was no training equipment or techniques to train cosmonauts. No cosmonaut-training center existed. No one had real knowledge of what cosmonauts would face during their journey to space, there were only theoretical assumptions supported by very few tests on animals that were flown to space before the year of 1961: rats, mice, flies and dogs etc. Added by multiple experiments, mainly with dogs on sounding rockets to altitudes 100, 200 and 500 kilometers.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the medical selection of potential candidates was very strict. The training of the first group of the Soviet Union cosmonauts was very difficult and hard and sometimes dramatic. One of the candidates Yuri Bondarenko died after the fire during training in a pressure chamber in 1961. At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, the cosmonaut trainings started to be less tough than the first group of the USSR cosmonauts had experienced, which was due to accumulation of real “hands-on” experience and practical knowledge of a human spaceflight.

In May 1959 the selection of the first group of the USSR cosmonauts started, when four to five groups of medical military doctors were formed. Each group consisted mainly of two officers—military doctors. The goal was set to them—to select potential candidates for a spaceflight, more precisely to fly beyond the stratosphere using a brand new technology. Criteria and procedures of selection of potential candidates did not exist at all at that time. The very first selection of potential candidates started in June–July 1959. The selection was done among military Air Force pilots. There were initial ideas to include Navy submarine officers into the search for the potential candidates to fly to space. But later, few people including Sergey Korolev the USSR Chief Designer, had become in favor of military jet fighter pilots, which are very healthy men who, while navigating high-tech jet aircraft, were able to make their decisions very quickly and solely on their own.

The military doctor P. Buyanov who did select later Yuri Gagarin, Pavel Belyaev, Georgiy Shonin and Ivan Anikeev, recalled the following procedure that he and his colleague, Alexander Pchelkin, had developed, also by themselves, (they were not given developed procedure ahead and, of course, everything was top secret): (a) arrival to the Air Force military unit and report to the Chief of the Unit about the goal of their mission; (b) prescreening of the pilot

medical records, taking into consideration the age, the weight and the height of a pilot (medical doctors were informed about boundaries they had to consider: up to 35 years old, up to 175 centimeters tall and up to 75 kilograms weight); (c) discussion of the list of preselected candidates with their superiors. The parameters to look for were the following: professional skills, communications skills, habits (smoking and drinking), stress resistance etc.; (d) reduction of the list of potential candidates after negative characteristics done by line superiors or absence of the well-defined positive characteristics; (e) general medical check of potential candidates; (f) final approval of the list of potential candidates with line superiors; (g) personal one by one meeting with potential candidates where potential candidates were told about a goal of a selection and a possible future new assignment; (h) agreement or disagreement of candidates to start a new assignment. Selection was done on purely voluntarily basis.<sup>1,4</sup>

After this procedure those who successfully passed the first selection and agreed to a new challenge, these pilots were called to Moscow for the thorough medical and psychological tests at the Central Air Force Medical Research Institute (TsNIAG). Already at that stage few pilots refused to come to Moscow being afraid to lose their jobs.

Cosmonauts remembered that at that stage of interviews, the most famous question was “Do you want to fly using a brand new technology?” Although the content of the interviews was top secret and candidates were not told up-front what the “new technology” was, at the same time, as it was mentioned above, everyone understood what was meant by “the brand new technology.” Interviewed pilots were not allowed to tell about that even to their wives and family members. Candidates were given from one day to a few days to give an answer, many of them as Pavel Popovitch agreed at the same day of the interview.<sup>1,5</sup>

Pavel Popovitch recalls that from the Kubinka Air Force military unit ten pilots were invited to come to TsNIAG. Because Kubinka is only 30 km from Moscow, pilots were able to send “spies” to Moscow to that institution. Kubinka pilots were really frustrated and disappointed to know that there was a big chance to be fired from the Air Force because of hidden health problems revealed by these specialized tests and thorough medical checks, for this still very unclear new assignment. This had happened already to a few Air Force officers who agreed to pass these tests in Moscow. So from ten selected candidates, Pavel Popovitch was the only one who had courage to come to the two-stage TsNIAG medical checkup.<sup>6</sup>

Today Russian space historians from the website [www.astronaut.ru](http://www.astronaut.ru) state that the original number of applicants whose medical records were screened was 3,461. A short list of candidates had 347 names. After the procedure described

above, 206 potential candidates were selected. Fifty-two pilots refused to come to Moscow to continue with the checkup. Medical and physiological tests were done to 154 military jet pilots at TsNIAG by groups of 33 persons at the same time. There were 134 pilots accepted to a second round. In February 1960 a group of 29 candidates was named. Finally the very first Soviet cosmonaut corps was formed of 20 young and absolutely healthy military pilots. On the 3rd of March 1960 the USSR Ministry of Defence issued the Order # 31 "Cosmonaut Temperate Order," which defined status and duties of cosmonauts.

At the time when satellite number three was successfully launched (1959), Yuri Gagarin wrote an official application for the human spaceflight. In October 1959 he was called to Moscow to the Central Institute of Aviation Medicine (TsNIAG). Gagarin was tested at the same time with Valery Bykovsky. The tests included: (a) pressure chamber tests that imitate "climbing" to 5,000 meters altitude and remaining there for 30 minutes, followed by "climbing" to 6,000 meters altitude with a stay of 15 minutes and lately, not the same time, test to be at 15,000 meters with a stay of 20 minutes; (b) centrifuge tests. During the centrifuge test Gagarin had difficulty to move his hand or head, but he did not feel pain. After completion of the first round of tests he was told by a medical doctor Ye. Feodorov that he had successfully passed all medical tests of the first selection stage. And to Feodorov's point of view, the stratosphere was not a limit to Gagarin anymore.<sup>6,8</sup>

In January 1960 he passed the second round of medical tests that included again vibration stand, pressure chamber and centrifuge. Even at that stage, as every candidate, Gagarin had the right to refuse from continuation of tests.<sup>6</sup>

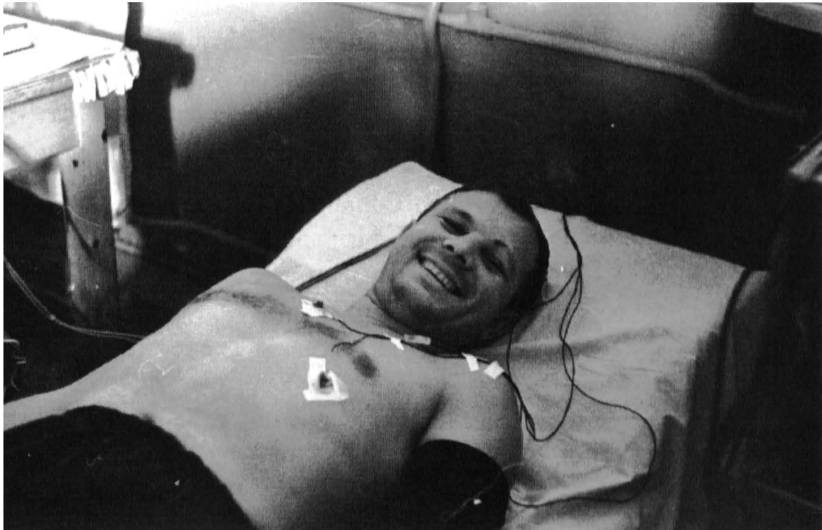
### **Flying to the Unknown**

On the 7th of March 1960, Yuri Gagarin was accepted into the first cosmonaut group by the order of the Chief Commander of the Soviet Air Force N 267. On the 11th of March he moved with his family to the new work place and on the 25th of March he started with the regular training. In summer 1960, from the group of 20 members, six persons were listed in the group for the very first flight into space, they were: Yuri Gagarin, Gherman Titov, Grigori Nelyubov, Andrian Nikolaev, Valery Bykovsky, and Pavel Popovitch. That was done because of the absence of the proper training center and necessary equipment to train 20 pilots. On the 14th of January 1961 the Superior Medical Commission approved all six candidates for the flight into space. On the 17th and 18th of January the first six cosmonauts passed the exams. On the 25th of January all six

were officially accepted to the position of cosmonaut and received the new title “Cosmonaut of the USSR Air Force.”<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 1-1:** Senior Lieutenant Gagarin while training for the historic spaceflight. Credit: Videocosmos Photo Library.



**Figure 1-2:** Yuri Gagarin at medical check-up. Credit: Videocosmos Photo Library.



Pavel Popovitch remembered that the first group of six cosmonauts was invited by Sergey Korolev in 1960, nine months before the launch to the Design Bureau (later Space Corporation Energiya). Korolev told them about long duration flights and space stations and showed them the spacecraft Vostok. Yuri Gagarin was the first one who entered the spacecraft and sat in the chair, followed by five colleagues. Coincidence isn't it?<sup>5,6</sup>

On the 5th of April 1961 all six cosmonauts arrived at the Cosmodrome Baikonur. On the 10th of April 1961 the State Commission approved Yuri Gagarin to be the first man to fly to space, German Titov as first back-up and Grigori Nelyubov as second back-up.

On the 10th of April 1961 Yuri Gagarin wrote his "last will" or "good-bye" letter to his loved ones, wife Valya and two daughters Lena and Galya in case something would go wrong. Senior Lieutenant Gagarin did hope that his family would never read this letter:

*My dear Lelecheka, Lenochka and Galochka!*

*I am writing these few lines to share with you the joy and happiness that I feel today. The government commission has decided today that I should be the first man to go into outer space. Do you know dear Valusha how glad I am, and I want you all to share this joy with me. Just imagine an ordinary man like me being entrusted with such a great task of national importance—the task of pioneering the road to outer space! What more is there to dream about? This is a history and a new era. My launch is the day after tomorrow. You all will then be busy with your everyday activities. This is a great responsibility on my shoulders. Before the flight, I wish I can spend some time with all of you and to talk to you. But alas you are too far from here. At the same time I always feel that you all are near me.*

*I trust the technology completely. It should not fail at all. But sometimes it can happen that a person may fall on a road and can break his neck. So, in my case something may go wrong too. But I don't believe it may happen. But if something does go wrong I am asking all of you and first of all you, Valya not to die from grief. Life is life you know and no one is ensured against run over by a car. Please take good care of our girls, love them the way I do. Please don't make them fine ladies or mother darlings bring them up to be real good people who won't be afraid of the difficulties of the life. Bring them up to be fit to live with dignity in a new society—communist society.*

*To do so, the state will help you. As for your private life, please feel free to arrange it with not a limit anymore and your way of conscience will tell you and the way you see it. I am not imposing any commitments on you and I have no right to do so. Well, this looks like a mournful letter isn't it? Myself, I don't believe in this. And I do hope that you will never see this letter and I will be ashamed of this few seconds of weakness. But if something does go wrong you should know everything, up to the end. Until now I was*

*living honestly and truthful trying to be useful to people although I haven't done too much.*

*Once upon a time in a childhood I read the book of the Valery Chkalov: "If to be, then always to be the first." So I always tried to be the first and shall be up to the very end. I want Valechka to devote this flight to the people of the new society, communism that we are entering now, also want to devote to our Motherland and our science.*

*I hope that few days later we will be all together again, will be happy all together. Valechka please don't forget my parents, if there is a need, please help them. Please pass to them from me a big hello, and let them forgive me for that they did not know anything, but at the same time they were not supposed to know this at all. So, it seems that's all what I want to say. Good-bye my beloved ones.*

*Very strong hug and kiss.*

*With greetings, Yours Papa and Yura.<sup>6,7</sup>*

His wife did read this letter but many years after 1961.

### **The First Flight to Space through Official Documents**

On the 12th of April 1961 the long-awaited event occurred: at 9 h 06 m 59.7 s spacecraft Vostok No. 3 with the mass of 4,725 kg was launched, carrying pilot-cosmonaut Yuri A. Gagarin. The spacecraft was launched into orbit with the altitude of 181 km at perigee and 327 km at apogee. The cosmonaut landed at 10 h 55 min onto a soft ploughed field on a bank of the Volga River near the village Smelovka in Ternovski district of Saratov region.<sup>10</sup>

The First flight to space is described in this section through official statements that were made on the 12th of April 1961 and published in all Soviet newspapers. These translated into English documents are taken from the official website of the Russian Space Corporation Energiya.<sup>10</sup>

General Yuri Mozzhorin who was the Head of Central Research Institute of Machine building (TsNIIMASH) wrote in his memoirs that before the flight there were few official statements prepared and given in the sealed envelopes to the Information Agency of the USSR—TASS. One was about the successful launch of the Soviet Cosmonaut, two others were prepared in case of off-nominal situations that included landing on the territory beyond Soviet Union territory or sea surface, another one was very short in case of death of cosmonaut during launch or landing. In case of landing on foreign territory TASS was appealing to a foreign government to help the cosmonaut to return quickly to the USSR. Fortunately, these two envelopes were never opened and they were destroyed immediately after the first spaceflight, they have never ever been archived.<sup>9</sup>

## **Yuri A. Gagarin's Statement before the Launch on 12 April 1961**

Before setting off on his mission to space onboard Vostok spacecraft, Yuri A. Gagarin made the following statement for the USSR press and radio:

Dear Friends, close and unknown, Compatriots, People of all countries and continents!

In a few minutes a mighty spacecraft will carry me to the far end of the Universe. What can I say to you in these last few minutes before the lift-off? All my life seems to me now to be one beautiful moment. All that I lived through, all that I did before, has been lived through and done for the sake of this minute. You understand that it is difficult to sort out one's feelings now, when the hour of trial, for which we have been fervently preparing for a long time, has drawn very close. I hardly need to talk about the feelings I had when I was offered to make the First such flight in history. Was it joy? No, it wasn't just joy. Was it pride? No, it wasn't just pride. I felt great happiness. To be the First Man in space, to be engaged in this unique one-to-one with nature—could one even dream of something greater than this?

But my next thought was about the huge responsibility, which fell to me. To be the First Man to fulfill the dreams of generations of people, to be the First Man to open up the road to space for humanity. Could one name a task of greater complexity than the one which fell to me? This responsibility is not towards one or dozens of people, not towards a team. This responsibility is towards the whole of the Soviet people, towards the entire Mankind, towards its present and its future. And if, nevertheless, I am determined to make this flight, that is only because I am a communist, because I have examples of unmatched heroism of my compatriots, Soviet people, to follow. I know that I will be able to sum on all my will power in order to accomplish the mission in the best way possible. Being aware of the importance of this task, I will do my utmost to accomplish the mission assigned to me by the Communist party and the Soviet people.

Am I happy to set out on a space mission? Certainly I am. Because throughout the ages, people found that greatest happiness is in taking part in a new discovery.

I want to dedicate this First space mission to the people of communism—the phase in the development of society, which our Soviet people are already entering, and which, I am sure, will eventually enter all the people of Earth.

It's only a few minutes before the lift-off now. I say good-bye to you, my dear Friends, just as people always say to each other setting out on a long journey. I wish I could embrace you all, known and unknown, distant and close!

See you soon! Yu. Gagarin

## **TASS Statements, the Soviet Union Press Agency on 12 April 1961:**

### ***ABOUT THE WORLD'S FIRST MANNED MISSION INTO SPACE***

On April 12, 1961, the Soviet Union launched into orbit around Earth the world's First manned spacecraft Vostok. The cosmonaut piloting the Vostok spacecraft is a citizen of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics pilot major GAGARIN, Yuri Alexeevich.

The launch of the multistage space rocket was successful, and after reaching orbital velocity and separating from the final stage of the launch vehicle the spacecraft began its free flight in orbit around Earth. According to preliminary data, the orbital period of the spacecraft is 89.1 minutes; the minimal distance to Earth surface (at perigee) is 175 kilometers, and the maximum distance (at apogee) is 302 kilometers; the orbital plane inclination angle with respect to the equator is 65 degrees 4 minutes. The mass of the spacecraft with the cosmonaut pilot is 4725 kilograms, without taking into account the mass of the final stage of the launch vehicle.

Two-way communications with the cosmonaut, comrade GAGARIN, has been established and is being maintained. The frequencies of the on-board shortwave transmitters are 9.019 megahertz and 20.006 megahertz, and in the ultra-short wave range it is 143.625 megahertz. The condition of the cosmonaut is being monitored in flight using radio-telemetry and TV systems.

Comrade GAGARIN has survived the orbital insertion on board Vostok satisfactorily, and at present feels well. Systems maintaining inside the spacecraft cabin the environment necessary for life are functioning normally. The orbital flight of Vostok spacecraft piloted by cosmonaut comrade GAGARIN continues.

#### ***9 hours 52 minutes***

According to data received from onboard Vostok spacecraft at 9 hours 52 minutes, Moscow Time, cosmonaut pilot major Gagarin flying over South America sent the following message: "The mission progresses smoothly, I feel well."

#### ***10 hours 15 minutes***

At 10 hours 15 minutes, Moscow Time, cosmonaut pilot major Gagarin flying over Africa sent the following message from onboard Vostok spacecraft: "The mission progresses smoothly, I experience zero gravity well."

#### ***10 hours 25 minutes***

At 10 hours 25 minutes, Moscow Time, having made an orbit around the globe per pre-programmed mission plan, the retro-pack fired a burn and the manned spacecraft carrying its pilot cosmonaut major Gagarin began its descent from orbit to land at a designated landing site in the Soviet Union.

***ABOUT SUCCESSFUL RETURN OF MAN FROM THE FIRST  
MISSION TO SPACE***

After successful completion of the research program and the mission plan, on April 12, 1961, at 10 hours 55 minutes, the Soviet manned spacecraft Vostok successfully landed at its designated landing site in the Soviet Union. Pilot cosmonaut major Gagarin sent the following message: "PLEASE INFORM THE PARTY, THE GOVERNMENT AND PERSONALLY NIKITA SERGEEVICH KHRUSHCHEV THAT THE LANDING WENT WELL. I FEEL WELL, I HAVE NO INJURIES OR BRUISES"

Accomplishment of a manned space mission opens up new vistas for humanity's conquest of space.

**Statements from the Central Committee of the Communist Party,  
Soviet Government and Soviet Parliament on 12 April 1961:**

***ADDRESS OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE  
COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE SOVIET UNION, OF THE  
PRESIDIUM OF THE SUPREME SOVIET OF THE USSR AND  
OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SOVIET UNION***

***TO THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND NATIONS OF THE SOVIET  
UNION! TO THE NATIONS AND GOVERNMENTS OF ALL  
COUNTRIES! TO THE ENTIRE PROGRESSIVE MANKIND!***

A great event has taken place. For the First time in history a Man flew into space.

On April 12, 1961, at 9 hours 7 minutes, Moscow Time, manned spacecraft Vostok carrying a man onboard lifted into space, and, having made an orbit around the globe, safely returned to the holy soil of our Motherland—the Soviet Country.

The First Man to penetrate into space is a Soviet man, a citizen of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

This is an unprecedented victory of man over forces of nature, a great achievement of science and technology, a triumph of human reason. This marks the beginning of manned missions into space.

This heroic deed, which will go down in history, embodies the genius of the Soviet people and the mighty power of socialism.

With great joy and justifiable pride, the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the Soviet Government note that this new era in the progressive development of mankind was ushered in by our country—the country, where socialism has won.

In the past, the backward tsarist Russia could not even dream of such feats in the fight for progress, of a competition with countries with higher levels of technological and economic development.

By the will of the working class, by the will of the people inspired by the communist party headed by Lenin, our country has become a mighty socialist power, has reached unprecedented heights in the development of science and technology.

When in October 1917 the working class seized power, many people, even honest ones, were doubtful whether the workers would be capable of running the country, of at least preserving the existing level of economical, scientific and technological development.

And now, in front of the whole world, the working class, collectivized peasantry, soviet intelligentsia, the entire Soviet people demonstrate an unheard-of victory of science and technology. Our country got ahead of all the other nations in the world, and was the first to blaze the trail to space.

The Soviet Union was the First to launch an intercontinental ballistic missile, the First to launch an Earth artificial satellite, the First to send a spacecraft to the Moon, created the First artificial satellite of the Sun, sent a probe towards Venus. One after another, Soviet spacecraft carrying living beings on-board made flights to space and returned to Earth.

Our victories in space have been crowned with the triumphal flight of a Soviet man in a spacecraft around Earth.

Honours and glory to the working class, Soviet peasantry, Soviet intelligentsia, to the entire Soviet people!

Honours and glory to Soviet scientists, engineers and technicians—developers of the spacecraft!

Honours and glory to the cosmonaut, comrade Gagarin, Yuri Alexeevich—the Pioneer of space!

We, the Soviet people constructing communism, are privileged to be the First to penetrate into space. We regard our victories in space as achievements of not only our people, but of the entire mankind as well. We gladly offer to use them for the benefit of all nations in the name progress, happiness and prosperity of all the people on Earth. We are going to use our achievements and discoveries not for the purposes of war, but for the purposes of peace and safety of all nations.

Development of science and technology opens up infinite possibilities of learning to command the forces of nature and using them for the good of man, but in order to achieve this, we need, above all, to secure peace.

On this great day, we once again make an appeal for peace to peoples and governments of all nations.

Let all the people, regardless of their race and nationality, skin color, faith and social standing, make every effort to secure lasting peace throughout the world. Let us put an end to the arms race! Let us try to achieve global and total disarmament under strict international control! This will be a decisive contribution to the sacred cause of defending peace.

This glorious victory of our Motherland inspires all Soviet people to new feats in constructing communism!

Onwards, to new victories in the name of peace, progress and happiness of humanity!

CENTRAL COMMITTEE  
OF THE CPSU

PRESIDIUM OF THE  
SUPREME SOVIET  
OF THE USSR

COUNCIL OF  
MINISTERS OF  
THE USSR

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*To all scientists, engineers, technicians, workers, all work teams and organizations which contributed to the success of the world's first manned space mission on board Vostok spacecraft,*

*TO THE FIRST SOVIET COSMONAUT comrade GAGARIN, Yuri Alexeevich*

Dear Comrades, Friends and Compatriots,

The people of our country are now experiencing a joyous and exciting event. On April 12, 1961, our Motherland—the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics—for the First time in the history of humanity successfully achieved the First flight of Man into space onboard Vostok spacecraft.

The flight of a Soviet man into space is a great achievement of our peoples' creative genius, the result of free and inspired labor of Soviet people constructing a communist society. What used to be a dream of outstanding representatives of Russian and world scientific and engineering communities, what was the focus of his entire life to the brilliant son of our people, Konstantin Eduardovich Tsiolkovsky, has become today a reality of our heroic days. This is a great and outstanding contribution of the Soviet people to the treasure-house of world science and culture. This priceless service of the Soviet Union will be gratefully accepted by the mankind. This heroic mission of Soviet man into space has ushered in a new era in Earth history. Mankind's age-long dream has come true.

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and the Council of Ministers of USSR on behalf of our glorious Communist Party, Soviet Government, all peoples of the Soviet Union heartily congratulate on the great victory of Human Mind and Labor all the scientists, engineers, technicians, workers, all work teams and organizations that contributed to the success of the First manned mission into space.

We extend full-hearted salute and congratulations to you, our dear comrade Yuri Alekseyevich Gagarin on the greatest feat—the First flight into space.

Our free, talented and industrious people awakened by the communist party headed by the great leader and teacher of the workers of the world Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in October of 1917 to embark on consciously changing the course of history, now demonstrate to the whole world the great advantages of the new, socialist system in all areas of social life.

Man's flight into space is a result of successful implementation of an ambitious program of expanded construction of communist society, of unceasing care of the Communist Party and its Leninist Central Committee and the Soviet Government about sustained development of science, technology, culture, about the good of the Soviet people.

Less than four years separate the launch of the world's first Soviet artificial satellite of Earth from the successful manned mission into space.

Soviet scientists, engineers, technicians, and workers, through their unremitting and dedicated work, have blazed the trail for the human genius into the depths of the Universe. And they did this in the name of peace on Earth, in the name of happiness of all the peoples.

The First flight of Man into space will become a source of new inspiration for all the Soviet people in the name of further progress and peace in the whole world.

Glory to the Soviet scientists, designers, engineers, technicians and workers—conquerors of space!

Glory to our people—creative and victorious people blazing the trail to the bright future of all mankind—communism—under the guidance of the Communist Party!

Long live the glorious Communist Party of the Soviet Union—the great architect of all the victories of the Soviet people!

Long live Communism!

CENTRAL COMMITTEE  
OF THE CPSU

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS  
OF THE USSR

### **After the Spaceflight**

Major Yuri Gagarin landed in the Volga region (before the launch Gagarin had a rank of Senior Lieutenant. The next rank is Captain rank. Yuri Gagarin was awarded the Major rank during his historic spaceflight). After landing he received the highest award of the Soviet Union—Hero of the Soviet Union as well as a monument, which was decided to be built for him (only a few people in the Soviet Union were awarded the monument during the time they were still alive, only two Heroes of the Soviet Union).

The official meeting by Party and Government leaders was done on the 14th of April, when the whole of Moscow was greeting Yuri Gagarin along the streets as well as at the Red Square in Moscow. The celebrations were continued at the Congress Palace in the Kremlin. He met his wife and parents only on the 14th of April. They were staying next to Nikita Khrushchev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and other government people.



On the first evening when he came back home after the spaceflight, he told his wife: “Valusha, I never ever can imagine that I will be met (back at home) in such a manner. I was thinking just I shall make flight, I shall return back but I never thought that the meeting back was the way it was.”<sup>11</sup>

On that evening Yuri Gagarin could not imagine that this was only the beginning of his way, the way to immortality...



**Figure 1–3:** Moscow welcomes Yuri Gagarin home after his historic spaceflight. Nikita Khrushchev together with Yuri Gagarin and his wife Valentina Gagarina on the 14th of April 1961. Credit: Videocosmos Photo Library.

### **Step to Eternity**

On the 12th of April 1961 after his 108 minute flight, Yuri Gagarin stepped into eternity—he became the First Man in Space. Awards and Honors of Yu. Gagarin from the official website of Russian Space Corporation Energiya.<sup>10</sup>

*Honorary titles:* A Hero of the Soviet Union (14 April 1961), Pilot-Cosmonaut of the USSR (14 April 1961), Honorary Radio Operator (1962). Merited Master of Sports (namely, running, 1961).

*Government awards:* Gold Star Medal of the Hero of the Soviet Union (1961), Order of Lenin (1961), Medal for Development of virgin lands (1961) and four jubilee medals.

*Awards of foreign countries:* The following medals: Gold Star Medal of the Hero of Socialist Labor of PRB and Order of George Dimitrov (1961), Gold Star Medal of the Hero of Socialist Labor of CSR (1961), such Orders as Cross of Grunwald First Class (1961, PPR), Playa Giron Order (1961, Cuba), Aeronau-

tics Service Order (1961, Brazil), order of State Banner of HPR (1961), Necklace of Nile Order (1962, UAR), Order, Badge and Big Ribbon of the African Star for the following Order: Light in Darkness (1962, Liberia), Hero of Labor of DRV (1962), Order of the Star Second Class (Indonesia, 1961), Order of Karl Marx (1963, GDR).

*Awards from scientific and public organizations:* Tsiolkovsky Gold Medal (Academy of Sciences of the USSR), De Lavaux Medal (Aeronautics Federation), Gold Medal and Honors Diploma of the International Association Man in Space, Gold Medal and Honors diploma of the Italian Association of Cosmonautics, Distinguished Distinction Gold Medal and Honors Diploma of the Royal AeroClub of Sweden, Gold Medal of the British Society of Interplanetary Communication, Big Gold Medal and a diploma of Aeronautics Federation, Galaber Astronautics Prize for Distinguished Services in Space Exploration (1963), Gold and Silver medals of astronomical observatory and planetarium in Stara Zagora (Bulgaria), Columbus Medal (Italy), Gold Badge of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Finland (1961), Communard Medal March 18, 1871 (France, 1963), Puteaux Gold Medal (France, 1963), Saint-Denis Gold Medal (France), Medal in honor of proclaiming Yu. A. Gagarin the first honorary member of the united trade union of steel founders of England and Ireland (Manchester, 1961), LYCLSU CC Badge for Active Work in the Young Communist League (posthumously, 1970), Korolev Medal of the Aviation Sport Federation of the USSR (posthumously, 1972), Korolev Medal of OKB-1 Enterprise Scientific Council (1967), breastplate and diploma for Active Propaganda of Cosmonautics Achievements, Ideas of K. E. Tsiolkovsky of the State Museum of Cosmonautics History after K. E. Tsiolkovskiy (posthumously, 1974), Medal for Active Propaganda of K. E. Tsiolkovsky Ideas and Cosmonautics (posthumously, 1974), Badge of the Honorary Builder of Komsomolsk, 1932–1957 (1962), diploma of Exhibition of Economic Achievements of the USSR for Development and Introduction of Technology (1967).

*Honorary citizen of the following towns:* Kaluga (1961), Lyubertsy (posthumously, 1987), Novochoerkassk, Sumgait, Smolensk, Vinnitsa, Novozybkovo and Novozybkovo Region of Bryansk Area (1966), Sevastopol, Saratov (1967), Leninsk (now Baikonur, posthumously, 1977)—all these towns are the towns of the USSR, as well as Sofia, Pernik (1966), Burgas (1966) are the towns of PRB, Athens (Greece), Famagusta, Limassol (Cyprus), Saint-Denis, Puteaux (1963, France), Trenianske-Teplice, Martin (1961, CSR).

Yu. A. Gagarin received gold keys to the gate of such cities as Cairo and Alexandria (1962, Egypt) for perpetual storage.

*The following was named Yu. A. Gagarin:* The town of Gagarin (former Gzgatsk) and Gagarin Region (former Gzhatsk Region) of Smolensk Area. His name was given to the memorial museum built in the town of Gagarin, the Red Banner Military Air Academy in the town of Monino, the Cosmonaut Training Center. The research ships, schools and technical schools, Yakutsk Regional Printing-House have his name. The bronze bust of Yu. A. Gagarin is installed in Moscow on the Avenue of Space Heroes. The monument in the Star City (unveiled in 1971). The bronze bust of a fifteen-year Yu. A. Gagarin is installed on the second site of the Baikonur Cosmodrome. There are monuments in Moscow (on the Gagarin square), in Gagarin, Leninsk (now Baikonur) on the square having his name, in Sofia, at Yu. A. Gagarin Thermo-Electric Power Station in Visonta, Hungary (1973). The name of Gagarin is given to the crater on the back side of the Moon and small planet No. 177.<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 1–4:** Step to immortality—  
Yuri Gagarin “First Man in space” and  
Valentina Tereshkova “First Woman in space.”  
Credit: Videocosmos Photo Library.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> First selection of the USSR Cosmonauts, [www.Astronaut.ru](http://www.Astronaut.ru).
- <sup>2</sup> Reminiscences of Yuri Gagarin from 1964, in the press release devoted to the 50th Anniversary of the First Man in Space #1 July–August 2010.
- <sup>3</sup> Ada Kotovskaya: “Of course Yuri was nervous but he never show up this,” in the press release devoted to the 50th Anniversary of the First Man in Space #2 September–December 2010.
- <sup>4</sup> The letter of Buyanov P. to journalist Ya. Golovanov about the selection of Air Force pilots into first group of cosmonauts in the press release devoted to the 50th Anniversary of the First Man in Space #1 July–August 2010.
- <sup>5</sup> From reminiscences of the cosmonaut P. Popovitch about Yu. Gagarin in the press release devoted to the 50th Anniversary of the First Man in Space #1 July–August 2010.
- <sup>6</sup> Biographical stories about Yu. Gagarin, in the press release devoted to the 50th Anniversary of the First Man in Space #1 July–August 2010.
- <sup>7</sup> *Always Aim to Be the First*, The 30th Anniversary of the Flight of Yuri Gagarin, the First Cosmonaut (booklet) (Moscow: Novosti Publishers, 1991).
- <sup>8</sup> Biography of Yu. Gagarin, in the press release devoted to the 50th Anniversary of the First Man in Space #1 July–August 2010.
- <sup>9</sup> Top secret messages for TASS, reminiscences by Yu. Mozzhorin.
- <sup>10</sup> Official Website of Russian Space Corporation Energiya, pages devoted to Yu. Gagarin flight <http://www.energia.ru/en/history/gagarin/tsk.html>.
- <sup>11</sup> *108 Minutes and the Life*, written by Valentina Gagarina (Moscow: 1988).