

Yuri Gagarin

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Biography: Yuri Gagarin, cosmonaut

Born: 9 March 1934

Birthplace: Klushino, Russia

Died: 27 March 1968
(airplane crash)

Best Known As: The first
human in space



Early life



Yuri Gagarin was born in the village of Klushino near Gzhatsk (now in Smolensk Oblast, Russia), on 9 March 1934. The adjacent town of Gzhatsk was renamed Gagarin in 1968 in his honor. His parents, Alexei Ivanovich Gagarin and Anna Timofeyevna Gagarina, worked on a collective farm.

Early life



Like all people his age Gagarin had to undergo the ordeals of the war years. He was seven, when the Second World War broke out. The boy survived the Nazi invasion, the severe hardships of the war. The first planes he saw were war planes.

Early life



When the war ended the Gagarin family moved to Gzhatsk. Yuri attended an elementary school in this town.

Early life



Gagarin briefly attended a trade school to learn foundry work in the Moscow satellite town of Lyubertsy, then entered a technical school. He joined the Saratov Flying Club in 1955 and learned to fly the Yak-18.

Early life



Later that year, he was drafted and sent to the Orenburg Flying School, where he trained in the MIG jet. Gagarin graduated November 7, 1957, four days after Sputnik 2 was launched. He married Valentina Goryacheva, a nursing student, the day he graduated.

Career in the Soviet space program

Selection and training



Post-graduation, he was assigned to Luostari airbase in Murmansk Oblast, close to the Norwegian border, where terrible weather made flying risky. In 1958 space officials recruited air force pilots to train as cosmonauts.

Career in the Soviet space program

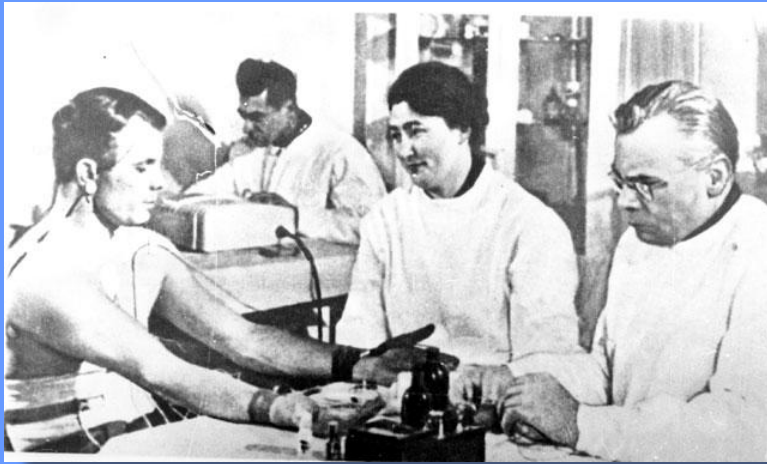
Selection and training



Gagarin applied and was selected to train in the first group of sixty men. Only twelve men were taken for further training at Zvezdograd (Star City), a training field outside Moscow.

Career in the Soviet space program

Selection and training



Space officials closely observed the trainees. They finally selected Gagarin for the first spaceflight. Capable, strong, and even-tempered, Gagarin represented the ideal Soviet man, a peasant farmer who became a highly trained cosmonaut in a few short years.

Career in the Soviet space program

Space flight



He was launched in Vostok 1 on the planned date, and during the crowded 1 hour 48 minutes of his single orbit of the earth he proved that man could survive in space and perform useful tasks. His mission ended at 10:55 A.M., when he landed safely in a field near Saratov

Career in the Soviet space program

Fame and later life



After the flight, Gagarin became a worldwide celebrity, touring widely with appearances in Italy, Great Britain, Germany, Canada, and Japan to promote the Soviet achievement.

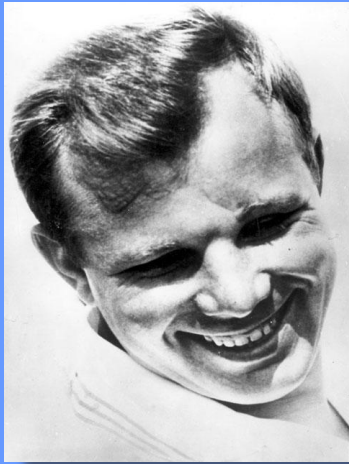
Career in the Soviet space program

Fame and later life



In 1962, he began serving as a deputy to the Supreme Soviet. He later returned to Star City, the cosmonaut facility, where he worked on designs for a reusable spacecraft. Gagarin worked on these designs in Star City for 7 years.

Death and legacy



On 27 March 1968, while on a routine training flight, he and flight instructor Vladimir Seryogin died in a MiG-15UTI crash near the town of Kirzhach. Gagarin and Seryogin were buried in the walls of the Kremlin on Red Square.

Death and legacy



American astronauts Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin left one of Gagarin's medals on the moon as a tribute. The cosmonaut training center where he had first trained was named after him. A crater on the moon bears his name, as does Gagarin Square in Moscow with its soaring monument, along with a number of monuments and streets in cities throughout Russia. At Baikonur, a reproduction of his training room is traditionally visited by space crews before a launch. Russians celebrate Cosmonaut Day on April 12 every year in honor of Gagarin's historic flight.