



## Yuri Gagarin

On board *Vostok 1*, Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin (1934 - 1968) made history on April 12, 1961 when he became both the first person in the world to enter space and the first person to orbit the Earth.

### **CHILDHOOD OF YURI GAGARIN**

Yuri Gagarin was born in Klushino, a small village west of Moscow in Russia (then known as the Soviet Union).

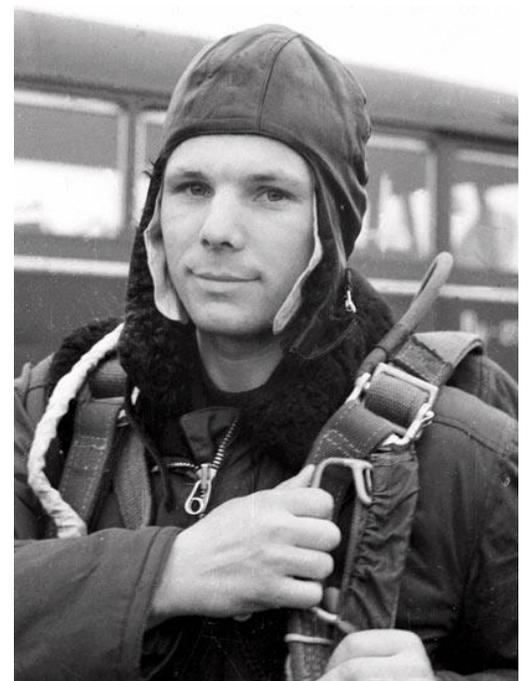
Yuri was the third of four children and spent his childhood on a collective farm where his father, Alexey Ivanovich Gagarin, worked as a carpenter and bricklayer and his mother, Anna Timofeyevna Gagarina, worked as a milkmaid.

In 1941, Yuri Gagarin was just seven years old when the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union. Life was difficult during the war and the Gagarins were made to leave their home. The Nazis also sent Yuri's two sisters to Germany to work as forced laborers.

### **GAGARIN LEARNS TO FLY**

In school, Yuri Gagarin loved both maths and physics. He continued on to a trade school, where he learned to be a metalworker and then went on to an industrial school. It was at the industrial school in Saratov that he joined a flying club. Gagarin learned quickly and was obviously at ease in a plane. He made his first solo flight in 1955. Since Gagarin had discovered a love of flying, he joined the Soviet Air Force.

However, while Gagarin enjoyed being a fighter pilot, what he really wanted to do was to go to space. Since he had been following the Soviet Union's progress in space flight, he was confident that soon they would be sending a man into space. He wanted to be that man; so he volunteered to be a cosmonaut. Yuri Gagarin was just one of 3,000 applicants to be the first Soviet cosmonaut. Out of this large pool of applicants Gagarin was chosen to be the first man into space because of his skills.



*Yuri Gagarin in flying school.*



*Vostok 1*

## LAUNCH OF VOSTOK 1

On April 12, 1961, Yuri Gagarin boarded Vostok 1 at the Baikonur Cosmodrome. Although he was fully trained for the mission, no one knew if it was going to be a success or a failure. Gagarin was to be the very first human being in space, truly going where no man had gone before. *Vostok 1*, with Yuri Gagarin inside, launched on schedule at 9:07 a.m. Moscow Time. Just after lift-off, Gagarin reputedly called out, "Poyekhali!" ("Off we go!")

After entering space, Gagarin completed a single orbit around Earth. The Vostok 1's top speed reached 28,260 kph (about 17,600 mph). At the end of the orbit, Vostok 1 re-entered the Earth's atmosphere. When Vostok 1 was still about 7 km (4.35 miles) from the ground, Gagarin ejected (as planned) from the spacecraft and used a parachute to land safely.

Gagarin landed safely with his parachute about ten minutes after Vostok 1. Right before Gagarin landed (near the village of Uzmoriye, near the Volga River), a local farmer and her daughter spotted Gagarin floating down with his parachute.

## GAGARIN RETURNS A HERO

After his successful first flight into space, Gagarin never again was sent into space. Instead, he helped train future cosmonauts. On March 27, 1968, Gagarin was test-piloting a MiG-15 fighter jet when the plane plummeted to the ground, killing Gagarin instantly.

Yuri Gagarin's death at the young age of 34 deprived the world of a hero.

Today Gagarin is regarded as a true pioneer of spaceflight. Yuri Gagarin's successful flight into space paved the way for all future space exploration. He will forever be remembered as the first human to leave the earth and enter space.



*Soviet poster of Yuri Gagarin*