



## YURI GAGARIN

*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). He 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, when the young Yuri was just seven years old, the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union. Life was difficult during the war and the Gagarins were thrown out of their home by the invading German forces. The Nazis also deported Yuri's two sisters to Poland to work as forced laborers.

### **Gagarin learns to fly**

By 1946, the Gagarin family had moved to the town of Gzhatsk where Yuri went to school and excelled in mathematics and physics. He continued on to a trade school where he learned to be a metalworker, before progressing to an industrial school. It was at the industrial school in Saratov that he joined a flying club. Obviously at ease in a plane, Gagarin learned quickly and made his first solo flight in 1955. Having discovered what would be a lifelong love of flying, he joined the Soviet Air Force.

However, while Gagarin enjoyed being a fighter pilot, what he really wanted was to go to space. He had been following the Soviet Union's progress in space flight and was confident they would soon be sending a man into space – he wanted to be that man. With this in mind, he volunteered to join the cosmonaut programme. He was just one of 3,000 applicants to become the Soviet Union's first cosmonaut and, remarkably, out of this large pool of applicants, Yuri Gagarin was selected. He would be his country's – and the world's – first man in space.



*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 had trained intensively 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 Gagarin inside, launched on schedule at 9:07 am Moscow time. Just after lift-off, Gagarin reputedly called out, "Poyekhali!" ("Off we go!").

After successfully entering near space, Gagarin completed a single orbit around Earth. The spacecraft reached a staggering 28,260 kilometres per hour (about 17,600 miles per hour) at top speed. At the end of the orbit, *Vostok 1* re-entered the Earth's atmosphere. When it 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 near the village of Uzmoriye, close to the Volga River.

### **Gagarin returns a hero**

Despite his successful maiden flight into space, Gagarin would never again be sent into space. Instead, he helped train future cosmonauts. However, on March 27, 1968, Gagarin was test-piloting a MiG-15 fighter jet when the plane plummeted to the ground, killing him instantly.

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

Today, Gagarin is regarded as a pioneering figure in spaceflight. His successful venture into space paved the way for all future space exploration. He will forever be remembered as the first human to leave Earth and witness the wonders of Space firsthand.



*Soviet poster of Yuri Gagarin*