

Russia fetes 50th anniversary of first woman in space

June 16 2013, by Dmitry Zaks



Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space, seen in Star City, outside Moscow, on June 7, 2013. Russia is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the maiden flight of the Soviet national hero who went by the call name "Seagull" and captured the imaginations of girls around the world.

Russia celebrated Sunday the 50th anniversary of the maiden flight of the first woman in space—a Soviet national hero who went by the call name "Seagull" and captured the imaginations of girls around the world.

Valentina Tereshkova, now a lawmaker for Russia's ruling party, blasted off in a Vostok-6 spaceship two years after [Yuri Gagarin](#)'s historic first [manned flight](#) in 1961.

The 76-year-old remains the only woman to have ever made a solo flight in space.

"The importance of this event is impossible to overestimate in the history of Russian and world space travel," Russian Prime Minister [Dmitry Medvedev](#) said in a congratulatory message to Tereshkova.

State television celebrated by running documentaries about Tereshkova's life while the former cosmonaut herself spent the day commemorating a new space museum in her native region of Yaroslavl.

"You have to love your country—love it so hard that your heart is ready to stop," Tereshkova said in a documentary aired on Russia's state rolling news channel.

Soviet authorities in April 1962 had initially whittled down their list to five prospective candidates as they competed against the United States for space supremacy during the Cold War.



Russian cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space, poses before boarding the Vostok 6, at Baikonur cosmodrome, on June 16, 1963. Russia celebrates the 50th anniversary of the maiden flight of the Soviet national hero who went by the call name "Seagull" and captured the imaginations of girls around the world.

Their choice eventually settled on textile factory worker Tereshkova—the child of a peasant family and a Communist Youth (Komsomol) leader who had already performed 90 parachute jumps.

Tereshkova was not allowed to confide even in family members. They only learned of her exploits when Moscow announced it to the entire world.

She circled Earth 48 times during her three-day mission.

In the past few years, press speculation has said that she was space sick for much of this time and unable to perform some basic functions or respond to commands from ground control.

But Tereshkova blamed everything on mistakes with how the computer software had been programmed and denied feeling ill during the flight.

"A problem appeared on the first day of the flight," Tereshkova told a press conference last week.

"Due to a technical error, the spaceship was programmed not for a landing but for taking the ship into a higher orbit," she said.

Tereshkova's adventures did not end in space.



Russia's President Vladimir Putin presents flowers to cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space, at his Novo-Ogaryovo residence outside Moscow, on June 14 2013.

She also was nearly killed when a failed assassin opened fire in January 1969 on a limousine that he thought was carrying the late Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev.

The car was actually taking Tereshkova and three of her fellow cosmonauts to a Kremlin event.

"A few of the bullets whizzed by under my feet," Tereshkova told the Komsomolskaya Pravda daily.

More than 40 women from the United States have gone into [space](#) since Tereshkova but only one other Russian has made it—Yelena Kondakova

in 1994 and 1997.

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