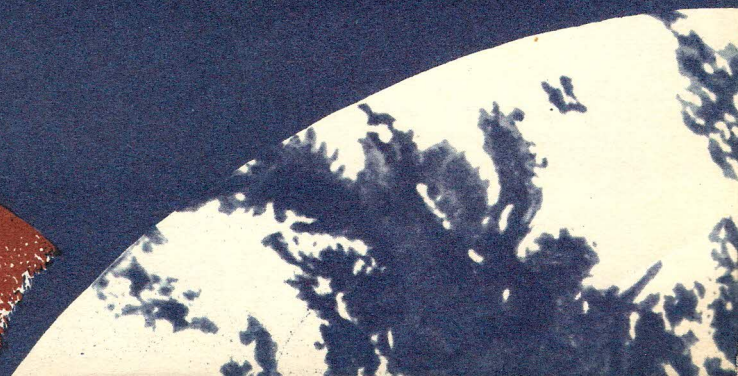
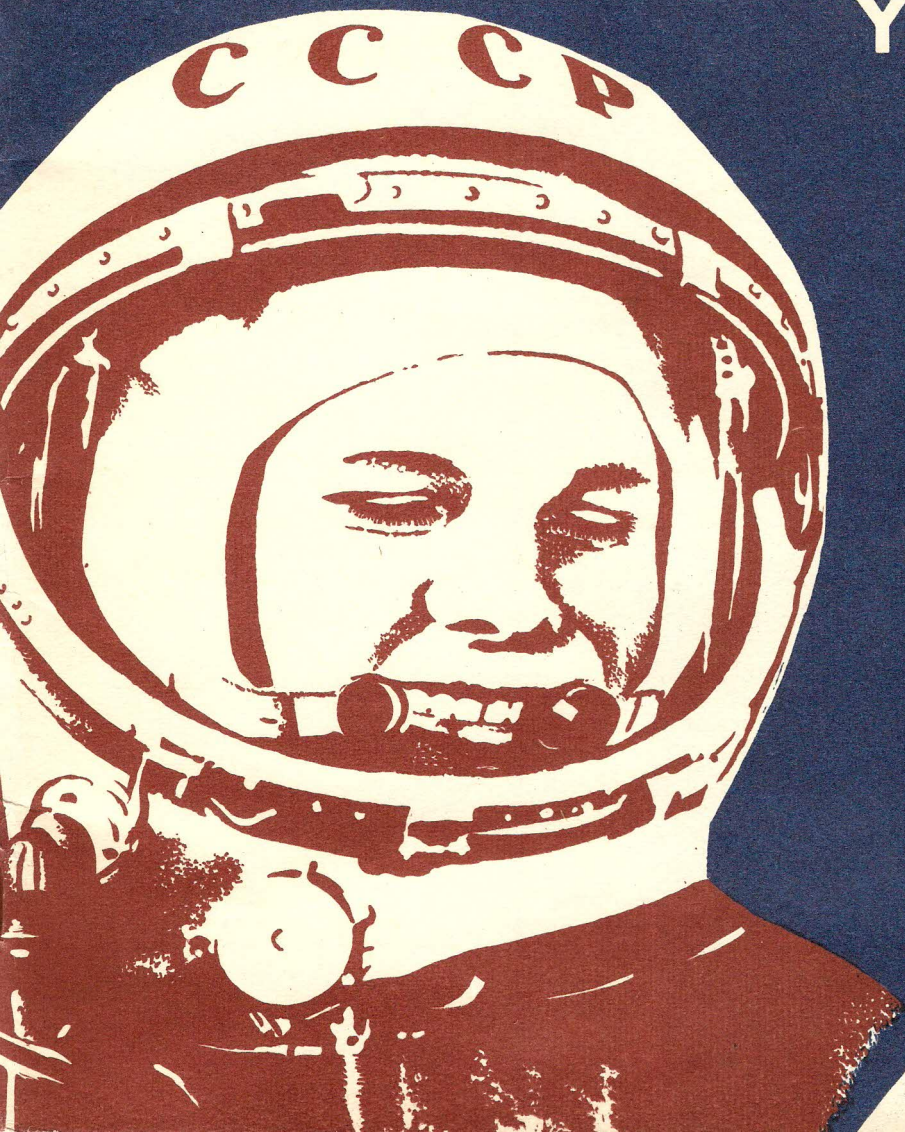
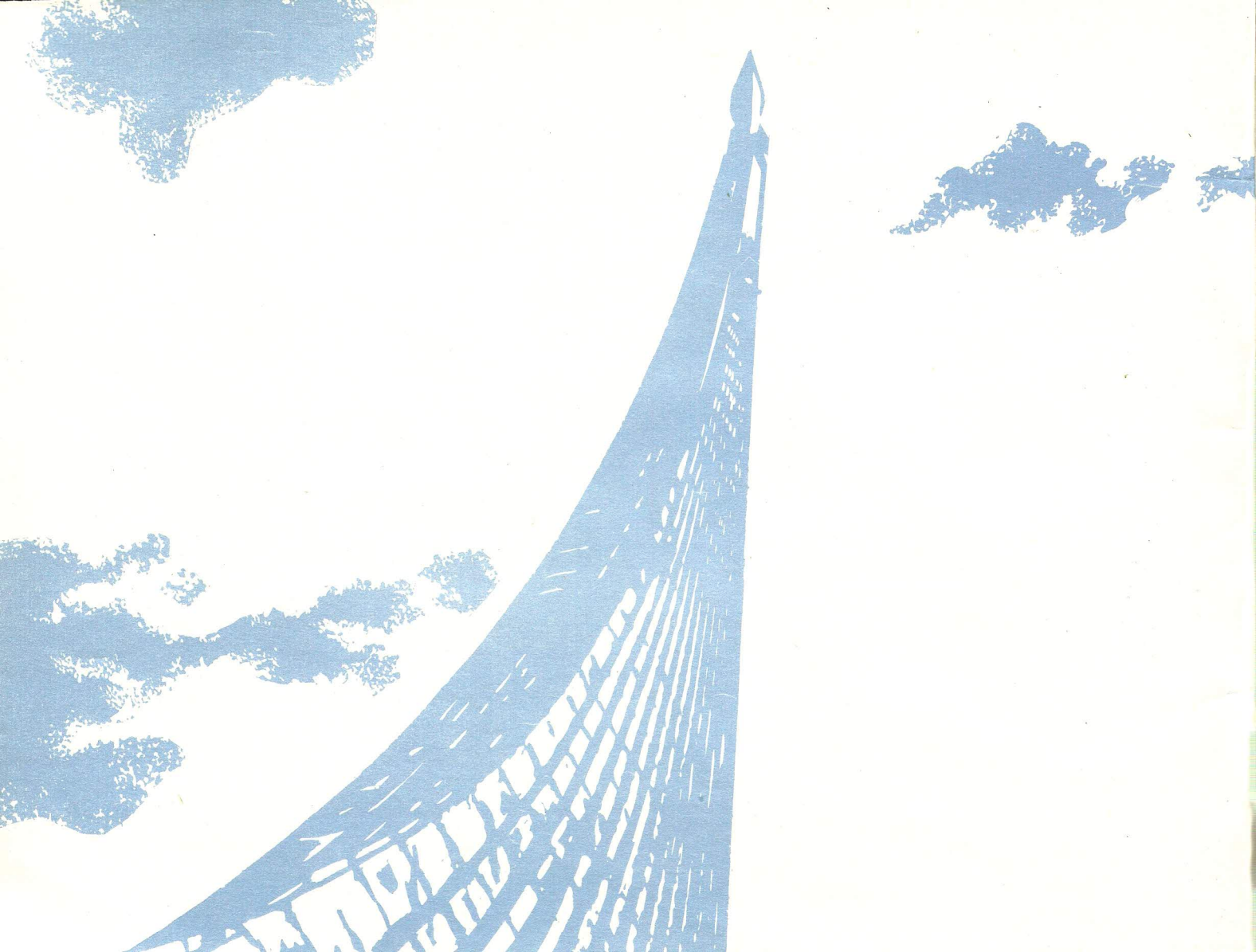


YURI GAGARIN





YURI GAGARIN

The First
Cosmonaut



This booklet is a brief account of the eventful life of the brilliant young Soviet spaceman, Yuri Gagarin—the world's first cosmonaut.

On 12 April, 1961, the first manned spaceship left our planet from the Baikonur cosmodrome in the Soviet Union. This was the beginning, the blazing of a trail which has now become a road to the cosmos. One after another, spaceships are leaving earth for the wide expanses of the universe. Today, space pilots live and work for months aboard space stations, they fly to the moon; and Soviet and American spacemen have accomplished a joint experimental flight.

In the near future, perhaps, earthmen will go still further, journeying to other planets and universes. But alongside the names of these future explorers there will always rank the name of the first Soviet cosmonaut, for Yuri Gagarin's 108-minute flight in space represented not only a triumph of science and engineering, but also a bursting of the "bounds of possibility", the breaking of a psychological barrier. It was literally a flight into the unknown.

Being a pilot, he had flown many demanding assignments, including flights at night and in blizzard conditions, and at home they would wait anxiously for his familiar step. Even so, he was never very far from the earth. But now... He had gone out into the unknown where no man had ever been before. Valentina, his wife, well understood all that this entailed but had agreed. And this, too, was an act of heroism for the mother of two small children.

... From Zvyozdny Gorodok (Star Town), Yuri had flown to the cosmodrome. It was quiet at his home. The children were asleep. The sky, washed by recent rain, was studded with stars. The night seemed to be waiting for something. The wet pines stood motionless, and the houses merged together in the stillness and bluish darkness. In only one of them shone a yellow rectangle of light...

"Am I happy to be setting off on a cosmic flight?" said Yuri Gagarin in an interview before the start. "Of course. In all ages and epochs people have experienced the greatest happiness in embarking upon new voyages of discovery... I want to dedicate this first cosmic flight to the people of communism—the society which the Soviet people are now already entering upon... I say 'until we meet again' to you, dear friends, as we always say to each other when setting off on a long journey. How I should like to embrace you all—my friends and those with whom I am not acquainted, strangers and the people nearest and dearest to me!"

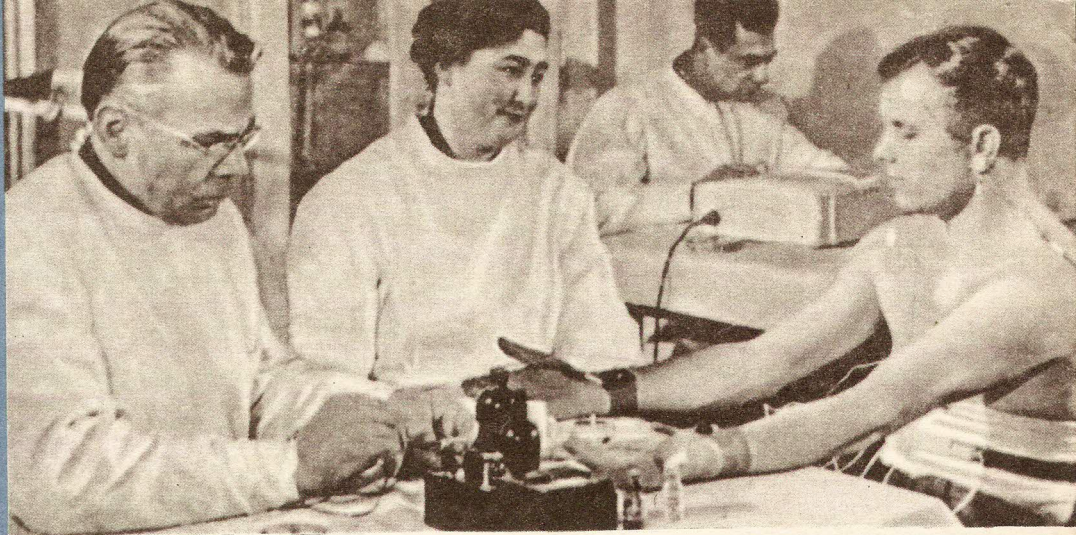


The chimes rang out from the Kremlin's Spassky tower, ushering in a new day, an ordinary spring day—the 12th of April, 1961. There were few who knew in those first hours that this day would go down in history, that the approaching dawn would open a new page in the history of man's exploration of the world around him, that it would herald his pioneering venture into cosmic space. At the Baikonur cosmodrome, in these pre-dawn hours, all the operations connected with the preparations for the flight had been completed. The rocket with its spaceship stood at the ready, held secure by the long supporting arms. It shone whitely in the surrounding darkness, lit by flood-lights and powerful reflector lamps attached to the framework of the servicing structures. And just as on the eve of a major assault, of a crucial battle, the engineers, scientists and doctors spent a tense, sleepless night... At last everything was ready.





Morning came. The sun rose over the horizon, and in the awakening, boundless steppeland of Kazakhstan, at the Baikonur cosmodrome, lit up the contours of buildings, the launching pad, the power transmission pylons and the directional antennae... The first rays of the sun also penetrated the windows of a small cottage in which, still asleep, lay a man whose name the whole world was to know in a few hours' time... A doctor entered the quiet room and shook the shoulder of the sleeper, who opened his eyes and smiled. Then, jumping to his feet, the future cosmonaut went through his morning exercises and unhurriedly began to dress, as if for a normal working day... In the laboratory, which was also housed in the cottage, he underwent yet one more medical check-up. At six o'clock there was a meeting of the State Commission. It was brief: the cosmonaut and the ship were pronounced ready for the flight.





Gagarin put on special warm, light combination overalls, and then a light orange space suit which served as an additional "cabin" for the pilot, protecting him from harmful radiation and against the possibility of a hermetic failure of the cabin proper. When every fastener had been checked, the cosmonaut rose and, making his way awkwardly to the door of the cottage, paused on the threshold. There, some distance away, as if straining upward, shone the silver body of the rocket.

At the launching site Gagarin reported to the members of the State Commission that he was ready for the flight. They noticed the emotion with which he spoke, and were aware, for that matter, of being in a similar state themselves... When the official part was over, Gagarin made this statement for the press and radio:

"Dear friends, compatriots, and people of all countries and continents! In a few minutes a mighty ship will carry me aloft to distant space. What can I say to you in these last moments before the launch? At this instant the whole of my life seems to be condensed into one wonderful moment... To be the first to enter the cosmos, to engage, single-handed, in an unprecedented duel with nature—could one dream of anything more!"

The Chief Designer glanced surreptitiously at his watch. Gagarin noticed and went up to him. Sergei Korolev's face showed traces of strain and fatigue after the long night's work.

"Well, Yura, it's time—time to get aboard!" said the chief.

"Don't worry, Sergei Pavlovich, everything will be fine," Gagarin replied quietly...





They helped the cosmonaut into the specially designed seat in the cabin. Noiselessly the hatch shut tight and Gagarin was alone with his instruments. One hour before the countdown was announced. While the preparatory work was proceeding, between rocket and ground a lively dialogue was struck up, now serious and businesslike, and now relaxed, with friendly, light-hearted banter. It was all very like departure time at a railway station... It must have been one of the most endlessly drawn out hours in Yuri Gagarin's life, for while time may be relative according to Einstein's theory, it seems much more so when it comes to the law of the human mind and heart.

To help pass the time they played some music over the intercom, and Gagarin heard the words of a familiar song. It flowed from the earphones broadly, freely, and Yuri saw himself as if on a cinema screen, in flashes—as a barefooted boy helping to take the collective farm cattle out to pasture... Then as a schoolboy, when, for the first time, he had written Lenin's name... At trade school after making his first casting box... At industrial training college preparing his graduation work... And later, as a pilot, protecting the northern borders of the country.



Yuri Gagarin was born on 9 March, 1934, in the village of Klushino in the Smolensk region, in the west of the Russian Federation. The cottage, smelling of freshly planed wood and of apples, the expanse of river, the birch groves, the green ocean of the never-ending Russian fields, the country

roads running through flowering rye and flax—all this was his world.

At the end of summer, in 1941, Yura, like the other children, was getting ready for school. He was not yet able to understand properly the misfortune that had befallen his country, and that was even then fast



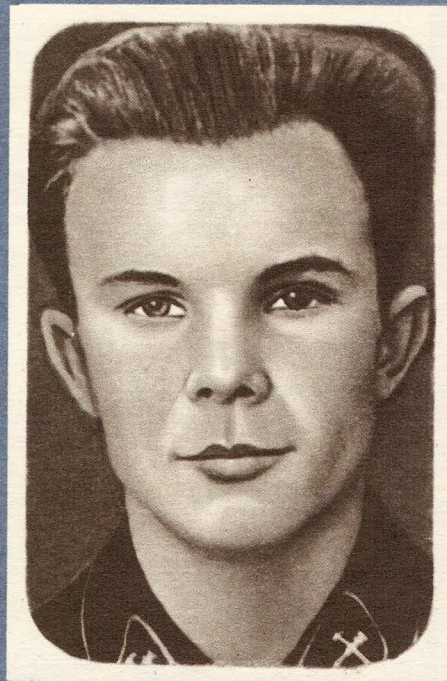
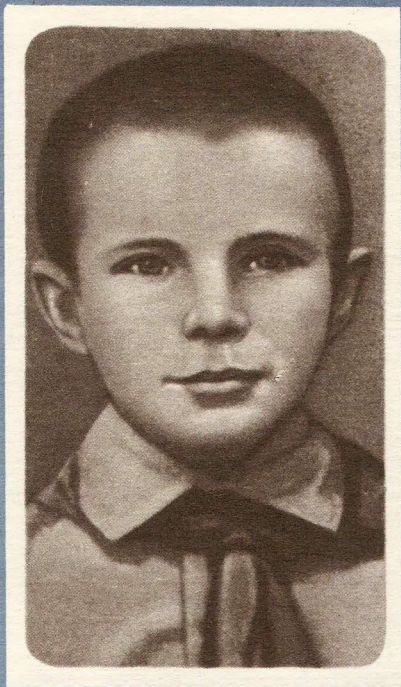
approaching his own home. The war unleashed by Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, burst upon Klushino early on an autumn morning. This was the beginning of long days of privation, misery and fear...

Yuri remembered very clearly that joyous day when Soviet soldiers liberated the vil-

lage, all the more so because on that same day he had turned nine. A new life began on the ashes—for everything had been destroyed. But never mind, it was on freed land...

In 1945, after the war, the family moved to Gzhatsk. When he had finished the sixth class at school Yuri took the entrance

exams to enrol at a trade-training school and learn the skills of casting and forging. Now he studied and at the same time underwent training while working at a factory. But he wanted to continue his studies, and later he was sent to an industrial training college in the Volga city of Saratov.



In Saratov Yuri Gagarin accomplished his first flight, in a trainer at the local aero club. But success didn't come easily. He distinctly remembered that evening when he was walking across the deserted airfield, his jaw set stubbornly. He had to overcome the nervous excitement in himself, a tendency to hold his muscles taut, or it would

mean the end of his dream... The next time he was at the controls the plane responded to his wishes as it should...

Later he went on to the air force training college at Orenburg. Here he gained his wings and also met his future wife, Valentina. After graduating, he served for two years in the North as a pilot. And just at this



time, as if they had been waiting for the young Gagarin, the first Soviet sputniks, one after another, began orbiting the earth.

In the spring of 1960, learning that airmen were being selected to form a group for training as future cosmonauts, Gagarin put in an application. After a whole number of tests, he heard the longed-for words: "For

you the stratosphere is not the limit." A whole year of training followed. Everything was new and unfamiliar—the specialists who instructed him in the operation of the spacecraft, and the training apparatuses and installations such as the centrifuges and vibrators, and the "quiet" chamber and

the pressure chamber, all of which meant that the body had to grow accustomed to abnormal strains and overloads. And there were also the parachute jumps, and the learning to work under conditions of weightlessness.





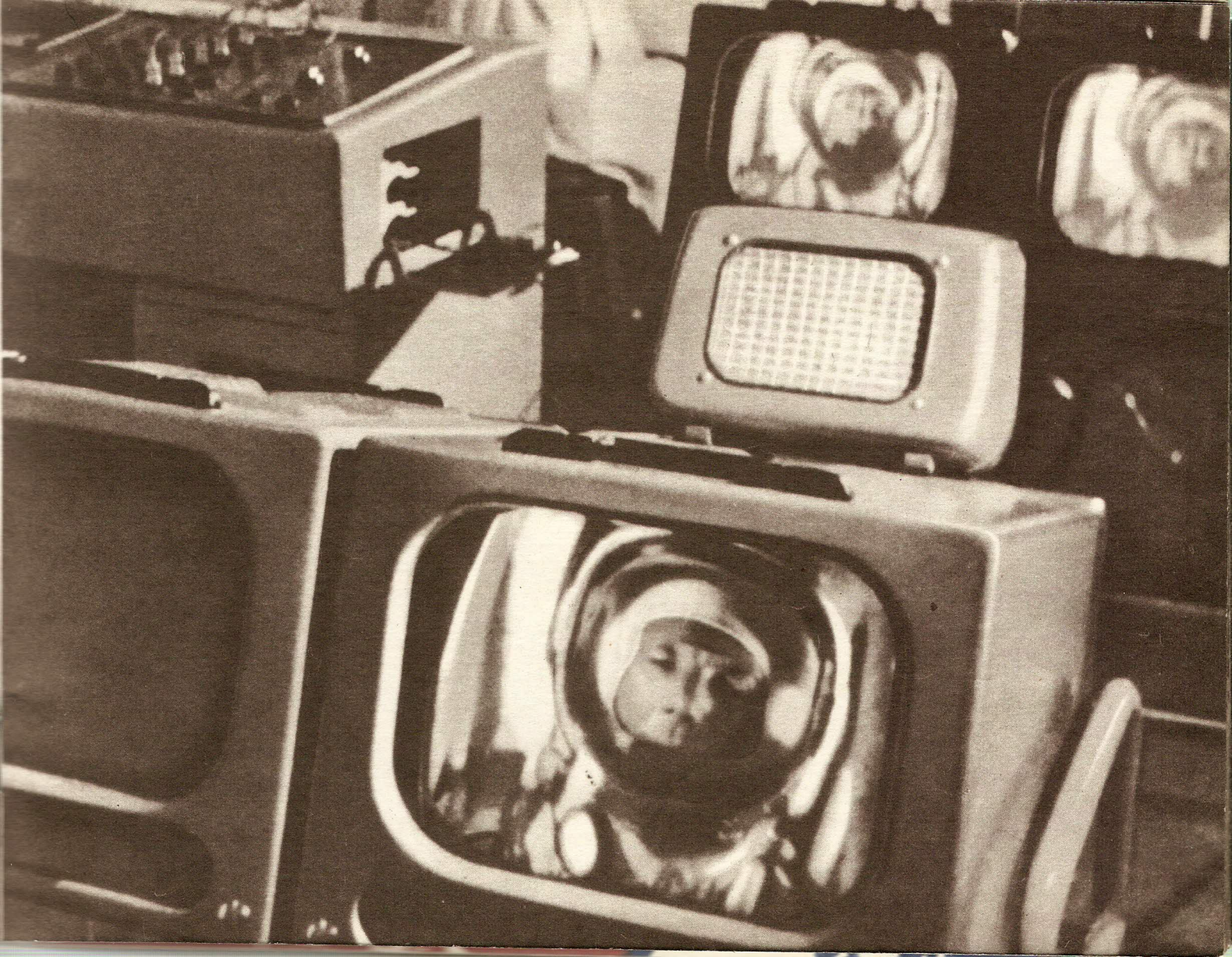
Now, Yuri recalled one of the last "examinations" he had undergone before the Chief Designer, Sergei Korolev, and then the conference of the State Commission, which had been held just a few days before. It had then been confirmed that he was to pilot the first orbital spaceship, the "Vostok".

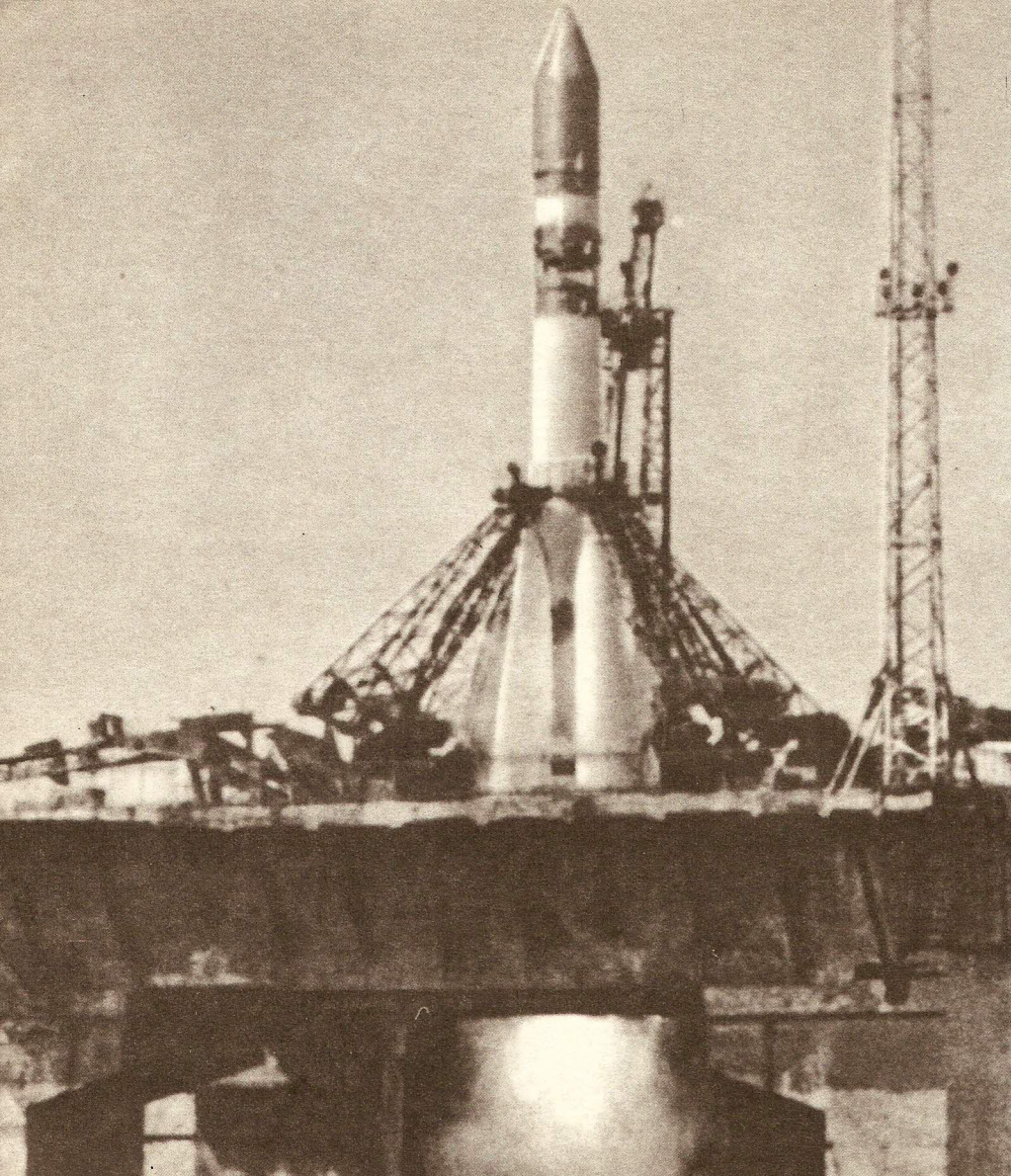
... Unexpectedly, the music in the headphones died away. The camera in the cabin was switched on, and Gagarin appeared on the television screens at the control desk. Several more minutes elapsed, and Sergei Korolev picked up the microphone:

"'Dawn' calling 'Cedar' (Gagarin's call-sign). The count-down is about to start."

"Roger. Feeling fine, excellent spirits, ready to go."

This is what the Chief Designer was waiting for, because his full attention was centred now, not on the technicalities of the cosmonaut's situation in the cabin, but on his psychological preparedness—his spirits, and his faith in the success of the flight. It was still not too late to replace the cosmonaut, should he change his mind, with the backup pilot waiting below. But in any event the flight would go ahead...





"Switch to 'go' position!" Gagarin settled back into his reclining seat.

"Idle run!" flashed the instruction to the chain of ground command-monitoring posts, and the fuelling tower moved smoothly away from the side of the rocket.

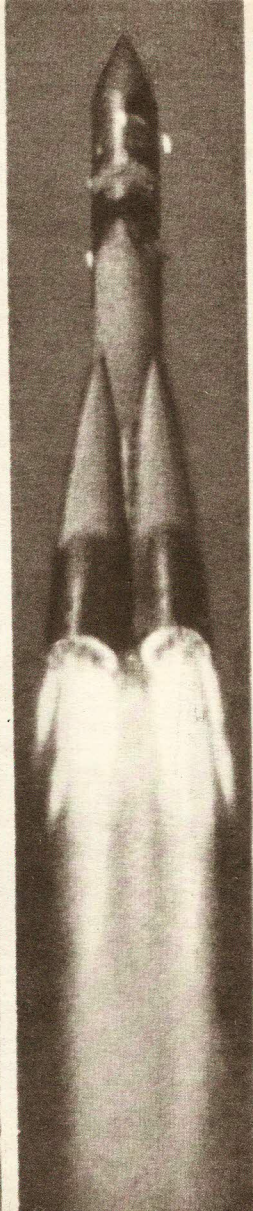
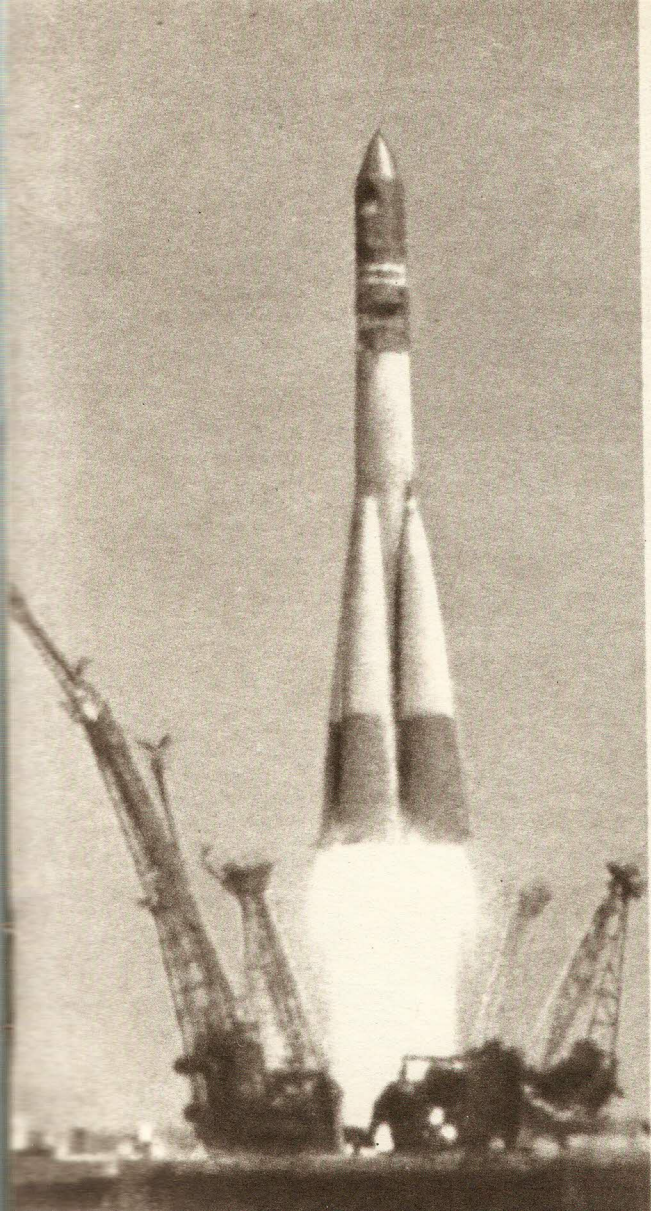
"Ignition!"

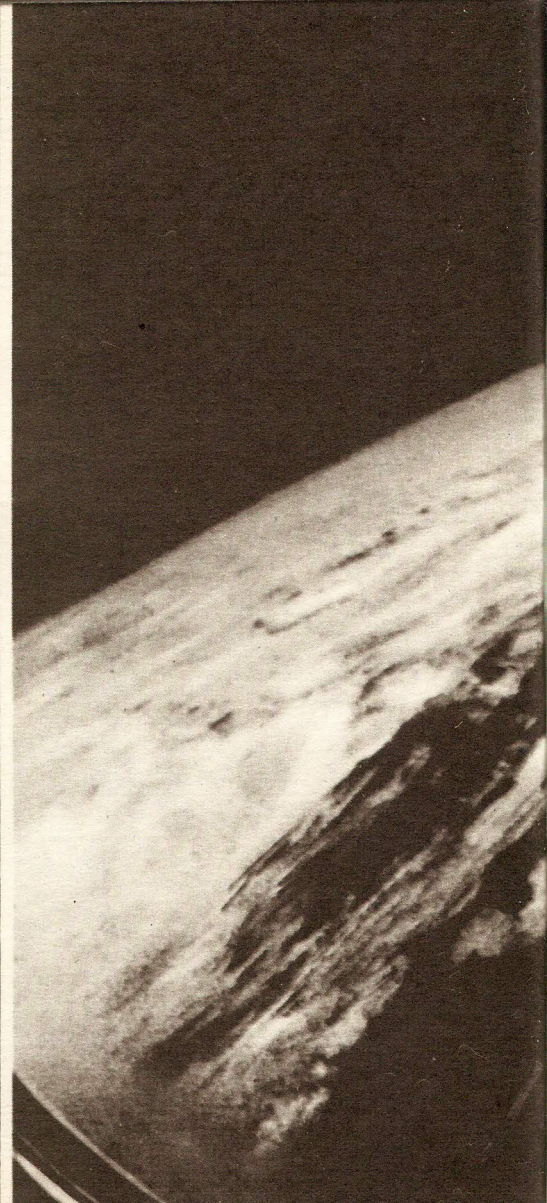
Slowly, it seemed reluctantly, the jib carrying the power cable swung away...

"Lift-off!"

Suddenly the supporting arms opened like the petals of a flower, freeing the rocket. Enveloped in flame from the inferno of fire rushing from the exhaust nozzles of the engines, the rocket rose slowly over the launch pad. Like something living, trembling slightly, it hung over the earth for a second or two as if undecided, but then, leaving a raging whirlwind of fire behind it, quickly disappeared from sight. All that could be seen in the sky was a bright fiery trail...

"Off we go!" came the jubilant voice of Gagarin...





He felt calm, and his thinking was methodical and precise. Only once did anything strike him as being quite unreal. It was when Sergei Korolev's voice informed him that 70 seconds had elapsed since lift-off. "Can it really be only seventy?" he thought. "What long seconds..."

The cosmonaut experienced a crushing force which pressed him harder and harder into his padded seat. He could move neither his arms nor his legs.

But at last the launch vehicle, having cut through the dense layers of the atmosphere, carried the spaceship into orbit. The last stage of the rocket separated; the ship was in orbit and weightless. Gagarin was no longer sitting, or lying, but seemed to be suspended in the cabin. Everything not fastened down—for example, writing board, note-book and pencil—began to float in the air... For a moment he lost sight of the earth, but then, through the porthole, the pale sapphire globe of our planet, girdled with the light of dawn, appeared again.

Every second was precious, and Yuri at once got down to work, noting the instruments and checking the apparatuses, and recording his sensations. He had to observe, hear, sense, understand and remember everything, and convey all this to earth. Approaching Africa, he realised that he had already almost circled the globe and that in ten minutes, according to plan, the retro engine would be switched on...





Meanwhile, on earth, the news of man's first flight into the cosmos was being broadcast in all languages. Through open windows, from loud-speakers, could be heard the solemn announcement: "... the world's first orbital spaceship, 'Vostok', with a man on board..."

From every direction, people poured into Red Square. They embraced and cheered, and held aloft hastily prepared placards saying "Moscow—Cosmos—Moscow. Hurrah!" and "Hurrah for Gagarin!"

Having been slowed down by the braking system, the ship dropped out of orbit and entered the dense layers of the atmosphere. Flames began to leap and dance around the capsule, the glass of the porthole became covered over with a dark film, and the temperature of the heat shield rose to thousands of degrees... "Vostok" drew closer to earth—ten thousand metres... Nine thousand... Below, he discerned the Volga and the city of Saratov where he had made his first flight. Five hundred metres... One hundred...

At 10:55 a.m. Moscow time, the blackened and scorched steel capsule landed.

At home, Valentina, after Yuri had flown off to Baikonur, had been waiting all the time for news. And suddenly, filling the TV screen, she saw Yuri's portrait and heard the announcement that the journey into space had been successfully accomplished.

"Daddy," observed their small daughter calmly, looking at the screen, but her mother, suddenly weak, sank onto a chair and pressed her hands against her whitened cheeks...



МОСКВА -
КОСМОС -
МОСКВА. УРА!

ГАГАРИН
УРА!

ГАГАРИН
УРА!

КОСМОС
МОСКВА
УРА!





Groggily, Gagarin set foot on the raw earth of a ploughed field. Over his head, in a vast sky, a warm spring sun shone down. After the cramped cabin everything was wonderfully spacious, and instead of the fiery glow of flames there was now a peaceful azure sky, and deep silence. Only the wind, following the undulating ground, tugged at the line of waving shrubs and bushes that provided shelter for the field... Yuri caught sight of a woman and a girl who were staring at him with curiosity. The cosmonaut went towards them. Taking off his helmet, he cried: "Don't be alarmed... I'm Soviet!"

At that same instant he heard: "Yuri Gagarin, Yuri Gagarin!" Tractor drivers, who had been nearby, were running up to him. Here, too, the radio had brought news about the flight. They all surrounded him and helped to take off the protective suit. Someone gave him a cap. Then, together, they examined the spacecraft. In no time a helicopter appeared with members of the spacecraft landing support team...

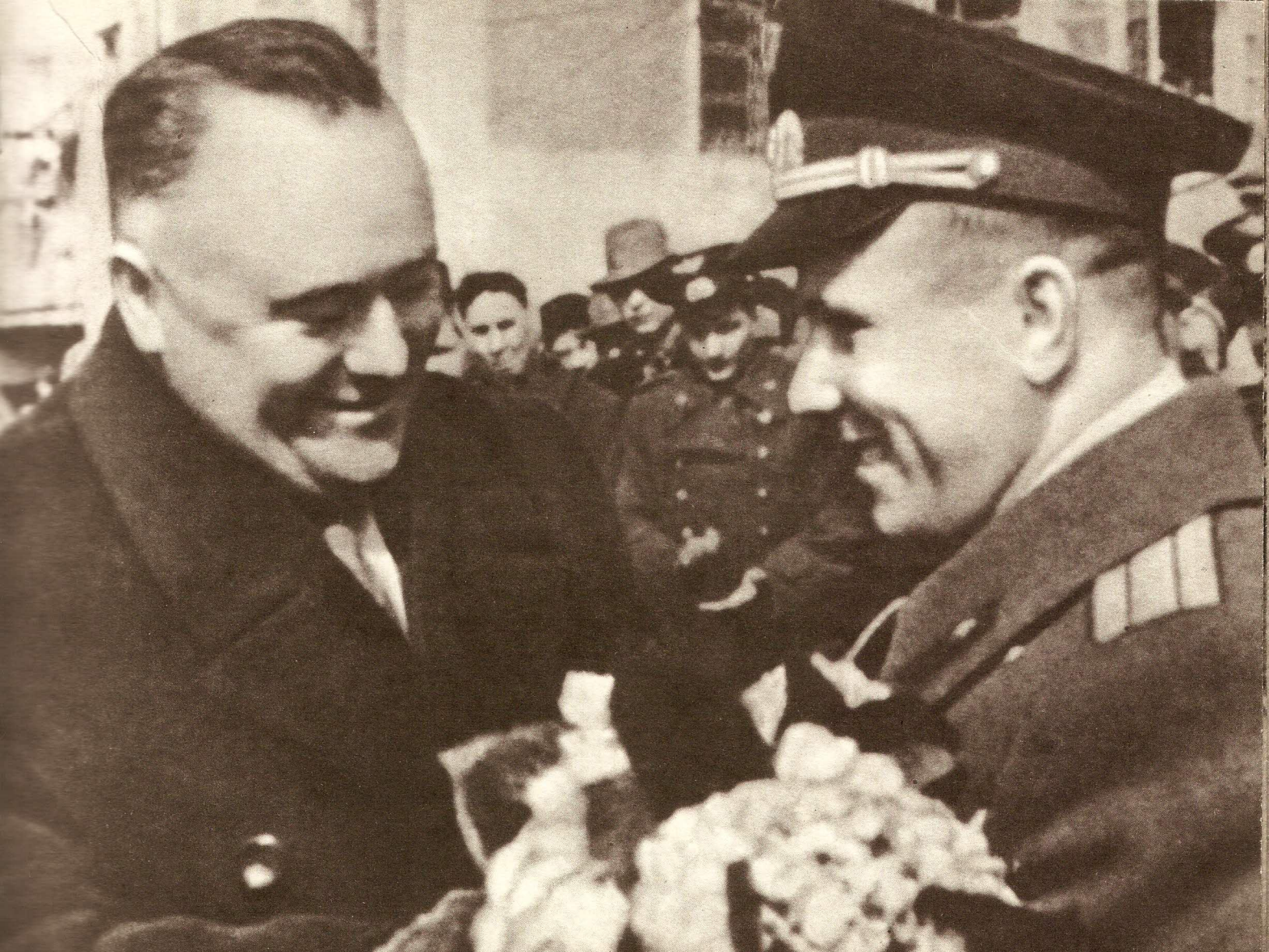




For the first few hours following his return to earth Gagarin had a strange appearance. His fair hair lay tangled on his forehead, and his eyelids darkened and heavy from fatigue, seemed to be weighed down by his brows. They all understood his condition. It had been a momentous feat—the first flight by man into the unknown realm of space... And it was not until Yuri had found himself back on the earth again that he had really comprehended that everything had gone off brilliantly.

First he had a short rest, then a brief conversation with Moscow. After that there was the meeting with all the people who had only very recently sent him on his way to the cosmos. Sergei Korolev was the first to embrace him... Then they showered Gagarin with questions.

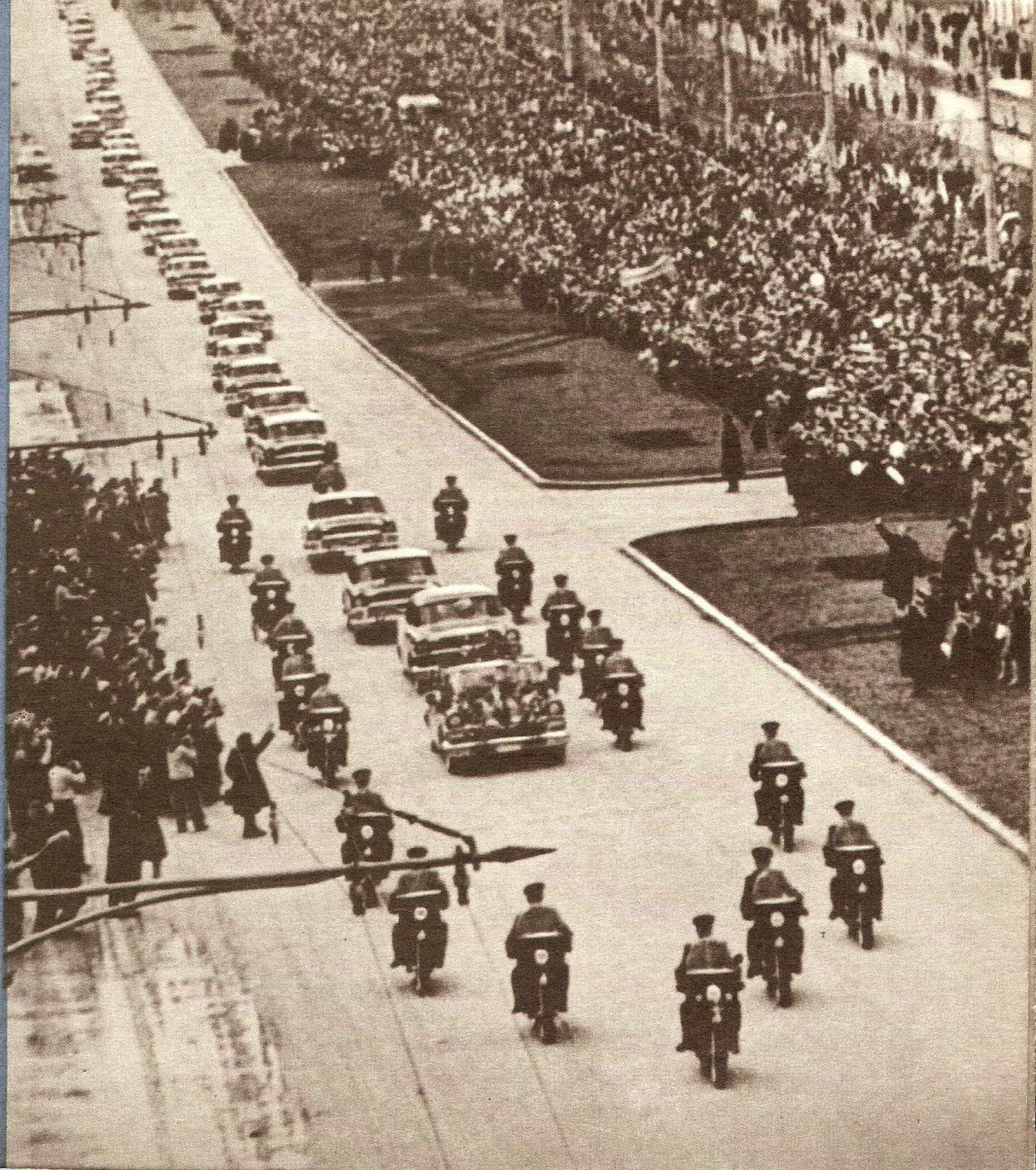
On the morning of the 14th of April, the cosmonaut boarded a special plane in Saratov and flew to Moscow. Some fifty kilometres from the capital the aircraft was met by a guard of honour of fighter planes which escorted it to the airport. The plane flew low over the city and then landed at the Vnukovo terminal. Passing over the streets, Yuri had seen the throngs of people waiting for his arrival. The eager Muscovites were even standing on the roofs of the buildings, as if hoping to get a first glimpse of the cosmonaut while he was still in the plane.





No sooner had the taxiing plane come to a stop by the long, narrow strip of red carpet which stretched across the tarmac to the official welcoming stand, than the excitement and noise stopped and a solemn hush of expectancy fell over the crowd. Gagarin, wasting no time, stepped smartly down the gangway. The crowd held its breath, and all eyes were fastened on him as he marched toward the rostrum with military precision. In the setting of the huge, strangely quiet airport, he appeared a diminutive, even fragile-looking figure, and the way leading along the ribbon of carpet seemed so long...

Reaching the stand, where Party and government leaders awaited him, Gagarin reported the successful accomplishment of his mission. After the report there were embraces, handshakes and congratulations from all sides. Valentina and the children were there to throw their arms around him, and his mother and father were also present. Then the ceremonial cortège drove out of the airport and along a seething, excited and noisy human corridor which began at the entrance to the airport and extended for thirty kilometres, all the way to Red Square in the very centre of the city. The people waved pennants and flowers, bands were playing, and everywhere children were perched on the heads of their fathers...





The ceremony began by the wall of the Kremlin in Red Square. Yuri Gagarin was the first to speak. The proceedings were televised to all of Europe, and broadcast throughout the world. His voice catching with emotion, Yuri gave a brief speech: he thanked the Communist Party and Soviet government, and the scientists, engineers, technicians and all the workers who had taken part in building the spacecraft, and declared that he and his fellow cosmonauts were ready to fly further—out into the expanses of the universe...

That same evening the whole Gagarin family attended a reception in the Grand Kremlin Palace, arranged by the government in honour of the first space flight. It was all a new experience for Yuri, with the heavy clusters of chandeliers, the fanfares, the gleaming white marble of the Georgievsky Hall... After announcing that the USSR Supreme Soviet had conferred upon Yuri Gagarin the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star of Hero of the Soviet Union, the country's highest honour, Comrade Leonid Brezhnev stepped forward and fastened the Order and the Star on the breast of the hero's dress uniform.





After his exploit, Yuri Gagarin found himself even busier than before. Now, in addition to his normal duties and training routine, were added press conferences, radio talks and interviews, and public appearances. He described the work he had had to perform on the flight, gave his impressions of flying in space, and told about his background —the story of his life.

A foreign correspondent once asked Yuri if he hadn't got tired of fame since his exploit, and supposed that now Gagarin would be able to rest on his laurels for the remainder of his life.

"Rest?" objected Gagarin. "In the Soviet Union everybody works, and those who work hardest of all are the best-known people, the Heroes of the Soviet Union and Heroes of Socialist Labour, of whom there are thousands in the country. They strive to work better, to the best of their abilities, and in this way to set a personal example."

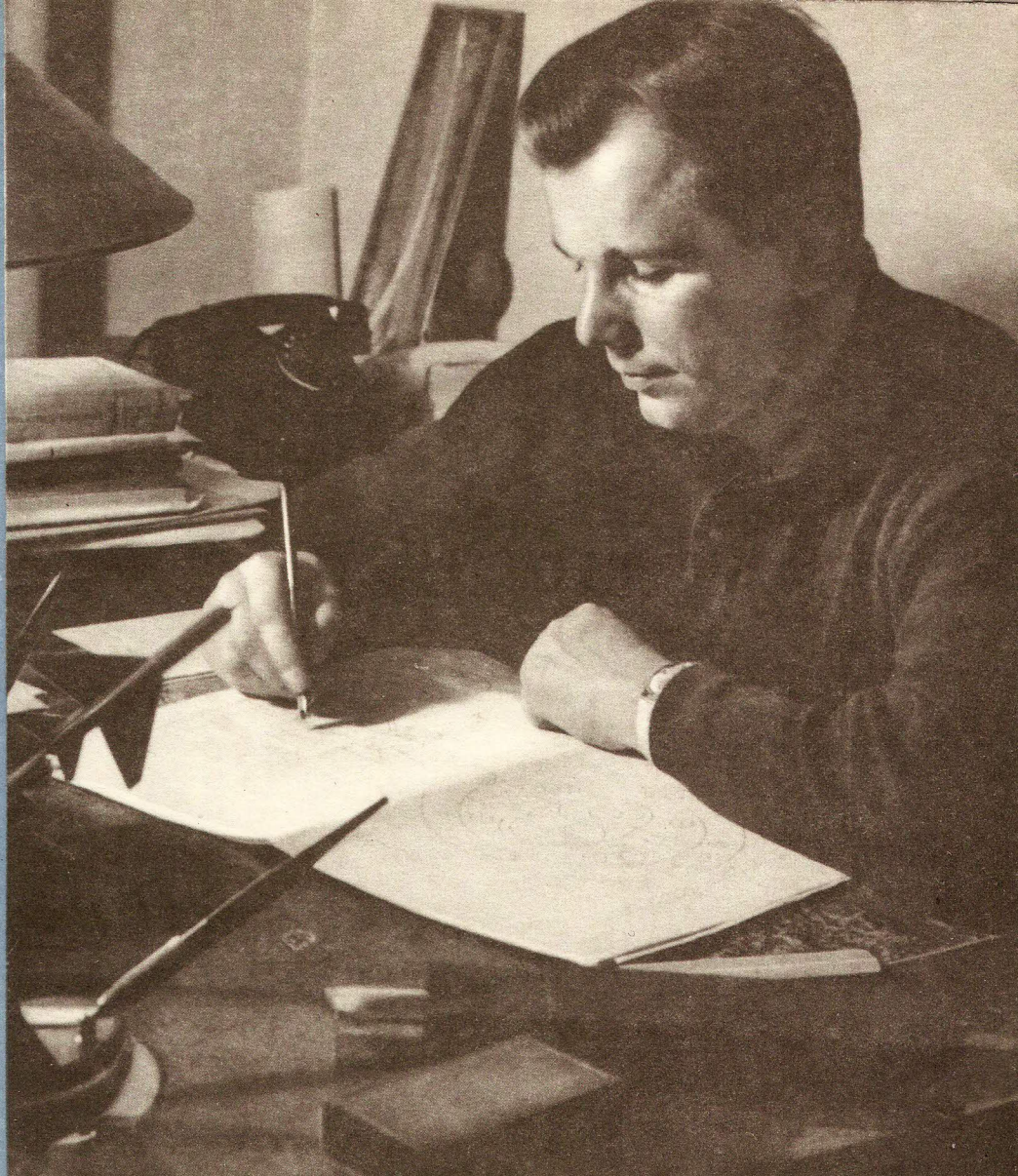
Yuri Gagarin, too, worked in this way. However, occasionally there would be some free time, and then he and his wife and daughters would go to see his parents in Gzhatsk (now called Gagarin). In no time the whole town would know that their fellow-countryman had arrived, and it would be a festive occasion, with the Gagarin home packed with guests.

But soon Yuri found himself with more formal obligations towards the residents of the entire district, for they elected him deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR for the Smolensk region.





Notwithstanding the great changes that had taken place in his life, Gagarin remained the same as he had always been—hard-working, modest, responsive and cheerful. He studied at the Air Academy, and was an instructor at the training centre in Star Town. The first cosmonaut took an active part in preparing every space flight to follow, and the cosmonauts under training found him to be a good teacher and expert instructor. For recreation he enjoyed water skiing or early-morning fishing, or hunting in the nearby forest. But in the evenings, in the Gagarin home, the table-lamp would often burn late into the night. Yuri would be writing. He had a keenly developed feeling for the written word, and his speech, too, was imaginative and colourful. The journalists who knew him said that if he had not become a cosmonaut Yuri would have been a writer. When asked where his talent came from, he smiled: it was from his mother. There was no end to the songs she knew, the folk tales and the sayings of the people. The words in these songs and stories were like jewels you could string together as if on a thread, to make a beautiful necklace... Several days before the tragic accident in which he lost his life, Yuri Gagarin had sent to the publisher a book entitled "Psychology and the Cosmos". And copies of the first edition of his book, "Road to the Cosmos", with his autograph, are in the major libraries of the world.

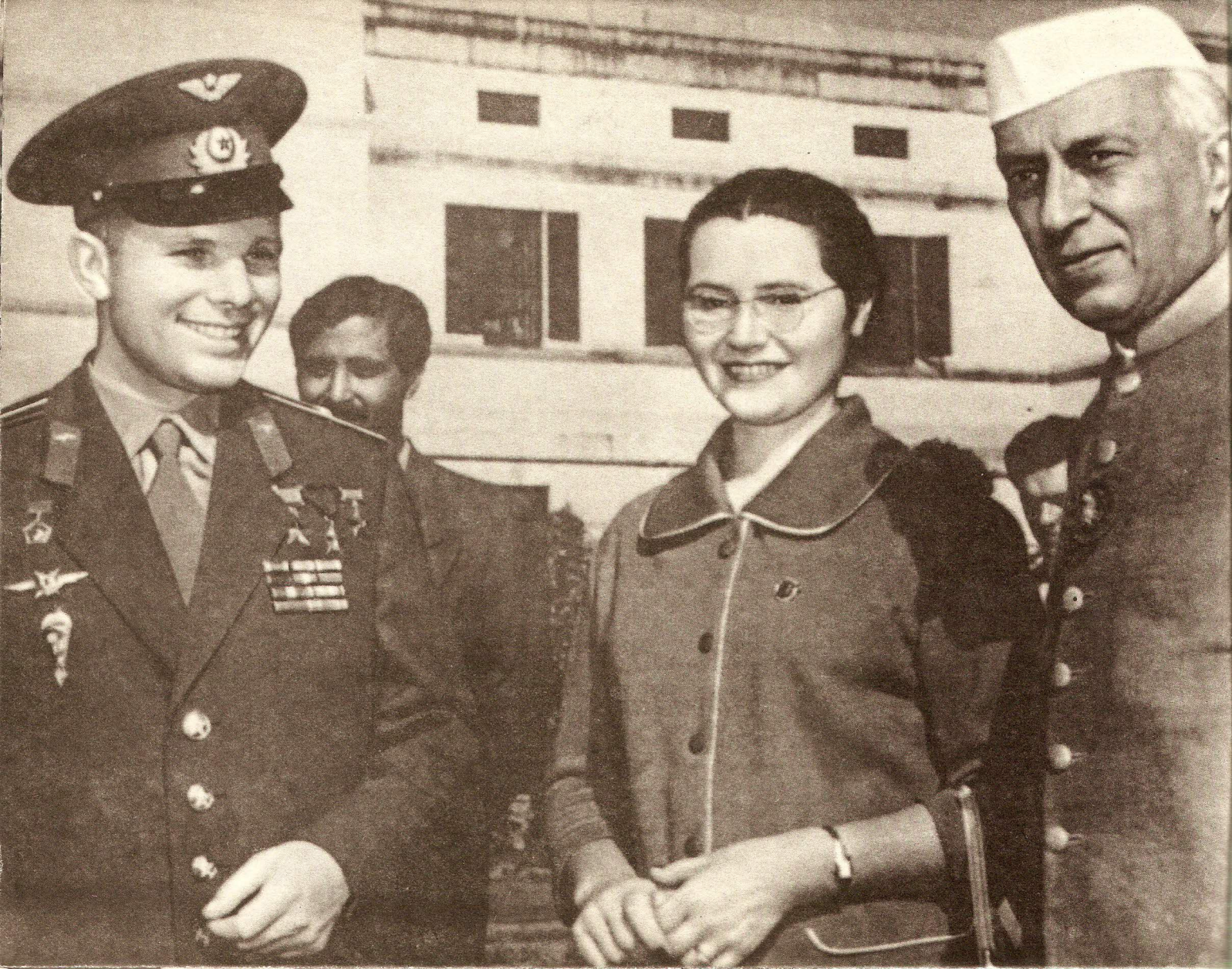




The time passed swiftly. Gagarin travelled to many countries on good-will missions—all in addition to his many new duties. Combined, the routes of these journeys exceeded many times the length of the path he had traversed in "Vostok". He visited Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland, Cuba, Canada, Mexico, Japan, Brazil, Norway, Britain, India, Egypt, Ghana, and many other places. He was fêted by the people, by presidents and monarchs, and honoured with the highest state awards. He was welcomed in many different languages, and everywhere flowers were showered upon him.

People of all ages, professions and persuasions came to greet the world's first space pilot as if the occasion were a national holiday. He found words for all, but liked to talk especially with the youth. When looking at our earth from space, Yuri would tell them, what strikes you is not only the beauty of the continents, but their closeness to one another, their essential unity. The different parts that make up the world all merge into one whole. How enjoyable life would be on our planet, he would say, if the young people of all the continents were to really become aware of their closeness, their common interests. What wonderful soil this would make in which peace and friendship could flourish!





Although now looking more mature in his outward appearance, for everyone Yuri Gagarin remained the youthful-looking Russian who had been the first to leave the confines of our planet, who had dazzled the world with his wide, boyish smile, a citizen and favoured son of the Earth.

Gagarin still had a heavy programme of study and he continued his space training. He did not ask for any lightening of his work-load, and if, because of work or public engagements, he had to miss lectures at the Academy, he always made up the time lost. Even when making his trips abroad Gagarin found time to study, with the result that he completed his course at the Academy with distinction, graduating as an engineer. But Yuri was and remained a space pilot. He wanted to fly, and to see the world again through the porthole of a spaceship.

"Being a cosmonaut is my profession, and I did not choose it just to make the first flight and then give it up," said Gagarin.

It was with thoughts of future space missions in his mind that Yuri Gagarin took off in an airplane on his last, tragically interrupted training flight.





As the years go by, some events fade or lose their original impact in the memory of mankind, but the name of Yuri Gagarin will remain fresh and live on as the world's first explorer of the mysteries of space. As the American astronaut, Frank Borman, said, Yuri Gagarin was one of the world's great sons, a courageous pioneer in whom mankind would always take pride. And Soviet cosmonauts, in accordance with the tradition which has been established, after returning to earth from a space mission, visit Gagarin Square in Star Town to place flowers by the memorial statue of the first cosmonaut, their former leader, friend and comrade-in-arms.





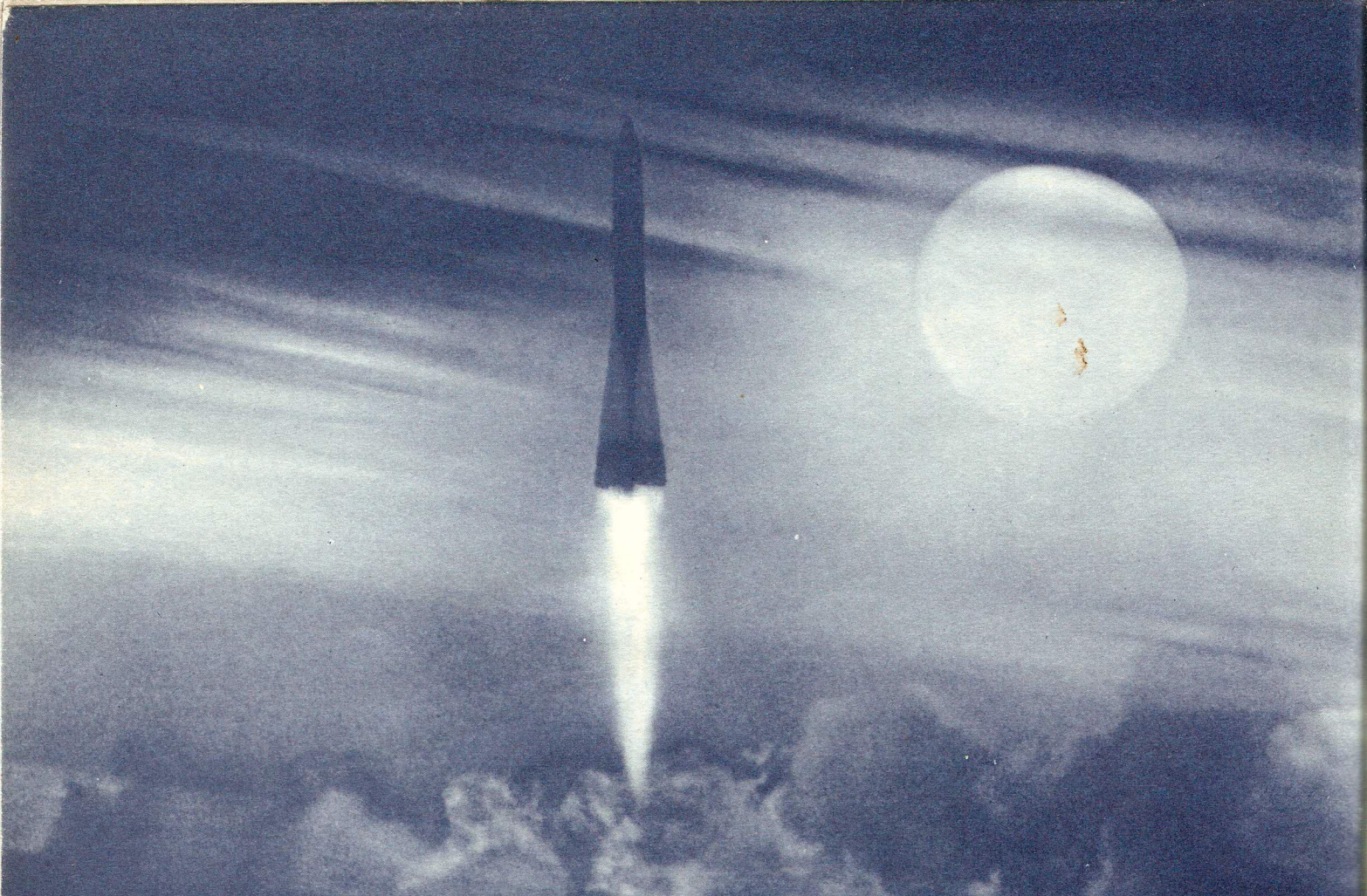
“Yura personified the eternal youth of our people,” said Sergei Korolev. “He combined within himself in a most happy blend the attributes of courage, an analytical mind, and exceptional industry.”



“Circling the earth
in the orbital
spaceship I marvelled
at the beauty of our
planet.

“People of the
world! Let us
safeguard and
enhance this
beauty — not
destroy it!”

GAGARIN



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