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Classification: UNCLASSIFIED **Status:** [STAT]
Document Date: 22 Sep 90 **Category:** [CAT]
Report Type: JPRS Report **Report Date:**
Report Number: JPRS-USP-91-002 **UDC Number:**

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Prague: ''Was Gagarin Really in Space?: Cosmonaut No. 1
Flew Around the Planet One Time. But This Fairly Shabby
'Canard' Is Making Its Umpteenth Orbit'']

Headline: Allegations Concerning Cosmonaut Losses, Gagarin's Role
Refuted

Source Line: 90700167 Moscow KOMSOMOLSKAYA PRAVDA in Russian 22 Sep
90 p 3

Subslug: [Article by KOMSOMOLSKAYA PRAVDA staff correspondent Ye.
Chernykh, Prague: ''Was Gagarin Really in Space?: Cosmonaut
No. 1 Flew Around the Planet One Time. But This Fairly
Shabby 'Canard' Is Making Its Umpteenth Orbit'']

FULL TEXT OF ARTICLE:

1. [Article by KOMSOMOLSKAYA PRAVDA staff correspondent Ye. Chernykh, Prague: ''Was Gagarin Really in Space?: Cosmonaut No. 1 Flew Around the Planet One Time. But This Fairly Shabby 'Canard' Is Making Its Umpteenth Orbit'']
2. [Text] The book ''Gagarin--kosmicheskiy lozh?'' [Gagarin--a Space Lie?] came out recently in Hungary. The author, I. Nemere, alleges that Gagarin did not fly around our planet on 12 April 1961. The Vostok craft had gone into space several days earlier. In it was the son of the famous aircraft designer, Ilyushin. But after a difficult landing, he looked more like a human wreck than a Soviet ''hero.'' Someone like that couldn't be shown to the world. Just the opposite, he would have to be kept out of sight for a long time, or better yet, for ever. In that same year, Ilyushin was in a serious traffic accident.
3. An attractive fellow with an optimistic smile and excellent biographical particulars was quickly found from among the workers. He also played the role of the representative of the grandiose success of Soviet science and especially of Soviet policy. It is clear that a person with such a terrible secret could not live long.
4. I. Nemere, a social and political affairs writer, spent many years in Moscow, where he met ''with knowledgeable people.'' He concealed his authorship right up to the publication of the book, fearing that, even in Hungary, there would be people who would be

Approved for Release 322
2/2010

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prepared to take whatever steps were necessary to preserve the legend and the eternal ``truths.'' It wasn't until a press conference at the end of August that journalists learned the name of the author of the sensational book.

5. They have lived for some time in the fraternal countries of socialism, and I can visualize the reaction. They are removing the statues of Lenin and defiling the memorials to the Soviet soldiers. Now they have even gone after Gagarin.

6. But it is someone ``from among them'' who came forward in defense of Gagarin--the famous Czechoslovakian journalist and author of 12 books on the space program, Karel Patsner. His article has just been published in Prague by the newspaper MLADA FRONTA DNES. One detail: after 1968, Karel had big problems. So, wish as you might, you cannot regard him as a staunch Marxist ready to defend ``communist legends'' at any price.

7. ``To tell the truth, doubts about Yuriy Gagarin being the first person in space are nothing new,'' wrote K. Patsner. ``This began back in the mid-1960s. All the rumors that appeared in the Western press were filed by the American writer, D. Oberg, in his book 'Secret Soviet Accidents,' published in 1988. Cosmonaut Lodovskiy died in 1957 while taking off from the Kapustin Yar cosmodrome. In that same year, Shiborin died. Two years later, there was the death of Mitkov. A cosmonaut, still unknown to this day, crashed in May of 1960. In September of 1960, while Khrushchev was giving a speech at the UN, an unknown cosmonaut died, identified at one point as Petr Dolgov. On 4 February 1961, some Western amateur radio operators picked up a transmission from an astonishing Soviet satellite of the 'beating of a human heart,' which faded away shortly thereafter. According to some reports, two Soviet cosmonauts were circling the Earth and, according to others, there were three of them: Belokonev, Kachur and Grachev. In early April 1961, Vladimir Ilyushin flew around the earth three times, but he was injured during the return. In mid-May 1961, some amateur radio operators in Europe caught a weak call for help coming, apparently, from two Soviet cosmonauts. On 14 October 1961, a Soviet craft with a crew was lost in the vast reaches of space. In November of 1962, Italian amateur radio operators heard SOS signals from space. According to some sources, that's when Belokonev died. On 19 November 1963, an attempt to place a second female cosmonaut into orbit ended tragically. One or more Soviet experimenters, again according to the reports of Italian amateur radio operators, died in April of 1964.

8. ``Oberg himself was previously engaged in military missile research and worked at NASA's space center. He emphasized that all those reports were absolutely false.

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9. "However, even Oberg, although a specialist himself, could be wrong. But there are also other sources. Of course, one can't believe the official Soviet sources of the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras. It is interesting, however, that an emigrant, V. Fedorov, in a critical article about the Soviet space program, published by DER SPIEGEL in 1973, also refuted rumors about allegedly concealed cosmonaut losses. Only one name is mentioned--Yuriy Dolgov. But he, according to Fedorov's data, died while testing a space suit."

10. "It should be stated," Karel Patsner continued on, "that, over the 25 years that I have been traveling to the USSR, I have never heard anything like that from my own friends--scientists, cosmonauts and journalists. Even in conversations at midnight, when wine or cognac had loosened tongues and they talked to me frankly about launch delays, about details as yet unpublished about the deaths of the crews of the Soyuz-1 and the Soyuz-11, about the many accidents of rockets involving people and about the difficulties with the hush-hush moon project. However, there was not even a hint of tragedies involving unknown cosmonauts. As for accidents prior to the end of 1960, they can be ruled out if only for technical reasons. At that time, the Soviets still did not have a readied, tested spacecraft. In fact, the first satellite was launched in October of 1957. But fine, assume that I had not met with 'knowledgeable people' and that those launches were conducted in a special, supersecret sector, so that my informants could not know anything about them. But that is illogical because a tremendous amount of money would have been required to carry out two parallel programs. And the existence of the programs cannot be kept a secret among the specialists."

11. Patsner reported in detail about Ya. Golovanov's book "Kosmonavt nomer odin" [Cosmonaut No. 1], published in 1986. Discussed in it as well were rumors about our cosmonauts' catastrophes. Back in the spring of 1961, in an American weekly, there appeared a report that, several days prior to the 12th of April, a person had died in space and that Yuriy Gagarin was now playing his role on the ground. Later, in that connection, the name of V. Ilyushin, the ship Rossiya and the date--the 7th of April--came up. But Ilyushin had been in a serious motor vehicle accident back in June of 1960.

12. Does it not seem that the Hungarian writer was raising the old rumors to cause a stir?

13. On the other hand, Patsner still other weighty arguments. Dr. C. Sheldon--chief of the Research Division of the U.S. Library of Congress, until his death considered to be the greatest American expert on the Soviet space--wrote a report for members of congress in

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November of 1967: "Up to 1967, not a single country had lost a single crew during a space flight.... The stories that a lot of Russians had died in space are difficult to refute because they are so persistent and supplied with names and dates. Even such a prominent informant as O. Penkovskiy (an American spy--Ed.) wrote in his reports about those difficulties. However, American government employees has assured Congress several times that the United States did not have any information about such Soviet losses.

14. Even F. Klass as well, in the book "Taynaya strazha v kosmose" [The Secret Watch in Space], which is devoted to space-based espionage, has no doubts about Gagarin being the first. The network of American ground tracking stations along the Soviet borders and the reconnaissance satellites make it possible to follow all the flight preparations in the USSR. For example, President J. Kennedy knew about the successful launch of G. Titov in August of 1961 even before it was officially announced by TASS. In 1975, a law was passed in the United States regarding the declassification of old information from the intelligence services. M. Kassut, a writer, found nine documents in the CIA [TsRU] archives about the training of cosmonauts for the years 1960-1975. And in not a single one was there even a hint of any suspicions by the intelligence agents about secret Soviet space flights and catastrophes.

15. "I believe that I. Nemere is one of those authors who are trying to acquire money and fame from the wave of anti-Sovietism which has flared up in the former communist countries," wrote K. Patsner at the end of his article in defense of Gagarin.

16. "If, in 1960, you had published in the press that a cosmonaut training detachment had been formed and if you had given all the names of the candidates, is it likely that rumors would have arisen around Gagarin?" Patsner said to me.

17. "Karel, what do you mean 1960? Even in the 1980's, Komsomolka [KOMсомолская PRAVDA] could not have pushed through Yaroslav Golovanov's article 'Kosmonavt nomer odin,' where, for the first time, the truth was disclosed about that detachment. And, in order to publish the book of the same name in 1986, in the time of glasnost, you yourself wrote that Yaroslav needed the personal permission of one of the members of the Politburo."

18. "In the summer of 1964, S.P. Korolev vacationed in Czechoslovakia. Prior to that, Gagarin was here, he liked 'Golden Prague' very much and he talked about it a lot to Sergey Pavlovich. The chief designer was here incognito. He was not even registered in the guest book of the Czechoslovak Communist Party's Central Committee. When he was leaving, he said then to his entourage: 'When

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I come to Czechoslovakia next time, you will know who I am.' Korolev was opposed to the veils of secrecy, but.... There is nothing we can do, both you in the Soviet Union and we have to endure what has already died down in the West. The preachers, who have undertaken to cure the masses suffering from all kinds of illnesses, and the UFOs, which were of interest to a lot of people there, but which are now of interest to only individual groups. Those same outdated sensationalisms....''

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