Leonov, Alexei Encyclopedia Article

Leonov, Alexei

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Leonov, Alexei

Russian Cosmonaut 1934-

Alexei Leonov was a former Soviet cosmonaut who was the first human to walk in space. Leonov was born in Listvyanka, Siberia on May 30, 1934. After graduating from pilot school in Ukraine in 1957, he served as a Soviet Air Force pilot before being selected as one of the Soviet Union's first 20 cosmonauts in 1960.

Alexei Leonov works onboard the Soyuz 19 spacecraft during link-up with Apollo 18 in Earth orbit, 1975. The Apollo-Soyuz docking was the first of spacecraft built by different nations and foreshadowed future American/Russian cooperation in space.

Leonov's first spaceflight was in March 1965 on Voskhod 2. During that flight, Leonov performed the first space walk, leaving the spacecraft through an inflatable airlock for several minutes. He was almost unable to reenter the spacecraft after his suit stiffened in the vacuum of space; only after releasing some air was he able to fit through the airlock.

Leonov was scheduled to command Soyuz 11 in 1971, but a backup crew flew instead when another crewmember became sick just before launch. That turn of events proved fortunate when the Soyuz 11 crew died when their capsule depressurized during re-entry. Leonov finally flew in space again in July 1975 as commander of Soyuz 19, which docked with an Apollo spacecraft for the first joint American-Soviet space mission. Leonov served as chief cosmonaut from 1976 until 1982, then as deputy director of the Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center until his retirement in 1991.

See Also

Cosmonauts (Volume 3);; Gagarin, Yuri (Volume 3);; History of Humans in Space (Volume 3).

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Internet Resources

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