

Russia's Cosmonaut Club Suddenly Loses Two Legends

April 24, 2017



Gennady Padalka (L) and Sergei Volkov [Wikicommons / modified by MT](#)

Two of Russia's most famous living cosmonauts are going into retirement, with another big-name resignation expected to follow, the TASS news agency reported Monday, citing an unidentified space program official.

The source said that Sergei Volkov, son of a Soviet-era cosmonaut, will be leaving the Cosmonaut Corps "at his own request." Another cosmonaut, who was not named by the source, will also be resigning shortly for health reasons.

A veteran of three spaceflights, Volkov's exploits included [bringing the flag of notorious Russian nationalist biker gang The Night Wolves](#) to the International Space Station in 2015. The flag was given to Volkov by the gang's leader Alexander Zaldostanov — a friend of Vladimir Putin's.

Embed:

Флаг Мотоклуба Ночные Волки в космосе на МКС. Ура!!!

pic.twitter.com/cHPjhkcoV

— Александр Хирург (@hirurg_Wolves) [October 14, 2015](https://twitter.com/hirurg_Wolves/status/653811150000000000)

Volkov's retirement was preceded by the announcement that Gennady Padalka, a legend in the aerospace community, would retire. Padalka's decision was announced by former cosmonaut Sergei Krikalev, director of Russia's manned space program.

Padalka holds the world record for longest time spent in space. Over the course of three long-duration flights, he racked up 878 days in space. Padalka was hoping to fly for a sixth time, extending his record beyond the 1000 day range.

While aging cosmonauts will inevitably leave the corps, Russia's manned space program has also been hit hard by Russia's economic crisis. The space agency Roscosmos has been forced to fly with an empty seat in its three-man Soyuz spacecraft as a cost-saving measure.

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