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On This Day Valentina Tereshkova, the First Woman in Space, Was Born

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Tereshkova's achievement was celebrated both within Russia and abroad. **RIA Novosti**

Today marks the 83rd birthday of Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space. She remains the youngest woman to ever venture into space (at age 26) and the only woman to embark upon a solo mission.

Tereshkova was born in 1937 in the Yaroslavl region. Her parents were collective farmers, although her father would die in the Finnish Winter War just two years after Tereshkova's birth. Tereshkova attended school in Yaroslavl until the age of 16, after which she was employed as a factory worker. It was during this time that she took up a rather unusual hobby: parachute jumping.

In 1961, a Soviet space official learned that female pilots were being trained as cosmonauts in America. Asserting that the first woman in space must not be an American, as it would be "an insult to the patriotic feelings of all Soviet women," it was determined that the next group of

cosmonauts trained in the Soviet Union must include women. The initial group of 400 women would ultimately be narrowed down to just five; given her impressive parachutist background, Tereshkova made the cut.

Following more than a year of training, Tereshkova was selected above her four female peers to be the first woman to travel to space. The launch of her aircraft took place on June 16, 1963. She orbited Earth 48 times over the course of nearly 3 days, and landed in Kazakhstan on June 19. Documents which remained classified until the collapse of the Soviet Union indicate that a systems error nearly prevented the ship from navigating back to Earth, but that quick action on the part of Tereshkova and engineers on the ground allowed for a recalibrated landing at the last moment.

Tereshkova was awarded the Order of Lenin, the Gold Star Medal, and the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, as well as many international awards and recognitions. She would never return to space but to this day remains active in promoting space education and culture. Politically active both before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, she currently serves as a member of the Russian State Duma representing the United Russia party.

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