



REFLECTIONS ON THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST SPACEWALK BY ALEXEY LEONOV; MIROSLAW HERMASZEWSKI – POLISH ASTRONAUT

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Source of support: Own sources

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Alexey Leonov, a pilot, general of the Russian Air Force was the 11th Russian cosmonaut and the 15th man in space. Since 1960, he had been one of the 20 pilots selected to be a part of the first cosmonaut group, the so-called Gagarin group. Owing to his abilities, determination and remarkable personality traits, Leonov was appointed with the most difficult and pioneering tasks including missions in space.

For the first time Leonov went into space on the Voskhod spacecraft together with Pavel Belyayev on March 18th, 1965. It was during that flight that he performed the first ever extravehicular activity in outer space – wearing a spacesuit he was floating for 12 minutes in the proximity of the Voskhod. Because NASA were planning a similar mission, Le-

onov's flight was organized in a hurry. This resulted in several malfunctions that Leonov was able to single-handedly overcome thanks to his determination, competence and intuition. Consequently, his mission turned out to be a success and was described as an achievement of the Soviet space exploration program. In 1967, Leonov's courage and competence made him a candidate for the Moon flight that eventually did not go ahead owing to technical difficulties with the N-1 rocket. Subsequently, Leonov held several important positions including that of deputy commander at the Yuri A. Gagarin State Scientific Research-and-Testing Cosmonaut Training Center in Zvyozdny gorodok.

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On his second spaceflight, Leonov was the commander of the Soyuz-19 spacecraft that went into space in 1975 as a part of the Apollo-Soyuz program. During that mission Russian and American spacecraft communicated with one another for the first time. This was reflected by a symbolic hand-shake in outer space between Leonov and Stafford – the commander of the Apollo. Moreover, Russian and American cosmonauts carried out a number of joint scientist experiments.

Leonov played an important role during the creation of the first Interkosmos group, when he was a supervisor of candidates from Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Poland. He was a demanding but also a caring supervisor – he and his wife Svetlana helped us overcome the language barrier but also the barrier of insecurity. Their house was always open to us. Leonov's demeanor and kindness were different from the stereotypes of that time. He spoke Russian with eloquence and cared about it very much. He taught these values to the candidates. He was interested in the history of the world and Europe in particular. He was able to objectively approach the difficult moments in

the history of Russia. As regards interpersonal relations, Leonov was always kind, thoughtful and caring. After many years he allowed me to call him a friend. Alexey is a humanist and artist. With his drawings, he documented the most important milestones of astronautics. Leonov is also one of the founding fathers of the International Association of Space Explorers for which he designed a logo.

After he retired, he engaged in educational and artistic activities. He paints cosmos – both realistic and futuristic, as well as landscapes and old Russian architectural landmarks. He lives in the vicinity of Zvyozdny gorodok in a house that he had designed himself and which is also his artistic workshop. He enjoys spending time with his grandchildren and stays up to date with current astronautics.

For his bravery and courage Alexey Leonov was awarded twice as the Hero of the USSR. He also received various distinctions from other countries but despite this remains a humble person. He is generally respected and appreciated. He publicly expresses his sympathy towards Poland.

Excerpt from the speech given by general Miroslaw Hermaszewski during the scientific session of the Space and Satellite Research Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences that took place in the Military Institute of Aviation Medicine, Warsaw, May 8th, 2015.



Fig. 1. General Miroslaw Hermaszewski during the scientific session of the Space and Satellite Research Committee.