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Russians Put Man in Space; Returns Alive [ARTICLE]

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Russians Put Man in Space; Returns Alive

Moscow (AP)—A Soviet astronaut's orbit around the earth five miles a second sent humanity across the frontier of space Wednesday and left the Soviet Union challenging the West to try to catch up.

The pioneer astronaut, Maj. Yuri Alekseyevich Gagarin, 27, plumbed the cosmos for an hour and a half, sending back messages of reassurance as he passed into the realm of weightlessness.

His feat taxed the Soviet Union's supply of superlatives and won the plaudits of scientists everywhere — including experts in the United States.

And Wednesday night Soviet Premier Khrushchev, who had promised a few weeks ago that the first human flight into space was soon to be realized, declared, "Let the capitalist countries try to catch up."

The Tass news agency said Khrushchev talked with Gagarin on the phone, and told him "You have made yourself immortal."

And Khrushchev replied "That's right. Let the capitalist countries try to catch up with our country, which has blazed the trail into space and which has launched the world's first cosmonaut."

Soviet announcements promised to place the achievement at man-

kind's disposal. But the tone indicated that the feat—with its enormously important military overtones—would echo in the political cold war in a toughened Soviet attitude toward world problems.

By Soviet account the flight occurred between 9:07 a.m. and 10:55 a.m. Wednesday.

Gagarin—already fondly dubbed "Gaga" by a feverishly excited Soviet public—was in the air for one hour and 48 minutes. He was in outer space one hour and 29 minutes, the time it took his five-ton space ship to whip around the earth. That was at a speed of about 17,000 miles an hour, or six times as fast as man ever flew before.

Man's fastest previous speed was 2,905 miles an hour achieved by the U.S. X-15 rocket plane.

President Kennedy called the feat "an outstanding technical accomplishment." Washington heard expressions of regret that the United States once again lagged behind, but space administration officials unhesitatingly praised Soviet scientists.

The Soviet government and Communist party, in a statement, promised to "place our achievements and discoveries not at the service of war but at the service of peace and the security of peoples."

But then it added: "Let us put an end to the arms race! Let us accomplish universal and complete disarmament under strict

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international control. This will constitute a decisive contribution to the sacred cause of safeguarding peace."

Since these are the main points of Premier Khrushchev's political propaganda offensive, such talk seemed to reflect a Soviet intention to make the greatest diplomatic use possible of the space feat.

Moscow diplomats expressed belief the Russians named the spaceship Vostok — or East — both to please Asians and to counter the political and cultural prestige associated with the West.

Swarthy young Gagarin, husband of a medical student and father of two girls, rocketed to world fame the moment Moscow announced the news. Khrushchev told him his venture "will be remembered as an example of courage, gallantry and heroism in service to mankind."