

Cosmonauts and Cosmo-nots

Image falsification in the Soviet manned space program



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August 2007

Photographic forgeries

- To a degree unprecedented in any other space program, but fully in keeping with Soviet practice in imagery of all other subjects (particularly politically sensitive subjects) the USSR practiced deceptive photographic retouching of space program imagery in the early years of the ‘Space Age’.
- To a similarly unprecedented degree, Western publication and criticism of such forgeries forced official responses, some of them constructive, to the benefit of accurate public knowledge of events. But only Soviet collapse brought real disclosure.
- This is the story of that process, and its lessons.

Bombshell – one of the ‘persons of interest’ shows up ‘unpersoned’ in another book



Discovered in May 1973, the forgery immediately sparked speculations on what he may have done – or had done to him – to require his total disappearance from official imagery. The clumsiness of the effort led to wide derision as well.

Quantity if not quality

Subsequent scouring of Soviet books, films, magazines, and newspapers eventually located different versions of the forgery – replacing the man with a shadow, a stairway, and a bush



Step by step, X2 fades (*or is faded*) away



Now you see him, then his face is smudged, then his whole head, then the background becomes all black, or empty with painted-in fake curtains... Why?



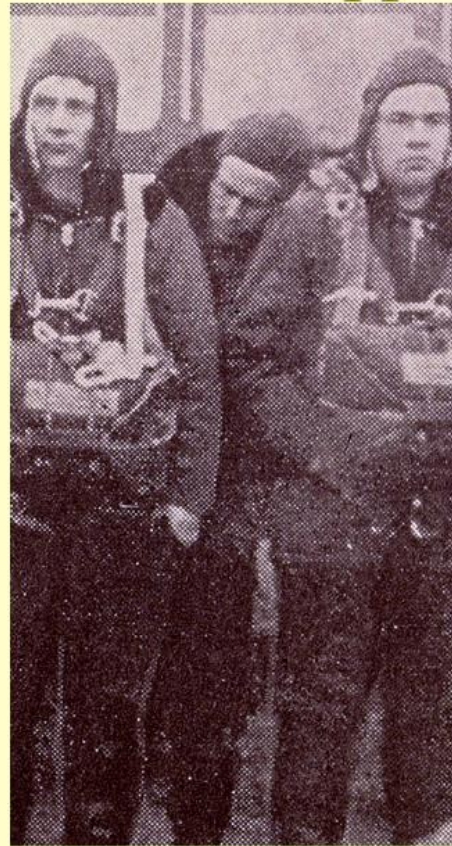


Another angle –
Though not a before-after
pair, these images show that
some photos from another
position *were also retouched*
to remove the same man

Obviously, a number of
different photographers
were present at this event --
and their archives would
'leak' for the next four
decades, in both original
and retouched formats....



One airbrushed, and one more cropped



Should be one more figure here, by the 'buddy system'

Aesthetics (& peace propaganda)



Korolyov bids farewell to Gagarin at launch pad, and extra characters are one-by-one removed so false fill-in is needed (but fence stops). Marshall Kiril Moskalenko, missile commander, departs.





Bus ride to the launch pad, Voskhod-2, March 1965 – and one back seat rider's head seems to have rolled





A vanished Salyut-1
cosmonaut crewman



Published still of celebration
as 'Rukavishnikov joins the
[first] crew' -- but a later
version [right] shows another
rookie cosmonaut LEAVING
the group of candidates.



223



221



*Even historical scenes (e.g.,
Tsander team meeting in
1936) subject to background
retouching, figure removal*



279

Izvestiya: The Fate of Valentin Bondarenko



Bondarenko was killed in an oxygen fire in a test chamber 3 weeks before Gagarin's Vostok flight. His death led to Moscow rumors of a failed secret space shot. He is visible in the background of several news films, and in one parachute training group photo, and he was designated 'X7' until his name was released in a newspaper in 1986.



Official (left);
Unknown "X7" (right & below)



Bondarenko and his wife Anna had one son, who became a AF officer and cosmonaut trainer. Anna later exchanged letters with Apollo-1's Roger Chaffee's father.



229



228

Rocket chief Valentin
Glushko hosts cosmonaut
visit (circa 1962), shadows
removed and horizon rebuilt



227

The ultimate space 'historical justice'?

At the Baykonur Cosmodrome, where cosmonauts depart for outer space, there have been many, many post-Soviet changes. One small change [at left] – a bas relief that once displayed Lenin's face has been chiseled flat. One larger change [below], the city name is no longer 'Leninsk'. Lenin's legacy will not entirely disappear (statues, wall mosaics, silhouettes etc remain), but Lenin-style ability to make cosmonauts disappear is already gone.

