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"Tin Can In Space"

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ASTRO SPACE STAMP SOCIETY

Leonov & Belyayev Joint Spaceflight or “It Takes Two to Tango”

Jim Reichman tells the story of “the bridesmaid” of the momentous Voskhod 2 flight fifty years ago....

While the world’s space enthusiasts are celebrating the 50th anniversary of Cosmonaut Alexei Leonov’s 18 March 1965 spacewalk outside the spacecraft Voskhod-2, many may overlook the fact that there was a second cosmonaut on that space mission, Pavel Belyayev. As the idiomatic expression “it takes two to tango” implies, the success of that historic milestone really took the efforts of both of these outstanding space flyers.



Figure 1 (above) shows a post-flight photo of these two cosmonauts from an image on a 1965 Soviet postcard. This view is known to be a post-flight photo because both cosmonauts’ uniforms are adorned with their Pilot-Cosmonaut and Hero-of-the-Soviet-Union medals. These were awarded to them on 23 March 1965, 4 days after their spaceflight ended and they landed back on Earth.

The fact that this spacewalk event was really a two-man effort was acknowledged in Leonov’s own words. While discussing their training for emergencies that might occur during this spaceflight, Leonov said that Belyayev had prepared for a number of contingencies including the need “...to exit the spacecraft to rescue me...”.⁵ This, as it turned out, was almost required when Leonov’s spacesuit unexpectedly ballooned and stiffened so much in the vacuum of space that he had a lot of trouble getting back into the Voskhod-2 airlock access.

A view of this airlock, from Leonov’s spacewalking perspective, is shown in the left side of Figure 2, above right. This figure is a scan of the 50- kopeck, Soviet souvenir sheet issued on 18 March 1980 (Scott#4817, Michel#4938) to commemorate the spacewalk’s 15th anniversary. The artwork on this philatelic issue is from a painting that

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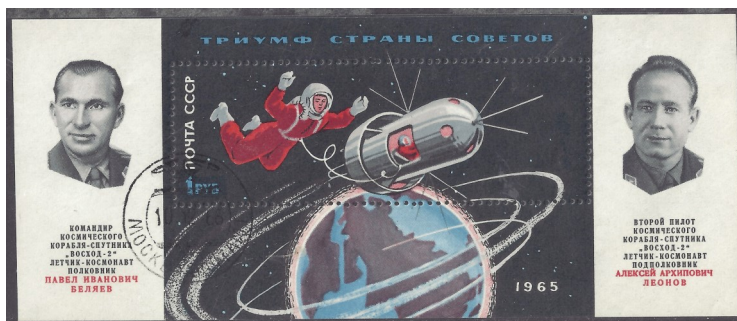


Leonov made and includes a faint copy of his autograph in the upper-left side.⁶



Like this philatelic commemorative item, many stamp issues and the postmarks that cancelled them, feature Leonov but not Belyayev. At least the first few Soviet issues commemorating this spaceflight were an exception as Figure 3 - March 1965 Soviet stamp commemorating the spacewalk (above) exemplifies.

The first Soviet stamp commemorating the Voskhod-2 spaceflight (Scott#3015, Michel#3032) was issued on 19 March 1965. That stamp shows a distorted, Soviet-propaganda view of the on-orbit scene. See a scan of it in Figure 3. In that depiction, the airlock that Leonov had to crawl through to get out of and back into Voskhod-2 is missing. This allows a partial view of Belyayev at the spacecraft controls.



The second Soviet issue was a one-ruble souvenir sheet released on 12 April 1965 (Scott#3016, Michel#3041). The image on this sheet (above) includes that same, distorted view of the spacewalk and spacecraft as can be seen in Figure 4. At least this issue includes nice portraits of both cosmonauts and reinforces (in the text below his name)



Figure 6 – 15th Anniversary



Figure 7 – 20th Anniversary



Figure 8 – 40th Anniversary



Figure 9 – Belyayev satellite tracking ship cachet, circa

Cosmonaut Belyayev’s position as the Commander of the flight from which the first spacewalk was achieved.



By 1975 and beyond, the images on commemorative philatelic issues almost totally featured only Leonov, pushing Belyayev’s role in the spacewalk into the obscurity of history books. Examples of this can be seen in the 1975 Soviet stamp shown in Figure 5 (Scott#4332, Michel#4365) and the series of Soviet and Russian commemorative postmarks commemorating various spacewalk anniversaries shown in Figures 6, 7, & 8.

Luckily Cosmonaut Belyayev was honoured in other ways that Leonov was not. This fact was uncovered in a recent philatelic study of commemorative covers related to Soviet satellite tracking ships. These ships plied the oceans of the world and provided invaluable tracking, telemetry, & commanding (TT&C) support to on-orbit spacecraft like the Voskhod-2. A 1977 addition to this Soviet fleet was named the *Cosmonaut Pavel Belyayev*. See a ship cachet, typically applied to covers originating on that ship, in Figure 9. The image in that cachet features a view of the TT&C ship named after Belyayev.

Over the years these tracking ships were active, 36 ships were created and used in the Soviet TT&C fleet. None, unfortunately, were named after Leonov. The reason for this was probably due to the fact that the ship names were selected from the list of deceased individuals who were related to the Soviet space and missile programmes.

Of the two cosmonauts, only Belyayev was deceased. He had died on 10 January 1970 due to complications related to a surgery which was just a few years prior to a ship being named after him. Since Leonov was alive when the last of these satellite tracking ships were built in the late 1980s, there was no opportunity for him to receive this type of posthumous honour. (Editor’s note: Neither the 1979 nor the 1980 Soviet Scientific Research Ship issues depict this vessel).

This year, 2015, presents another opportunity to commemorate the Voskhod-2 spaceflight and the spacewalk that was accomplished by its crew. It is hard to believe that

half a century has passed since that event. The Russians did issue a stamp to commemorate Leonov’s spacewalk but as anticipated, this stamp makes no reference to Cosmonaut Belyayev. The text at the top of the stamp reads: “First entry of a man into open space - 50th anniversary” in Russian. Interestingly, this stamp was issued “late” on 10 May 2015 - three weeks after the actual anniversary date on 18 March 2015. There was a special postmark on the actual anniversary for cancelling cover at Kaluga. The first day of issue covers have a special postmark at a Moscow post office on 10 May 2015. Also interesting is that this new stamp was issued in sheets of only 15 stamps - attached is a scan of it. The margins are decorated with space (astronomy) images.



Above 1985 postal stationery item celebrating Belyayev’s 60th birthday (though he had died in 1970)

