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Biographies: Arnaldo Tamayo Méndez



Brigadier General Arnaldo Tamayo Méndez was the first Latin American, Cuban astronaut and the first person of African descent in space..

Arnaldo Tamayo was born in Baracoa, Guantánamo, Cuba, on January 29, 1942. Tamayo was born into a humble family and his mother died before he turned one. Arnaldo was adopted by his uncle, Rafael Tamayo, and his wife, Esperanza Mendez.

After the Cuban Revolution took power on January 1, 1959, Tamayo joined the Rebel Army Technical Institute and later the Revolutionary Armed Forces so he could become a fighter pilot. After completing training as an aviation technician, he was selected to receive pilot training for the MiG-15 fighter jet at the Yeisk Higher Air Force School, in the Soviet Union, and received certification as a combat pilot when he was only 19 years old.

While Tamayo was training in the Soviet Union, Yuri Gagarin arrived in Havana on July 24, 1961 only three months after becoming the first man in space. In part of his speech Gagarin said, "The day will come when a son of the Cuban people will also travel to the cosmos."

Tamayo was promoted to military pilot 1st class. Later, he was a flight instructor. In 1975, he was appointed Chief of Staff of the Santa Clara Aviation Brigade and was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in 1976.

Being an experienced war pilot and speaking the Russian language well, Tamayo was chosen to enter a pool of 600 pilots from which only two would be selected for the Soviet space program.

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On September 18, 1980, at 03:11 a.m. in Havana, Cuba, the Soyuz 38 spaceship

launched from Platform № 1, at Cosmodrome of Baikonur, with Arnaldo Tamayo and the Soviet astronaut, Yuri Romanenko on board.

Tamayo's ship docked with the Soviet space station, Salyut 6. Tamayo and Romanenko joined the Soviet astronauts Leonid Popov and Valery Riumin who had previously arrived at Salyut 6 on the Soyuz 37.

Tamayo and Romanenko carried out more than 20 experiments, some of which commissioned by the Cuban Academy of Sciences. The Cuban scientific experiments were the cultivation of the first organic monocrystals in microgravity using Cuban sugar; the exploration of the Caribbean country from space in search of oil and mineral deposits; the test of shoes designed to counteract the weightlessness and the first electroencephalograms to humans in the cosmos; among other experiments.

Seven days later, on September 26, 1980, Tamayo and Romanenko landed southeast of the city of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan. In total, they orbited Earth 128 times during their trip, and their time in space was 7 days, 20 hours, 43 minutes, and 24 seconds.

Upon returning to Cuba, Tamayo became a national hero. But because the Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin had died tragically in March 1968, while piloting a fighter plane; Fidel Castro himself forbade Tamayo to continue piloting for the rest of his life. A decision that Tamayo had to accept.

Since 1980, Arnaldo Tamayo has been a Deputy in the Cuban National Assembly. He rose to the rank and of Brigadier General. He also serves as Head of the Department of Foreign Affairs for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba, and Director in the Civil Defense Organization of Cuba, among other government positions.



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ANSWER THE QUESTIONS

1. What was the family of Arnaldo Tamayo like?
 - a. It was a rich family, but his father died.
 - b. It was a poor family and his mother died.
 - c. It was a humble family and his grandmother died.
 - d. It was a rich family and her grandmother died.



2. Who was the first man to go to space?
 - a. Arnaldo Tamayo
 - b. Yuri Romanenko
 - c. Yuri Gagarin
 - d. Leonid Popov



3. How long was Tamayo in space?
 - a. 26 de septiembre
 - b. 128 veces
 - c. 20 horas
 - d. 7 días

4. Cuban President Fidel Castro forbade Tamayo to drive a car for the rest of his life.
 - a. True
 - b. False

5. What is Tamayo's position at present?
 - a. Brigadier General
 - b. Lieutenant Colonel
 - c. Minister of Education
 - d. Vice President

