

48th IAA HISTORY OF ASTRONAUTICS SYMPOSIUM (E4)
Scientific & technical histories (2)

Author: Mr. Philippe Cosyn
Belgium, philippe.cosyn@skynet.be

Mr. Thu Vu Trong
Vietnam, vutrongthu@gmail.com

COSMONAUT PHAM TUAN AND VIETNAM'S ROAD TO SPACE

Abstract

Following a visit by Soviet cosmonaut Gherman Titov in the early 1960s to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN), Vietnamese leaders started to take an interest in space issues.

However, circumstances besetting the country did not allow further work in this area (the Vietnam war). In 1980, however the Soviet Union, in the framework of the Intercosmos program, offered to fly a Vietnamese cosmonaut aboard a Soyuz spacecraft. Candidates were selected among "jet aces" in the Vietnamese air force. The pilot ultimately chosen was Pham Tuan, a Soviet-trained flight mechanic who rose through the ranks to become a record-breaking Mig-21 fighter pilot.

On July 23, Pham Tuan was launched into space aboard the Soyuz 37 commanded by Soviet cosmonaut V. Gorbatko, docking with the Salyut-6 space station. During his week-long space mission, Pham Tuan performed several experiments including remote sensing and life sciences. Upon returning back to Earth, he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-general and director of the General Department of Defense Industry in the Ministry of Defense. In 2002 he was appointed as the Chairman of Military (commercial) Joint Stock Bank and continues to hold this position after his retirement in 2008.

Pham Tuan's flight was followed by the disintegration of the Soviet Union and of the Intercosmos program. However, based on the experience gained in those years, Vietnam has recently started an active space program.

Our paper is based on a extensive interview with Pham Tuan and additional research in Vietnam and Russia.