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COSMONAUT PHAM THUAN AND VIETNAM'S ROAD TO SPACE

Abstract

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In the wake of the first Soviet space successes, cosmonaut Vladimir Titov visited the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) – then known as North Viet Nam. Vietnamese leaders, including Ho Chi Minh, took an interest in space but a country at war could hardly contemplate initiatives of its own in this early field. In 1980, however, the Soviet Union launched the Intercosmos Program which offered an opportunity for air aces from Soviet-allied countries to fly aboard the Soyuz spacecraft and visit the Soviet Salyut space station. In Vietnam, candidates were selected among “jet aces” in the Vietnamese Air Force. The pilot ultimately chosen was Pham Thuan, a Soviet-trained flight mechanic who became a record-breaking MiG-21 pilot. On July 23, 1980, Pham Thuan travelled toward Salyut-6 aboard Soyuz-37 commanded by V. Gorbatko, performing a number of experiments including remote sensing and life sciences. Upon returning to earth, he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-general and later was given important responsibilities regarding civil aviation and defense procurement, holding that position until his retirement in 2008. It is only in recent years, however, that the DRVN became actively involved in practical space applications. Vu Trong Tu was awarded with the IAF Youth Grants Programme and is currently involved with nanosatellites ; Philippe Cosyn is a long-time member of the IAA History Committee.