

This week in history: June 1-7

1 June 2015

25 years ago: Third module launched to dock with Mir space station

A Soviet Proton rocket carrying a special Kristall module was launched from the USSR with a June 6, 1990 schedule for docking the module to the Mir space station. The Kristall module contained technology that would significantly augment the scope of scientific experiments that Mir would conduct, including biochemical, astronomical and astrophysics equipment.

Also included in the launch were tools to aid cosmonauts Anatoly Solovyev and Aleksandr Balandin in the repair of the Soyuz spacecraft that would return them to earth. The craft was damaged during takeoff the previous February, when some of its thermal blankets protecting the outer skin of the craft had come loose.

Planning for the Mir project had begun in early 1976 by the Soviet space program. The space station assembly began with the launching of the core module in February 1986. Another, larger module, called Kvant-1, was launched in 1987, followed by Kvant-2 in 1989. The Kristall module was the third to be added to the Mir complex.

In April 1989, the decision was made to shut down Mir due to budget constraints and the failure to complete the next two modules. That month, three cosmonauts returned to earth, leaving Mir vacant for four months. By then, the Mir had already set records for space exploration, including the record for manned space travel of 365 days, 22 hours.

In September 1989, Mir was re-occupied when two Soviet astronauts docked their Soyuz TM-8 capsule. In February, Solovyev and Balandin relieved them when they arrived in their damaged Soyuz craft. A spacewalk was planned for later in June to repair the ship when a ladder aboard the Kristall module arrived.

50 years ago: Australia sends first soldiers to Vietnam

June 2, 1965, marked the formal entry of Australia into the

“police action” known then and since as the Vietnam War, when several hundred combat troops of the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment joined the US 73rd Airborne Brigade at Bien Hoa air base. They were followed by another contingent of 400 Australian soldiers on June 8, as the US ramped up its neo-colonial war against the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam and the Stalinist government of Ho Chi Minh in North Vietnam.

The Australians were part of a contingent known as the “Free World Military Forces,” by which the administration of US President Lyndon Johnson sought to lend a veneer of internationalism to its scorched-earth campaign in Southeast Asia. Most of the US NATO allies provided inconsequential support. Australia joined the military dictatorship in South Korea as the major backers of the so-called “Many Flags” strategy. Canberra had earlier committed “advisers,” experts in jungle warfare, to train South Vietnamese officers.

The decision by the government of Prime Minister Robert Menzies represented a deepening of Australia’s subordination to Washington in foreign affairs. Australian imperialism had served as a regional proxy of British imperialism through World War II. But that war had seen the British role in the Asia-Pacific reduced at the expense of the US. To guarantee its own predatory interests, Canberra positioned itself as the most fervent regional American ally in the SEATO (South East Asia Treaty Organization).

In justifying the sending of Australian soldiers to Vietnam, Menzies combined anti-communism with the Australian ruling class’s old canard of the Yellow Peril. “We have decided ... in close consultation with the Government of the United States—to provide an infantry battalion for service in Vietnam,” Menzies said on April 29, 1965, asserting that the revolution in South Vietnam “must be seen as part of a thrust by Communist China between the Indian and Pacific Oceans.”

The war soon became unpopular in Australia. On Moratorium Day, May 8, 1970, over 200,000 Australians demonstrated against the war. Australian involvement in Vietnam peaked in 1969 with a force of 8,000 soldiers. Roughly 60,000 fought in what became Australia’s longest war until Afghanistan. Of these, 521 died and more than 3,000 were wounded.

75 years ago: Nazis propose exile on Madagascar for Europe's Jews

On June 3, 1940, with France only days from surrender to German invaders, the newly appointed head of the German Foreign Ministry's "Jewish Desk," Franz Rademacher, presented an internal memorandum listing a number of different fates for the Jews of Europe.

Rademacher suggested three options: the removal of all Jews from Europe to the French colony of Madagascar, off the east African coast; the deportation of Western European Jews only, while leaving Eastern European Jews as hostages should the US enter the European theater; or the establishment of a Jewish state in the British mandate of Palestine.

The settling of the "Jewish Question" by deporting Europe's Jews to the island of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean had long been an "option" considered by European anti-Semites—regardless of the sentiments of the Jews or the people of Madagascar. With French imperialism close to collapse, the issue of Nazi Germany gaining control of France's vast colonial empire, including Madagascar, now loomed as a concrete possibility.

Historians believe it was Heinrich Himmler who initially broached the subject of deporting Europe's Jews to an African colony, without specifically mentioning Madagascar. After a visit to occupied Poland in mid-May, the Reichsführer-SS published a memo titled, "Some thoughts on the treatment of the Alien population in the East," detailing the Nazis brutal designs for Poland. In one section Himmler wrote, "The term 'Jew' I hope to see completely extinguished through the possibility of a large-scale emigration of all Jews to Africa or to some other colony."

With the support of Nazi Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, Himmler and Hitler, Rademacher set about producing a plan for the resettlement of Europe's Jews on the Indian Ocean island. In mid-June Ribbentrop informed his Italian counterpart Ciano that Hitler intended to deport all of Europe's Jews to Madagascar.

The plan was forestalled, however, by its practical impossibility, given control of the seas around Africa by the navies of Britain and later the United States. Even more important, the Nazi leadership had begun to turn towards the genocidal "final solution," extending ghettoization and forced labor to concentration camps and mass extermination.

On June 1, 1915, the escalating air war between Britain and Germany reached the outskirts of the British capital, with German Zeppelins (balloon airships) dropping bombs in the suburbs of London. According to the official British report: "Zeppelins are reported to have been seen near Ramsgate (on the Kentish coast) 67 miles east-southeast of London and in Brentwood (17 miles east-southeast of London) and in certain outlying districts of London. Many fires are reported but these cannot be absolutely connected with the airship visits."

In the previous few months, German Zeppelins had been getting closer and closer to London. There were other raids on coastal towns on the North Sea, including the May 10 bombing of Southend, a seaside resort, which resulted in multiple fires, and an April 20 raid on Brookshall and Ipswich.

Ninety bombs were dropped in the June 1 attack, killing four people and wounding several others. Prior to the raid, the nearest an aircraft had approached London was on May 19, when bombs were dropped at the mouth of the River Thames, near the naval arsenal of Sheerness, 35 miles from the city.

The bombings produced anti-German riots in certain parts of London. Rioters pulled down barricades from German-owned shops, which had been boarded up, and there was some looting of furniture and other goods. Shoreditch, Hoxton, and Pimlico Walk were the scenes of anti-German demonstrations. A baker's shop in Pearson Street was attacked by a crowd mostly of women; it later emerged that the shop was actually owned by an Irishman. Anti-German sentiment had been assiduously promoted by the British political establishment, in an attempt to cover up the predatory character of Britain's participation in the war and to divert growing anti-war sentiment in the working class.

Germany declared the raid to be a reprisal for a bombing raid by Allied forces on the Rhine city of Ludwigshafen, which had caused serious damage and loss of life.



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