Apollo-Soyuz Test Project ends Space Race, July 17, 1975

Suzanne Deffree - July 17, 2016

On July 17, 1975, a US Apollo capsule carrying a three-man crew docked with a Soviet Soyuz capsule carrying a two-man crew, marking the first time the two different countries met in space and ending the “Space Race” that had come before it. This first joint US-Soviet space flight was also the last flight of an Apollo spacecraft.

The two vessels involved in the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project had left within approximately seven and a half hours of each other on July 15. They met over France. (See the NASA depiction below)

![NASA depiction of Apollo and Soyuz spacecraft docked](https://example.com/a.png)

NASA’s Apollo command module was launched with a docking module that had to be retrieved from the S-IVB upper-stage of the Saturn IB rocket after launch. The module was designed as both an airlock and an adapter.

One end of the docking module was attached to the Apollo utilizing the same “probe-and-drogue” docking mechanism used on the Lunar Module and the Skylab space station. The other end had the APAS docking collar, which Soyuz carried in place of the standard Soyuz/Salyut system of the time. The APAS fitting with the Soyuz was releasable, allowing the two spacecraft to separate.

The ships were docked for 1 day, 23 hours, seven minutes, and three seconds. The two teams spent 44 hours together, conducting joint, as well as separate, experiments, visiting the other’s ships, sharing meals, and exchanging gifts. Each had learned the other’s language in order to converse.

The men onboard the Apollo were: Commander Thomas P Stafford, Command Module Pilot Vance D
Brand, and Docking Module Pilot Donald K Slayton. The men onboard the Soyuz were: Commander Alexei Leonov and Commander Anatoly Filipchenko.

The test project was considered a resounding success and provided useful engineering experience for future joint US-Russian space flights, such as the Shuttle-Mir Program and the International Space Station.

A minor planet, 2228 Soyuz-Apollo, was discovered in 1977 by Soviet astronomer Nikolai Stepanovich Chernykh and is named after this mission.

Also see:

- Russia in Space
- 1st human journey into space, April 12, 1961
- Outer Space Treaty comes into force, October 10, 1967

Also on this day in tech history:
On July 17, 1920, Gordon Gould, a physicist who played a major role in inventing the laser, was born.

For more moments in tech history, see this blog. EDN strives to be historically accurate with these postings. Should you see an error, please notify us.

Editor’s note: This article was originally posted on July 17, 2012 and edited on July 17, 2016.