Today in History - June 24

June 24
Select date: June 24 Go

Today's Stories: **The Space Age** | **Siam and the World Transportation Commission**

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The Space Age

On **June 24**, 1961, the public learned of President John Kennedy's letter assigning Vice President Lyndon Johnson the high priority task of unifying the U.S. satellite programs. Twenty-two years later, on the same day, astronaut Sally Ride landed at Edwards Air Force Base aboard the 100-ton Space Shuttle *Challenger*, completing her voyage as the first American woman in space. These two events evidence the nation's leap from an age of earth-bound technology and communication and travel into the space age.

I will appreciate your having the Space Council undertake to make the necessary studies... for bringing into optimum use at the earliest practicable time operational communications satellites.

Letter to the Vice President on the Need for Developing Operational Communications Satellites ([released June 24, 1961, dated June 15, 1961] *The American Presidency Project*)

John F. Kennedy, head-and-shoulders portrait, facing right, (between 1960 and 1970). Prints & Photographs Division

On May 25, 1961, President Kennedy declared to a joint session of Congress his belief that the nation should commit itself to landing a man on the moon by the end of the decade. This mission was accomplished on July 20, 1969.

Development during and after WWII of the appropriate technology for large, liquid-fueled rockets made the space program possible. Rockets such as those tested at the White Sands Missile Range provided the power needed to place satellites and man into orbit. The U.S. Air Force Missile Test Center began operating at Cape Canaveral in 1949; the first U.S. earth satellite, *Explorer I*, was launched from the center in 1958.

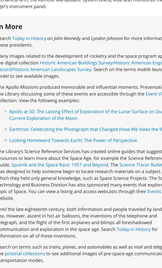
After the Soviet Union launched the world's first artificial satellite in 1957, Americans riveted their attention on the U.S. space program. As chairman of the National Aeronautics Space Council, Lyndon Johnson played a significant role in developing coherent policy for a program plagued by interagency rivalries, high turnover of top personnel, and expanding costs.

Under Johnson, the Space Council recommended that the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) provide policy coordination with civil government agencies involved in space flight. NASA established its command and control center, the Manned Spacecraft Center (now known as the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center), in Houston, in Johnson's home state of Texas.

Aerial View Showing Sides 3 and 4 of Mobile Launcher One, Part of NASA F.L.-4, Mobile Launcher One, Kennedy Space Center, Titusville, Brevard County, FL, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, photographer, 1983. Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record/Historic American Landscapes Survey. Caption: "Side 3 of the Mobile Launcher (ML) was an integral part of the Apollo Program. Its use shortened the time period between launches as assembly of the launcher and launch vehicle no longer had to take place on the launch pad. Apollo 11, the first manned landing on the moon, lifted off on ML-1."

The government's policy approach was two-pronged: 1) develop a system of unmanned satellites that would orbit the earth and provide global telecommunications; and 2) pursue manned and unmanned space exploration. To serve the former purpose, the Communications Satellite Corporation (COMSAT) was founded in 1962, and the International Telecommunications Satellite Organization (INTELSAT) in 1964. In 1965, INTELSAT operated the launch of *Early Bird*, the capacity of which was sufficient to provide either 240 voice circuits or one two-way television link between the U.S. and Europe, technology which came to impact people's everyday lives.

NASA's Mercury Program rapidly pursued space exploration by preparing a group of seven astronauts to go into outer space. On May 5, 1961, Alan B. Shepard Jr. flew sub-orbitally, and, on February 20, 1962, John Glenn orbited the earth.



Nightime View of a Space Shuttle Launch from Kennedy Space Center, Dan Brawning, photographer, 2006. State Library and Archives of Florida. World Digital Library

In June 1963, Soviet astronaut Valentina Tereshkova became the first woman in space, but it was another twenty years before the American astronaut Sally Ride orbited Earth. Ride, who had received her (PhD. in physics from Stanford University, was accepted for astronaut training in 1978. During her six-day mission aboard the Challenger (she launched from the Kennedy Space Center on June 18, 1983), Mission Specialist Ride helped launch two communications satellites and retrieve another. An expert in use of the shuttle's fifty-foot-long mechanical arm, the Remote Manipulator System (RMS), Ride also monitored the Challenger's instrument panel.

Learn More

- Search Today in History on *John Kennedy* and *Lyndon Johnson* for more information on these presidents.
- Many images related to the development of rockets and the space program appear in the digital collection Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record/Historic American Landscapes Survey. Search on the terms *mobile launcher* and *rocket* to see available images.
- The Apollo Missions produced memorable and influential moments. Presentations at the Library discussing some of these events are accessible through the Event Videos collection. View the following examples:
  - Apollo at 50: The Lasting Effect of Exploration of the Lunar Surface on Our Current Exploration of the Moon.
  - Earthrise: Celebrating the Photograph that Changed (How We View) the World
  - Looking Homeward Towards Earth: The Power of Perspective
- The Library's Science Reference Services has created online guides that suggest resources to learn more about the Space Age, for example the Science Reference Guide, Sputnik and the Space Race: 1957 and Beyond. The Science Tracer Bullets series was designed to help someone begin to locate research materials on a subject about which they hold only general knowledge, such as Space Science Projects. The Science, Technology and Business Division has also sponsored many events that explore the topic of Space. You can view a listing and access webcasts through their Events website.
- Until the late eighteenth century, both information and people traveled by land and sea. However, ascent in hot air balloons, the inventions of the telephone and telegraph, and the flights of the first airplanes and blimps all foreshadowed communication and exploration in the space age. Search Today in History for information on all of these inventions.
- Search on terms such as *trains, planes, and automobiles as well as mail* and *telegraph* in the pictorial collections to see additional images of pre-space age communication and transportation modes.
- View other images of Sally Ride and of space exploration through the image galleries and image library on the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) website.
- See the online exhibition Revelations from the Russian Archives, which illustrates both the domestic and the foreign policy of the Soviets and is a source of primary materials which may help us better understand the history of the twentieth century. The documents presented cover Soviet history from the October Revolution of 1917 to the failed coup of August 1991.

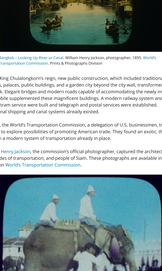
Siam and the World Transportation Commission

On **June 24**, 1932, during the reign of King Prajadhipok of the Chakri dynasty, a coup ended the absolute monarchy of Siam (present-day Thailand). The military-dominated constitutional monarchy that replaced it brought 700 years of absolute rule under a series of Siamese kings to an end.

The Chakri dynasty had assumed power in 1782, at which time the king, Rama I, established his capital, Bangkok, on the east bank of the Chao Phraya River. During his reign, the impressive city wall, the Grand Palace, and the Buddhist Temple, Wat Po, were constructed.

During the nineteenth century, the Thai kings became increasingly receptive to Western influences, particularly under the reigns of King Mongkut (1851-68) and his son, King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910). By introducing social and political reforms recommended by their European advisers, they enabled Siam to avoid the colonial rule imposed on most of Southeast Asia.

Bangkok - Palace Court Interior, William Henry Jackson, photographer, 1895. Worlds Transportation Commission. Prints & Photographs Division

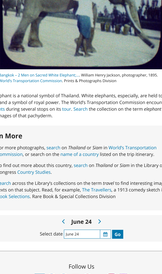


Bangkok - Looking Up River or Canal, William Henry Jackson, photographer, 1895. Worlds Transportation Commission. Prints & Photographs Division

During King Chulalongkorn's reign, new public construction, which included traditional temples, palaces, public buildings, and a garden city beyond the city wall, transformed Bangkok. Elegant bridges and modern roads capable of accommodating the newly invented automobile supplemented these magnificent buildings. A modern railway system and an electric tram service were built and telegraph and postal services were established. Traditional shipping and canal systems already existed.

In 1898, the World's Transportation Commission, a delegation of U.S. businessmen, traveled to Siam to explore possibilities of promoting American trade. They found an exotic, thriving city with a modern system of transportation already in place.

William Henry Jackson, the commission's official photographer, captured the architecture, art, modes of transportation, and people of Siam. These photographs are available in the collection World's Transportation Commission.



Bangkok - 2 Men on Sacred White Elephant, William Henry Jackson, photographer, 1895. Worlds Transportation Commission. Prints & Photographs Division

The elephant is a national symbol of Thailand. White elephants, especially, are held to be sacred and a symbol of royal power. The World's Transportation Commission recommended elephants during several stops on its tour. Search the collection on the term *elephant* to see more images of that pachyderm.

Learn More

- For more photographs, search on *Thailand* or *Siam* in World's Transportation Commission, or search on the name of a country listed on the trip itinerary.
- To find out more about this country, search on *Thailand* or *Siam* in the Library of Congress Country Studies.
- Search across the Library's collections on the term *travel* to find interesting images and texts on that subject. Read, for example, The Travellers, a 1913 comedy sketch in Rare Book Selections. Rare Book & Special Collections Division

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