

RT QUESTION MORE.

🏠 → News → Mars 500 turns one year old (Earth time) ↓

Mars 500 turns one year old (Earth time)

Published: 3 June, 2011, 11:41

Edited: 3 June, 2011, 14:59



Today marks one year since six plucky volunteers set off on an unprecedented 17-month simulated mission to Mars.

Of course, the crew never really left Earth: the Mars 500 simulation is a scientific mission confined to a scale mockup of a spaceship, but the pressures faced by the astronauts are very real.

The first test of this kind was set up in 1967, when the space race between US and USSR was in full swing. Three men entered a secret simulation facility in Moscow to determine the effects of long-duration space flights on humans.

"The sheer duration of it, the monotony... It's hard. I mean the regimen, little things get to you. In the beginning we had a steady temperature all the time. Later the temperature was fluctuating, making it incredibly uncomfortable," remembers German Manovtsev, Leading Research Fellow at Institute of Medical and Biological Problems who was one of those who took part in the original 1967 experiment.

German and his two crew mates spent one year in a metal box 12 meters square, with no private space.

The Mars 500 module, with its 72 meter square living quarters, as well as separate areas for conducting experiments, looks like a five-star hotel by comparison.

Still, being asked about another shot in isolation German says *"Never again in my life! Not even with the same team. But I often think about other options available to other teams."*

One year into the Mars 500 project, those "on board" have plenty to keep them occupied including a garden to allow them to grow some of their own food.

It would be wrong to say that the current crew has an easy ride. Astronauts who have spent time in space for real are full of admiration for the things they are making do without.

"My missions were not at all this long. And I had opportunity from the space station to call home and talk to the family through a telephone system. That must be the hardest for them that they cannot do that," explained ESA astronaut Christer Fuglesang.

The end is in sight for the Mars 500 mission, but what goes through your mind when you are on that final furlong?

"It's a very nervous period and it can easily burn you out. During the last two weeks I was looking at my watch every five minutes to figure out how much time was left. We all got rather tense," shared German Manovtsev.

One year into their voyage, the Mars 500 team is currently simulating their return journey to Earth. However, it will be another five months before that door will be opened and they can step back into normality.

Founder of the Capital Science Connections innovation agency, Dr. Patrick Fullick, says that psychological pressure for the team is indeed high.

"These guys have been locked away for a year and they've still got five months to go and it's important to remember that they haven't actually had voice contact with the control center for 11 months now. They've still got four months now before they are back in voice contact with [the command center], so the only real human contact they've had is with each other. I think they really must be, at this point, counting down the days and wondering what it will be like to re-establish human contact again," he said.