

Francis Gary Powers and the 1960 U-2 Incident: The History and Legacy of the Fateful Spy Plane Mission that Changed the Cold War

Charles River Editors



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*Includes pictures *Includes accounts of the mission and the trial written by Powers and others *Includes online resources and a bibliography for further reading *Includes a table of contents "I must tell you a secret. When I made my first report I deliberately did not say that the pilot was alive and well...and now just look how many silly things the Americans have said." - Nikita Khrushchev "Mr. Chairman, on May 1 the Soviet Government captured, 1300 miles inside the boundaries of the Russian empire, an American plane, operated by an American pilot, under the direction and control of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, and is now holding both the plane and the pilot. The plane was on an espionage mission...The activity...[was] under the aegis of the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the United States, for whom all members of the subcommittee have the highest regard and in whose military capacity they have the utmost confidence." -Clarence Cannon, House Appropriations Chair In September 1959, Nikita Khrushchev became the first Soviet leader to visit the United States, and for 13 days, he toured the country, fueling a media frenzy. Landing at Washington D.C. with his wife Nina Petrovna and his adult children, he proceeded to visit New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Iowa, Pittsburgh, and Washington. The end of the trip included a meeting with President Eisenhower at Camp David, where the two leaders agreed to hold a four-power summit about Berlin to settle the issues on the city. Khrushchev left the U.S. considering his visit a success, believing he had developed a strong relationship with Eisenhower, and though the latter did not exactly feel the same way, the president was scheduled to visit Moscow in 1960. It was a visit that was to not to take place, because on May 1, 1960, Soviet surface-to-air missiles shot down a U-2 spy plane piloted by Francis Gary Powers. The flights, which had long angered the Soviets, had been resumed after a long halt, but Khrushchev held off announcing the shoot down until May 5, worried that the incident would jeopardize the 4 power summit scheduled for May 15. When the announcement was made, Khrushchev tried to blame the American overflights on rogue elements in the U.S. military, attempting to deflect possible blame from Eisenhower, but the president admitted that the flights had occurred and that he had ordered them. This put Khrushchev in a very difficult position with the summit approaching. The subsequent summit in Paris was a disaster for both sides as they tried to save face. When Khrushchev arrived, he demanded an apology from Eisenhower and a promise of no more U-2 overflights. He got no apology, but Eisenhower had already suspended the flights and offered his Open Skies proposal for mutual overflight rights. Khrushchev refused and left the summit, and Eisenhower's visit to the Soviet Union was cancelled. The collapse of the summit ended Khrushchev's soft approach to the West. In his September 1960 visit to the U.N. General Assembly, he showed his hard approach; rather than trying to charm the West, he began the Soviet Union's wooing of Third World countries in an effort to bring them into the Soviet orbit. As for Francis Gary Powers, he would spend almost 2 years in prison in the Soviet Union, and when he was returned in a swap of spies, he was vilified for being taken alive and letting the Soviets capture the U-2 spy plane. He would go on to receive a number of awards, but most of them were posthumous because he died in a helicopter crash in 1977. To this day, the shooting down of Powers' plane remains one of the most famous events of the Cold War. Francis Gary Powers and the 1960 U-2 Incident: The History and Legacy of the Fateful Spy Plane Mission that Changed the Cold War looks at the chain of events that brought about one of the seminal moments of the 20th century.

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