

A Spy's Story

OPERATION OVERFLIGHT

Francis Gary Powers with Curt Gentry

(Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 375 pp., \$6.95)

Reviewed by David Wise

The reviewer is co-author with Thomas B. Ross of *The U-2 Affair, The Invisible Government and The Espionage Establishment*.

Sitting there in his Soviet prison cell, weaving rugs, making envelopes, reading Pushkin, dreaming of banana splits, coconut-cream pie and hamburgers, U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers became reasonably philosophical about his predicament: "Oh, well," he concluded, "they didn't invite me to come . . ."

The most famous spy of the Cold War waited almost 10 years to tell his story because, he says, John A. McCone, who was director of the Central Intelligence Agency, wouldn't let him write it when he wanted to, following his exchange for Soviet master spy Rudolph Abel in 1962.

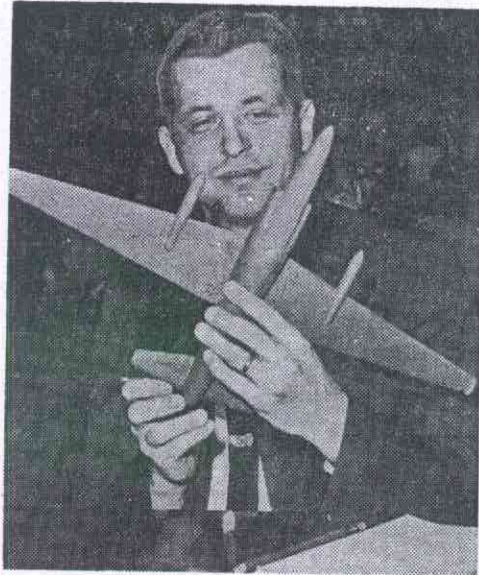
A decade after the flight, it is difficult to recapture the full extent of the incredible bungling that took place in Washington when the CIA's high-altitude spy plane was downed 1,200 miles inside the Soviet Union. First, the Eisenhower administration dusted off an inept CIA cover story and announced that the U-2 was a "weather research" plane that had strayed off course. Soviet Premier Khrushchev savored that for two days, then disclosed that he had both the plane and its live pilot. Whereupon the State Department admitted the flight—but said it was unauthorized. Two days after that, President Eisenhower reversed field, took personal responsibility and indicated, through his Secretary of State that the CIA overflights would continue because the Russians didn't have an open society.

Khrushchev stormed and broke up the summit meeting in Paris. Ike finally announced he had called off the U-2 flights, but it was a bit late. And Francis Gary Powers was in jail.

In 10 years, Francis Gary Powers has had a good deal of time to think. He has matured, divorced, remarried, moved to California (to test U-2s for Lockheed at Burbank), fathered a son, Francis Gary Powers II, and built a new life. He has grown. It comes through; and that, more than anything else, is what makes his book interesting.

Operation Overflight solves no ultimate mysteries—we learn little that is clear about the workings of the destructor unit, which Powers did not use to destroy his plane; or about why the CIA timed a flight over Russia so close to a summit meeting on which the world had pinned its fragile hopes for peace. The destructor unit was a device designed, in the event of trouble aloft to allow what Powers describes as "a small but supposedly sufficient margin of time to bail out before the explosion occurred." He denies that the U-2 pilots worried that the CIA had rigged the timer to destroy both plane and pilot. Powers (and CIA) maintain that the unit would not have destroyed the plane, only the cameras and certain equipment. Yet he says ground crews tested the timer before each flight because "a few seconds could mean life or death."

So the matter remains



Associated Press

Pilot Francis Gary Powers holds a model of the U-2 plane in an appearance before the Senate Armed Forces Committee in 1962.

fuzzy. But we do learn a good deal about Francis Gary Powers, and how his view of life, CIA, and the game of nations has changed. Powers was raised in the grinding poverty of a remote Virginia valley in Appalachia. Understandably, he fled. To the Air Force. When mysterious men playing Keystone Cop games in motel rooms offered him a job at \$30,000 a year ("it was nearly as much as the captain of a commercial airliner received!"), he signed up.

Shot down near Sverdlovsk, grilled by the KGB, Powers builds a rather persuasive case that he told the Russians as little as possible. After his return, the CIA put Powers through a second grilling. He was rehabilitated by the agency and hailed as a hero—because, CIA, by so doing, could also rehabilitate itself. And Powers knows it. The primary concern of his superiors in Langley, Powers writes, "was to get CIA off the hook."

Shunted off to California, kept under wraps at Lockheed, awarded a secret medal by CIA in 1965 to help keep him happy, Powers had more time to reflect. Despite everything, he has not become bitter. But no man, he writes, "likes to admit he has been used."

Perhaps that is what espionage and Cold War is all about. Governments using people, playing games, pursuing means that gradually become ends. What was more important to the intelligence operators—a summit meeting, or one more U-2 flight over the Soviet Union?

The U-2 episode made Americans aware for the first time that their government spied, and sometimes lied. It focused major attention on CIA, and on the continuing question of how intelligence operations can be made compatible with democratic government. As Francis Gary Powers has observed, "Never again would we be quite so innocent."