

WAS I BETRAYED BY LEE HARVEY OSWALD?

by
GARY POWERS

EAST-WEST relations were on a knife-edge when America's U2 spy plane was shot down over Russia in 1960. After 21 months in prison the pilot, Gary Powers, was exchanged for Colonel Abel, a top Russian agent. Today Powers concludes his remarkable story—until now suppressed by the C.I.A.

THERE is no doubt that the U2 overflights from 1956 to 1960 were valuable. The New York Times was to call them "the most successful reconnaissance espionage project in history."

For instance, in the United States in the mid-fifties a battle had long raged in military and congressional circles over how much of our defence effort should be allotted to bombers, how much to missiles.

It was not only a matter of

U2

"keeping up with Russia" in retaliatory strength; also at stake was whether our defenses were or were not geared to the actual threat.

There was considerable evidence the Russians had chosen to concentrate on production of heavy bombers. On Soviet Aviation Day in July 1955 a mammoth air spectacular had been staged over Moscow.

Flight after flight of these planes passed over the reviewing stand, in numbers far



LEE HARVEY OSWALD

greater than our Intelligence had believed existed.

The U2s revealed this "bomber build-up" for what it was, an elaborate hoax.

There was only one squadron of these planes. Having once passed overhead, the same planes had flown out of sight, circled, and returned again and again.

The U2s revealed more than this. Evidence accumulated proved that while the United States was busily manufacturing bombers, the Russians had shifted their major emphasis to missiles.

Bit by bit, mission after mission, the U2s were penetrating and dissipating a cloud of ignorance which had for decades made the Soviet Union a dark and shadowy land.

BUT from early 1958 until April 1960 we made almost no overflights. So why, with the Summit so close, had Eisenhower approved my flight?

I knew there had been no overflights for months and then suddenly two in close succession. Could Eisenhower have wanted Krushchev to know of the flights?

We knew that the Russians had radar-tracked most if not all of the overflights, so the chances were that these last two U2 flights would not have gone undetected.

Might Eisenhower or his advisers have felt it to be to our advantage, psychologically, to have Krushchev know, to have this very much on his mind when he arrived in Paris for the talks?

Eisenhower smug in the knowledge that we could overfly Russia at will; Krushchev inwardly raging but unable to protest, because to do so would be to admit that his country did not have missiles capable of reaching the planes

Unhappily there is more than a suspicion that someone betrayed the U2's most vital secret—the height at which it customarily operated. This would have made it a sitting duck for Russian missiles. Consider the facts:—

In 1957 the U2s were based in Atsugi, Japan.

In September of that year a

17-year-old Marine was stationed at Atsugi and had access to equipment which included height-finding radar. He was a trained radar operator.

He remained in Japan until November 1958, at which time he was returned to the United States and assigned to Marine Air Control Squadron No. 9 (MACS-9) at the Marine Corps Air Station at El Toro, California. El Toro was not a U2 base, but U2s frequently flew over this portion of Southern California. At El Toro he had access not only to radar and radio codes but also to the new MPS 16 height-finding radar.

In September 1959 he obtained a "hardship discharge" from the U.S. Marine Corps.

The following month he

defected to the Soviet Union. On October 31 he appeared in the American Embassy in Moscow to state his intention of renouncing his U.S. citizenship. According to Richard E. Snyder, the second secretary and senior consular official, and John A. McVickar, Snyder's assistant, who was also present, during the course of the conversation he mentioned that he had already offered to tell the Russians everything he knew about the Marine Corps and his specialty, radar operation. He also intimated that he might know something of "special interest."

His name was Lee Harvey Oswald. Six months later my U2 was shot down.

When I returned to America it was to a mixed reception.

The criticism hit me with a sledgehammer blow.

"A Hero or a Man who Failed His Mission?" read the head-

line on the New York Sunday Herald Tribune.

The American people demanded answers to certain questions, the paper said. Among them:—

"Why, knowing that neither he nor the U2 should fall into unfriendly hands, didn't he blow himself up, and the plane?"

"Why didn't Powers use the poison needle he had on hand?"

Apparently a great many people thought that I had orders to kill myself, come what may.

I WAS to use the destruct device—which wouldn't have destroyed the plane, only a portion of the equipment—if possible. Under the circumstances, it had not been possible.

As for the poison needle, since

carrying was optional, suicide was obviously optional too.

The criticism went far beyond that, however. Comparisons were made between my conduct and Abel's following capture, the implication being that while Abel had revealed nothing about his mission, I had "spilled my guts." "I told everything."

I knew better. The other pilots knew better. As did the agency, the President, the Secretary of State, and, I presumed, quite a few others. I had withheld information from the Russians, particularly vital information about the altitude of the U2.

In the end I was cleared by the C.I.A.

At a dinner at the Beverly Hilton Hotel, at which I was present, Allen Dulles, former director of the C.I.A., said:—

"I would like to say... Francis Gary Powers performed his duty in a very dangerous mission and he performed it well, and I think I know more about that than some of his detractors and critics know, and I am glad to say that to him tonight."

MEANWHILE my marriage had gone through a bad period. My relations with Barbara had been going bad well before I was shot down. When she came to join me at Adana in Turkey there had been incidents—nothing definite enough to precipitate a break, only strong suspicions, but enough of these to leave the marriage very shaky.

When I returned to America nothing had changed with Barbara, except to grow worse.

Finally, I filed suit for divorce. The decree became final in January 1963.

Because I was merely killing time with the C.I.A. I resigned in 1962 and took a job with Lockheed, makers of the U2, as an engineering test pilot.

I had also met a very attractive and intelligent agency employee named Claudia Edwards Downey.

On October 21, 1963, she resigned from the agency and we were married October 26, in Catlett, Virginia. It was the beginning, without qualification, of the happiest part of my life.



1970 Francis Gary Powers and Curt Gentry.