



By AP/Tass

Moscow: Downed U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers in dock for beginning of his 1960 espionage trial in Moscow. Pilot's son says public still misinformed about the incident.

Missile, not a MiG, brought down U-2 in 1960

I would like to set the record straight about some Cold War misinformation in a letter to the editor by Stephen I. Schwartz, director of the Brookings Institution's U.S. Nuclear Weapons Cost Study Project ("Original U-2 plane not hit by Soviet missile," Nov. 24).

My father, Francis Gary Powers, had a unique opportunity to play a key role in providing the intelligence community with reconnaissance imagery during the height of the Cold War.

On May 1, 1960, my father flew the last Cold War U-2 mission over the former USSR and, through the reality of a Soviet shutdown over Sverdlovsk, made it clear that the Soviets had improved their surface-to-air missile (SAM) capability.

Upon my father's capture, he was held in Lubyanka Prison, where he was interrogated for 10 to 16 hours a day for 61 days. During his imprisonment, all kinds of false statements, misinformation and cover-ups appeared in the media. And now there is this new story from a Soviet pilot who says his MiG-19 flew so close to the U-2 that he caused the U-2 to crash.

Not only are these stories false but, unfortunately, many also are still quoted by the media as fact.

In August 1960, the Soviet Union staged a widely publicized public trial of Francis Gary Powers that was designed to embarrass the United States,

and my father was sentenced to 10 years in a Soviet prison. However, he was exchanged after 21 months for Soviet spy Rudolf Abel, who was being held in the United States.

When my father returned home, because of the misinformation in the media there were many people who didn't see him as a hero, and some Americans questioned his conduct and loyalty. Some criticized my father because he didn't "follow orders" and kill himself. There never were any such orders.

Francis Gary Powers was extensively debriefed by the CIA and the designer of the U-2, C.L. "Kelly" Johnson, and both agreed that the U-2 would handle as my father described if hit by a shock wave from a near-miss SAM explosion.

In March of 1962, he appeared in an open hearing before the Senate Committee on Armed Services. The committee exonerated him of any wrongdoing and called him "a young man performing well in a dangerous job." For obvious reasons, there were many gaps between what the government knew and what it told the public.

Recently, in an effort to help maintain historical accuracy about the Cold War and bridge the gaps, I founded the Cold War Museum. Sergei Khrushchev, son of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, is a member of the board.

Francis Gary Powers Jr.
Fairfax, Va.