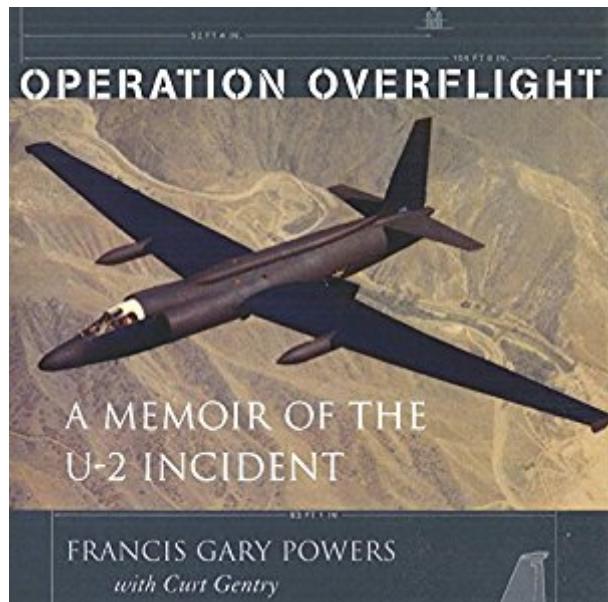


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Operation Overflight: A Memoir Of The U-2 Incident



Synopsis

U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers is a central character in the movie Bridge of Spies starring Tom Hanks. In his classic 1970 memoir, Powers reveals the full story behind what happened in the most sensational espionage case in Cold War history. After his U-2 reconnaissance plane was shot down, Powers was captured on May 1, 1960 and endured 61 days of rigorous interrogation by the KGB, a public trial, a conviction for espionage, and the start of a 10-year sentence. After nearly two years, the US government obtained his release from prison in a dramatic exchange for convicted Soviet spy Rudolph Abel. The narrative is a tremendously exciting suspense story about a man who was labeled a traitor by many of his countrymen but who emerged a Cold War hero.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A number of important lessons call out from the pages of this engrossing and rather sad story - not the least of which is that Francis Gary Powers got shafted, folks. Plain and simple. During his captivity, the press severely tarnished his reputation by publishing sometimes gross misinformation about him and his mission. Some of these misconceptions thrive to this day. How many people still believe he was under CIA orders to use his infamous suicide pin? (he wasn't even required to carry it) How many people still think he told the Soviets too much? (his handling of the interrogations was very shrewd; he cleverly protected the most important secrets - even after our reckless press published information that threatened to undermine his strategy) How many people really think he was considering defecting to the USSR after release from Soviet prison? (never crossed his mind) Or that he didn't activate the U-2's destruct mechanism because it was allegedly set to destroy both

plane and pilot? (completely false rumor started by the Soviets) Perhaps the saddest part is that after his release, the CIA could have done more to clear his name. But they apparently back-peddled from this effort because clearing his name meant tarnishing theirs (For starters, Powers states that the CIA did not train their U-2 pilots on what to do if captured. These days, practically all military pilots receive such training). Several years ago I paid for a pristine first edition of this 1970 book, signed by Powers and co-author Curt Gentry (Powers died in 1977). At first I thought I'd paid too much. After reading it, I think I got a bargain.

I was only 12 years old when FGP was shot down over the USSR and have been following the story ever since. In 1970, I purchased the Operation Overflight book and still have my copy. However, in recent years, the government has released more information on this period of American history. We now know such things as how many flights there were, the objectives of those flights, and other pertinent information about the U-2 program. But the personal information is only found in the book by Powers and in detailing his role in the CIA. He describes how he behaved and how he was treated while in captivity and upon his return to the US. All of this gives us a picture of a private American citizen (and former military man) who was thrust into the Cold War and the controversy about the U-2. I visited the grave site in Arlington Cemetery and just stood there remembering how this brave young man did what he did and suffered what he did for our nation. When the new reprint comes out, be sure to read it as it will, no doubt, reveal much more about the man, the plane, and the mission.

With respect to the "Cold War" we usually know the official versions from both the government of the USA and of the USSR. Powers book is extremely interesting because it gives you a private account of somebody that was deeply involved in the U-2 Cold War incident: a third point of view. A point of view that has no "agenda" to push through. Powers description of his life in prison had for me an almost spiritual meaning. After reading what he went through, I felt grateful for what I have. He mentions, for example, that in prison work is cherished: he and his cell mate fought to have the privilege of cleaning their cell. On the other hand, his actual experience in jail was very different from what you see in the movies. There was no violence, no torture, no conspiracy to escape. In almost two years he had a chance to speak with only one other prisoner: his cell mate. It was the most boring experience imaginable, so much so that some prisoners lost their minds. It is difficult not to feel contempt for Dwight Eisenhower who after ordering the flight completely abandoned Powers to his fate. Eisenhower cared much more for his "prestige" than for any person but in the end his

prestige went down the drain anyway when his involvement in the U-2 affair was finally known. Another player that has dramatically dropped in stature for me is Robert Kennedy. His callousness is hard to believe. After all the suffering Powers went through in the USSR for doing his duty for the CIA, R. Kennedy was willing to try him for treason with the only purpose of advancing his political career! The politics surrounding this event are sickening: JFK had invited Powers to meet him at the White House but at the last moment the offer was withdrawn. In the end, no president or high level politician did anything to obtain Powers' release from the USSR. It was his father whom he had to thank for his release. Obviously, the CIA did not want this book to be published and 8 years had to pass before it finally saw the light. I fully recommend the book as it gives you an insight as to how history is really made by real people, in real places, performing real duties.

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