

Volume 1

Number 103

The U-2 Incident - Part II, The Losers

Lead: On the morning of May 1, 1959, Francis Gary Powers piloting a U-2 spy plane was shot down by elements of the Soviet Union's Air Defense Force.

Intro.: "A Moment in Time" with Dan Roberts.

Content: The fallout from the incident went far beyond the fate of Francis Gary Powers. He was tried, convicted and then exchanged for Soviet spy Rudolf Able in 1962. Khrushchev went to the Paris summit conference on the 15th of May and

disrupted it completely, using the U-2 incident as an excuse.

In fact from the very beginning, the Administration had known about the flights and the President had authorized them. The CIA had assured the Administration that no one could survive an attack by a surface to air missile, but had then provided a parachute for the pilot.

The President was forced to admit that he had authorized the flights and that he done so in order to maintain the security of the United States. The Republicans in the next campaign were not able to use the peace issue to their advantage since many Americans, while supportive of

Eisenhower, were disturbed by the prospect of continued Cold War tension. Richard Nixon later wrote that in the extraordinarily close election of 1960, the U-2 incident may have been one of the deciding factors in his loss.

Ironically, it was Nikita Khrushchev whose air defense command had finally succeeded in shooting down a U-2, who lost most of all. His position had never been terribly secure in the first place. His provocative diplomatic techniques such as banging his shoes on the table during United Nations speeches were designed for home consumption as much as disruption on the scene. He had embarked on a process of

liberalization in the Soviet Union and this was generating some opposition. In 1969, he related to an American friend and visitor that the U-2 incident had damaged him politically, "Things were going well, until one event happened." Khrushchev said, "From the time Gary Powers was shot down in a U-2 over the Soviet Union I was no longer in full control. My decision making powers were weakened after the U-2 crisis. It scared the Kremlin militarists, my own ascendancy was over."

"A Moment in Time" is produced at the University of Richmond. This is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Gann, Ernest Kellogg. *The Black Watch: The Men who Fly America's Secret Spy Planes*. New York, NY: Random House Publishers, 1989.

Geelhoed, E. Bruce. "Dwight D. Eisenhower The Spy Plane and the Summit: A Quarter Century Retrospective." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 1987 17 (1): 95-106.

O' Tolle, George J. A. *Honorable Treachery: A History of US Intelligence, Espionage and Covert Activity from the American Revolution to the CIA*. New York, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991.

Powers, Francis Gary. *Operation Overflight*. Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 1970.

Copyright by Dan Roberts Enterprises, Inc.