

Front Edit Other
Page Page Page
Date: JUN 3 1960

STATINTL

His Father, Friends Agree:

Francis Powers

Doesn't Fit Spy Pilot Role

Oliver Powers Recalls Son's First Flight and How He Loved Planes

What kind of person is Francis Gary Powers, the U-2 pilot captured by the Soviet Union and facing possible death? UPI sent a reporter into his mountain home to talk to his father, his friends, his teachers. Here is what he learned:

BY JACK V. FOX

GRUNDY, VA. (UPI): The school day of the seventh-grade class of Mrs. Mary Meade in Grundy High School these spring mornings begins with a prayer for Francis Gary Powers.

Whatever he may be to the rest of the world, the 30-year-old pilot of the lost U-2 is a hero in his home town in the extreme western point of the Virginia mountains.

Francis left Grundy High in 1946. He had gone to grade school in nearby Harmon, a hamlet so small it isn't on the maps. His family home was there (five daughters and the one boy) and his dad, Oliver, had a ramshackle shoe repair shop on the road twisting through the steep valley.

The boy loved to hike, like the mountain men before him. There is a beauty in these hills, but it is stained with coal mine outcroppings, soured with poverty and plagued by sudden torrents. You can read the grimly humorous hatred of the floods in the names—Dismal River, Contrary Creek.

AN AMBITIOUS young man has to burst out of these surroundings. One out of every seven families has moved from the area in the past 10 years. Francis Powers broke the bounds and, in so doing, may have forfeited his life.

Dr. John T. Holland, pastor of the Baptist church, summed up the feelings in his sermon last week when he wondered that a "child snuggled down in these mountains" had been chosen by fate the instrument that led to the summit conference and made Powers the best

known American spy since Nathan Hale.

That word "spy," is one to avoid here. It falls in, about the same class as "revenooer."

DIGGING into the past of Francis Powers brings again and again the impression that he would seem most unlikely for a cloak and dagger role.

He was shy, almost to the point of painful bashfulness. He avoided girls. He was a fair athlete, not a star. He played football in high school, moving from guard to halfback in his senior year because of his swiftness afoot. In college he went out only for track.

His grades were fair—he finished, coincidentally, 22d in a class of 71 in high school and 22d in a class of 59 at Milligan College.

His father refused to let him go into the coal mines after he finished school, and the boy wouldn't enter his father's trade of cobbling. He enlisted in the Air Force because he was bored, was about to be drafted, and his attempt to get a Coast Guard Academy appointment had not come through.

Up to that time his horizons had been bound to the area around his birthplace in Jenkins, Ky. He went to school there, less than 100 miles from home and hitchhiked back to his

family almost every week end.

OLIVER POWERS is enduring as stark an ordeal as a father could. His only son is in the hands of the Soviet military police, branded a spy and very possibly close to death before a firing squad.

Powers, 55, is facing it with dignity and with a courage that only fleetingly wanes at the desperation of his son's plight and the bitter frustration of being unable to help.

Almost every day since 30-year-old Francis was brought down in his U-2 far inside Russia and the Communist charges trumpeted to the world, the father has gone to his one-man shoe

repair shop in this tiny Virginia mountain town and worked at his cobbler's trade.

Last week he sat at his bench and, between customers, talked about his son. A radio played incessantly and Powers paused for each newscast. He had gone on working, he said, because his son would want it that way. His wife is severely ill with a heart condition, aggravated by worry over her son.

"HE WAS a daddy's boy," Powers said. "No one will ever know how close that boy was to me. We had five girls, too, and I told his mother, 'you raise them however you want, but I'll raise the boy.' And I did."

Powers recalled when Francis first went up in an airplane. The boy was 14 and they were driving through Princeton, W. Va., on the way back from taking the elder boy to school.

"He kept after me to let him go up and there was an airport at Princeton," Powers said. "I remember the ride cost \$2.50 and it was a woman pilot in a two-seater plane.

"When he came down, he said 'daddy, I left my heart up there.'"

The elder Powers has tried to get State Department approval for a trip to Europe and Russia and made personal appeals to Premier Nikita Khrushchev (as a fellow coal miner and father) to let him take Francis' place.

BUT HE realizes how little chance those attempts have. Closing his talk, he said he was aware his son may be executed, acknowledged that Francis was unquestionably involved in espionage.

"Some one has to pay and perhaps it must be my boy," he said slowly. "But know this. Whatever he did, he did for his country and it may turn out to be one of the most valuable things a man ever did."

BARBARA GAY POWERS wanted her suitor to quit flying before she would marry him. But Francis Powers told her she would have to take the Air Force and flying, too, if she wanted him—and she did.

The striking, dark-haired Georgia girl, now 24 but only 18 when she married, has borne up well waiting for news of the fate of Francis.

Mrs. Powers has gone into seclusion, spending part of her time here in the tiny green and white cottage of her mother, Mrs. Monteen Brown in Milledgeville, Ga., and at the home

(Code)



These three pictures of Francis Gary Powers were supplied by his father, Oliver. On the left is Francis just before he entered the Air Force; in the center, he's shown with a fish he caught in Turkey; on the right is a snap taken on a visit home from his job at Lockheed.

calls her husband Gary—
not Francis.

They were married in 1954. The girl didn't want any children so long as her husband was flying and they have had none. In 1956, Powers resigned his commission with the Air Force and took a job as "test pilot" with Lockheed Aircraft.

He was making \$627.48 per month then as a first lieutenant. The Lockheed job paid \$1500 a month to start. Premier Nikita Khrushchev has said Powers told Russian authorities he was making \$2500 a month and that he was saving to buy a house.

POWERS was a top-notch fighter pilot, one of the top six in his squadron. But his record was not particularly distinguished. His only decoration was the National Defense Service Medal, given to all men in service during the Korean War whether they were in combat or not.

But there was something extra about the young man that led Lockheed and the Central Intelligence Agency to assign him some of the most dangerous and delicate of missions.

Dr. Dean Walker, the soft-spoken, scholarly president of Milligan College, which Powers attended from 1946 to 1950, said that in retrospect he remembers a quality about the young man that set him aside.

"I've seen the same trait in young men singled out for work by the Federal Bureau of Investigation," he said. "It's a certain integrity of intellect and of character. Francis had it. He was reserved, but not withdrawn. He was the type of person you knew you could count on."

of her married sister in Albany, Ga.

Mrs. Powers no doubt knows a great deal about her husband's high altitude flights over Russia from Adana, Turkey, where he was based. But government and Lockheed officials obviously have warned her to say absolutely nothing.

At the one news conference she held, she said her husband was not a "spy." It surprised listeners because the U. S. Government has admitted Powers was making photographic espionage flights. It probably is a matter of her definition of the word.

TYPICAL of his shyness with girls, Powers met Barbara through her mother. He was an F-84 Thunderbolt pilot with the 468th Fighter Squadron of the Strategic Air Command based at Turner Air Force Base outside Albany.

Mrs. Brown worked in the base cafeteria—and as he so often did with older women—the young man endeared himself to her. Mrs. Brown brought her young daughter to meet the handsome pilot from the Virginia hills and their courtship was swift. Mrs. Powers