

CIA's Questions: What Powers Said About Its Methods, Why He Failed to Destroy Plane

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Matter of Whether He Was Shot Down at 68,000 Feet Is of Minor Interest Now—He Had No Positive Instructions to Kill Self

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THE INTERROGATION, or more properly the debriefing, of Maj. Francis Gary Powers, the unlucky pilot of the U-2 spy plane brought down in the Soviet Union May 1, 1960, is designed primarily to learn as much from his experience as possible by Soviet officials as possible.

The Central Intelligence Agency is interested in the interrogation methods and the particular matters in which Soviet authorities seem most interested. It wants to know what information of CIA methods he disclosed to the Russians under two months of interrogation by them. It wants to know what actually happened to his airplane and why he was unable to destroy it and the recording and photographic instruments aboard.

In Congress there has always been some suspicion that Powers did less than he should. Senator Howard W. Cannon (Dem.), Nevada, wants to know what sort of training and indoctrination he had against the possibility of being captured.

POWERS HAD Instructions, if he went down inside the Soviet Union, to:

1. Insure destruction of his aircraft and equipment;
2. Escape capture if possible;
3. Delay giving damaging information;
4. Tell the truth where it was within the knowledge of his captors;
5. Admit CIA sponsorship.

He was given no positive instructions about self-destruction.

It was the belief of the intelligence agencies after his trial that Powers gave no important information to the Russians.

The question of whether Powers was shot down by an air defense rocket at 68,000 feet, as the Russians said, was of considerable importance at the time. Intelligence officials were confident then that the Russians did not have air defense rockets with radar capable of accurate shooting at that altitude.

THE REALIZATION of military interest now, because since then it is known that the Russians have developed anti-aircraft rockets that can bring down an airplane from that altitude with ease.

At the preliminary interrogation before the trial, Powers is quoted in the indictment as having said: "Quite unexpectedly I heard a kind of hollow explosion and saw an orange flash. The plane suddenly pitched down and, I think, its wings and tail started falling off. I think it happened at the altitude of some 68,000 feet."

At the trial he was asked: "It was at that altitude (68,000 feet) that you were struck down by a Soviet rocket?"

"It was at that altitude that I was struck down by something," he replied. "I had no idea what it was. I didn't see it."

Powers's father attended the trial. In an interview in the New York Times Aug. 27, 1960, his father said that Powers did not believe he was shot down.

POWERS WROTE a letter to the Times in which he said that his father had not properly understood his answers.

"Although I did not see what caused the explosion," Powers wrote, "I am sure that the plane did not blow up by itself. I also saw an orange flash when I looked down. I did not feel any blow whatever on the surface of the plane. Therefore, I think that the destruction of the plane was caused by shock wave."

"I can only guess what happened after this. I think that at first the tail of the plane was torn off causing the nose to drop, as a result of which the wings were torn off. The cockpit and the remaining parts of the plane began to fall in a spin because of the acceleration of the fall. I could not eject myself at a height of 14,000 feet."

CHARITABLE ON POWERS

prestige that the Russians should give they were able to shoot down a high-flying aircraft. Soviet Premier Khrushchev admitted that they had learned of the U-2 flights for years and had expressed his dissatisfaction of the failure to bring down a U-2 flight on April 3. Consequently, at the trial great emphasis was placed on having the Soviet Power at top altitude.

But there was a contradiction in the indictment and in the reports not used at the trial of the crew that allegedly did the job.

THE INDICTMENT

"Witnesses (four names omitted) and many others in the area of Sverdlovsk witnessed how the Lockheed U-2 plane was hit by a rocket."

It would not be possible to see a plane hit at 68,000 feet. One of the witnesses testified to seeing a cloud of smoke at 68,000 feet and the parachute was used at 14,000 feet.

The official army magazine, Red Star, published a narrative given allegedly by the crew, including the following: "Lieutenant Corporal Gornanov shouted from the observation platform, 'It is falling.' Maj. Voronov ran outside and saw in the rays of the May sun the fragments of the foreign plane falling down, and not far from it the pilot himself."

It is obvious that the fragments of the plane would have reached the ground long before the pilot in a parachute. If this statement is true, the plane was hit at low altitude.

WHAT REALLY happened is different from the Soviet narratives. The U-2 had a flameout and had to descend to lower altitudes, below 40,000 feet, to start the engine. Powers was actually hit at 37,000 feet and managed to leave his plane at 4,000.

Powers failed to destroy the plane and its equipment. It is evident from the testimony of Soviet experts that he may have tried to do so.

"A part of the magnetic tape was burned up, apparently as a result of a deliberate explosion," one expert said.

Why was the plane not destroyed? It has a destruction mechanism that would cause a delayed explosion after the pilot was ejected from the cockpit.

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POWERS TESTIFIED

"I was able to see the explosion that hit the U-2 plane. I remember it was at a height of 68,000 feet and I realized that I could not see the explosion itself. So I opened the canopy and loosened the straps. The centrifugal force pressed half of me against the instrument panel, while the other half hung outside. I had forgotten to disconnect the oxygen hoses and they held me in. I had to struggle to get out."

He had no chance to escape above. One man was waiting for him to come down and three more ran up immediately after Powers had to be helped up and had to be supported by the man who took him to their command post.

At his trial he evaded answering any questions about the photographic and tape recording equipment the plane carried, saying he had never seen it and if he was instructed he was to press certain levers at certain points in his flight.

It is the opinion of intelligence circles that Powers did about as well as anyone could under the circumstances. He was not ordered to destroy himself, nor would anything have been gained if he had done so. He carried poisoned needles for self-destruction, but they were intended for use only in case he was tortured.

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