

## **Biography On U-2 Pilot Francis Gary Powers**

### **Childhood:**

Francis Gary Powers was born to Oliver and Ida Powers on August 17, 1929 in Burdine, Kentucky and raised in Pound, Virginia during the Great Depression. He graduated from Grundy High School, Virginia in 1946 and four years later graduated from Milligan College, Tennessee. In 1950, upon graduating from Milligan College he enlisted as an Aviation Cadet, USAF.

### **Military Service and Career Overview:**

Francis Gary Powers received his wings and commission in December 1952 and flew F-84's until he was recruited in May 1956 to become a U-2 pilot for the CIA on a joint USAF program. He began high-altitude surveillance and over flights of the USSR in 1956, which provided vital intelligence photographs of Russian military activity to the Eisenhower administration. On May 1, 1960 Powers was shot down over Sverdlovsk, USSR by a newly developed SA-2 missile. Powers was captured, sentenced, and held prisoner until his exchange on February 10, 1962 for Russian spy Colonel Rudolph Abel. Although Captain Powers was criticized at the time (some believing that he should have died rather than allow himself to be captured), 1998 declassified documents show that he followed orders by maintaining a cooperative attitude, gave out no secret information, and refused to denounce the United States of America. As a result Russian intelligence gained no vital information from him.

Following his return to the United States on February 10, 1962 he was extensively debriefed by the CIA, the USAF, and shown "to be a fine young man performing well under dangerous circumstances" by the Senate Select Committee assembled to investigate the U-2 Incident. Within months of his return home his marriage fell apart, he and his first wife divorced, and in October 1963 he married Claudia "Sue" Edwards. Powers flew for Lockheed as a U-2 test pilot from late 1963 until early 1970. In 1970 he published his book, "Operation Overflight," which detailed his account of the U-2 Incident. From 1972 to 1977, he flew for radio and television stations in Los Angeles, doing on-air weather, news, and traffic reports. He was killed in a helicopter crash August 1, 1977 in Los Angeles, California while reporting news for K-NBC television. Powers is the father of Dee Powers and Francis Gary Powers, Jr. He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

When asked how high he was flying on May 1, 1960, Powers would often respond, "Not high enough."

### **Awards and Decorations**

CIA Intelligence Star for Valor (April 20, 1965)  
CIA Director's Award for Extreme Fidelity and Courage (May 1, 2000)  
USAF Distinguished Flying Cross (May 1, 2000)  
Prisoner of War Medal (May 1, 2000)  
National Defense Service Medal (May 1, 2000)  
USAF Silver Star (June 15, 2012)