Francis Gary Powers

Francis Gary Powers received his Air Force pilot wings in December 1952 and flew F-84's until he was recruited in 1956 to become a "civilian" U-2 pilot for the CIA. He began high-altitude surveillance and overflights of the USSR and other hostile countries in 1956, which provided vital photographic intelligence of Soviet military capabilities 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 to ten years in prison, and held captive until his exchange on February 10, 1962 for Soviet spy, Colonel Rudolph Abel as depicted in Steven Spielberg's 2015 Cold War thriller "Bridge of Spies."

Following his return to the United States in February 1962 he was extensively debriefed by the US Government, awarded the CIA's Intelligence Star for Valor, 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. Powers flew for Lockheed as a U-2 test pilot from late 1963 until early 1970. He played a vital role as a Lockheed test pilot to ensure that U-2 planes were ready for deployment for operational missions around the world. 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 station KGIL and K-NBC News Channel 4 in Los Angeles, doing on-air weather, news, and traffic reports. He was killed in a helicopter crash August 1, 1977 in Encino, California while news reporting for K-NBC News Channel 4. Powers is the father of Dee Powers and Francis Gary Powers, Jr. He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

On May 1, 2000, as a result of the 1998 declassification conference showing military service at the time of the U-2 Incident, Powers was posthumously awarded the National Defense Service Medal, the Prisoner of War Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross, and the CIA's Director's Medal for "Extreme Fidelity and Courage. On June 15, 2012 the USAF awarded Powers the Silver Star for valor in the line of duty while he was incarcerated in the Soviet Union.