

U.S. Honors Cold War U-2 Pilot

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Schwartz presenting the Silver Star to Trey Powers, grandson of Francis Gary Powers, at the Pentagon on Friday. **Yuri Gripas**

The American pilot whose spy plane was shot down in 1960 over the Soviet Union has received one of the U.S. military's highest decorations posthumously.

The ceremony to award the Silver Star, the third-highest combat military decoration for valor, to Francis Gary Powers was held at the Pentagon on Friday.

Air Force Chief of Staff General Norton Schwartz praised the U-2 pilot for his gallantry during harsh interrogation in Soviet prisons from May 1960 to February 1962.

"At the height of the Cold War, the nation called on extraordinary men like Captain Powers to undertake the most sensitive and dangerous missions," Schwartz said before presenting the Silver Star to Powers' grandson, Francis Gary Powers III, and granddaughter, Lindsey Berry.

"Captain Powers earned this Silver Star," he said, according to remarks published on the Air Force's official website.

Powers, who trained as a photographer after enlisting in the Air Force in 1950, joined the U-2 spy plane unit in 1955 and flew for the first time over the Soviet Union in 1956. Powers bailed out over Sverdlovsk on May 1, 1960, after his plane suffered damage from shockwaves caused by Soviet-fired air missiles that exploded behind his plane. He was swapped for a Soviet spy in February 1962 in Berlin.

"When I was growing up in southern California, I knew that Dad had been shot down over the Soviet Union, imprisoned by the KGB and ultimately exchanged for a Soviet spy," his son, Francis Gary Powers Jr., said at the ceremony, according to the Air Force website. "But as a kid growing up in this family, I thought everybody's dad had done this."

Powers posthumously was awarded a military POW medal and a CIA medal in 2000, after incident records were unsealed.

He died in a 1977 helicopter crash.

(MT, AP)

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