



Francis Gary Powers, working for America's CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) on May 1, 1960, was flying a Lockheed U-2 reconnaissance plane over Soviet territory when his plane was struck by a surface-to-air (SAM) missile.

This U.S. Air Force photo depicts a U-2 in flight. The USAF provides [more information](#) about this high-flying plane:

The U-2 provides continuous day or night, high-altitude, all-weather, stand-off surveillance of an area in direct support of U.S. and allied ground and air forces. It provides critical intelligence to decision makers through all phases of conflict, including peacetime indications and warnings, crises, low-intensity conflict and large-scale hostilities.

The U-2 is a single-seat, single-engine, high-altitude, reconnaissance aircraft. Long, wide, straight wings give the U-2 glider-like characteristics. It can carry a variety of sensors and cameras, is an extremely reliable reconnaissance aircraft, and enjoys a high mission completion rate.

Because of its high altitude mission, the pilot must wear a full pressure suit. The U-2 is capable of collecting multi-sensor photo, electro-optic, infrared and radar imagery, as well as performing other types of reconnaissance functions.

One thing to keep in mind about this high-flying plane. To allow it to reach the heights it was able to attain, the plane had to give-up some of its weight. This meant certain features were either minimized or eliminated altogether.

Gary Powers, for example, never really felt comfortable with the plane's ejection system. As it happens, as he was later to learn firsthand, he was right to be worried about that.

Click on the image for a better view.

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