

Elyse: Our next story takes us deep into the clandestine world of cold war espionage. It's May 1, 1960. An American U2 spy plane is flying over the former Soviet Union, photographing a suspected military installation. Suddenly, the shock wave from a surface-to-air missile sends the plane spinning out of control. The pilot, Francis Gary Powers, bails out and is captured by the Soviets.

Archive: Announcer - On display in Moscow, the wreckage of pilot Francis Powers' U2 reconnaissance plane.

Elyse: Searching Powers' pockets, the Soviets find a small poison pin. Khrushchev claims it's a suicide pin, absolute proof that Powers was on a spying mission.

Archive: Announcer - The emotional Russian Premier was in an ugly mood. He withdrew his invitation to President Eisenhower to visit the Soviet Union, and demanded a public apology for the U2 spy flights.

Elyse: Far away from the world of international espionage, Bill Robertson of Kansas City believes he's found a poison pin just like the one carried by Gary Powers.

Bill Robertson: I make miniatures of all kinds of objects. Almost everything I build just fits in the palm of my hand. Here's a little spice chest. About 20 years ago, I went to an auction. It was an estate auction of a guy named Milton Frank in Frederick, Maryland. And I bought a lot of stuff, and one of the things I bought was this little plastic box. And I bought it because it was filled with little tiny drill bits and taps and springs, the sort of thing I use. And when I was going through it, I found this. It was a newspaper clipping about a pin that was used by the U2 pilot Gary Powers, and stuck in it were two pins.

"Mission Impossible theme music"

Male voice: Good morning, Elyse, and welcome to Kansas City. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to investigate Bill Robertson's poison pins. He's waiting for you in his workshop. Good luck. This CD will self-destruct in five seconds.

Elyse: Hi, Bill.

Bill: Hi, how are you?

Elyse: Nice to meet you.

Bill: I'm glad you could come.

Elyse: Thank you. So, Bill, tell me what you have.

Bill: Well, I have this newspaper clipping that talks about this poison pin from Gary Powers, and in it are two pins.

Elyse: They look like ordinary pins to me.

Bill: Pull one out and try to pull the head off and see what happens.

Elyse: Okay. Let's see. Ah, it's a pin within a pin.

Bill: Mm-hmm.

Elyse: I've never seen anything like this before. And what specifically do you want me to find out?

Bill: Well, I'd like you to find out: are these real poison pins, and did Milton Frank make these for the CIA?

Elyse: Well, getting any information from the CIA is going to be tough.

Bill: Well...that's why you're here.

Elyse: But I'll see what I can do.

Bill: Okay.

Male Voice: Good afternoon, Elyse. To begin your investigation, we suggest you dig deeper into the Gary Powers incident for any clues about Bill's pins.

Elyse: I've found out that three months after he was shot down, Powers was put on trial in Moscow, and I got hold of the complete transcript.

Russian prosecutor: Who gave you the poison pin?

Powers' voice: It was given to me by Colonel Shelton during the briefing at Peshawar.

Russian prosecutor: For what purpose?

Powers' voice: In case I was captured and couldn't stand the torture and would rather be dead.

Russian prosecutor: This means commanders ordered you not to spare your life.

Powers' voice: It was up to me whether to use the pin.

Russian prosecutor: They wanted you to blow up the plane, kill yourself, and wipe out all trace.

Powers' voice: No, no, they didn't tell me to kill myself.

Elyse: To prove that the pin was tipped with a lethal poison, the prosecution had it tested on an experimental dog. After one minute, the dog fell on his side and his breathing slackened. After 90 seconds, breathing ceased entirely. Three minutes later, the heart stopped and death set in. At the end of the three-day trial, Powers was sentenced to 10 years in Moscow's Lubyanka Prison, a notorious way station to the Gulag. His poison pin is still there today, a prize artefact of the Cold War. So neither of our pins is the actual Powers' pin. Are they even poison pins at all? We can't get the Powers' pin, but I was able to get this. It's an x-ray image of the Powers' pin. It's from Tass, the old Soviet News Agency. Now, the first thing that I notice is that the Powers' pin is a pin within a pin, which is good, because both of these pins are exactly that. But our pins have these little grooves on the inside pin. And you know, when you look at it closely, it almost looks like a drill, rather than just a -- a smooth pin. There's a lot of detail at the end of this thing. And I can't tell from this x-ray if the pin that's inside has these grooves, so -- it's a dead end.

Male voice: The CIA can't comment officially on our pins, but we've managed to get you a meeting with one of their boys. He's Peter Earnest, a 37-year veteran of covert operations. Don't turn around. He's following

you right now. Earnest is now the executive director of the International Spy Museum in Washington. He has extensive knowledge of concealed weapons and suicide devices.

Peter Earnest: This is, of course, a display of assassination devices: pistol inside a glove, the lighter gun, the flashlight gun. If someone were captured and tried to get away, they could use that maybe to disarm, disable, or even kill somebody. This specific umbrella was designed by the KGB, the Soviet intelligence service, and was used by the Bulgarians to assassinate a dissident in London: Georgi Markov. That was in 1978.

Elyse: Do you have any examples of just specifically suicide devices?

Peter: Yes, we do. Here is a standard pair of glasses. If someone were captured and faced interrogation, they could casually take off their glasses, and you can see where the top has been slid aside, revealing a suicide pill. So simply by appearing to chew on the ends of their glasses, which people who wear glasses often do, they could actually ingest that pill, and it would be over within -- within seconds.

Elyse: Wow, that's fascinating. Peter, have you ever seen these before?

Peter: Isn't that amazing?

Elyse: What do you think?

Peter: These -- these have been beautifully engineered, and I notice that the tip is -- looks very much like a drill bit, where, if you were to put some sort of toxin, cyanide or something else on it, the grooving would help the pin to retain that. It gives it something for the toxin to grab hold of. But that's beautifully done, isn't it?

Elyse: So it could be a poison pin?

Peter: It could be a poison pin, yes.

Elyse: Wow! Wouldn't it be hard for something like that to get out into the public? I mean, if the CIA was making poison pins, wouldn't it -- wouldn't they be, you know, so on top of it that it wouldn't actually get out into the public sector?

Peter: I would expect that a device like this would be very, very tightly controlled. And by that, I mean that there would be, you know, x-number made, they would be accounted for, and they would not be just out on the market. I think if there's any way you can determine who fabricated this, and, let's say, either did it under contract to CIA or was a member of CIA. You mentioned the name Milton Frank to me. If there's any way you can determine who he was, what he did, then I think that would be one way to try and get at the provenance of this.

Male voice: Nice work, Elyse. You've established that our pins are real poison pins. All you need to do is link Milton Frank, the man who made them, to the CIA.

Elyse: We've located two of Milton's grandsons in Frederick, Maryland. Maybe they can tell us whether their grandfather worked for the CIA.

George Frank: This was my grandfather, at his 50th, and my grandmother. This is me, and this is Bob here.

Bob Frank: When we were growing up, he was the perfect grandfather. He took us wherever we wanted to go, and he bought us ice cream when we wanted ice cream.

George: This one's my favorite.

Elyse: Oh, that's great!

George: Here's my grandfather relaxing with his pipe and his feet up on the desk.

Elyse: It's a great shot. Doesn't seem like the kind of guy who would make poison pins.

Bob: And he was also a machinist, and he worked with a lot of delicate instruments.

George: He developed a drill bit that was so small you could hardly see it.

Elyse: Huh.

George: This is a pen that he made. This is actually a gun.

Elyse: Wow!!

George: You -- you put the cartridge in here...

Elyse: Uh-huh.

George: ...and you just...[clicks pen]...shoot it and just stick it right in your pocket, like a pen.

Elyse: Wow, I feel like I'm in James Bond right now. [laughs]

George: He made that.

Elyse: Let me see that. I've never seen anything like that before. This is real!

George: Yes, it is.

Elyse: Huh! And what else do you have?

George: This thing. He told me that this was for biological weapons. I've been playing with it since I was, you know, 10 or 12 years old. It's just an interesting looking little gadget there.

Elyse: Well, let me show you what I have because this kind of is in the same genre of -- of what I have. These are, um, two pins that were found by a gentleman who bought a toolbox that was once owned by your grandfather. That was your grandfather's toolbox and in it, he found these two pins. And if you pull it apart...a pin within a pin.

Bob: A pin within a pin.

Elyse: Have you ever heard him talk about making pins or anything like that, Bobby?

Bob: I have. I've heard this story since I was little that he, you know, worked on this. I've never seen one.

Elyse: Oh, really? Well, would you like to hold one? Be careful.

Bob: And if I'd known it was in the estate sale, it wouldn't have gotten sold.

Elyse: Well, tell me what you heard.

Bob: Well, he did this -- he did these pins, and, um, he worked in special operations unit.

Elyse: For where?

Bob: At Fort Detrick.

Elyse: And what's Fort Detrick?

Bob: Fort Detrick is a military army installation here in Frederick. And the special operations unit, as we were growing up, was always, um...secret. Nobody knew what was going on.

Elyse: So, do you think your grandfather worked for the CIA?

Bob: I have no idea.

Bob: That was another thing that was never talked about. Everything was secretive. Everything was secret. Everything out of that place was secret.

Male voice: So, still no definitive link between Milton Frank and the CIA, but you did establish that Milton Frank made the pins at Fort Detrick. As a final step, see if you can find a connection between Fort Detrick and the CIA. We suggest a visit to the National Security Archive at Georgetown University, it's chock-full of declassified information.

Elyse: I'm looking through top secret CIA documents that are now declassified, there's some unbelievable stuff in here: the story of the CIA testing LSD on unsuspecting people, one of whom killed himself by jumping out of a window; a whole volume of CIA plots to assassinate foreign leaders, including an attempt to kill Castro with a poison cigar. This is the Church Committee reports from 1975. This is the report that exposed the abuses of power in the CIA during the Cold War. And inside, we have the testimony of William Colby, who at the time was the director of the CIA. He talks about all sorts of biological and chemical weapons being developed at Fort Detrick for the CIA. He talks about poison darts, the use of poison on animals.

Narrator from Fort Detrick Video from 60s: You are at Fort Detrick, where some 600 military and civilian scientists work together in research at the army biological laboratories to protect this country against a biological attack.

Elyse: Listen to this: "CIA association with Fort Detrick involved the Special Operations Division, S.O.D., of that facility." Well, that's the facility that Milton Frank worked for. Oh, my God, look what I found!

Male voice: Well done, Elyse. Mission accomplished. It's time to report back to Bill.

Elyse: We were able to meet up with Milton Frank's grandchildren. He was a machinist; you were right. He worked at Fort Detrick, and at Fort Detrick they were making biological and chemical weapons for the CIA.

Flashback to Elyse reading Church Committee Report

Elyse: "A major early requirement of the agency was the coating of a small pin-sized drill with a shellfish toxin. Work on this problem was done at Fort Detrick. The only application of this effort was in the U2 flight over the USSR in May, 1960, during which Gary Powers carried such a device concealed in a silver dollar."

Back to Bill's House

Elyse: So Gary Powers' poison pin was made at Fort Detrick. I believe that you have the real thing, a poison pin made by the same man who made the Gary Powers pin.

Bill: Wow, that's great!

Elyse: I mean, you really have a great piece of Cold War history.

Bill: Well, thank you. Thank you so much for going out and finding all this.

Elyse: You know, Bobby (Milton's grandson) told me that if he'd known that those pins were in the toolbox, he never would have sold them.

Bill: You never know what you're going to find. Who would have known that day that that's what these were, you know?

Elyse: It's an amazing find!

Elyse: As for Gary Powers, he never served his full 10 years in Lubyanka Prison. In February, 1962, at a checkpoint between East and West Germany, Powers was exchanged for a high-ranking soviet spy. He returned home to an ambivalent public. Some people believed he should have killed himself with the poison pin rather than divulge his mission to the Soviets. Although he was vindicated at a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Powers never flew another mission for the CIA. Years later he found work as a helicopter pilot for KNBC in Los Angeles. He died when his helicopter crashed in 1977.

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