



Major Rudolf Anderson Jr., US Air Force

Cold War / Cuban Missile Crisis

Major Anderson was the first recipient of the Air Force Cross medal, our Nation's and the Air Force's second-highest award and decoration for valor. He was our only U.S. fatality by enemy fire during the Cuban Missile Crisis when his aircraft was shot down over Cuba in 1962.

Rudolf Anderson, Jr was born in Spartanburg, South Carolina in 1927. Three years after graduation from Clemson University he entered the US Air Force as a pilot. He began his operational career flying RF-86 Sabres and earned two Distinguished Flying Crosses for reconnaissance missions over Korea.

After the war in Korea he served with the 15th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron at Kunsan Air Base in South Korea. He then returned home to the US in 1955 to train and qualify in flying the U-2 (Dragon Lady) high altitude reconnaissance aircraft. After qualifying on the U-2 "he became the 4080th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing's top U-2 pilot with over one thousand hours, making him a vital part of the United States' reconnaissance operation over Cuba in October of 1962."

On Saturday, October 27, 1962 Major Anderson took off in which would be his sixth mission over Cuba in a U-2F Dragon, from a forward operating location at McCoy Air Force Base in Orlando, Florida. A few hours into his mission, he was shot down by one of two Soviet-supplied S-75 Dvina surface-to-air missiles launched toward his aircraft high over Banes, Cuba. Two Soviet generals stationed in Havana had given the order to a Soviet antiaircraft rocket unit at the Banes Sam site to shoot down Anderson's aircraft.

In 1964, by order of President John F. Kennedy, Anderson was posthumously awarded the first Air Force Cross, as well as the Air Force Distinguished Service Medal and the Purple Heart.