

# Cold War, Hot Jets

When Britain's Aircraft Ruled the Skies



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Programme running: 2 x 60 mins    Production: BBC    Available in HD

The jet engine is one of the most important inventions of the twentieth century. A triumph of engineering born out of conflict; it accelerated life and revolutionised the world. In the post war World, the jet plane and its daredevil pilots were doing victory rolls over Europe, impressing adoring crowds, and pushing technology to its limits to break the sound barrier.

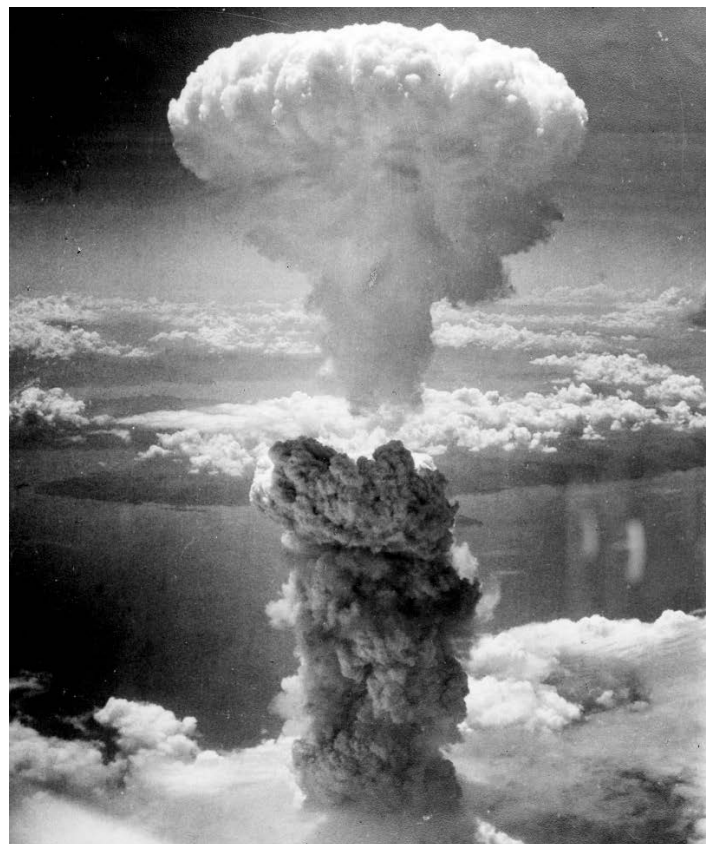
But by 1950 the jet had become the focus of intense rivalry and one-upmanship between superpowers – a platform for unleashing nuclear Armageddon, a vehicle for undertaking espionage, and the most sought after technology of the Cold War.

Across two programmes, we will explore the vital role the jet played in this conflict; and discover how it was embraced, adapted and improved to face up to the frightening realities of the new era.

## Programme One: Wide Blue Yonder

With Britain emerging from the Second World War in financial crisis there was one innovation that provided hope for the future - its world class aircraft industry. We examine the British companies which pioneered the rapid development of the jet aircraft, and the heroic test pilots who risked life and limb in untried machines. We tell the story of how these men pushed the technology to its limits to sell the World an idea: the British Jet plane.

We document the financially driven decision to sell this world-class technology to the Russians, despite American protests, which aided the rapid and successful development of the Mig-15. It was a decision we would pay for dearly in the Korean war. We conclude contrasting the hope and excitement of early technological breakthroughs with the long shadow cast by the Cold War and the British Royal Air Force (RAF) pilots doing the American's dirty work flying top-secret spying missions over the USSR.



## Programme Two: Darker Skies

As the Iron Curtain fell across Europe, the jet plane came to epitomise how the Cold War was fought. Britain's V bombers, armed with devastating new weapons, were able to fly faster, higher and further. The V Bomber became the platform for delivering nuclear annihilation.

Programme two tells the story of how these planes came to define Britain's military planning and we reveal the bleak role the RAF pilots would have to play in the event of Nuclear War. But with the advent of surface to air missiles as nuclear delivery systems and satellites to provide detailed intelligence the role of jet aircraft in the Cold War diminished. As a technology however its importance continues to impact on life to this day with the growth of international jet air travel.

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