



One flew over the Kremlin

Mathias Rust and the End of the Soviet Bloc

A documentary by **Gabriele Denecke**

In Coproduction with **HR/ARTE**

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45/52 min

It is the 28th of May 1987, shortly after 7 pm. The world is richer by one sensation and the Soviet Union is totally disgraced. What had happened? The nineteen-year-old Mathias Rust from Wedel near Hamburg had landed his single engine Cessna 172 directly next to the Red Square in Moscow. No one had stopped him on his several hour flight through the Soviet airspace. The Soviet Air Force, so far considered invincible, is exposed to ridicule and mockery. Thousands of missiles, state of the art air defence radars and anti-aircraft defences overcome by an amateur pilot, a messenger of peace, who wanted to build a bridge between East and West with his flight. The flight scandal becomes state affair, the minister of defence has to resign and many high-ranking officers have to follow. The young German pilot's intent had been to move the deadlocked disarmament talks along, in order to bring peace between East and West. His idol was the science fiction hero Perry Rhodan, the lonely saviour of worlds. In the end, his flight did indeed help perestroika along – though in another way than expected.

The president of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, acted outraged externally, but domestically he finally had enough space to reduce the military budget, to pull out of Afghanistan and to finally give the satellite states their longed for independence. The military had always been Gorbachev's opponent

and now he used its disgrace to enthrone the political hardliners. Among them are also senior officers who can't take the "dishonour" and kill themselves. The catalyst of all this becomes a media star. The "New York Times" and the "Washington Post" hail Mathias Rust in union as "daredevil pilot" on the 30th of May in 1987.

25 years later, exclusively for this documentary, Rust talks for the first time in detail about his flight, his motives and the stay in the Moscow prison afterwards. The former "high-flyer" is still a fascinating personality. Film author Gabriele Denecke undertakes a very special journey through time to the places and people who were involved then, politically, militarily or journalistically. The German foreign minister at that time, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, recalls the reaction in Bonn and the writer Wladimir Kaminer, who had been a soldier stationed in Moscow, explains how Rust escaped them, saying: "I was supposed to shoot him down!" The former foreign correspondent of the ARD in Moscow, Gabriele Krone-Schmalz, gets a say as well as do expelled Soviet generals and the chief of the Federal Intelligence Service BND, Hans-Georg Wieck. Mathias Rust himself says today: "If I would have known the outcome of this, I would not have done it. This is something you can only do if you don't know the consequences and the development of a story".