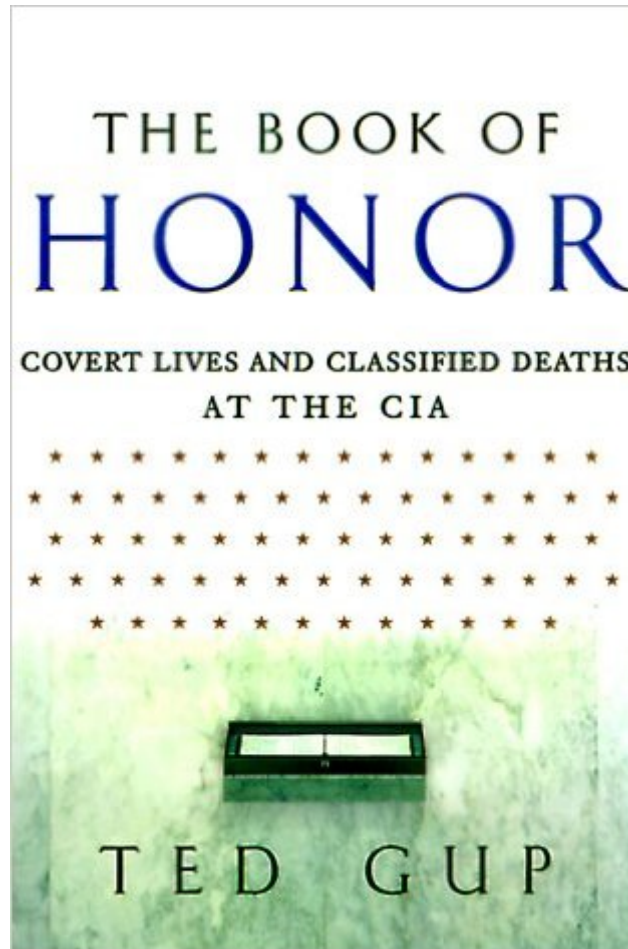


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The Book Of Honor: Covert Lives & Classified Deaths At The CIA



Synopsis

This is a story of heroes and secrets. In the entrance of the CIA headquarters looms a huge marble wall into which seventy-one stars are carved--each representing an agent who has died in the line of duty. At the base of this wall lies "The Book of Honor," in which the names of these agents are inscribed--or at least thirty-five of them. Beside the dates of the other thirty-six, there are no names. The identity of these "nameless stars" has been one of the CIA's most closely guarded secrets for the fifty-three years of the agency's existence. Even family members are told little--in some cases, the agency has denied the fact that the deceased were covert operatives at all. But what the CIA keeps secret in the name of national security is often merely an effort to hide that which would embarrass the agency itself--even at the cost of denying peace of mind for the families and honor due the "nameless stars." In an extraordinary job of investigative reporting, Ted Gup has uncovered the identities, and the remarkable stories, of the men and women who died anonymously in the service of their country. In researching The Book of Honor, Gup interviewed over four hundred current and former covert CIA officers, immersed himself in archival records, death certificates, casualty lists from terrorist attacks, State Department and Defense Department personnel lists, cemetery records, obituaries, and tens of thousands of pages of personal letters and diaries. In telling the agents' stories, Gup shows them to be astonishingly complex, vibrant, and heroic individuals--nothing like the suave superspies of popular fiction or the amoral cynics of conspiracy buffs. The accounts of their lives--and deaths--are powerful and deeply moving, and in bringing them at long last to light, Gup manages to render an unprecedented history of covert operations at the CIA.

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Customer Reviews

Ted Gups' efforts to pierce the secrecy of the Central Intelligence Agency has revealed the human side of covert operations . My father , John Merriman , was assigned to the Congo in the summer of 1964 , to provide logistical assistance to an "Instant Air Force " comprised of T-28 , counter-insurgency aircraft and the Cuban exile pilots that crewed them . It is a difficult task to investigate the result of years of secrecy and denial , but Ted Gup has reaffirmed the courage and patriotism of not just the men and women whose names are inscribed in the Book of Honor , but also their families who had to sometimes live with a lie . His work has produced a written legacy to all the otherwise nameless members of the CIA who made the ultimate sacrifice in unknown circumstances. My fathers story and those of all the others , can come out of the shadow of secrecy and into the light of American history .

An interesting and timely book. "The Book of Honor" sheds light on the extreme sacrifices made by a unique breed of Americans who were involved in the clandestine services and risked all for their country's security. It's appropriate to note and honor those brave men and women--including those who are still "out there"--engaged in our Nation's intelligence business. It is understandable, of course, that in some instances there are valid reasons why certain identities cannot be revealed, when this revelation may implicate others who might still be in the service and may endanger both them and/or their work. In reading about those in the book who have paid the highest price, I hope that others will become aware that there have been--and still are--thousands of men and women doing this dangerous work, all over the world, often under hazardous conditions and in places in which they undergo risks and hardships that would make most Americans cringe. They do it, not only out of a sense of adventure, but out of patriotism and a dedication that is not unlike that of young Americans who have gone to war throughout our country's history. These individuals are highly trained and educated; most could earn much higher salaries in the private sector, but they choose service instead, taking an oath of allegiance to our country and its Constitution. While the author is unable to name all of the fallen heroes that the stars represent, it is hoped that one day it will be possible that they all may be recognized and appropriately honored. For them, it was enough that they be known to their family, colleagues and friends. In the meantime, I hope this book will go a long way towards awakening the reader to the stories of these courageous Americans. The book is a service to their surviving families, who can be proud.

Even though I'm a compulsive reader of books about espionage and intelligence issues, I wasn't sure I was going to like "The Book of Honor." Some of the life stories it tells happened so long ago that at first blush they don't seem relevant to the present day. Yet I found the book very hard to put down and the story of the first man who died in CIA service (1949) to be one of the most poignant. I won't spoil the tale here but will simply say oh, to have come so far after suffering so much and then to die like that! James Bond addicts are not going to find much here to their liking. The deaths Gup chronicles are either very ordinary --a car accident, a plane crash-- or provide dramatic proof that even intelligence officers are not immune to a bullet or bomb. But the character sketches of the often heroic men and women who died these sad deaths are quite compelling. And even though I accept that some of the recent entries in the Book of Honor have to remain anonymous (at least for the time being), it is very difficult to understand why a 21 year old secretary who died in a car bombing 35 years ago in Saigon cannot be acknowledged as one of the Agency's own. I think refusing to do so is cruel to her survivors.

Having just completed F.M. Bailey's classic Mission to Tashkent (out-of-print), this book was a wonderful continuation of the lives and trials that are the price tag of intelligence gathering. Mr. Gup's book is well written and seemingly very well researched. Forget James Bond, Derek Flynt and Jack Ryan. Reality, as usual, is far more compelling than anything Hollywood can offer.

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