



The Central Intelligence Agency and Overhead Reconnaissance: The U-2 and OXCART Programs, 1954-1974

Gregory W. Pedlow, Donald E. Welzenbach, CIA History Office

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Please include this as the description: "On May 1, 1960, the news that the Soviet Union had downed a CIA high-altitude spy plane added the names "U-2" and "Francis Gary Powers" to the convoluted narrative of Cold War espionage. Yet this celebrated episode was only one aspect of an extraordinary history of covert, high-tech intrusion of secret U.S. aircraft into other nations' air space worldwide. Now, *The Central Intelligence Agency and Overhead Reconnaissance: The U-2 and Oxcart Programs* offers an official, comprehensive, and authoritative history of this manned overhead reconnaissance program. Long classified, it describes not only the program's technological and bureaucratic aspects, but also its political and international context. The book begins by carefully documenting the origins of the U-2, the top-secret testing of the plane, its specially designed high-altitude cameras and complex life-support systems, and even the suggested use of potassium cyanide capsules by the pilots if captured (it was up to each pilot to decide if he wanted to take one with him?some did, most did not). Once operational, its flight over the USSR in July 1956 immediately made the U-2 the most important source of intelligence on the Soviet Union, but its use against the Soviet target for which it was designed produced a persistent tension between its program managers and President Eisenhower, with the former much more eager to expand its use and the latter going along only reluctantly. After the 1960 U-2 incident and the capture of pilot Gary Francis Powers, the President forbade any further U-2 flights over the USSR. This was hardly the end of the U-2's participation in the Cold War. From the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban missile crisis to the skies of Laos and North Vietnam, the U-2 provided the same top-secret intelligence data as it had in the 1950s on revolts in Indonesia and Tibet. Even after the end of the U-2 era, the CIA attempted to continue its work via the Oxcart project?the A-12 surveillance aircraft?until fiscal pressures and CIA-Air Force rivalry caused its demise. Based upon both full access to CIA records and extensive classified interviews of its participants, along with maps, drawings, and low-resolution photographs, this important study provides an engrossing and timely look into the development and implementation of a top-secret U.S. intelligence effort, its technological wizardry, notable accomplishments?and the worldwide negative repercussions when it was revealed. Both fascinating history and cautionary tale, *The Central Intelligence Agency and Overhead Reconnaissance* will be of immense interest to students of military aviation, intelligence operations, international relations, history of the Cold War."

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