

Intelligence in Recent Public Literature

The Book of Honor: Covert Lives and Classified Deaths at the CIA

By Ted Gup. New York: Doubleday, 2000. 390 pages.

Reviewed by Thomas M. Troy, Jr.

The Book of Honor is a different kind of book—it is both a tribute to employees of the CIA and an exposé of the CIA as an institution. Ted Gup in essence pays homage to a number of extraordinary men and women who died serving their country while employed by the CIA, as staff officers under cover, contract employees, or members of proprietary organizations. The CIA has honored them with commemorative stars on the wall of the lobby entrance to its Headquarters. The Agency, however, has never acknowledged their true employment, and their names do not appear in its Book of Honor that is displayed at the base of the Wall of Honor. The exposé aspect of the book is that Gup names the CIA employees and provides information about their lives, careers, and their violent deaths.

The Book of Honor is not an exhaustive account of the lives and deaths of *all* CIA officers who died in the line of duty. Gup deliberately set out to focus on recounting the lives and deaths of only those individuals not acknowledged by the CIA. Gup therefore either ignores or mentions only in passing the CIA officers who died in the line of duty and who have been acknowledged by the Agency as employees. Thus, a reader who wants to learn about Richard S. Welch, Robert C. Ames, or William F. Buckley (to name just a few) or other CIA officers cited in the Agency's Book of Honor will have to turn elsewhere. Gup also is selective about the people he writes about in detail, and naturally he does not devote an equal number of pages to each of the 38 people who died but remain officially anonymous. One assumes that Gup simply could not discover much about some of the anonymous individuals or that he (or his publisher) wanted to keep the book to a manageable size. Gup states that, at CIA's request, he withheld the name of one young woman who died violently in 1996. He says that the Agency "made a compelling case that to identify her would put others at risk."

The Book of Honor is always interesting, sometimes provocative, and even awe-inspiring. Gup is an excellent writer, and his subjects are often larger-than-life figures. Who could not be impressed by his account of the life and death of Douglas Seymour MacKiernan, the first officer he discusses? MacKiernan, forced to flee China in 1949 from the capital of Xinjiang (Sinkiang), the westernmost state in China, set out for Tibet—about 1,200 miles away. MacKiernan and several companions trekked across desert and the Himalayas by horse, camel, and on foot. MacKiernan was within 50 yards of his goal when he was shot and killed (and later beheaded) by Tibetan guards—who had not received a message from the Dalai Lama instructing them to welcome MacKiernan's party. Who could not be frustrated and provoked by Gup's account of the ordeal of Hugh Francis Redmond, who was held in prison in China for over two decades before

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he died? (The Chinese claimed that Redmond committed suicide, but Gup makes clear that the Chinese allegation is suspicious.) Who could not be inspired by Gup's accounts of the lives of Mike Maloney and Mike Deuel, killed in the same helicopter crash in Laos in 1965, or of Matt Gannon, one of the victims of the Pan Am 103 terrorist act? Many of the other people Gup profiles also led extraordinary lives.

In addition to paying tribute to the anonymous CIA employees who died in the line of duty, Gup describes the efforts of some of the surviving family members to have the Agency acknowledge officially that their lost loved ones worked for CIA. I cannot judge why the Agency has refused to honor such requests. Gup evidently believes, however, that "bureaucratic inertia" and an "obsession with secrecy" rather than ill will—or a true need to protect "sources and methods"—explains the Agency's inconsistent and occasionally bizarre policies. Gup may be correct.

For years, following Mike Maloney's death, his family petitioned the Agency to acknowledge that Maloney was a CIA staff officer. In 1997, Gup was working as an investigative reporter for *The Washington Post*, and he wrote a long article about Maloney and the frustrations of his family. On the same day the article appeared, the CIA officially admitted that Maloney had been an employee. (There was, of course, no cause-and-effect relationship between Gup's article and the Agency's acknowledgement concerning Maloney's true work affiliation.) In May 1998, Maloney's name was added to the Agency's Book of Honor. At an annual ceremony in CIA Headquarters honoring those who died in the line of duty, Maloney's name was included. Mike Deuel, however, who died in the same helicopter crash as Maloney, remained anonymous! As Gup remarks, "CIA's secrecy often defied explanation." It was not until a year later that Deuel's name was added to the Agency's Book of Honor.

In trying to obtain the information to write his book, Gup states that he expected to meet stiff resistance from the Agency, and that it "did not disappoint me." He did receive help from many of the families of the deceased, and he says that more than 400 "current and former employees" of the CIA were willing to talk to him. Unless Gup has violated every rule of journalism, it is evident that these sources included some former high-ranking Agency officers, including a Deputy Director for Operations and some Chiefs abroad. Anybody who has worked or now works for CIA and even casual readers of *The Book of Honor* will know who these people are. Because Gup does not explicitly state that they are sources, I will not claim that either—or name them. It does seem, however, that they did no harm and that they may have done some good. I believe the same could be said of *The Book of Honor*.

In the prologue, Gup says that he wants to "draw a distinction between the individual and the institution, believing that what is noble in one can be put to ignoble ends by others." What this means is that Gup (or his publisher) evidently thought that he had to provide some critical "context" about the Agency's adventures and especially misadventures while he was basically extolling some of the people who worked for CIA. One example: in describing the lives and deaths of two men who died during the Bay of Pigs invasion, Gup lambastes the planners of that fiasco. But he does not really seem to have his heart in this effort. He basically rehashes a lot of old, well-known stories and adds

nothing new. In my reading, however, this halfhearted effort to provide at least implicit criticism of CIA as an agency detracts from *The Book of Honor*.

As one might expect, Gup provides no footnotes, no source citations, and no list of books, articles, or any other kind of documented evidence. This did not bother me, for it is clear who the sources of this book are. I was annoyed that the Table of Contents is totally useless; the chapter titles offer no clue as to what the chapter contains.

It would be interesting to learn how current employees of CIA and especially the current leaders of the Agency reacted to *The Book of Honor*. Given the subject matter, I cannot say that I enjoyed it, but I found it to be extremely interesting and a real page-turner. I personally knew only one of the subjects in the book, but I knew of several others. After reading *The Book of Honor*, I felt prouder of having known them and of having been an Agency employee. Not many books, newspaper and magazine articles, or television programs in the recent past have made me feel that way.