

Spying from the Sky: At the Controls of U.S. Cold War Aerial Intelligence, by Robert L. Richardson. Havertown, Pa.: Casemate Publishing, 2020. 312 pp., \$34.95.

A biography is always a welcome subject, especially when the person in question may be someone less than well known yet who has lived a unique and interesting life. Such is the case with Col. William J. Gregory (ret.) who is featured in this publication. Not only does one get his life story but also a lot of information on missions and operations undertaken or commanded by Gregory, virtually all of which has been declassified (in spite of reluctance on his part to discuss said information).

Rarely does one encounter any American military service member who has served in World War II as a fighter pilot (P-38s), flown bombers (B-47s) and strategic reconnaissance aircraft (RB-57s) in the Cold War, and finally served with the Central Intelligence Agency over the course of many of the most important missions of the aerial surveillance era (U-2s) across the globe, up to the advent of the SR-71 "Blackbird."

Born into poverty in Tennessee, growing up a sharecropper's son, it certainly was somewhat surprising that Gregory became the first one in his family to go to college. That wasn't easy, as the country was still in the throes of the Great Depression. Along the way, he obtained the opportunity to go to flight school, and with the war raging in Europe and the country on the cusp of entering it, he earned a commission in the Air Force.

His service in World War II was in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations. His sorties involved bomber escort, dive-bombing, and strafing targets of opportunity. Along the way, he lost at least one friend with whom he had gone to flight school. Indeed, his marriage came as a result of the loss of his wife's fiancé in a flight training accident.

Gregory was a reserve officer and re-entered active duty when called up during the Korean War. He made the Air Force a career, as he then found himself flying the aforementioned aircraft during the 1950s and 1960s. The aerial surveillance aspect meant frequent deployments and considerable missed time with family, as his family had no idea where he might be while he was gone.

Flying also meant being on the front lines of the Cold War, as the United States needed as much intelligence as it could get on the Soviet and Chinese (and later the North Vietnamese) orders of battle, intentions, capabilities and the locations of much of their defensive and offensive military infrastructure and weapons systems. These missions were fraught with risk by virtue of accidents, pilot error, mechanical failures and the ever-present possibility of a shoot down for violating a nation's airspace, as was the case of Francis Gary Powers in May 1960.

Gregory was even involved in the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, leading the detachment which overflew the island and provided the intelligence by which President John F. Kennedy justified his blockade and forced the Soviets to back down and remove their missiles.

Not surprisingly, his leadership and meritorious service resulted in promotion, awards and commendations, including four awards of the Legion of Merit and the CIA Medal of Merit, and all of which are listed in an appendix. The other appendices include the many aircraft flown by Colonel Gregory, the text of a personal letter of commendation from President Kennedy, a list of U-2 missions flown by the detachment led by Gregory, his handwritten mission flight checklist, the standard P-38 flight formation issued to pilots and a lengthy explanation of the Corona Satellite Reconnaissance Program.

Interspersed throughout the text are italicized, clarifying, and contextual quotes from Gregory himself and many photographs from the National Archives, Army and Navy, Lockheed Martin, the Gregory family, and other sources. Although there is no bibliography, the endnotes provide additional information and context and demonstrate considerable research by the author in declassified government documents, newspapers, magazine articles, reports and other sources.

This is certainly a publication meant for those who have an interest in aviation, the Cold War, and aerial surveillance. It is gratifying to finally have an opportunity to learn, know and understand much of what went on behind the scenes in defending this country during a critical period in its history.

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