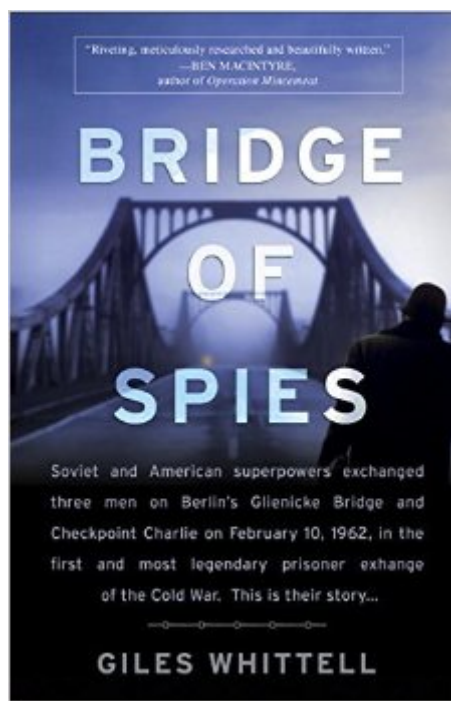


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Bridge Of Spies



Synopsis

The dramatic events behind the film, BRIDGE OF SPIES. Who were the three men the American and Soviet superpowers exchanged at Berlin's Glienicke Bridge and Checkpoint Charlie in the first and most legendary prisoner exchange between East and West? Bridge of Spies vividly traces their paths to that exchange on February 10, 1962, when their fate helped to define the conflicts and lethal undercurrents of the most dangerous years of the Cold War. Bridge of Spies is the true story of three extraordinary characters – William Fisher, alias Rudolf Abel, a British born KGB agent arrested by the FBI in New York City and jailed as a Soviet superspy for trying to steal America's most precious nuclear secrets; Gary Powers, the American U-2 pilot who was captured when his plane was shot down while flying a reconnaissance mission over the closed cities of central Russia; and Frederic Pryor, a young American graduate student in Berlin mistakenly identified as a spy, arrested and held without charge by the Stasi, East Germany's secret police. By weaving the three strands of this story together for the first time, Giles Whittell masterfully portrays the intense political tensions and nuclear brinkmanship that brought the United States and Soviet Union so close to a hot war in the early 1960s. He reveals the dramatic lives of men drawn into the nadir of the Cold War by duty and curiosity, and the tragicomedy of errors that eventually induced Khrushchev to send missiles to Castro. Two of his subjects – the spy and the pilot – were the original seekers of weapons of mass destruction. The third, an intellectual, fluent in German, unencumbered by dependents, and researching a Ph.D. thesis on the foreign trade system of the Soviet bloc, seemed to the Stasi precisely the sort of person the CIA should have been recruiting. He was not. In over his head in the world capital of spying, he was wrongly charged with espionage and thus came to the Agency's notice by a more roundabout route. The three men were rescued against daunting odds by fate and by their families, and then all but forgotten. Yet they laid bare the pathological mistrust that fueled the arms race for the next 30 years. Drawing on new interviews conducted in the United States, Europe and Russia with key players in the exchange and the events leading to it, among them Frederic Pryor himself and the man who shot down Gary Powers, Bridge of Spies captures a time when the fate of the world really did depend on coded messages on microdots and brave young men in pressure suits. The exchange that frigid day at two of the most sensitive points along the Iron Curtain represented the first step back from where the superpowers had stood since the building of the Berlin Wall the previous summer – on the brink of World War III. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Giles Whittell is a natural-born reporter, a writer with an eye for detail and for the dramatic. *Bridge of Spies* is not just his version of the famous story of the U2 pilot who was shot down over the Soviet Union and his swap with a legendary Russian spy. It's a thriller in its own right, with all the ingredients of an exceptionally well told and observed story. Whittell is a reporter in his element, writing on a subject he clearly finds fascinating and portraying Francis Gary Powers in a sympathetic light, unlike his CIA masters who appear to have resented the fact that he survived his traumatic shoot-down at 70,000ft and was imprisoned by the KGB, providing the Russians with a propaganda trophy with which to berate the Americans. What makes this book such a good read are the characters. They bring this story to life and provide the reader with an insight into an historical event which was not just about the politics of the Cold War but a personal account of people who were embroiled in some of the most daring and exciting exploits of that past era; and as we know from the more recent exposure of the Russian spy ring in the United States which included a beautiful and shapely female spy, Anna Chapman, espionage is not a dying profession. The Cold War, in a different disguise, goes on. The secrecy of the U2 programme - the elegant silver (then black) aircraft which were supposedly part of the Weather Reconnaissance Squadron Number Two - the sheer endurance of the pilots like Powers, strapped for hours in space suits as they flew over the forbidden territory of the Soviet Union; the machinations of William Fisher, alias Rudolf Abel, who achieved very little despite a reputation for being a masterspy; and Frederic Pryor, the spy who never was a spy.

Author Giles Whittell puts it together in a tidy package. He narrates in detail the events behind the most famous prisoner exchange of the Cold War era. Whittell provides the back-story of each of the three principals: the Soviet master spy, KGB Colonel Rudolf Abel as he was best known (however, he was actually William Fisher); F. Gary Powers, the famous U-2 spyplane pilot shot down over the Urals at 70,000+ feet (who survived); and graduate student Frederic Pryor, a Yale graduate who studied in East Germany at the precise time the Berlin Wall was erected. Whittell does a masterful job of integrating the three lives and putting them into historical context of the events and issues of the late 1950's and early 1960's. Time has shown this to be the height of the Cold War era, a time when the Cold War nearly went hot. Because of the unexpected shoot-down of Powers' U-2 spyplane by Soviet missileers, the key opportunity for down-scaling the Cold War arms race was lost. As Soviet radar had improved and Soviet missiles rocketed to new heights, President Eisenhower's fallback position of "plausible deniability" for overflights was no longer credible. Eisenhower was caught in a "big lie" when both plane and pilot were recovered. Khrushchev responded by disinviting Eisenhower to a much-anticipated May, 1960 summit at Lake Baikal, the primary purpose of which was to try to reign in the arms race on both sides. Eisenhower's much ballyhooed "honesty" proved to be a sham. In the context of the era, the alleged "missile gap" trumpeted by Cold War hawks was embraced "with vigor" by Presidential candidate John Kennedy. In the 1960 Presidential election, this issue alone may have made the difference in Kennedy's slim win over Richard Nixon.

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