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Spyplanes: The Illustrated Guide to Manned Reconnaissance and Surveillance Aircraft from World War I to Today

Norman Polmar, John Bessette

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A comprehensive history with descriptions of the world's most significant aircraft employed as "eyes in the sky."

For as long as there has been sustained heavier-than-air human flight, airplanes have been used to gather information about our adversaries. Less than a decade after the Wright Brothers flew at Kitty Hawk, Italian pilots were keeping tabs on Turkish foes in Libya. Today, aircraft with specialized designs and sensory equipment still cruise the skies, spying out secrets in the never-ending quest for an upper hand.

Spyplanes tackles the sprawling legacy of manned aerial reconnaissance, from hot air balloons to cloth-and-wood biplanes puttering over the Western Front, and on through every major world conflict, culminating with spyplanes cruising at supersonic speeds 85,000 feet above the Earth's surface. Authors Norman Polmar and John Bessette offer a concise yet comprehensive overview history of aerial recon, exploring considerations such as spyplanes in military doctrine, events like the Cuban Missile Crisis and the downing of Francis Gary Powers' U-2, the 1992 Open Skies Treaty, and the USAF's Big Safari program.

Polmar and Bessette, along with a roster of respected aviation journalists, also profile 70 renowned fixed-wing spyplanes from World I right up to the still-conceptual hypersonic SR-72. The authors examine the design, development, and service history of each aircraft, and offer images and specification boxes that detail vital stats for each. Included are purpose-built spyplanes, as well as legendary fighters and bombers that have been retrofitted for the purpose. In addition, the authors feature preliminary chapters discussing the history of aerial surveillance and a host of sidebars that explore considerations such as spyplanes in military doctrine, events like the Cuban missile crisis and the downing of Francis Gary Powers' U-2, the 1992 Open Skies Treaty, and the USAF's current Big Safari program.

From prop-driven to jet-powered aircraft, this is the ultimate history and reference to those "eyes in the skies" that have added mind-bending technologies, not to mention an element of intrigue, to military aviation for more than a century.

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