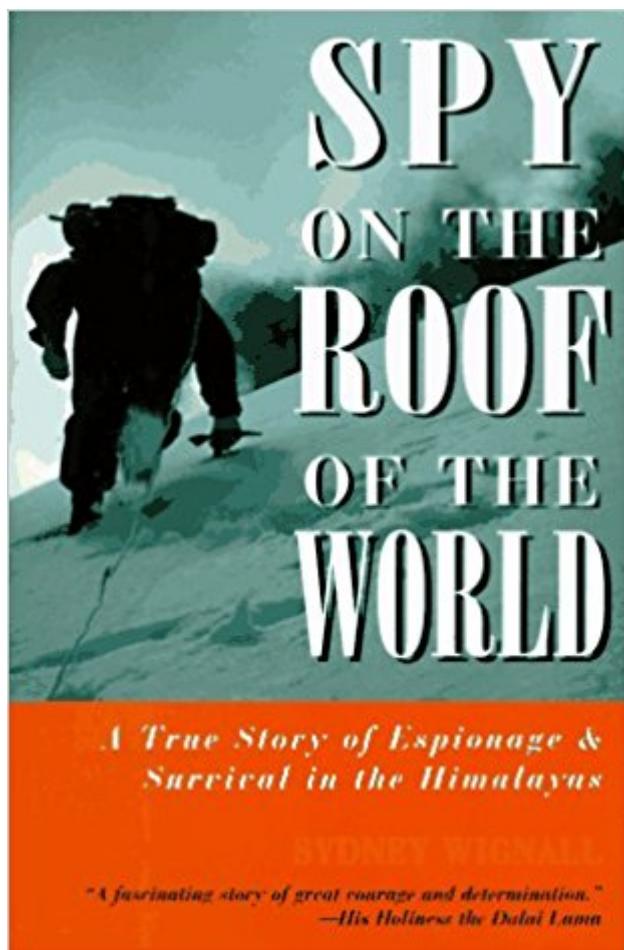


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Spy On The Roof Of The World



Synopsis

In 1955 Sydney Wignall led the Welsh Himalayan expedition to climb Tibet's highest mountain, Gurla Mandhata. With a rare view of Chinese military operations in Tibet, he and two of his companions were more than mountaineers; they were spies. Not long into their journey they were captured and imprisoned, thus beginning an agonizing ordeal that would draw on their last reserves of psychic strength and physical courage. This is their story. Imprisoned by the People's Liberation Army of the Republic of China, subjected to freezing, rat-infested cells and to near-tortuous interrogation, only Wignall's incredible courage, humor, and ingenuity enabled them to survive. Eventually, international pressure forced the Chinese to release the three men. Hoping that they would not get back alive, the Chinese abandoned them at the foot of one of the highest passes in the Himalayas -- a pass never before climbed in winter -- starving, exhausted, and physically broken. Their journey back is one of mountaineering's great epics. "Spy On the Roof of the World" is a riveting and unforgettable tale.

Book Information

Hardcover: 267 pages

Publisher: Lyons Pr (December 1996)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1558215581

ISBN-13: 978-1558215580

Product Dimensions: 1.2 x 6.5 x 10 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 14 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,261,219 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #38 in Books > Travel > Australia & South Pacific > Australia > Sydney #360 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Asia > China #578 in Books > Travel > Asia > China > General

Customer Reviews

In this cross between a travel adventure story and an espionage novel, Sydney Wignall tells how he became an ad hoc spy for a renegade faction of Indian intelligence operatives in 1955. Wignall had set out to climb the highest mountain in Tibet, but was recruited to investigate Chinese military activity in the region. After being caught, he spent months in a rat-infested, sub-freezing cell as he underwent interrogation. When international pressure forced his release, his captors "released" him and two companions in a nearly impenetrable wintertime wilderness and said "Go home." Yet

Wignall survived--and managed to smuggle out vital information. It is an exhilarating story that only now can be told.

While organizing a Himalayan expedition in 1955 to climb Tibet's highest peak, Welsh mountaineer Wignall was recruited as a spy by India's secret service. This exhilarating account of his espionage, arrest by Chinese communists, several weeks' imprisonment in a rat-infested Tibetan jail and harrowing escape over a never-before-scaled Himalayan gorge is at once a thrilling real-life spy tale, a serendipitous adventure and an ethnographic travelogue. It is laced with intrigue, close escapes from death, breathtaking vistas and affectionate observations of the Tibetan people surviving under draconian Chinese rule. Wignall, who displays acerbic wit and a flair for storytelling, obtained proof of China's Tibetan military buildup for an attack on India-intelligence ignored by India's Prime Minister Nehru, who befriended the supposedly "anti-imperialist" Mao Tse-tung until China's invasion of northern India in 1962. In prison, Wignall endured solitary confinement and kept a diary that he hid in an inflatable mattress. Decked with sketches from his trek-a mission he was prohibited from divulging for 25 years-his book condemns the West for allowing China's cultural and physical genocide of Tibet. He notes ominously that China is now building a strategic highway to Nepal-an easy means for a future invasion that would give Chinese troops direct access to India. Illustrations not seen by PW. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

I found this just fascinating. I think the author may have taken a little license with his memory for (recalling conversations verbatim years later, for example). Although some names were initially confusing, it all sorted itself out, and the photographs were a bonus. I've visited China a lot, and found it really interesting to read what their control used to be like. Great adventure story--and true!

Good Book and in good condition.

With the current crisis between the United States and China filling up the pages of the news media and the television screen, this book serves both a jarring and entertaining reminder of the nature of the totalitarian state of China, and of Communist regimes in general. An absolutely riveting book, it is a firsthand account of the experiences of the author and his two companions in a Tibetan prison after being captured for illegally entering Tibet while on a mountaineering expedition and reconnaissance mission for India. The detailed descriptions of numerous interrogations by the People's Liberation Army and their tactics of psychological torture through "Chinese Roulette" and

"Struggling Against" lay bare the tactics and aims of the Communist ideology -- Truth is Fiction, and Fiction is Truth. I found myself re-reading passages of this book almost in disbelief at the insanely distorted beliefs and actions of the author's captors. In the end, the author learns to turn the tables on his interrogators by exploiting the "Truth is Fiction, and Fiction is Truth" aspect of Communism, and provides the People's Liberation Army with "secret intelligence" so laughably ridiculous that anyone with the capability to think independently would reject immediately. The fact that the author's interrogators take all of his fabrications seriously is the truly frightening side of these outwardly comical confessions, because it shows the success that the Communist Party had in China with brainwashing large segments of the population. There are two passages in the book which completely distill the differences in the view between East and West of the value of life. The first is the description of the slow and deliberate slaughter of a live sheep by several Chinese prison guards, while the second is the inability of the author to kill one of his captors even after being put through all that has been described up to that point. These two passages, which occur in relatively close juxtaposition in the book, is one of the starker, most brutal comparisons of "good and evil" that I have ever read.

I read this book sometime ago and was thrilled and captivated by it! I could not put it down. It was so unusual and so interesting - a view point of the Chinese by a Scotsman (who worked as a spy for the Indian army that he loved and respected, in addition to climbing the treacherous Gurla Mandhata, which had been his lifelong mountaineering ambition as a member of the Scottish Himalayan Club) who suffered being captured, imprisoned and tortured by them. All of this and subtly funny throughout! I could not put the book down until I had finished reading all of it! Tellingly, this adventure cured the author of his mountaineering passion. I highly recommend it as a movie worth producing by Hollywood or Bollywood - within the next 5 years. I predict that this will be a blockbuster unlike any other!

Forty years ago when I was an undergraduate I had an abiding interest in the "Roof of the World." the Himalayas and the Sinkiang and Tibetan areas. I was introduced to it by reading Heinrich Harrar's Seven Years in Tibet. I went back and reread the accounts of Franc and Jean Bowie Shor which had appeared in the National Geographic in the late 40s. Also when I was a child I had read Lowell Thomas's account of his 1949 visit to Tibet in the Saturday Evening Post. Later when I took a job as a cartographer with the Army Map Service for a while I was assigned the area to keep up with. Nepal and India particularly. By then the high Asia area had been long closed to western

travelers by the Red Chinese. For a few years in the late forties just after WW II there was a period of open borders when the Chinese Civil War was being settled and the areas mentioned were still friendly to westerners. Even in the midst of the war the American OSS had sent an expedition to Lhasa to explore opening a land supply route to China from India. While I was still studying geography, the Indo Chinese War of 1962 broke out along the narrow neck of India where then East Pakistan juts northward and almost cuts off the Northeast Frontier provinces. The war had been provoked by Indian government posturing, whose foreign minister V.K. Krishna Menon, a left wing appeaser, disagreed with the Army and their intent to reinforce themselves. The dispute with China had been provoked by Indian vague border claims inherited from the British in the area of Ladakh, which is way to the west of Tibet and south of Sinkiang. This "border" was shown on most maps with a dotted line which meant that it was a claim not a line of control. Neither the British or the Indians had ever patrolled or garrisoned Ladakh. The whole area is a cold barren plateau about as infertile as the Mohave desert. The only reason to want it is that the Chinese had constructed a road across the claimed area from Sinkiang to Tibet in order to facilitate their occupation of the latter. Although this is a mighty roundabout way to get to Lhasa from China proper, considering the expense of building a road across the folded mountains of the "Hump" it made sense. When the Indians started posturing and barking about this intrusion into their claimed lands, the Chinese swiftly invaded directly south from Tibet through Sikkim and gave the Indian Army a bloody setback. Having proved their point they then withdrew. Now comes the setting for this story. Among several nations who were sympathetic to the Tibetan's aspirations was the US and the CIA. That story of their support is covered elsewhere. However, the long snaky shaped nation of Nepal lies between India and Tibet. On the northern flank and part of Nepal is a bump on the map which is the Kingdom of Mustang. There are books about it also. This area being lower in altitude and the border being porous was an ideal location for air strips supplying the Tibetan resistance and a jumping off point for land expeditions against the Red Army. Though all this had to be kept quiet, the Mustang border was widely recognized if undemarcated so the Red Chinese could not for international political reasons move in there permanently. Now we come to the story told in this book. Before the development of high flying reconnaissance aircraft such as the U2 there were few planes available that could fly over the area clandestinely and not be spotted. As mapping runs require a regular pattern of repetitive flights, the activity is both apparent and readily vulnerable to attack. In any case the use of US planes was not possible and there were no air bases near either. So the only way to find anything out was to sneak and peek. The author was a British mountaineer who mounted a small expedition to Mustang. While passing through India he was secretly contacted by Indian Army

intelligence and asked to dash over the border and check out a town which contained a Chinese garrison. While doing so he was captured, jailed, and then set free to hike over the mountains in the winter. The book recounts his experiences in some detail and having been written many years later when most of the other players are long dead, has been able to be frank in his opinions.

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