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Skunk Works: A Personal Memoir Of My Year At Lockheed



Synopsis

The onetime director of Lockheed's Skunk Works, the top-secret facility that developed the U-2 spy plane and the stealth fighter, reveals the behind-the-scenes drama involved in the development of the military's aerial technology. 50,000 first printing.

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Customer Reviews

Lockheed's Advanced Development Project has set standards for the aerospace industry for half a century. Under its presiding genius, Clarence "Kelly" Johnson, the Skunk Works produced America's first jet fighter, the world's most successful spy plane (U-2), the first three-times-the-speed-of-sound surveillance aircraft and the F-117A stealth fighter. Rich was Johnson's right-hand man and succeeded him as director in 1975, retiring in 1990. In an entertaining style, the authors describe Johnson's tyrannical managerial style, his thorny but productive relationship with the Air Force and the stealth-technology breakthrough that revolutionized military aviation. Writing with freelancer Jonas, Rich also recounts Skunk Works' failures, including experiments with liquid hydrogen as a propellant and spy-drone flights over China's remote nuclear test facilities. He has much to say about the Defense Department bureaucracy and warns, "Everyone in the defense industry knows that bureaucratic regulations, controls, and paperwork are at critical mass... and... in danger of destroying the entire system." This is a significant book for those interested in aerospace research and development. Photos. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Since its inception in 1943, the Skunk Works has been one of the most top-secret military contractors. Now that the Cold War has ended, its story is uncloaked by former chief Rich, now retired. Using a small number of expert employees, the Skunk Works built technologically advanced aircraft that were disavowed by the government and its users, the Air Force and the CIA, for years after the aircraft were operational. The Skunk Works built notable planes such as the P-80 (the first operational jet fighter), U-2 (the high-altitude spy plane), and F-117A (the Stealth fighter). The story of Stealth's development is most interesting not only in the design, building, and testing but also in its origins in a Russian scientist's paper on aeronautics. There are first-person accounts of some of the missions flown by pilots and notes from many government officials. Highly recommended. William A. McIntyre, New Hampshire Technical Coll. Lib., Nashua Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This is a phenomenal book, and I want to stress that the few criticisms I'm going to offer should not dissuade people from picking this up and reading it. With help from co-writer Leo Janos, Ben Rich has written a fascinating account of one of the most secretive and successful "black projects" outfits in American military history. Lockheed's "Skunk Works" was responsible for developing the P-38, but its real fame began to build as it concentrated on spy planes during the Cold War, specifically the U2 and the SR-71 Blackbird. Rich's account of the conception, construction and deployment of these two iconic aircraft is absolutely ... well, pun intended here ... RIVETING. The narrative is exciting; how could it not be? Here you had a secretive division of a major aeronautical contractor working on planes that would change the course of world history, and this division was facing deadlines, problems with materials, difficulties in coming up with new construction methods, and on and on. The Blackbird's use of titanium alone proved a major engineering hurdle, given how difficult that metal is to work with, but Skunk Works pulled it off...and the Blackbird remains the FASTEST air-breathing aircraft ever constructed, years after its retirement! Two brief criticisms: One, the "other voices" interludes sometimes break up the narrative flow a bit too much. But Rich being what he was -- the second leader of a highly complex organization -- would naturally feel drawn to this kind of structure, in which value is placed on multiple viewpoints. Two, and I can't believe I'm writing this: Most books, if length is a problem, suffer from being too long. With "Skunk Works," I was hoping it would last even longer. Again, though, the book's concision is indicative of its author's personality; Rich was a "get it done" kind of guy who belied the image of a greedy contractor stretching out a project for as long as possible. Skunk Works prided itself on making or even beating deadlines, and thus Rich the author wasn't going to write a bloated book. This is just a terrific read, especially for

anyone interested in how successful organizations of any kind work, how America truly did win the Cold War, and how complexity challenges people with creative minds.

This book is absolutely AMAZING!! I'm kicking myself in the teeth for not having read it when it first came out. The hard copy was given to me as a gift when it was released and I refused to break the binding on it because I knew it would be a good book, perhaps a collector even. I had forgotten I had it when I saw it was available on kindle and immediately bought it. This book isn't simply about the amazing work of the Skunk Works up until the declassification of the F-117, this book is about leadership, teamwork and dedication. SIMPLY AMAZING, A MUST READ!

"Skunk Works" is the popular moniker of Lockheed Martin's top, top secret aircraft program for the US government. This book is written by the second director of this program, Ben Rich. The book's primary focus is the U-2, F-117A, and last but not least the SR-71. A ship for the Navy, and a drone program are briefly covered also. Ben Rich is credited for developing and building "stealth" into military assets. Primarily aircraft. After Francis Gary Powers was shot down piloting a U-2 over Soviet Russia, it quickly became apparent that a faster, higher flying and stealthy aircraft was needed. Hence the SR-71. It can travel in the atmosphere at a height of nearly 90,000 feet. It can cruise at well over Mach 3, and has a Radar profile of about a ball-bearing (thus "Stealthy"). This book is fascinating and gives you a first-person account of these extraordinary aircraft. The F-117 flew over the center of Baghdad, without fighter escorts; and dropped 2,000 lb. bombs during the Iraq war. The U-2 is the only one out of the three that is still flying missions. As a matter of fact, a U-2 just recently crashed in California.

This book is amazing, what the men inside skunk works were able to do with a slide rule and paper is simply awe inspiring. Being an engineer and having a healthy understanding of what it takes to make things fly I was speechless reading about the quick turn around and the minuscule budgets they were able to operate on and still create the most advanced aircraft of all time. Still nothing has topped the SR-71 and they were able to completely design and build a prototype in a matter of months with not a single computer in the building. The end is a bit preachy about money and misappropriation of government funds but it does not overshadow the feats described by Ben Rich and many of the pilots that flew his contraptions.

Fascinating story of some of the most innovative aircraft in history. The story thrills me with the

brilliance behind the scenes. I highly recommend this read.

This book is amazing. So much insight and detail into things that were beyond top secret, my favorite work of non fiction yet!

Kelly Johnson decided in 1958 that he wanted to design a Mach 3 plane that flew at 80,000 ft. 4 years later in 1962 the first legendary SR-71 spy-plane was on the runway ready for test flights. Today such a feat seems like magic. This book is a reminder of what a small dedicated team can achieve under an inspired leader. A very enjoyable read, and an insight into the "anything is possible" 60's that culminated in the moon landings.

This book came recommended from an engineer I know. Amazing story, great advice in the last chapter. Shows how good we can be when focused. A good factual account that has technologies that are discussed in fiction books such as space wars.

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