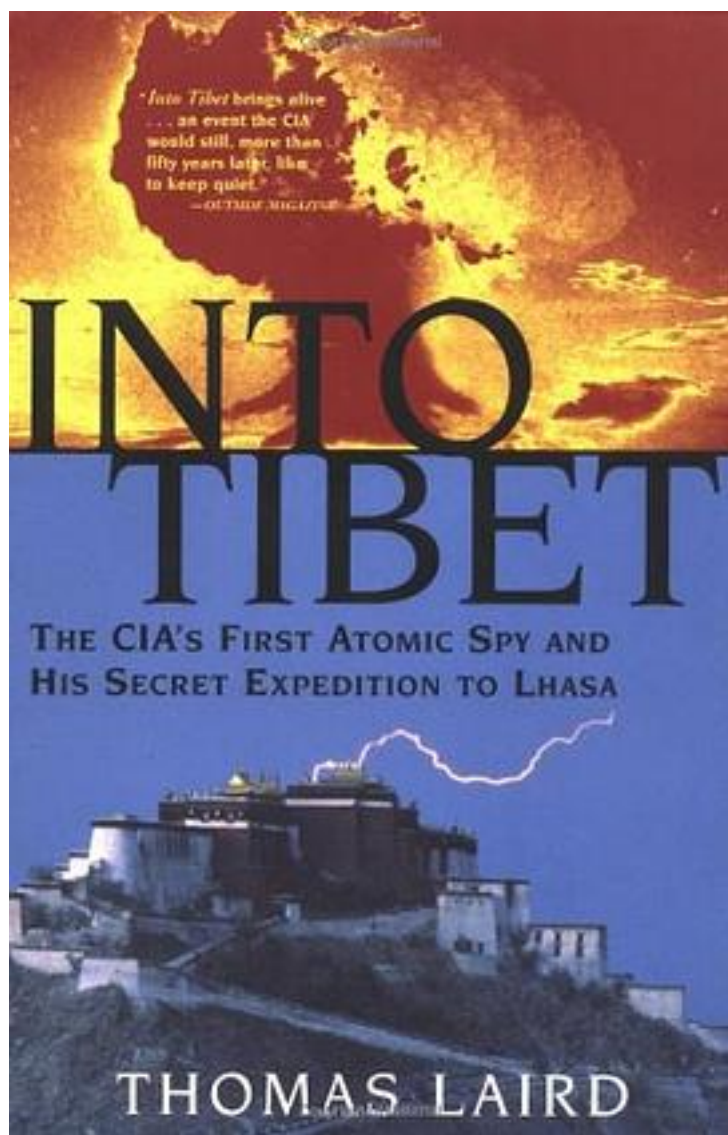


Into Tibet



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Editorial Reviews

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Fought in the remote corners of the world, the cold war had many victims--among them the ancient kingdom of Tibet. China invaded that land in 1950, charging that Tibet was playing into the hands of enemy imperial powers. The Communist government may have had a point, to judge by Thomas Laird's reconstruction of a little-documented CIA mission into Tibet intended at least in part to keep the country's uranium stores from falling into Russian hands. Long disavowed and involving only a handful of agents, the mission also delivered arms to the Tibetan resistance--which, Laird maintains, the CIA funded and supplied until the 1970s, when it abandoned the Tibetan freedom fighters. The mission was a failure on all counts, and the surviving participants were carefully hidden away; half a century later, the CIA "cannot affirm or deny" the existence of leader Douglas Mackiernan, "shot dead on the borders of Tibet and Sinkiang," the first agent to die in a covert operation. Though sometimes disjointed, Laird's eye-opening account probes this forgotten episode, blunders and heroic moments alike. --Gregory McNamee --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

From Publishers Weekly

Laird, a journalist for Asiaweek who has lived for many years in Nepal, traces the story of two CIA agents, Douglas Mackiernan and Frank Bessac, sent on an intelligence expedition to Tibet in 1949-1950, at the height of U.S. concern about the Soviet Union's atomic experiments and the spread of communism in China. Mackiernan (who was killed during the mission, the first undercover CIA agent to die in the line of duty) and Bessac, with several other cohorts, trekked through Tibet on foot, gathering atomic intelligence and establishing regional contacts. The mission was part of a U.S. attempt to arm Tibet, and Laird argues that the American presence may have precipitated China's invasion of the country, which the U.S. abruptly abandoned (cutting off covert funding) after establishing diplomatic relations with China in the 1970s. Focusing on the heart-stopping details of the expedition itself, Laird gives the now familiar story of callous CIA manipulation an absorbing twist. The need for lengthy historical context, however, results in a number of digressions on subjects such as the Tibetan earthquake of 1950 that disrupt an already meandering story and, in their brevity, are often simplistic. Further, much of the source material remains classified, forcing Laird to speculate a great deal. This (perhaps unavoidable) approach raises questions of whether Laird has the whole story. Although the adventures make for interesting reading, a lack of critical facts and focus undermine this account.

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