



Over and Back: A Daring Band of American Pilots Flying North to South Into Mexico!: The Untold True Stories Smuggling Contraband Into Mexico

Wild Bill Callahan

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Unknown and true aviation adventure, vividly and humorously told in the spirit of the legendary Air America! Some of those famous pilots found their way to south Texas and continued their life on the edge as did some Vietnam veterans still thirsting for a final drink of adrenline. But like a rabid dog, Mexico could bite if you let your guard down. Piloting skill helped but often had nothing to do with the disastrous outcome of many flights south.

The author, with an abundance of incredible luck, survived nearly five years of this type of flying. With his meticulously kept journal, he lived to tell the tale of others, those who died and some who made it out alive. According to Ben O'Neal, owner of South Central Aviation in McAllen, Texas and a pioneer in this type of aviation, sixty-two pilots were killed in ten years of operations.

In the 1980s, South Texas border airports were a beehive of activity. It was SRO, Standing Room Only, on jam-packed aircraft parking ramps. Outdated, overloaded aircraft were winging their perilous way south and across the darkened Rio Grande. The cargo cabins of Beech 18s, DC-3s, C-46s and other types were crammed full of electronic contraband.

This book is about the little known enterprise during the 1980s of the aerial smuggling of domestic goods across the Rio Grande into Mexico. There is vast public knowledge about pilots smuggling drugs north from Mexico and into the United States but not in the other direction. The author was one of those pilots flying against the grain.

Dealing with notoriously corrupt and ruthless Mexican officials, pilots found their well-being hung by a tenuous thread. Trust and reliability were unknown on both sides of the border. Shootouts were common. Everyone had a price. For more than a few, that price was death. It was all part of the job.

When pilots crossed the darkened Rio Grande, they were on their own. Their very lives hung on their engines, both engines. The overloading was such that even a partial power loss would result in a forced landing. The single engine boys had it worse. The official penalty for a pilot violating Mexican import laws was nine years in a dangerous, vermin infested penitentiary.

The only thing missing was a sign stating: "Abandon hope, all you who enter here." A little dramatic maybe but it would've been aptly symbolic for those who never returned.

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