



John Birch: A Life

Terry Lautz

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John Birch was better known in death than life. Shot and killed by Communists in China in 1945, he posthumously became the namesake for a right-wing organization whose influence is still visible in today's Tea Party. This is the remarkable story of who he actually was: an American missionary-turned-soldier who wanted to save China, but became a victim instead. Terry Lautz, a longtime scholar of U.S.-China relations, has investigated archives, spoken with three of Birch's brothers, found letters written to the women he loved, and visited sites in China where he lived and died. The result, *John Birch: A Life*, is the first authoritative biography of this fascinating figure whose name was for a political cause. Raised as a Baptist fundamentalist, Birch became a missionary to China prior to America's entry into the Second World War. After Pearl Harbor, he volunteered for the U.S. Army in China, served with Claire Chennault, commander of the famed Flying Tigers, and operated behind enemy lines as an intelligence officer. He planned to resume his missionary work after the war, but was killed in a dispute with Communist troops just days after Japan's surrender. During the heyday of the Cold War in the 1950s, Robert Welch, a retired businessman from Boston, chose Birch as the figurehead for the John Birch Society, believing that his death was evidence of conspiracy at the highest levels of government. The Birch Society became one of the most polarizing organizations of its time, and the name of John Birch became synonymous with right-wing extremism. Cutting through the layers of mythology surrounding Birch, Lautz deftly presents his life and his afterlife, placing him not only in the context of anti-communism but in the longstanding American quest to shape China's destiny.

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