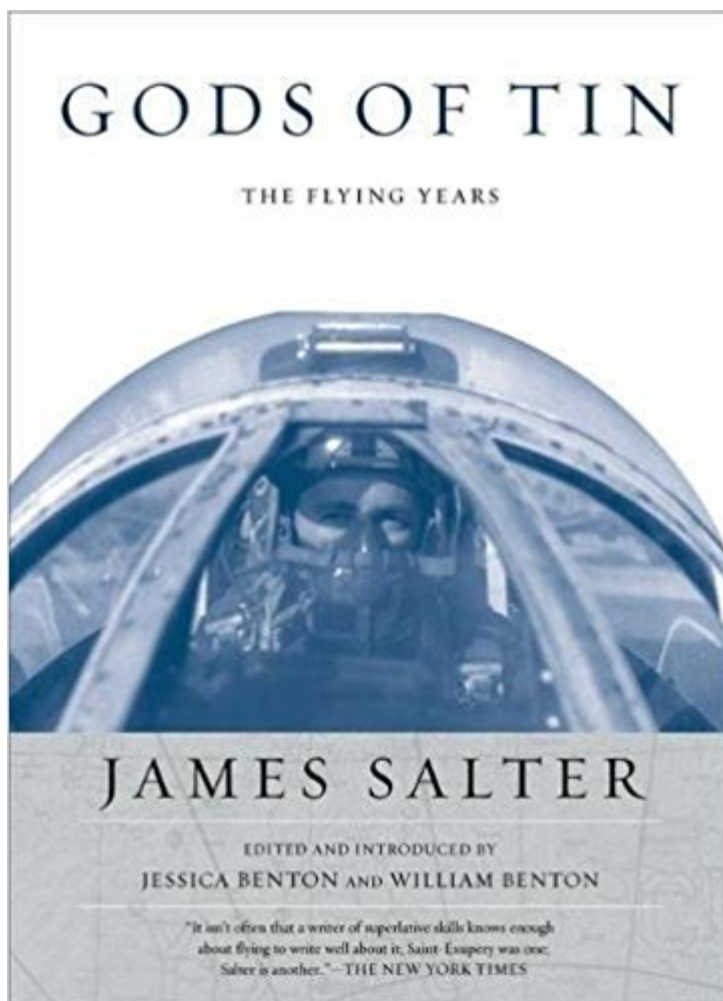


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# Gods Of Tin: The Flying Years



## Synopsis

A singular life often circles around a singular moment, an occasion when one's life in the world is defined forever and the emotional vocabulary set. For the extraordinary writer James Salter, this moment was contained in the fighter planes over Korea where, during his young manhood, he flew more than one hundred missions. As The New York Times noted, "It isn't often that a writer of superlative skills knows enough about flying to write well about it; Saint-Exupery was one; Salter is another." The editors have gathered selections from a journal Salter kept during the Korean War, published here for the first time, and assembled selections from two novels, *The Hunters* and *Cassada*, and from the author's celebrated memoir, *Burning the Days*. As the editors comment in a brief introduction, "It is, as a record of the day-to-day, mission-to-mission life of a young fighter pilot, a remarkable document by any standard. But it provides as well a view into the crucible of a writer's beginnings, like pencil studies that precede a painting, in which the essential qualities of the artist's hand are unmistakable."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A splendid thing in a small package is this flying book compiled from several earlier works of fiction (including the great novel of Korean War aviation, *The Hunters*) and memoir, and from Salter's journals. Salter graduated from West Point in 1945 and went straight into the Army Air Force, later the U.S. Air Force. His training was not always smooth—he once lost his way over Pennsylvania and crashed into a house in Massachusetts. But he survived to qualify in fighters and to fly a tour of duty (100 missions) in Korea in F-86s, shooting down one MiG. After the war Salter

flew fighters in Europe before resigning from the air force to embark upon a distinguished literary career. The text has excerpts from *The Hunters*; another novel about the European years, *Cassada*; his previous memoir *Burning the Days*; and an unpublished diary from the Korean tour. Although it's sometimes difficult to tell whose voice one is hearing, all the voices have a superb command of the English language and vividly depict the sensations and human interactions involved in flying.

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Award-winning novelist Salter is a West Point graduate and was a pilot in the Korean War. The missions he flew over Korea form not only the basis of his fiction but also the foundation on which he built much of the rest of his life. This book, concerned with his flying years, draws from a journal he kept at the time, from the novels *The Hunters* (1956) and *Cassada* (2000), and from his memoir *Burning the Days* (1997). The journal sections, in particular, amount to a jump back to a time and place largely forgotten except by those who were there; the whole book is valuable for that alone, though those interested in the genesis of Salter's writing will highly appreciate it. Above all, the book collocates some of the finest aviation writing of the twentieth century, otherwise hard to find, if not altogether out of print. Let us hope this book will inspire the reprinting of some of those from which it extracts. Frieda Murray Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Being a pilot myself, James Salter's description of his first solo was spot on. More's the pity, he died recently leaving a canon of work which puts him right up in the top category of fiction and non-fiction writers. A much neglected writer who has recently received a lot of very well-deserved attention. As one commentator said, he lived the life Hemingway thought he had led and his writing is on a par. I'd thoroughly recommend both his "flying" books and his novels. I'm at present half way through he and his wife's 'Life is Meals' and loving it. Like all his (and in this case her) writing, it is taut - actually much like Hemingway, in the best sense. Given the spread of his writing and his other activities, he is a writer of whom many more should be aware. Whether flying and 'Gods of Tin' is up your alley or not, please introduce yourself to this wonderful writer.

I first became aware that James Salter was a writer the umpteenth time I watched the credits at the start of the movie "THE HUNTERS", one of two of the finest films on Korean War aviators. Salter wrote the book the screenplay was based on, and in the 1990s I started seeking the book to read it for myself. Lucky for me, it had been reissued in 1997, so I got it and did so. A good read, a bit different from the movie story. More in depth about the feeling of flight and combat experiences.

Salter is a fine writer and his command of the words can put you in the cockpit with the pilot, be he real or fictional. This book collects passages from two other books he wrote about his military flight career and entries from his personal journal kept during his tours of military flying duty through flight training in late WWII, into combat duty in Korea in 1952, and through his post war flying up into the early 1960s. Masterfully edited by Jessica and William Benton, it has been organized chronologically and simply is wonderful. You can read from the journal entry, and then it is followed by fiction he created using that experience. His mastery of the written image is beautiful and above all one senses his love of flying and all it entails. Salter has written other books, and reading the literary reviews of them, one learns he is an American literary master but has maintained a low profile... "off the radar"...to too many common readers. If you love aviation, follow history of flying or not, the words in this book will take you for a great experience in the "blue yonder" that is not always so wild, but always captivating and awe inspiring. Reading this book has led me to searching out his other works to add to my library. I think you will too.

James Salter is (or was: he's recently deceased) a marvelous writer, and *Gods of Tin* is an engrossing read. It includes portions of his journal when he was a fighter pilot during the Korean War, providing fascinating details of that experience, followed by descriptions of his later flying experiences in Europe as a U.S. Air Force pilot under NATO. The book combines fiction and nonfiction, drawing on *The Hunters*, his novel about the air war in Korea between U.S. Sabre jets and Russian MiGs, and *Cassada*, his novel about flying in Europe after the Korean War, as well as his journal or notes on his flying experiences. Highly recommended, especially if you're a flying buff.

Having read some of the works from which this book takes much of its content I was prepared to be disappointed; however, Salter has woven the material into a much tighter and stronger work. It's clear that he looked back at the old material with improved writing skills and a more mature handling of the nature of warfare in the early days of the jets. He captures the isolation of these modern day knights of the air, the randomness of early aerial engagements in the first jet on jet conflict and one which was further complicated by the political restrictions which put the bases on the north side of the Yalu off limits. With the possible exception of the middle-east the Korean war probably marked the last engagement of large numbers of American aircraft in air to air combat over a small area. Highly recommended, especially for those who have enjoyed his other works. Deserves a place on the bookshelf between *Stranger to The Ground*, *Night Flight*, Tom Wolfe's writings on flight and other literate classics on the challenge and characters in flying. For those wanting to know more

about the why of the Korean air engagements Robert Cornan's "Boyd The Story of a Fighter Pilot Who Changed the Course of War" is most enlightening. Like Wind, Sand and Stars the book has a very broad appeal that is not limited to pilots. Great gift for someone who appreciates good writing.

Salter was the very best in this domain of 50s jet fighters. Sorry he's gone. Derivative of his previous works: The Hunters and Cassada. No fly by wire, stability augmentation, GPS or AIM19s. Cold, the smell of kerosene and cordite.

Really great, one of the best combat and flying books ever...but not as good as the original "Hunters" or a long article he wrote for the literary magazine, Grand Street, title "A Single Daring Act"...that was his best.

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