leaders at the time, who would have preferred a maximalist, no-holds-barred strategy to swiftly win the war in Vietnam. Schwab describes this preference for a decisive, total strategy as "Clausewitzian," a narrow interpretation that colors the argument throughout. Rather than characterizing the civilian-imposed operational restrictions of the Vietnam conflict as anti-Clausewitzian, one might more properly characterize them as highly influenced by the eminently "Clausewitzian" notion that the limited importance of Vietnam in the broader scheme of U.S. interests in a protracted Cold War demanded that caution be exercised and limits be imposed.

Much of the senior military leadership during the Vietnam era had similar difficulties in appreciating the fundamentally limited nature of a conflict that came to dominate their professional lives. This myopia, combined with misunderstandings of the nature of the conflict and underestimation of the opposition, led military leaders to persist far too long in the hope that ultimately civilians would prove willing to escalate to a level that would secure victory in Vietnam. This does not let civilian leaders off the hook—their decisions to intervene, to escalate, and to prolong the U.S. commitment in Vietnam were disastrous, but despite the hypertrophy of the Vietnam effort the civilian leadership retained, at least dimly, an awareness of the limited stakes involved.

Plainly there *were* cultural disconnnects between the military leadership and civilian elites, as well as between the military and civilian society at large, which profoundly shaped the Vietnam conflict and its longer term effects on the United States—the concluding discussion of the legacies of Vietnam is the strongest portion of the book. Yet while Schwab covers a broad range of topics and issues in this slim book, *A Clash of Cultures* presents no really compelling new evidence to settle the contentious issues it seeks to address.

Erik Riker-Coleman — Duluth, Minnesota

Perfect Spy: The Incredible Double Life of Pham Xuan An, Time Magazine Reporter & Vietnamese Communist Agent. Larry Berman. New York: Harper Collins, 2007. ISBN 978-0-06-088838-1. Photographs. Notes on sources. Notes. Index. Pp. 328. $29.94.

Some books fit a niche that few realized even existed. This is one. While there are many studies on the relevance, or not, of human intelligence for war they are usually at the grand campaign level. Otherwise, there are studies of individual spies or their captors. Despite the rather lurid title, this book is an important contribution to the relevance of human intelligence collection during the Vietnam War. It is one of the best examples I have read of the ambiguity of human intelligence both in the way that field affects war and in the way it affects personal relationships. While somewhat in the genre of spy sto-

ries, it offers far more and Dr. Larry Berman ably weaves together history, personality, politics, and biography throughout the book.

This book is a well written description of General Pham Xuan An's activities as a communist agent in South Vietnam from the 1940s through 1975 and afterwards. It is a biography of a young nationalist disillusioned by the Japanese occupation, disgusted by the French reoccupation, and drawn into the communist fight against all comers. It documents the journey of one man to understand the enemy. It is a journey that takes a trained intelligence operative to a small southern California college to study journalism, through internships at an American newspaper and the United Nations, positions with the government of the Republic of Viet Nam, a job with *Time Magazine* and close personal relationships with senior Vietnamese and American journalists, military officers, and intelligence agents. And all of this was at the direction and for the benefit of communist efforts. At the end, this is a story of a very capable, complicated man who, as the author deftly describes, personifies the complicated and conflicted history of his country.

Through this biography, we see pivotal players in U.S. and Vietnamese history in a different way. People such as Edward Lansdale, William Colby, Nguyen Cao Ky, Stanley Karnow, David Halberstam, Frances FitzGerald, just to name a few, are shown in a new perspective. This book describes the view of one man whose hidden goal was to report the public and private thoughts of as many of the enemy as he could. After reading this book we may, or may not, question anew how we view our history in Vietnam.

Most significantly, from this reviewer's point of view, the book provides a fascinating insight into the effects of a highly placed agent. It is one of the best examples of the wilderness of mirrors often used to describe the world of intelligence. Behind the narrative lie a host of questions suggesting that many policy makers did not know what they thought they knew. At the same time, the book shows that South Vietnamese or U.S. policy makers did not know their deliberations and plans were soon in their adversaries' hands. The author's claims regarding the importance of An's reporting and effect on specific battles, such as Ap Bac, or campaigns or negotiating tactics deserve further evaluation.

The author does a good job of checking, and quoting, sources who corroborate An's unique stories and accomplishments. These sources include both current Vietnamese, past South Vietnamese, and U.S. government people, journalists, and others. Nonetheless, this reviewer was left with a feeling of disquiet. Rather than describing those concerns, I recommend readers evaluate the book on their own with the following questions in mind. How do we evaluate the claims of someone who spent his whole life dissembling to others? How do we value the observations of someone whose job it was to influence people with a particular outcome in mind? How trusted are our sources?

Steven S. Minniear — Dublin, California